

**Hollywood and the Chinese Film Market:
Crosscultural Communication or Commercial Transaction?**

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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies
The University of Canterbury
2020

Abstract

Globalisation as a cultural as well as an economic phenomenon has led to more frequent communication and exchange across cultures. Hollywood has long been familiar with exporting American cultural values internationally as a means of soft power, but faces particular challenges in its attempts to enter the Chinese film market, the largest and potentially the most lucrative audience in the world. In order to be released and screened in China, Hollywood films must comply with a strict set of cultural policies. These include a quota system, which permits the importation of foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis, but limits them to 34 films per year, censorship by the film regulating sector in China before distribution and exhibition, and an uncertain release schedule. China has been the fastest-growing film market since 2008, hence, despite the restrictive cultural policies that they encounter, Hollywood producers, attracted by the promise of increased revenue, have developed various aesthetic and commercial strategies to please the Chinese film regulators and audiences in order to gain access to the Chinese film market, such as producing Chinese-themed Hollywood films, incorporating plots about China, casting Chinese renowned actors in cameo roles, adding Chinese film locations, placing Chinese products, and seeking China-US co-productions. For the large Hollywood studios, these methods provide effective strategies to circumvent Chinese cultural policies in the film sector; for China, they offer methods to export its cultural soft power and change the Orientalist stereotypes and images of China which have long circulated in the international community. As a result, the depiction of China and Chinese culture has become more positive and diverse in recent Hollywood blockbusters. In fact, the complicated interplay between Chinese cultural policies and Hollywood's strategies for circumventing these policies illustrates how, through compromise, competition and collaboration, both in economic, political and cinematic terms, China and the United States negotiate the dynamic process of crosscultural exchange.

Acknowledgements

I would like to first thank my previous supervisor, Dr. Adam Lam, who offered me the template for writing a research proposal, helped me decide the research topic and guided me to form the general framework of my thesis. Though he left the University of Canterbury at the end of 2017, he still offered me great help in my thesis writing.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my current supervisor, Dr. Alan Wright, who helped me adjust the structure of my thesis, and revised my thesis time and time again, section by section, chapter by chapter. Every time, he offered me very detailed comments, then I could revise my thesis accurately towards those problems. He has played a significant role in completing my final thesis. I am really grateful for what he has done. I also would like to thank my co-supervisor, Professor Anne-Marie Brady. Because Chinese politics is her primary research interest, she often offered me a different perspective on analysing problems in the film sector.

In addition, I would like to thank my friends and fellow students. We communicated frequently. They often shared their own experiences in PhD studies. I have gained plenty of support and lessons from them. Especially, I would like to show my appreciation to Kara, who helped me edit my thesis thoroughly. Her meticulous editing is crucial to my final thesis. I really appreciated her work.

At last, I would like to thank my parents and my brothers, though they are living in China. Without their support, I could not finish my PhD study.

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Introduction

Abominable (Jill Culton & Todd Wilderman, 2019), the latest and highly anticipated joint production between Pearl Studio (China) and DreamWorks Animation (United States), opened in Chinese theatres on 1 October 2019, the National Day of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Golden Week, as the seven-day holiday period is known, has become one of the prime release dates in the film calendar. "Main Melody" films, often with patriotic themes that celebrate national pride, are popular with audiences during this week. That year's National Day was especially auspicious as the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the PRC, and the scheduled films — *My People, My Country*, *The Captain* and *The Climbers* — depicted memorable moments and heroic achievements from the recent past of the PRC. Given this context, it is remarkable that *Abominable*, a children's movie featuring an animated Yeti, was premiered in China during Golden Week, after a moderately successful run in American theatres. In many respects, however, the fate of *Abominable* provides a telling example of the complicated relationship between Hollywood and the Chinese film market.

The film tells the story of Yi, a Chinese teenage girl who finds a Yeti on the roof of her house. After overcoming various setbacks, Yi and her friends help to return him safely to his home, Mount Everest. However, as a result of a minor detail in a single scene, *Abominable* has provoked an international controversy and a dispute with China's neighbours: Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia. A map, marked with pictures from famous scenic spots in China that Yi would like to visit, appears in the background on a wall of Yi's shed. The map visibly shows the nine-dash line in the South China Sea (Figure 1), which demonstrates China's claim to sovereignty over the region. According to BBC News, it was Vietnamese filmgoers who first noticed the nine-dash line, prompting officials from the Vietnamese film sector to pull the film from screens.¹ The Foreign Secretary of the Philippines called for a boycott of all DreamWorks films, and the Film Censorship Board in Malaysia ordered that the controversial scene should be cut.²

¹ "Abominable: A DreamWorks Movie, A Map, and A Huge Regional Row," *BBC.com*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50093028>.

² Cecilia Yap, "Uproar over 'Abominable' Movie's Map of China Spreads in Asia," *Bloomberg.com*, October 17, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-17/philippines-blasts-dreamworks-abominable-for-china-map>.



Figure 1

The controversial status of the map is the result of territorial disputes in the South China Sea, which have been ongoing for several decades. In 1947, the Republic of China issued a map displaying its claims to the South China Sea region, which was initially recognised by the international community on the basis of the *Cairo Declaration* of 1943. However, the disputes can be traced to the San Francisco Treaty in 1951, which failed to determine the ownership of the Spratly Islands when Japan was stripped of its title to them after it was defeated in the Second World War.³ The enactment of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) further complicated the issue by establishing an exclusive economic zone of 200 nautical miles as the boundary of a nation's territorial waters.

Ultimately, though, the problem is economic and political in nature. The South China Sea region is one of the most significant geostrategic locations in the world. Economically, the South China Sea is abundant in fishing resources, oil and gas. In addition, it is one of the busiest commercial shipping routes in global waters: "One third of global shipping, or a total of USD 3.37 trillion of international trade, passes through the South China Sea."⁴ It is also a strategic passage to South East Asia, the Strait of Malacca, the Persian Gulf, and further to Europe. The maritime route sees 80% of China's crude oil importation and 50% of its maritime commerce.⁵ Thus, the region serves as an important economic lifeline for China. Geopolitically, the United States (US) maintains significant political, economic, and security interests in the Asia-Pacific region; thus, the US has increased its military activity and naval presence in recent years. The

³ "South China Sea Territorial Disputes," Peace Palace Library, accessed November 30, 2019, <https://www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/library-special/south-china-sea-territorial-disputes/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Yong Liang, "Nanhai Zhengduan de Youlai yu Jiejue (The Origin and Solution of the South China Sea Disputes)" (lecture, *Quanqiuhua Shidai de Falv Chongtu yu Duihua (Conflict of Laws and Dialogue in the Globalisation Times)*, Fudan University, March 28, 2018).

involvement of the US has made the landscape in the South China Sea more complex, as the US would like to maintain its influence and guarantee its military interests in the Asia Pacific region. The landscape therefore reflects the intricate game between the great powers behind the territorial disputes.

However, for the purposes of my thesis, the focal point is not the territorial disputes between China and its neighbouring Southeast Asian nations, but the attitude of DreamWorks towards the disputed map. Although Vietnam, the Philippines and Malaysia boycotted *Abominable*, the producers refused their request to remove the controversial map.⁶ The scenario that DreamWorks encountered in this particular instance reveals many of the contradictions and challenges in the relationship between Hollywood and the Chinese film market. Differences in terms of ideologies and political systems have always existed between the US and the PRC, but in the area of film production, both nations have developed a vested interest in cooperation and competition in order to extend their reach into the global marketplace. Compared to the strategies that Hollywood has adopted to incorporate Chinese elements into its blockbusters to gain access to a Chinese audience, the situation with *Abominable* is quite an extreme case of the usual template for success. This incident has merely brought the political and cultural interplay between Hollywood and China to the surface. These tensions can be broadly analysed in terms of cinematic production and policy as well as economic and commercial concerns.

In recent years, Hollywood has been learning the rules and policies to work with Chinese film regulators. *Abominable*, a Chinese-themed joint blockbuster animation by DreamWorks and Pearl Studio, follows the basic pattern for film collaboration between the two nations, and adopts the usual cinematic techniques and themes as well as the trusted commercial practices to enter the Chinese market. Pearl Studio was previously known as Oriental DreamWorks, a company established by DreamWorks Animation founder Jeffrey Katzenberg and China Media Capital and Shanghai Media Group in Shanghai in 2012.⁷ Oriental DreamWorks produced its first China–US co-production, *Kung Fu Panda 3* (Alessandro Carloni & Jennifer Yuh Nelson), in 2016, which won great success at home and abroad. Universal acquired DreamWorks in late

⁶ Naomi Xu Elegant, “Hollywood is Learning How to Work in China — the Hard Way,” *Fortune*, October 22, 2019, <https://fortune.com/2019/10/22/hollywood-china-coproduction-abominable/>.

⁷ Ryan Faughnder, “With ‘Abominable’, Shanghai’s Pearl Studio and DreamWorks Animation Aim for Audiences in China and Beyond,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 25, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2019-09-24/abominable-china-hollywood-dreamworks>.

2016, and thus inherited a 45% share of Oriental DreamWorks. However, due to differences in strategy development, CMC Capital Partners took over the ownership of Oriental DreamWorks and relaunched it as the 100% Chinese-owned Pearl Studio.⁸

In spite of these changes in ownership and equity, the two companies aim for *Abominable* to win both the local and overseas markets by emphasising the Chinese themed aspects of its narrative through telling a warm and appealing story set in modern China with Chinese characters in the main roles. The postcards pinned onto the disputed map depict a number of scenic spots, such as the Yellow Mountain, Qiandao Lake, the canola flower field in Jiangxi, Leshan Buddha, and the Gobi Desert, which Yi and her friends visit on their way to the Himalayas. These locations show a more diversified range of scenery than that of the usual stereotypical Western impressions of China such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City or the Terra Cotta Warriors. The film therefore conveys an image of China's landscape, history and culture to the rest of the world that is in keeping with its tourist brand and its international reputation as a beautiful country. The filmmakers aim to create the appearance of authenticity by referring to real locations and everyday activities in an animated version of contemporary China to the extent that American actors with Asian heritage are cast to voice the main characters. In an interview with the *New York Times*, the director states, "I would never want a Caucasian actor representing a Chinese character," and that their mission is to achieve authenticity.⁹ The same tendency to bridge the distance with Chinese audiences is evident with the dubbing, which was performed by a Chinese-language celebrity cast; the soundtrack too included a Chinese version of the Coldplay song "Fix You." Jokes are rewritten in order to be more intelligible to the local audience and Chinese slang is included in the script. In fact, the inclusion of Chinese characters, themes, locations and plot elements continues a recent trend in Hollywood films intent on breaking into the Chinese market. I will discuss these strategies in depth in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 through case studies of several Hollywood blockbusters in recent years, including *Mulan*, 2012, *Gravity*, *The Martian*, *The Transformers* series, and the *Kung Fu Panda* series.

In addition to its positive representation of China and Chinese characters, DreamWorks' refusal to withdraw the disputed scene from *Abominable* seems to confirm that commercial

⁸ Amid Amidi, "Oriental DreamWorks Relaunched as 100% Chinese-Owned Pearl Studio," *Cartoon Brew*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.cartoonbrew.com/business/oriental-dreamworks-relaunched-100-chinese-owned-pearl-studio-156372.html>.

⁹ Brian Chen, "In 'Abominable', Asian Actors Play Asian Characters. What a Novelty." *The New York Times*, September 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/27/movies/abominable-asian-americans.html>.

factors in this case are more important than political issues. The Chinese film market is much more significant than that of the rest of South East Asia. Hollywood is not primarily motivated by political concerns but is prepared to tacitly support Chinese territorial claims in the region to the degree that commercial interests are at stake: the priority for Hollywood is the profitability in the Chinese film market and its stable market share rather than the geopolitical interplay in the Asia Pacific region or the different ideological influences. DreamWorks' attitude more or less indicates it stands with China, as opposed to the neighbouring states, regarding the contested nine-dash line map, in order to guarantee its long-term profitability in the Chinese film market. DreamWorks cannot afford the price of upsetting Chinese film regulators and Chinese audiences; otherwise, it might lose the opportunity to gain access to the burgeoning and lucrative Chinese market under the limited quota shared by other competitive Hollywood studios. Especially in the context of the China–US trade war, DreamWorks' position, at least on the surface, runs counter to the strong policy of the Trump Administration and implies a new, more accommodating tendency of big US studios to work with Chinese film regulators and Chinese filmmakers. Hollywood is learning to seek a balance between the American government's political decisions and its own commercial interests in terms of some ideological issues. It is quite possible that DreamWorks did not notice the “minor” detail of the map and did not expect that it would raise the intricate geopolitical issues among the Southeast Asian nations, but the incident reveals how precarious that balance is. Ultimately, however, it appears that the case of *Abominable* has not damaged Hollywood's relationship with China but instead made a positive impression on Chinese film regulators, for DreamWorks demonstrated a pro-China attitude by refusing to remove the map from the film when encountering pressure from concerned Southeast Asian nations.

Taking a historical view, the representation of China has become drastically different in recent Hollywood films. Behind the changes is the rapidly rising political influence of China in the international community, due especially to China's economic growth and scientific technological development. A noticeably more positive depiction of China has been advanced in the plots of recent films. For instance, in *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013), the heroine, Ryan Stone, is stranded in space due to the destruction of her space shuttle by space debris. Stone returns to Earth with the help of the Chinese Tiangong space station and Chinese Shenzhou spacecraft. Likewise, in *The Martian* (Ridley Scott, 2015), by virtue of a timely booster rocket offered by the China National Space Administration in the rescue response to the astronaut left accidentally on Mars after being launched there by NASA, the astronaut is returned to Earth

safely. In addition, more diversified and positive Chinese characters have begun to make appearances in Hollywood blockbusters, though their screen time is limited. These include the Chinese female senior executive in *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (Michael Bay, 2014), the Chinese female fighter pilot in *Independence Day: Resurgence* (Roland Emmerich, 2016), and the Chinese female biologist in *Kong: Skull Island* (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017). Besides, audiences around the world watched Matt Damon fight against the monstrous creatures jointly with an ancient Chinese army in *The Great Wall* (Zhang Yimou, 2016), and Jason Statham cooperate with a Chinese female oceanographer and her crew to rescue countless beachgoers from the attack of a giant shark in *The Meg* (Jon Turteltaub, 2018).

My thesis will draw on the communications and interactions between China and Hollywood in terms of Chinese cultural policies, industry development, Hollywood's market strategies, and film co-productions to examine the reasons behind the positively changing representation of China and Chinese culture in Hollywood blockbusters compared to the stereotypical Orientalist images of the past. It will also examine how the inclusion of Chinese elements in recent Hollywood blockbusters serves to demonstrate the successful export of Chinese culture to the rest of the world. Here, Edward Said's work on Orientalism and Joseph Nye's analysis of soft power will offer a helpful theoretical framework to evaluate the complicated interplay between China and Hollywood in terms of cinematic or cultural representation, commercial profits and political concerns.

Edward Said elucidates how and why Orientalism was generated and developed as a means of representing, describing and shaping the Orient for the West. He claims that "the Orientalist scholars reduced the obscurity by translating, sympathetically portraying, inwardly grasping the hard-to-reach object."¹⁰ To some degree, today's Western filmmakers who produce films about China or related to China may also be regarded as Orientalists; thus, understanding the pioneering Orientalists' mode of thought is conducive to analysing contemporary Western filmmakers' creative intention. The works Said reviewed in *Orientalism* were mostly associated with the Middle East and the Islamic world, such as Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, and the Ottoman Empire, but his insights may also be applied to the representation of China. Orientalism, as Said observes, is not about advocating "anti-Westernism" or inciting antagonistic emotions between the East and the West, but is "a study based on the rethinking of what had for centuries been believed to be an unbridgeable chasm

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 222.

separating East from West.”¹¹ Said calls for “a new way of conceiving the separations and conflicts that had stimulated generations of hostility, war and imperial control.”¹² In other words, Said attempts to elaborate how culture, history, and power, as specific social-economic realities, exert their influence upon the representation of the East in the West, and how the distinction between the East and the West is generated, developed and deepened in specific social, cultural, political and economic settings.

In this view, Orientalism is a mode of thinking and a kind of discourse based upon the power relationship between the East and the West. The representational strategies of orientalism are evident in the portrayal of China and Chinese people in earlier Hollywood films (see Chapter 3, the analysis of *Broken Blossoms*), and form a point of comparison with the recent representation of China. It is necessary to analyse the reasons for these changes and to break the stereotypes of the Orient in order to reduce conflict and confusion and to enhance the engagement between the East and the West.

In current globalised society, communication and exchange among different cultures have become more frequent, and nations have attached increased importance to the output of their “soft power,” a concept developed by Joseph Nye in the 1990s. Nye claims that “soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment.”¹³ He asserts that “the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture, its political values and its foreign policies.”¹⁴ Soft power, as a political and cultural phenomenon has existed for thousands of years, as exemplified by the legacy of Ancient Greece in terms of literature, art, and philosophy as well as the Tang Dynasty in China (A.D. 618 – A.D. 907). In the Tang Dynasty, people lived and worked in peace and contentment. The economy prospered, literature and art flourished, and political integrity was maintained. The Tang Dynasty exerted enormous influence on neighbouring vassal states, such as Japan and the states on the Korean peninsula, in terms of the political system, culture, art, and technology. Meanwhile, numerous talents from neighbouring countries were attracted to China and many of them served as high-ranking officials in the government of the Tang Empire. The open atmosphere of the Tang Dynasty formed an unprecedented culturally diversified environment.

¹¹ Ibid., 352.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Joseph Nye, “Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (2008): 94.

¹⁴ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 11.

With regard to culture, Nye asserts that “[it] is common to distinguish between high culture such as literature, art and education, which appeals to elites, and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment.”¹⁵ Generally, popular culture is comprised of news, broadcasting, the cinema, and television. A vigorously flourishing mass culture, including films, TVs, radios, internet literature and the press, has exerted a significant influence on people’s daily life and become the main means to communicate culture, ideas, information and values between different countries. Research on mass culture, especially films, which are one of the most efficient and direct expressions of popular desire, provides a direct way to understand the aesthetic requirements and artistic tastes of people.

Film blurs the boundary between high culture and popular culture as it integrates many artistic forms, such as literature, music, photography, dance, painting and performance. The visual intuitiveness of film can bring about direct and efficient cross-cultural communication. Cinematic images often convey values and transmit messages more powerfully and efficiently than paper media in contemporary society. Films, though not always consciously, do reflect and contain the social norms and ideologies of the society in which they were created, sometimes promoting them and sometimes criticising or doubting them. And Films have the power to evoke emotions, change conceptions, sway opinions, and shape outlooks on life, values and the world. From this perspective, Hollywood cinema is the strongest and most effective promoter and exporter to disseminate messages to the public globally. As one of the US’s most significant modes of soft power, Hollywood productions are the most popular form of cinema in the world because of their spectacular scenes, gripping and intriguing plots and star-studded casts, creating one box-office success after another internationally. More importantly, American culture and values imperceptibly exert their influence upon the lives of filmgoers across the world. Former French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hubert Védrine, observed that Americans are powerful “because they possess what the writer and philosopher René Girard has called the ‘mental power’ to inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to their mastery of global images through film and television and because, for these same reasons, large numbers of students from other countries come to the United States to finish their studies.”¹⁶ This remark indicates the enormous attraction of soft power and the extent to which it influences people’s views and minds.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hubert Védrine and Dominique Moïsi, *France in an Age of Globalization*, trans. Philip Gordon (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 3.

Nye contends that “the resources that produce soft power arise in large part from the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others.”¹⁷ However, the resources also depend upon the economic strength, social cohesion and military might that guarantee incentives for cooperation and mutual exchange between nations. In this sense, neither hard power nor soft power is absolute, and the distinction between the two is one of degree. Sometimes, hard power is conducive for the exercise of soft power. Nye indicates that “a strong economy not only provides resources for sanctions and payments, but can also be a source of attractiveness.”¹⁸ Here the parallels between the constant growth of the lucrative Chinese film market and the incorporation of positive Chinese elements into Hollywood blockbusters offer a clear example of soft power in operation. In this process, though China does not actively export its cultural soft power through its own domestic films, the tremendous profitability of the Chinese film market has inspired and attracted Hollywood productions to spontaneously incorporate Chinese elements to win the opportunity to gain access to the profitable Chinese film market. The whole process can be interpreted as a kind of indirect conversion of China’s hard power (economic development) into soft power. It is an effective method for Hollywood to win the opportunity to gain more box office revenue; meanwhile, China exploits the opportunity to modify its previous Orientalist image and to demonstrate its cultural soft power to the rest of the world through Hollywood’s global influence and reach.

My research, therefore, will provide an analysis of the cultural policies instated by China for importing Hollywood films to the Chinese film market, as well as Hollywood’s strategies for circumventing those cultural policies. I will seek to answer the following questions: How and why are the Hollywood films introduced to the Chinese film market on a revenue-sharing basis? What kind of cultural policies do Hollywood films encounter when being introduced to the Chinese film market? What kind of influence do the Hollywood films exert on the Chinese film industry? How do Chinese domestic films cope with Hollywood’s powerful momentum in the Chinese film market? How do Hollywood films react to or cope with these cultural policies? What kind of changes have Hollywood films made in terms of the depiction of China and Chinese culture since they were introduced to China on a revenue-sharing basis?

¹⁷ Nye, 8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

My research concentrates on the interplay between China and Hollywood in terms of culture, economy and politics by means of elaborating the cultural policies of the Chinese government toward the importation of Hollywood films and the strategies that Hollywood films adopt to gain access to the booming and lucrative Chinese film market. My thesis also concerns the globalisation of the Hollywood film industry since the Chinese film market is one of the most significant overseas markets for Hollywood at present. The literature that provides a framework for my thesis draws upon three research categories. The first category mainly concerns the development and history of Chinese cinema, the reform of the Chinese film institution, and the growth of the Chinese film market, as well as the specific cultural policies for introducing Hollywood films to the Chinese market. The second category examines the globalisation and domination of Hollywood films in the global film industry, mainly focusing on the reasons why Hollywood has grown into a global film behemoth in terms of American government support, its sophisticated film industry mode in terms of production, distribution and exhibition, and the methods of accommodating local audiences in different nations and regions. The third category focuses on the relationship between China and Hollywood, including what kind of strategies Hollywood has been exploring and employing to pursue larger profits and expand its market share in the burgeoning Chinese film market through collaborations and interplay with Chinese filmmakers and Chinese film regulators. There exist inevitable contradictions and frictions in the interactions between China and Hollywood in terms of cultural expression, cinematic production and policy systems; thus, both two parties need to seek a balance or make compromises in the collaborations.

With China's economy and film market growing rapidly, in recent years more scholars are focusing upon the exportation of China's influence and cultural soft power, and the cooperation between China and Hollywood. In *Hollywood Made in China*, Aynne Kokas examines the Sino-US media brand collaborations during the period from China's accession to the WTO to the opening of Shanghai Disney Resort. Kokas analyses the dynamic relationship between China and Hollywood in terms of culture, economy, and politics from the perspective of film production and collaboration, as well as the construction of film theme parks and English-language schools. She focuses on exploring the method of film co-production with the case studies of *Ironman 3* and *Transformers 4*, illustrating the cooperation of Disney, English schools and the co-construction of Shanghai Disney Resort and analysing the two most representative film industry forums in China (SIFFORUM affiliated to the Shanghai International Film Festival) and in the US (US-China Film Summit). In addition, Kokas

examines China-US film collaboration from the perspective of the film practitioners, the specific roles of the “above-the-line” film workers (including directors, producers, screenwriters and film policymakers) and the influence of the “below-the-line” film crews (including translators, production managers and logistics managers). She argues that China and Hollywood become more symbiotic in terms of the media brand collaborations at the levels of policy, investment, labour, and marketing. All the stakeholders in the process, including government policymakers, industry executives and production practitioners on both sides, are pursuing what they would like to garner from the new China-US brandscapes that blend both media industry resources. Hence, this will make the relationship between China and Hollywood more intertwined and complicated in terms of politics, economy and culture. The broader scope of Kokas’ research offers a much wider background and more detailed understanding of the relationship between China and Hollywood than the standard analysis of films in terms of production, distribution and exhibition. The collaboration between film theme parks and English language schools indicates that the relationship between the media industries of the two global powers has become increasingly interdependent and comprehensive. My own research, however, places greater emphasis on the specific strategies employed by Hollywood productions when incorporating Chinese elements into recent releases in response to Chinese cultural policies, hence revealing that the process of cultural exchange, as the case of *Abominable* illustrates, is necessarily conflicted, contested and compromised.

These issues are not without historical precedent as Ting Wang shows in her contribution to *Global Hollywood 2*. The book provides a comprehensive discussion of the process of globalisation and its influences on the Hollywood film industry from the perspective of cultural imperialism and a political economy. The section on the PRC which Wang contributes to briefly recounts the situation of co-productions with a few Hollywood studios in terms of capital in the beginning of the 21st century. Wang draws a comparison between the co-productions at that time and the recent China-US film co-productions in terms of methods and goals, which is conducive to analysing the changing attitude of Hollywood towards China’s film market. In addition, Wang’s earlier PhD dissertation, *Global Hollywood and China’s Filmed Entertainment Industry* (2006), examines the dynamic interface between Hollywood’s global expansion and the Chinese film market before and after China’s accession to the WTO. Wang focuses upon the institutional reform of the Chinese film industry and the Motion Picture Association of America’s lobbying of the American government in support of China’s membership, along with the subsequent business strategies of Hollywood producers after

China's accession to the WTO. Wang analyses the reasons for the relative recession of Hollywood blockbusters in the Chinese film market compared to their popularity just after importation, and explores why China became the new destination for Hollywood runaway productions and collaborative film productions with Chinese film companies. In the face of an influx of foreign films, Chinese domestic films, represented by Zhang Yimou's two martial arts blockbusters, *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), formed a tendency to imitate the Hollywood model. Wang expresses concerns over the trend of advocating the commercialisation of Chinese films while disregarding the successful art-house films of the Fifth Generation because of their relatively limited box office appeal.¹⁹ Thus, Wang lays more emphasis on concerns about the homogenising effect of Hollywood on film production in the Chinese market and its threat to national identity and cultural diversity. Her elaboration of the institutional reform of the Chinese film industry, Chinese film policy and the localised methods employed by Hollywood productions in the period after their introduction into the Chinese market illustrates the complicated interplay between the Chinese government and Hollywood studios.

Compared to Wang's work focusing on the situation revolving around China's entry into the WTO, Wendy Weiqun Su's research on the China-Hollywood relationship has covered more issues and spanned a longer time. She researches the Chinese film market and its encounter with Hollywood from the perspectives of Chinese cultural policies and transnational partnerships.²⁰ Meanwhile, Su's PhD dissertation, *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood from 1994 to 2008—Cultural Policy, Film Modernity, and Transnational Partnerships* (2009), is a comprehensive achievement synthesising her previous research. She argues that before 2000, the Chinese government attempted to promote "Main Melody" films, which eulogise socialism, patriotism and collectivism or the heroic stories during the revolutionary war period, to compete with the imported Hollywood films; however, the method did not work effectively due to the effects of globalisation, China's entry into the WTO, and the loosening of the film policies by the Chinese government. As a result, an increase in transnational productions led to a vaguer demarcation of the differences between foreign and domestic films. The importation

¹⁹ They had studied at the Beijing Film Academy from 1978 to 1982 and were the first graduates after the Cultural Revolution, including the representative directors Zhang Junzhao, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou and Tian Zhuangzhuang.

²⁰ To learn more, please see these journal articles: *To be or not to be—China's Cultural Policy and Counter-hegemony Strategy Toward Global Hollywood from 1994 to 2000*; *Resisting Cultural Imperialism, or Welcoming Cultural Globalization? China's Extensive Debate on Hollywood Cinema from 1994 to 2007*; and *Cultural Policy and Film Industry as Negotiation of Power: The Chinese State's Role and Strategies in its Engagement with Global Hollywood 1994-2012*.

of Hollywood films received various responses from different groups. Some scholars and directors strongly opposed the decision to allow more Hollywood films to enter China for they thought this decision would devastate the local film market, and they advocated the protection of the domestic films. Others were more optimistic as Hollywood films would definitely provide greater competition, cooperation and motivation for Chinese filmmakers. *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry, 1994-2013* collects years of Su's previous research on the global-local interplay between China's encounter with global Hollywood, transnational media conglomerates and American culture, global media capital and local agency from 1994 to 2013, as well as the impact of Hollywood on China to modernise its film industry. Su examines how liberal film critics and distributors welcomed the revitalisation of the Chinese film market while ordinary filmgoers embraced Hollywood blockbusters and cheered for the diversification of Chinese film market. The attitude of the Chinese government was, according to the proverb, "going to sea by borrowing a boat," that is, taking advantage of Hollywood's resources, learning from the Hollywood mode of production and transforming the film industry in China in order to export Chinese culture overseas. Su's research, therefore, exposes the contradictory attitude of the Chinese authorities, filmmakers, critics and audiences toward Hollywood in the first 20 years after the introduction of Hollywood films.

As there are many inevitable contradictions and frictions in the interaction between China and Hollywood due to political and historical reasons, it is necessary to first understand the development of Chinese cinema, which interweaves the relationship between filmmakers and Chinese film regulating sector, and the reform of the Chinese film system. The historical development of Chinese cinema is closely associated with the formulation of China's policies in terms of film production, distribution, exhibition, importation and exportation.

The birth of Chinese films was closely related to the exhibition of foreign films in China around the beginning of the 20th century. In *Zhongguo Zaoqi Dianyingshi 1896-1937 (The Early Film History in China 1896-1937)*, Jirong Hu traces early film development in Shanghai where Chinese and Western cultures communicated in the early 20th century. She elaborates how the nascent Chinese filmmaking originated in the context of the exhibition of foreign films by virtue of abundant and detailed historical materials and archives, especially the variety of film magazines and pictorials at that time. Hu also recounts the transformation of an early film exhibition space in Shanghai. Similarly, in *Projecting a Nation: Chinese National Cinema*

before 1949, Jubin Hu has offered a new interpretation of Chinese national cinema by means of examining the historical, ideological and cultural process of the formation of the Chinese nation and the characteristics of the Chinese cinema. He argues that before 1949, the national cinema in China placed more emphasis on national ideology and nation building than national culture. His discussion of “the national” in Chinese cinema shows that it was closely associated with the involvement of political parties (including the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Communist Party of China (CPC)) in the production of Chinese films in the 1930s and 1940s when the Chinese nation was trapped in the War of Resistance against Japan and the Civil War between the KMT and the CPC. Facing the invasion of Japanese aggressors during the period, the KMT as the party in power initiated the Nationalist Film Movement, and the CPC, though not in power but growing into a strong force to resist the Japanese invasion, launched the Left-Wing Film Movement. Both film movements have inspired the nationalist spirit and patriotism of the Chinese nation. Indeed, the situation before 1949 exerted a powerful influence on the establishment of a series of regulations on film production, distribution and exhibition after 1949. For the previous historical reasons, Chinese cinema became entangled with Chinese authorities’ intervention in film production, distribution and exhibition and gradually moved to the edge of collapse in the 1990s,²¹ which stimulated the reform of the film industry, the introduction of Hollywood films and integration and collaboration with foreign film companies.

Continuing Jubin Hu’s research, Paul Clark in *Chinese Cinema: Culture and Politics since 1949* expounds on the complex and dynamic relationship between Chinese cinema and the Chinese political system and explores the origin of and fundamental reason why the Chinese cinema and Chinese political system interweave with each other and form such a complicated relationship. Clark’s analysis is limited to the mid-1980s but offers a useful description of how films are produced in China and the sort of setbacks and hardships Chinese filmmakers encounter in their attempts to work with the film regulating sector. The fundamental reason for the complex association between Chinese cinema and Chinese authorities originates from the state monopoly over film production, distribution and exhibition during the planned-economy period. Because the current climate of transnational coproduction still involves similar negotiations and limitations, albeit in a more globalised context, the previous experience Clark explores can still serve as a reference for today’s international film co-productions.

²¹ See the detailed analysis in Chapter 1.

Ying Zhu's book *Chinese Cinema during the Era of Reform* provides a helpful sequel to Clark's work in its examination of the transformation of Chinese cinema from a political or ideological propaganda entity to a market-oriented industry after the Reform and Opening-up period.²² She connects the institutional reform of the Chinese cinema sector and the situation of the Fifth-Generation Chinese filmmakers and independent films in China with the social and historical background under which Hollywood films were introduced to China on an internationally agreed revenue-sharing basis. Her anthology with Stanley Rosen, *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, insists upon the interplay between art, politics and commerce in the development and reform of the Chinese film industry. The anthology attaches importance to the politics and commerce which influenced the development of the Chinese film industry. The book illustrates the connections between market reform and globalisation under China's political system through addressing Chinese cinema's evolution into an industry, the consumption society in China and the exportation of Chinese films to the international market. It also explores the contradictions between state-monopoly and marketisation, and artistic creation and commercial profits by means of examining the Chinese art-house films and films released during the Chinese New Year period. In addition, the book analyses martial arts films, Chinese animations and Chinese documentary filmmaking. It has attempted to offer a multifaceted reassessment of Chinese cinema.

Differing from the previous scholars, who focus on the intertwined relationship between Chinese filmmaking and political involvement from Chinese authorities, Dai Jinhua in *Wu zhong Fengjing: Zhongguo Dianying Wenhua 1978---1998 (Sceneries in the Mist: Chinese Cinema Culture 1978---1998)* focuses on the artistic creation of Chinese films after the Reform and Opening-up in 1978 from the perspective of cultural studies and includes her speculation on Hollywood's re-entry into the Chinese film market. The book is a collection of Dai's previous essays about Chinese cinema compiled into a cohesive prose-style monograph. Chinese films were sometimes inspired by big hopes and ambitions, while also remaining constrained by the difficult reality of the period, and Dai is able to illustrate different generations of Chinese filmmakers and elaborate on the subtle interactive relationship between Chinese cinema and the changing social and cultural context in the new reform era. In the book, several essays in the chapter "Kuanghuanjie de Zhixie: 1995 Zhongguo Dianying Beiwang

²² After the policy of Reform and Opening-up was established, the focus of the Chinese government was shifted to the economic reform and the construction of socialist modernisation.

(Paper Scraps of Carnival: Chinese Cinema Memo in 1995)” refer to Hollywood’s re-entry into the Chinese film market, such as “Yingxiong yu Shisheng (Heroes and City Voice)” and “Lang Lai Le? (The Wolf has Come?)”. Dai claims the importation of Hollywood films is not a kind of connection with the track of international culture, but a connection between the Chinese cultural market and transnational capital, and that in the process, only market and profit are highlighted rather than art and aesthetics.²³ She expresses her concerns and discomfort regarding the importation of Hollywood blockbusters into the Chinese film market and their possible devastation of the domestic film industry, based on the experience of other nations such as Japan and Germany.²⁴

Compared to Dai and her concerns about the importation of Hollywood films, a trend within the context of globalisation, Zhang Yiwu attaches more importance to the relationship between globalisation and the development of the Chinese cinema in *Quanqiuhua yu Zhongguo Dianyning de Zhuanxing (Globalisation and the Transformation of the Chinese Cinema)*. He discusses the history of film culture in China and mainly examines China’s Fifth-Generation film directors within a postcolonial context. Zhang asserts that the art-house films of the Fifth-Generation directors with the exotic Chinese characteristics catering to the Western audiences in the late 1980s and early 1990s are a kind of special cultural consumer product about China created by transnational capital, and a demonstration of the Other about China within the context of globalisation dominated by Western cultural hegemony.²⁵ In addition, this “Other” is a tamed Other created by the filmmakers based on their cultural imagination with the Westerners’ stance. These films are a fantasy representation of Chinese history and culture which have blocked a rapidly changing China.²⁶ Zhang Yimou’s films are analysed in depth, from his early spectacle-demonstrating films²⁷— which the author claims are mysterious Eastern allegories, a thoroughly enclosed space created for Western audiences excluded from modern discourse²⁸ — to the commercial martial arts or costume drama blockbusters of the beginning of the 21st century. The transformation of his film style reflects the transformation of the Chinese cinema within the context of globalisation and Hollywood’s expansion in the Chinese film market.

²³ Jinhua Dai, *Wu zhong Fengjing: Zhongguo Dianyning Wenhua 1978—1998 (Sceneries in the Mist: Chinese Cinema Culture 1978—1998)* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2016), 328.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 338.

²⁵ Yiwu Zhang, *Quanqiuhua yu zhongguo dianyning de zhuanxing (Globalisation and the Transformation of the Chinese Cinema)* (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2006), 148.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁷ Most of the spectacles in Zhang Yimou’s films do not exist but are created by the director.

²⁸ Zhang, 163.

The previous research focuses on different periods of Chinese cinema history, while *Zhongguo Dianyingshi Gangyao (The Compendium for History of Chinese Film)* systematically offers a chronological development of Chinese cinema from the birth of the first Chinese film in 1905 to the beginning of the 20th century within the social, political and cultural context of China. It is an encyclopaedia-style book delineating the main development course of Chinese films, covering the dynamic relationship between domestic production and the film regulating sector, and interweaving the account of representative directors and films in different historical stages of Chinese cinema. The book does not take the same critical stance as the previous scholars, who illustrate Chinese cinema from the perspective of cultural studies, film system reform or the complicated relationship between Chinese cinema and Chinese film regulating sector. However, it offers a panoramic overview of the historical development of Chinese cinema and provides a clear way to gain a general understanding of Chinese cinema.

The previous literature that has been discussed concentrates on the cultural or artistic analysis of Chinese films, the historical development of Chinese cinema, the impact of China's political system on film production in China, the discussion of film market analysis and commercialisation of Chinese cinema, the institutional reform of the Chinese film industry and the importation of Hollywood films to the Chinese film market. In terms of my own research interests, they offer an important critical reflection on how the development of Chinese cinema and the creation of a national film industry contribute to the decision of the Chinese film authorities to loosen control over the film system, gradually transform it into a market-oriented system and import Hollywood films on a revenue-sharing basis. Moreover, the previous literature has laid the foundation for examining the ensuing relationship between China and Hollywood, in all its complexity, in terms of cultural policy and the Hollywood studios' methods to gain access to the Chinese film market.

China is one of the target markets for Hollywood's global expansion; thus, understanding how Hollywood has grown to dominate the global film industry is beneficial to an analysis of Hollywood's strategies to open China's film market. In *Hollywood Politics and Economics*, Zhou Liming provides a comprehensive review of the Hollywood film industry, including the industry landscape; the revenue and capital operation of Hollywood films; the production, distribution and exhibition of Hollywood; the remuneration of Hollywood stars; the influence of the film workers' political stance on films; and, interestingly, the film professionals with Chinese origins. Furthermore, Zhou elaborates on the relationship between Chinese films and

the international film market in a way that references the establishment and development of the Chinese film market and the industry practices of Chinese filmmakers. Zhou believes the potential of Chinese films lies in two factors. The first is that China possesses a domestic market similar in scale to the American market, which could consume a large amount of films in the future.²⁹ The second is that Chinese films have distinct cultural roots and charm, which could endow Chinese films with lasting influence in Chinese-language circles including the Chinese diaspora.

Kristin Thompson shares Zhou's view that a huge domestic market is one of the significant conditions needed for a country to grow into a huge film power. In *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market 1907-1934*, she explains how American films took the opportunity of World War I to turn Hollywood into the synonym of film industry in the world, and how Hollywood has maintained the dominant position since then. According to Thompson, the first reason is that the huge domestic American market could amortise the local films and recoup the cost of film production. Besides, the oligopoly of the major film studios in America was formed in the late 1910s and 1920s, which has ensured Hollywood's control over the film distribution in overseas markets. The second reason is that Hollywood has received support from different departments of the American government, especially from the diplomatic department. American consuls have offered a great deal of information to Hollywood as its references for film production and distribution, such as the market share of American films and the film viewing preferences of local audiences in different countries. Whereas Thompson emphasises the starting period of Hollywood's development, Kerry Segrave extends her research about how Hollywood grew into a film behemoth that dominated the global film market up until the 1990s in her book *American Films Abroad: Hollywood's Domination of the World's Movie Screen*. Segrave shows how the major Hollywood studios formed a giant cartel to control film production, distribution and exhibition, and how the Department of State and the Department of Commerce offered indirect support to Hollywood's expansion in the overseas film markets in terms of policy and trade.

Global Hollywood 2 provides further insights into the hegemonic practices employed by Hollywood studios to maintain their global dominance in film production, distribution and exhibition. With regard to China, the sections fall into three different chapters. As

²⁹ The revenue of the Chinese film market accounted for a tiny share in the world film market when the book was published in 2005.

aforementioned, Ting Wang contributes to the section about the cooperation between China and Hollywood productions up until the beginning of the 20th century that occurred due to the exotic Eastern locations or the cheap labour cost in China. The other two sections briefly examine the run-away productions in China until the 2000s and the brief history of Hollywood films' entry into China. Owing to the censorship in China, the quota system for foreign films, the cultural policies about co-productions between China and Hollywood, as well as the barriers of language, history and social norms contained in Hollywood films, plus the underdeveloped film industry and theatrical infrastructures in China, Hollywood films exported to the Chinese film market met with some setbacks in the beginning of the 20th century. However, over the course of its history, Hollywood has accumulated a great deal of experience and tested a number of methods of expansion and domination in the global film industry and is therefore well-equipped, despite the specific cultural and political challenges presented by the Chinese film regulators and Chinese audience, to adjust its specific strategies to open the Chinese film market and further expand its market share.

Compared to the situation in the past, China's importation of Hollywood films and Hollywood's attitude towards the Chinese film market have changed dramatically. Therefore, my research concerning the communication and interplay between China and Hollywood attempts to keep pace with the latest developments of both film markets. In 2012, when total ticket sales reached Renminbi (Chinese currency, hereinafter RMB) 17 billion, the Chinese film market became the second largest in the world;³⁰ astoundingly, however, 45% of the revenue was contributed by foreign films, which indicates that the Chinese film market has become the largest overseas market for Hollywood. Furthermore, in recent years, many Hollywood productions have performed better in terms of box office revenue in China than in the North American market. Some films, the *Transformers*' cycle in particular, developed sequels owing to the prominent ticket sales of the original title in the Chinese market. Additionally, the fact that an increasing number of Chinese domestic blockbusters have ranked in the top 15 box office list worldwide over the past few years has posed a potential challenge to the hegemonic position of Hollywood in the global film industry: for instance, *Wolf Warrior 2* (Wu Jing, 2017) ranked number 7, *Operation Red Sea* (Dante Lam, 2018) and *Detective Chinatown 2* (Chen Sicheng, 2018) ranked number 13 and 14, and *Ne Zha* (Jiaozi, 2019) and

³⁰ "Theatrical Market Statistics," Motion Picture Association of America, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.motionpictures.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2012-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-Report.pdf>.

The Wandering Earth (Guo Fan, 2019) ranked number 12 and 13.³¹ In response to the growth of supply and demand, Hollywood has begun to incorporate more Chinese elements into the blockbusters that have been co-produced with China in order to gain access to the local market. Chinese roles in Hollywood films have become more diversified compared to the previous Orientalist representations. The characterisation of China and Chinese culture is treated more positively as the cooperation between Chinese and American filmmakers proliferates. My research, therefore, attempts to track the consequences, in terms of economy, culture and politics, of the changing relationship between the Chinese film industry and Hollywood film production, by maintaining a persistent focus on the cultural policies established by the Chinese authorities for importing Hollywood films to the local market and the cinematic strategies adopted by Hollywood to circumvent the system of rules and regulations that govern access to Chinese audiences.

Thesis Structure

Chapter One recounts the early communication of American films to China from the end of the 19th century to the foundation of the PRC and discusses the formation of China's film system and the reform of the Chinese film industry, in particular the cultural policies instituted in 1994 that permitted Hollywood films' re-entry to China on a revenue-sharing basis. China's national film industry was initiated with the exhibition of American films, which continued to occupy a large share in Chinese theatres throughout the 1920s and 1930s. After the creation of the People's Republic, however, all American films were banned from Chinese screens. Chinese film studios became state-owned and almost all productions were planned and guided by the Chinese film regulating sector as cinema was regarded as a significant instrument for the government's propaganda. Nevertheless, several decades of restriction on the domestic film production has generated numerous problems. After China's Reform and Opening-up policy was established and implemented and Western goods and leisure activities were introduced, the public gradually lost interest in domestic films. By the early 1990s, China's domestic film market was on the edge of collapse. In order to revitalise the collapsing market, the Chinese film regulating sector decided to import 10 foreign films (most of them were Hollywood films) on a revenue-sharing basis. Thus, the quota system was established. Due to China's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001 and the signing of the China-US Memorandum of Understanding regarding theatrical releases in 2012, the quota has been

³¹ See the ranking details at boxofficemojo.com.

enlarged further, the number now being 34 films (including 14 enhanced 3D or IMAX format films). Besides the quota system, the chapter will also illustrate the other two cultural policies about importing Hollywood films, the censorship system and uncertain release schedule. The censorship system will be analysed by means of certain film regulations and specific Hollywood film case studies about how such films are censored. And the policy of uncertain release schedule of Hollywood films will be elaborated by using particular films as case studies.

Chapter Two analyses how and why Hollywood films have dominated the global film industry. Firstly, the American government offers great political and diplomatic support to promote Hollywood films globally and enlarge their market share. Secondly, Hollywood has always been adept in absorbing foreign filmmakers and foreign cultural elements and incorporating themes and subjects from foreign countries to reduce the side effect brought about by “cultural discount” to attract a foreign audience. Cultural discount is a term coined by media economists Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus when they research US dominance of television programmes in international trade. When cultural products from one country are communicated to target countries with different cultural backgrounds, resulting in the communication effects being weakened due to the language barrier, different social norms or value systems or other cultural or historical reasons. Thirdly, the systematic oligopoly of the Hollywood studio system provides the fundamental competitive advantage in maintaining the status of Hollywood as the leading centre of the motion-picture industry. In addition, this chapter elaborates on the recent developments in the Chinese film industry and the potential possibilities China possesses to challenge the hegemonic position of Hollywood in the global film market.

Both Chapters Three and Four elucidate the strategies for incorporating Chinese elements into Hollywood films destined for the Chinese film market. The techniques and methods employed can be identified under two separate but related categories: artistic and commercial motivations.

Chapter Three concentrates on the changing cinematic representation of China and Chinese culture in Hollywood films in terms of characters, plots and themes. I analyse a series of case studies of representative films that incorporate Chinese elements, such as *Broken Blossoms* (D.W. Griffith, 1919), *The Last Emperor* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987), *Mulan* (Tony Bancroft & Barry Cook, 1998), the *Kung Fu Panda* series (Mark Osborne & John Stevenson 2008, Jennifer Yuh Nelson 2011, Alessandro Carloni & Jennifer Yuh Nelson 2016), *Gravity*

(Alfonso Cuarón, 2013) and *The Martian* (Ridley Scott, 2015), in order to evaluate how Hollywood has evolved in its depiction of Chinese culture in an attempt to extend its appeal to the Chinese authorities and Chinese audiences.

Chapter Four focuses on the commercial strategies adopted by Hollywood to circumvent the cultural policies imposed in exchange for entry to the Chinese market, and the system of co-productions with Chinese film companies. I draw upon some typical contemporary Hollywood blockbusters, such as *Transformers 2 & 3 & 4 & 5* (Michael Bay, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2017), *The Great Wall* (Zhang Yimou, 2016) and *The Meg* (Jon Turteltaub, 2018), to show how they use the placement of recognisable Chinese products and filming locations to enhance their success in the Chinese market. I also discuss the various approaches that have been developed for co-productions between the Hollywood studios and Chinese companies, along with their relative merits and successes.

The conclusion of my thesis asserts that cultural exchange, in this case, the importation of popular Hollywood films into China, is a dynamic process and is inextricably linked to political and economic imperatives. From the perspective of China, the Chinese authorities have adopted a pragmatic and acceptable position intending to grow the domestic film industry and counterbalance Hollywood's market share by means of the quota system, censorship rules and an uncertain release schedule. In the meantime, cooperating with Hollywood and encouraging the inclusion of Chinese elements in its blockbusters is beneficial to exporting China's cultural soft power and changing its stereotypical image in the international community. On the other hand, from the perspective of Hollywood, the booming and profitable Chinese market, despite the restrictions imposed by Chinese cultural policies, holds immense appeal as a source of profit and further expansion. It appears that the cultural policies will not be cancelled completely in the short term, but will gradually be loosened to the mutual benefit of both partners. A new trend is emerging as Hollywood films begin to pre-empt cultural policies through self-censorship of topics, plots or scenes which may be offensive or objectionable to the Chinese authorities and audiences. The furore over the contested map in *Abominable* is a sign that further compromises and concessions can be expected as Hollywood films continue to secure their place in the Chinese market.

Chapter 1 How Hollywood Films have been Imported to China

1.1 Early Relations and Communications between China and American Film Studios

Shanghai has been the gateway for the entry of foreign imports into China; film proves no exception. In 1840, the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), which was in the late phase of the feudal age, was forced to open the door due to the First Opium War with Britain. After the war, the Qing government was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanking, one article of which was to open Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Ningbo and Shanghai as trading ports. As a result, Shanghai became one of the most prosperous economic and cultural centres in China; it also became one of the earliest cities to obtain access to foreign materials and one of the most open-minded cities, the place that blended Eastern and Western cultures in China. From the mid-1800s, more Western countries came to exploit a China declining in power by means of various wars and unequal treaties, through which they obtained a variety of profits, such as territory cession, financial compensation, the opening of trading ports, tariff negotiation, consular jurisdiction. These privileges created convenient conditions for these capitalist countries to export diversified products to China, including films. Therefore, it is no wonder that, because of its unique temperament and atmosphere, Shanghai witnessed many unprecedented events concerning the early development of cinema in China.

According to Huang Dequan, foreign films were shown for the first time in May 1897 at Astor House in Shanghai by an American film exhibitor named Youngson.¹ Just like marketing a kind of novel product, European and American businessmen brought films to exhibit them in Shanghai, aiming to gain substantial business profits. In the beginning, these foreign films were exhibited in tea houses, Chinese traditional opera theatres, or other entertainment venues. In 1903, Spanish businessman Antonio Ramos set the first fixed film exhibition place at Qinglian Pavilion in Si Malu (currently Fuzhou Road), Shanghai.² The film exhibition industry in China began to take shape and attracted more foreign film exhibitors. Meanwhile, watching films, a novelty entertainment experience, became increasingly popular with the public. Gradually, with the growing popularity of films and increasing audiences, these foreign exhibitors started to invest and establish professional cinemas. By the mid-twenties, there were altogether 140

¹ Dequan Huang, "Dianying Chudao Shanghai Kao (Research on the Films Shown in Shanghai for the First Time)," *Dianying Yishu (Film Art)* 3 (2007): 102.

² Jianchen Gu, *Zhongguo dianying fada shi (The Development History of Chinese Cinema)* (Nanjing: Zhongguo Jiaoyu Dianying Xiehui, 1934), 3.

theatres across China (39 theatres in Shanghai, 13 in Beijing, 12 in Harbin, 10 in Hankou and Tianjin respectively, and a few in some other cities).³

Before World War I, the films shown in Shanghai were mainly from France, Germany and Britain, mostly from the France Pathé and Gaumont Film Company. However, after the war, the framework in the exhibition market changed and American films began to replace French films in Chinese theatres and almost monopolised the Chinese film exhibition market.⁴ Over time, an increasing number of foreign producers started agencies and established new film distribution networks. Foreign film companies, on the one hand, controlled the theatres, and on the other hand controlled the exportation of foreign films to China, virtually monopolising both the distribution and exhibition networks. Furthermore, American film distributors were the most powerful, and the “Big Eight” film companies from America set up their own branch offices in Shanghai.⁵

Table 1 displays a comparison between the number of American films and the number of foreign films shown in Chinese cinemas from the 1920s to the 1940s.

Table 1

Year	Number of American films	Total Number of Foreign Films
1926	400	450 ⁶
1934	364	412 ⁷
1946	881 ⁸	Missing

We can see American films were quite popular in China and dominated the film exhibition in China’s cinemas in the first half of the 20th century. Having experienced two world wars, the film industry in Europe was at a grave disadvantage, with the United States taking advantage of the situation to develop its own strength and stand out from the other Western film powers. In the 1920s, in the United States, the total investment in the film industry was more than USD

³ Shuguan Rao, *Zhongguo Dianying Shichang Fazhan Shi (The Development History of Chinese Film Market)* (Beijing: Zhongguo Dianying Chubanshe, 2009), 11.

⁴ Jirong Hu, *Zhongguo Zaoqi Diangying Shi 1896-1937 (The Early History of Chinese Cinema 1896-1937)* (Shanghai: Shanghai People Publishing House, 2010), 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶ Zhiwei Xiao, “American Films in China Prior to 1950,” in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, ed. Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 56.

⁷ Richard Patterson Jr., “The Cinema in China,” *China Weekly Review* 40 (1927): 48.

⁸ Xiao, 57.

20 million, and the films produced each year had already exceeded 500 titles, which laid the foundation for America's hegemonic position in the world film industry, as Rao has remarked.⁹

It is important to note that the exportation of American films to China before 1949 took place under the backdrop of the dominance of Western countries over China in terms of the economy, politics and the military. As previously mentioned, Western countries had started to exert an influence on China's politics, economy, military, and culture since the Treaty of Nanking. After the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1912, though the Republic of China was founded in the same year, the situation became even worse. Only four years later, the whole of China fell into years of wars, including incessant fighting among competing military warlords who were supported by different Western countries, the War of Resistance against Japan and the first and second civil wars between the CPC and the KMT. Since Western countries had such control over the economy, politics and the military, let alone over exporting cultural products to China, it follows that Western films flooded into China. Hollywood films, as a brand new cultural and entertainment product, enjoyed popularity among Chinese filmgoers in these cities. For instance, the cinemas would compete for any first-run of new releases, for the status of a theatre in China was weighed by its ability to sign contracts with Hollywood studios. Dr. Julius Klein, an official of the US Department of Commerce in the 1920s, noted that "there has been a complete change in the demand for [American] commodities in dozens of countries. I can cite four instances of the expansion of trade in the Far East, traceable directly to the effects of the Motion Pictures."¹⁰ A contributor to *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, Charles Merz, confirmed Klein's statement that the Chinese demand for the modern invention of the sewing machine was largely owing to their exposure in American films.¹¹ These examples show that Chinese audiences considered the United States to be the model of modernity through Hollywood films.

With respect to film production, Benjamin Brodsky, a Russian American, founded the first formal film company in China in 1909 in Shanghai, the Asia Film Company (1909-1914).¹² In 1914, due to the breakout of World War I, the German films that the company relied on were cut off, so the film company had to close. But very soon, as Hu noted, "in 1916 American

⁹ Rao, 5.

¹⁰ William Seabury, *Motion Picture Problems: The Cinema and the League of Nations* (New York: Avondale Press, 1929), 28.

¹¹ Charles Merz, "When the Movies Go Abroad," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 152 (1926): 161.

¹² Hu, 35.

photographic films came to China instead of the German ones.”¹³ From this detail, it can be inferred that the film industry in Europe was damaged during the war. Furthermore, since the war did not take place on the territory of the United States, the United States had ample energy to develop its own film industry. Although foreign distributors controlled the importation of foreign films into China, foreign films could not satisfy the demand for exhibition of the Chinese film market due to the inconvenient transportation. Therefore, some foreign distributors considered investing with local partners and making films in China, which would surpass the cultural barriers, shorten production period and improve the speed of capital return. At this moment the pioneers in Chinese cinema, Zhang Shichuan and Zheng Zhengqiu, started their filmmaking career. In 1913, Zhang and Zheng founded the Xinmin Film Company, the first film company established by Chinese people, and took over film production from the Asia Film Company.¹⁴ Before this company was established, apart from several documentaries on the Peking Opera made between 1905 and 1909,¹⁵ most of the films exhibited in China were produced in Western countries. Thus, one of the prestigious Chinese film historians, Cheng Jihua, asserts that “the film industry in China did not start from making films but from exhibiting foreign films.”¹⁶ This special beginning of Chinese cinema suggests that Chinese filmmaking would have been influenced greatly by foreign films from the start.

In fact, American films exerted a great impact on early film production in China. As American film exhibitors firstly brought films to China, the only approach for the pioneers in Chinese cinema to studying filmmaking technologies and skills was watching Western films. In addition, they had to rely on the capital from Western film producers due to a lack of funds in the beginning stage. Xia Yan, a renowned screenwriter and one of the pioneers of the Left-wing film movement in the 1930s, believed that “the creation of Chinese films was primarily influenced by Hollywood films... with regard to film art, Chinese films, especially in terms of narrative methods, film structure and film language, are profoundly influenced by Western films.”¹⁷ Furthermore, Xia Yan admitted that his screenplays such as *Yasuiqian* (Zhang

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hongshi Lu, *Zhongguo Dianying Shi 1905-1949 (The History of Chinese Cinema 1905-1949)* (Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House, 2005), 9.

¹⁵ In 1905, the first film in the history of Chinese cinema was made at Fengtai Photo Studio in Beijing. This studio was originally renowned for taking the photos of the actors in Peking Opera costumes, and the first film was also an excerpt of a Peking Opera named *Dingjunshan*. Over the following years, the owner of the studio made a couple of Peking Opera documentaries. However, in 1909, a fire of unknown origin in the photo studio ended the film shooting. See more in Lu, 8-9.

¹⁶ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese book, Jihua Cheng, *Zhongguo Dianying Fazhan Shi (History of the Development of Chinese Cinema)* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1963), 13.

¹⁷ Rao, 216.

Shichuan, 1937) and *Nü'er Jing* (Zhang Shichuan, 1934) were inspired by American films. Zheng Junli elaborated in his *Xiandai Zhongguo Dianyingshi Lue* (*A Brief History of Chinese Cinema*) that early Chinese films, such as the romance, detective films, costume films and even martial arts films, were impacted by Hollywood films; moreover, other American genre films, like spoof, farce or sports films found their counterparts in Chinese films.¹⁸ Wu Yonggang, a renowned film director whose works include *Shennü* (*Goddess*, 1935) and *Langtaosha* (*Two Skeletons*, 1936) pointed out that some of the early successful domestic films can be attributed to skilful imitation of American films. He admitted that he was inspired by David W. Griffith's films in the earlier days of his film career.¹⁹ These examples demonstrate that early Chinese films were greatly influenced by Hollywood films.

In addition, Chinese local exhibitors played an important part in popularising American films at that time. In a study about the reception of American films in Europe, Ulf Hedetoft emphasised the “mediating role of the local agency in framing the films for national publics.”²⁰ Likewise, in China, the cooperation between American distributors and Chinese exhibitors was critical to the popularity of American films. In the 1920s and 1930s, watching films became one of the most popular modes of mass culture. There were three levels of film houses in China: the deluxe ones, the ones with less grandeur, and the inferior ones. All of the deluxe film houses and the ones with less grandeur signed exhibition contracts with American film studios, and the release schedules of American films were synchronised with those in the United States. For instance, if a certain film house signed contracts with MGM (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), the film house could not exhibit films produced by other studios. Even if these film houses exhibited Chinese films, if they did so without the permission of the American film studios, they would receive severe penalties from American film studios which had signed contracts with them.²¹

The main method of promoting Hollywood films was to publicise them in various pictorials, film magazines, and newspapers. With the introduction of Western printing technology to China in the 1920s, the growing popularity of films and the development of a film industry, a variety of film magazines and newspapers were established. From 1921-1949,

¹⁸ Ibid., 213.

¹⁹ Yonggang Wu, *Wo de Tansuo yu Zhuiqiu* (*My Exploration and Pursuit*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 1986), 176.

²⁰ Ulf Hedetoft, “Contemporary Cinema: Between Cultural Globalization and National Interpretation,” in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 278.

²¹ Xiaoyun Chen, *Zhongguo Dianying Mingxing Yanjiu* (*Chinese Film Star Studies*) (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2012), 143.

there were 207 film periodicals or journals published in Shanghai. There were mainly three categories: promotional publications for films produced or exhibited by different film companies, such as *Mingxing Tekan*, *Lianhua Huabao*; professional theoretical publications established by film playwrights and critics, like *Zhongguo Dianying Zazhi*, *Dianying Yishu*; and publications about film anecdotes or stories of stars, such as *Qingqing Dianying*, *Diansheng Zhoukan*.²² In addition, there were numerous film magazines and newspapers containing a variety of news about Hollywood, ranging from the film stills in progress to trivial details of the lives of Hollywood stars. Zhiwei Xiao describes how “entertainment magazines frequently ran quizzes based on their readers’ knowledge of American films, and promised rewards to those who could answer all the questions correctly... Fan magazines would sponsor ‘public voting’ for the best American films and film stars and those readers who voted for the winners would be given prizes.”²³ These activities not only boosted the sales of these periodicals but also facilitated the popularity of American films and expanded their influence in China.

Meanwhile, the phenomenon of film stardom and fan culture also started to form in China. Several magazines launched activities to appraise and rank Chinese film actresses; for example, the inaugural issue of *Mingxing Daily* launched the campaign to appraise the “Film Queen” in China, and Hu Die was voted as the first “Film Queen” in this public appraisal. At that time, one of the most popular magazines was *Liangyou* (*The Young Companion*), a comprehensive pictorial, the content of which ranged from politics, to economy and military news at home and abroad, to the introduction of domestic and international culture and arts. Photographs of Hollywood actors or actresses and stills of Hollywood films were often published in *Liangyou*. *Liangyou* also chose women as its cover girls, most of whom were renowned Chinese film actresses.²⁴ *Liangyou* was quite adept at packaging and promoting these film actresses as the spokeswomen of modern life, introducing their attire, daily necessities and recreational activities to provide a guide to the concepts of modern consumption and a modern metropolitan lifestyle for the public. In return, the stardom of these actresses was greatly enhanced. It was a kind of reciprocal marketing approach for both film actresses and media. Another representative example was *Shenbao* (1872-1949), the most influential newspaper in China at that time. It had special columns providing the latest news about Hollywood studios, as well as

²² Yigong Wu, *Shanghai Dianying Zhi* (*Shanghai Film Record*), (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1999), 689.

²³ Xiao, 59.

²⁴ Hu, 116.

articles discussing film technology and history, advertising strategies, and Hollywood stars, ranging from their careers and acting skills to their private lives. Chen claims that “this exhaustive and adulatory publicity surrounding film stars signalled the emergence of a full-fledged celebrity culture of idolization.”²⁵

As discussed above, on the one hand, Hollywood films exerted great influence on the pioneers of Chinese cinema in terms of filmmaking, and on the other hand, various film magazines and pictorials about Hollywood films and stars pervaded China. Hence, Hollywood became the criteria by which to evaluate the quality of domestic film productions and domestic film actors and actresses. To take Yin Mingzhu, one of the earliest film actresses in the 1920s, as an example, she went to an English-language girls’ school in Shanghai and received a Western-style education. Thus, her thinking and lifestyle were quite modern and Western. She loved watching Hollywood films and especially admired Pearl White, imitating her style and costumes in the films. She felt quite lucky to share a similar given name with Pearl White, for the literal translation of “Mingzhu” is “bright pearl.” In one film review of *Sea Oaths* (Dan Duyu, 1921), Zhou Shoujuan wrote that “parts of Yin Mingzhu’s performance were excellent, but she was still a long way from the standard of Hollywood actresses Norma Talmadge (1893-1957) and Mary Pickford (1892-1979).”²⁶ Another example was Li Lili. In one film periodical in 1930s, a review expressed appreciation about her performance that “she interpreted the songs she learned sweetly, and her performance was also full of sweetness... all her manners and bearing were just like Hollywood sweetheart star Nancy Carroll (1903-1965).”²⁷ From the beginning of Chinese cinema, therefore, the Hollywood standard became the target for Chinese filmmakers. The analogies between Chinese actors and American actors, and Chinese directors and American directors became a kind of fashion in Chinese society before 1949.

The leaders in the American film industry faithfully followed the principle attributed to Samuel Goldwyn: “If the audiences don’t like a picture, they have a good reason. The public is never wrong.”²⁸ Under the guidance of American consulate officials, Hollywood attached a great deal of importance to what Chinese audiences liked and disliked, trying to cater to the market in China. According to Qin, in the 1920s, three types of foreign films were quite popular

²⁵ Jianhua Chen, “Yin Mingzhu and the Hollywood Stardom Culture in Early 1920s Shanghai,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 44 (2012): 84.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁷ Xiaoyun Chen, 142.

²⁸ Lary May, *Screening Out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 171.

with Chinese filmgoers: comedies, detective dramas and romances.²⁹ In fact, “when certain American films ran into trouble with the Chinese government censors, the US diplomats would come to their rescue by applying pressure on the Chinese government.”³⁰ Indeed, according to Zongzhan Huang, “the strong support from the US government was a key factor in Hollywood’s dominance in world market and the distinctive feature that set the American film industry apart from the rest of the world, especially from the nascent Chinese film industry.”³¹ From the very beginning, the support of the American government has played a quite significant role in promoting Hollywood films globally. The diplomatic support of the American government is an indispensable premise for the popularity of Hollywood films around the whole world. The support the US government has offered to help Hollywood grow into a hegemon in global film industry will be illustrated in detail in the following chapter.

1.2 Formation and Reform of Official Film Institution in China

Before the foundation of the PRC, at the Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, Mao Zedong illustrated the properties of literature and art and their relation to the Chinese masses:

Literature and art are for the people... China’s new culture at present stage is an anti-imperialist, anti-feudal culture of the masses of the people under the leadership of the proletariat... The broadest sections of the people, constituting more than 90 per cent of our total population, are the workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie... In literary and art criticism there are two criteria, the political and the artistic... Literature and art are subordinate to politics, but in their turn exert great influence on politics... All classes in all class societies invariably put the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second.³²

As for the aims and function of literature and art in China, Mao also referred explicitly and approvingly to Lenin’s promotion of cinema as a proletarian art form, for Lenin said that the proletarian literature should “serve the millions and tens of millions of working people.”³³ Lenin also remarked that “Of all the arts, for us cinema is the most important.”³⁴ In August

²⁹ Xiqing Qin, *Oumei Dianying yu Zhongguo Zaoqi Dianying, 1920-1930 (European and American Cinema and Early Chinese Cinema, 1920-1930)* (Beijing: China Film Press, 2008), 13.

³⁰ Xiao, 60.

³¹ Zongzhan Huang, “Suo Wang yu Zhongguo Dianying Jie (What I hope the Chinese filmmakers would do),” *Silverland* 11 (1929): 14.

³² Zedong Mao, “Zai Yan’an Wenyi Zuotanhui Shang de Jianghua (Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art),” *Jeifang Daily*, May 2, 1943. Translation quoted from https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_08.htm.

³³ Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, Eng. ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 48.

³⁴ Richard Taylor, “A Cinema for the Millions: Soviet Socialist Realism and the Problem of Film Comedy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 18 (1983): 439.

1949, the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee indicated that “film art possessed the widest mass basis and the most popular propaganda effect, and that the film industry must be strengthened to implement the propaganda of Communist Party of China, democratic revolution and construction all over China and even in international community.”³⁵ From the previous statements, it can be seen that the paramount leaders in both China and the Soviet Union recognised the power and influence of films on social and political life, and placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of films to disseminate their political ideas. High literature is more delicate, more difficult to produce and harder to circulate quickly among the masses; besides, most of the workers, soldiers and peasants were illiterate and uneducated due to a long-term struggle with the enemy and the rule of feudal and bourgeois classes. Compared with other print media like newspapers, magazines or novels, films are more direct for the masses to accept and understand. The special nature of films in China determined that the creation of domestic films, the exportation of Chinese films and the importation of foreign films would be impacted by the political interference and cultural policies of the Chinese government.

The PRC was established in October 1949, and the Central Film Administration Bureau was transformed into the China Film Bureau, which was subordinated under the Ministry of Culture. After a series of conferences, the China Film Bureau released a set of policies and regulations in terms of the administration, production, distribution and exhibition of Chinese cinema, which signified the nationalisation of the entire film industry by means of these measures of administrative control. Since then, Chinese cinema has been integrated into mainstream political discourse and national administrative institutions, undertaking the task of ideological and cultural propaganda and becoming a significant part of national cultural industries.

On the one hand, the films from imperialist countries, especially American and British films, were rapidly removed from Chinese theatres due to the divergence of ideologies. By virtue of its unique geographic area and economic advantage, Shanghai had attracted most of the film distributors and exhibitors from Western countries, and almost occupied more than half of the market share in China. Therefore, Shanghai became the primary target for the expulsion of American films. Just before the foundation of New China, people from all walks

³⁵ Ji Yu, *Zhongguo Dian Ying Shi Gang Yao (The Compendium for History of Chinese Film)* (Chongqing: Xi nan shi fan da xue chu ban she, 2008), 115.

of life started to hold various forums, issue editorials and make comments in newspapers criticising these foreign films. In September 1949, *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the CPC, published an article which discussed how these films were used as cultural and economic propaganda tools to promote the power and superiority of foreign imperialism, advocate racial discrimination, distort the concept of classes, show off a depraved lifestyle, induce an erotic illusion, paralyse the fighting spirit and disseminate these abominable toxins.³⁶

In June 1950, the Korean War broke out, and the relationship between China and the United States deteriorated sharply, which offered a great opportunity to sweep out Hollywood films. From July 1950, the State Council published several regulations sequentially, including *Dianying Jiupian Qingli Zanxing Banfa (Provisional Methods of Clearing Old films)*, *Guochan Yingpian Shuchu Zanxing Banfa (Provisional Methods of Exporting Domestic Films)*, *Guowai Yingpian Shuru Zanxing Banfa (Provisional Methods of Importing Foreign Films)*.³⁷ An article in *People's Daily* explicitly pointed out the aims of these regulations, which included “developing domestic films, adhering to the patriotism in films, instructing and assisting private film companies, encouraging them to produce progressive films, anticipating to resist and replace American films and old domestic films, and fighting for the complete advantage of progressive films in film market.”³⁸ Hence, I contend that the original intention of these regulations was to foster domestic films, undermine the dominant position of Hollywood films and eliminate the impact of Hollywood films completely, and the fundamental reason for issuing these regulations was the divergent political ideologies between the PRC and the United States. Consequently, Hollywood films disappeared from Chinese film theatres over the following thirty years.

Prior to February 1953, all of the privately owned film companies had been nationalised under the guidance of the Soviet Union model, which ended almost fifty years' of privately run and owned Chinese cinema.³⁹ China had adopted the Soviet Union's planned economy model during the 1950s, and this directive was also implemented in the film industry. Since then, Chinese cinema started to proceed with difficulty under the barometer of politics. Film

³⁶ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese article “Suqing Yingmei Youdu Yingpian, Shanghai Gejie Fenfen Tichu Jianju, Yaoqiu Zhengfu Yanghe Jiancha Qudi (Clearing the Toxic British and American Films, People from Shanghai Report in Succession, Demanding Government Inspect and Ban Them Strictly),” *People's Daily*, September 21, 1949, quoted in Rao, 231.

³⁷ Rao, 231.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Yu, 123.

productions were not based on market demand but on the political agenda from the central government. According to Zhu and NakaJima, “[film] production resources and quotas, film licensing, film distribution and exhibition, and film export were all planned actually according to the Party’s propaganda targets, with the Ministry of Culture’s Film Bureau in charge of the planning.”⁴⁰ The films were considered neither as commodities nor art in the New China. The production of films was not to make money or offer entertainment for people, but to serve politics, functioning primarily as a tool of ideological propaganda, of uniting and educating people and striking and eliminating the enemy.

In the history of Chinese cinema, the years from 1949-1966 are named the Seventeen-Year film period. During this phase, the mainstream mode was heroic films, which generally fell into two categories: a revolutionary history theme and a revolutionary struggle theme. These films were mainly based upon the revolutionary struggles in politics, the military, the economy and culture led by the CPC, and the struggles between people and reactionary rule and oppression. Some portrayed a single lead protagonist, such as *Dong Cunrui* (Guo Wei, 1955) and *Xiaobing Zhangga* (Cui Wei & Ouyang Hongying, 1963); some depicted certain battles, such as *Pingyuan Youjidui* (Su Li & Wu Zhaodi, 1955) and *Didaozhan* (Ren Xudong, 1965); and some displayed contemporary history, such as *Lin Zexu* (Zheng Junli & Cen Fan, 1959) and *Jiawu Fengyun* (Lin Nong, 1962). To take *Dong Cunrui* as an example, this film was adapted from the story of a real soldier from the Chinese Eighth Route Army. In one battle with the enemy, the Chinese army was obstructed by a blockhouse in the shape of a bridge, and Dong Cunrui volunteered to explode the blockhouse with a pack of dynamite; however, when he rushed to the blockhouse, there was no holder for the dynamite, so Dong held the pack, exploded the blockhouse and sacrificed himself. The purpose for this type of films was political propaganda: to tell Chinese people that their current peaceful life was obtained by means of the sacrifice of countless revolutionary predecessors and the leadership of the CPC, and as such they should be commemorated.

The level of political control reached its height during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Even Chinese films produced before the Cultural Revolution were prohibited because the content and themes did not correspond to the dominant ideologies of class struggle of the time. During the early stage of the Cultural Revolution, for the Chinese, the main cultural

⁴⁰ Ying Zhu and Seio NakaJima, “The Evolution of Chinese Film as an Industry,” in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, ed. Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 23.

products from 1966 to 1972 were *Yangban Xi (Model Performance)* and films adapted from *Yangban Xi*. In April 1966, Jiang Qing (the wife of Mao Zedong) completely negated the achievement of literature and works of art from 1949 to 1966 in *Budui Wenyi Gongzuo Zuotanhui Jiyao (Conference Memoir of Literature and Art Works in Military)*, and all of the feature films produced before 1966 and foreign films were completely suppressed and prohibited from being watched again. Through strict political examination, Jiang Qing launched the so-called “Peking Opera Revolution”. She carefully selected eight models for cinematic production from modern Peking Operas and ballets which had been created by traditional opera and drama artists and performed in public for many years.⁴¹ In the editorial *Geming Wenyi de Youxiu Yangban (The Excellent Models of Revolutionary Literature and Art)* from the *People’s Daily* on May 31, 1967, the term “*Yangban Xi*” was officially put forward, and the above eight works were determined to be *Yangban Xi (Model Performance)*.⁴² Yao Wenyuan, a member of the “Gang of Four,” summarised the creative process in proletarian literature and art as the principles of “three highlighting:” highlighting protagonists among all the characters, highlighting heroic figures among the protagonists and highlighting the central figure among heroic figures, which became the cardinal principles of proletarian creation of literature and art.⁴³ Hence, based on the mainstream political values and the creation principles, the leading figures depicted in *Yangban Xi* were ideal images of workers, peasants and soldiers. They were far from depictions of people in real life.

From 1966-1969, filmmaking in China fell into total stagnation. From 1970, under the assignment of Jiang Qing, the nationalised film studios started to adapt the *Yangban Xi* as a model for production, as Jiang Qing wanted to promote *Yangban Xi* on a larger scale. The principles of “three highlighting” led to other rules of audio and visual language, such as *wo jin di yuan (the protagonist is near while the antagonist is far)*, *wo zheng di ce (the protagonist is in the front while the antagonist is at side)*, *wo yang di fu (the protagonist should be filmed from a low angle, while the antagonist from high angle)* and *wo ming di an (the protagonist is*

⁴¹ In the article *Guanche Zhixing Maozhuxi Wenyi Luxian de Guanghui Yangban (Executing the Glorious Model of Chairman Mao’s Route about Literature and Art)* in the *People’s Daily* published on December 26, 1966, five Peking operas—*Hongdeng Ji (The Red Lantern)*, *Zhiqiu Weihushan (Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy)*, *Shajiabang*, *Haigang (On the Docks)* and *Qixi Baihu Tuan (Raid on the White Tiger Regiment)*—two ballets, *Hongse Niangzijun (The Red Detachment of Women)* and *Baimao Nü (The White-haired Girl)*, and one symphony, *Shajiabang*, were named as the eight revolutionary artistic models or revolutionary modern model works by Comrade Jiang Qing.

⁴² Rao, 340.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 342.

under the spotlight while the antagonist is against the backlight). The lead characters in films that followed the *Yangban Xi* model were heroic proletarian figures who could not possess any human shortcomings or weaknesses and should conform to the dominant political ideology. The depictions of human nature or emotions of common people in daily life were completely eradicated and the placement of the camera in the *Yangban Xi* films was designed totally on the rules for composition and production. *Zhiqiu Weihushan* (Xie Tieli, 1970) is a typical example, in which, the lead protagonist, Yang Zirong, who represented the Chinese Liberation Army, was shot from an exaggerated low angle and shown in the spotlight from beginning to end. In *Hongse Niangzijingun* (Cheng Yin, 1972), the love between the male and female leads, Hong Changqing and Wu Qionghua, was eradicated completely; instead they maintained a relationship of comrades throughout. Since the leading roles in the *Yangban Xi* films did not have ordinary emotions, all they could do was striving for people's liberation and socialist construction or making sacrifice for a communist career. These heroic figures were neither living persons nor flesh and blood figures; rather, they were the unrealistic representation of certain concepts, such as the communist ethics, moral norms and spirit of the CPC. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, as the political atmosphere was moderated to some extent, feature films were resumed under the instructions of the film regulating sector, but the intrinsic nature of Chinese films oriented by the propaganda aims of the government had not changed.

After the expulsion of films from Western capitalist countries, a large number of films from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Asia and Eastern Europe were imported to China. Most of these films were about the October Revolution in Russia or the heroic deeds of soldiers in World War I and World War II, eulogising their lofty spirit of devotion and sacrifice for people's liberation. However, during the Cultural Revolution, the importation of these films was also impacted by the severe political atmosphere in China. During the Cultural Revolution, the ultra-left trend of thought resulted in an extreme nationalism of the Chinese people, and the whole country and the people started to despise, abhor and become hostile to foreign countries and everything associated with them. In addition, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union deteriorated during the 1960s, and Chinese authorities criticised the revisionism of the Soviet Union. Thus, Soviet films were rarely seen in Chinese cinemas. Chinese people could only see a few films from North Korea, Vietnam, Albania and Romania during that period. However, there were some *Neican Pian* (内参片) circulated among certain senior leaders and film workers in China. The literal meaning of *Neican Pian* is films for internal reference, which are purchased from non-commercial channels and will not be released

in public. The films are only watched by senior leaders in the central government to understand the ongoing situation in politics, economy, and culture worldwide, and satisfy the needs for the film circle insiders to understand the developing trends in filmmaking skills worldwide. During the Cultural Revolution, Jiang Qing required the China Film Corporation (hereinafter CFC) to purchase hundreds of *Neican Pian* from Japan, Canada, Mexico, Italy, France, West Germany, Britain and the Hong Kong region. These films included *The Waves of Danube* (Liviu Ciulei, 1959), *The Bridge* (Hajrudin Krvavac, 1969), *Patton* (Franklin Schaffner, 1970), *The Militarists* (Hiromichi Horikawa, 1970), *War Mornings* (Kristaq Dhamo, 1971), *Walter defends Sarajevo* (Hajrudin Krvavac, 1972) and *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (Richard Fleischer & Kinji Fukasaku & Toshio Masuda, 1970).⁴⁴

Jiang Qing has blocked one possible approach for Chinese people to learn the outside world, severely limited the vision and mind of Chinese people, and resulted in their extreme nationalism and xenophobia via making Chinese public to only see *Yangban Xi*. Whereas, she and certain senior leaders and insiders have enjoyed the privilege to watch the films from non-socialist Western countries on a small scale. Her contradictory policies towards *Yangban Xi* films and foreign films have deadly fractured the film talents in China and resulted in huge regression in filmmaking.

From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 to 1973, the creation of feature films in China was a complete gap. This period has exerted severe negative impact on the psychology and aesthetic taste of Chinese audiences, and devastated the spirit of Chinese filmmakers. At the later stage of the Cultural Revolution, the political atmosphere was loosened a bit. The then-Premier Zhou Enlai met with some practitioners in the fields of film, drama and music at the beginning of 1973, pointed out the problems analysed previously, such as politicising film creation and portraying characters unrealistically. He encouraged the creation of feature films different from the heavily ideological *Yangban Xi*. After that, feature film productions began to recover somewhat. However, those films still had to be made according to the “three highlighting” principles and were greatly loaded with class struggle or political strife. In the meantime, the importation of some foreign films recovered to a certain degree, though still on a quite small scale, with some from France, Britain, Italy and Japan, and some from socialist countries.⁴⁵ Furthermore, after the Cultural Revolution, a series of foreign film

⁴⁴ Yaping Ding, *A Brief History of Chinese Cinema* (Beijing: China Radio & Television Publishing House, 2008), 205-207.

⁴⁵ Ding, 210.

exhibition weeks were organised, but only a few films were exhibited publicly. These included the Romanian film week, the Japanese film week, the Yugoslavian film week, the Australian film week, and the British film week.⁴⁶ The recovery of importing foreign films and the organisation of foreign film exhibition weeks have injected new vigour to Chinese theatres, motivated film viewing enthusiasm of Chinese audiences, inspired new film conception for Chinese film practitioners, brought new styles and technology to Chinese film field, predicting a new transformation in Chinese film creation.

Since the Third Plenary Meeting of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CPC was held in December 1978, a new chapter has opened up for China. At the conference, the policy of Reform and Opening-up was established, and the thought path of “emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts” was determined. Within this context, a large number of films that had been produced before the Cultural Revolution were unlocked and screened once more to the public. In addition, Chinese film productions started to recover from the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. The number of Chinese film productions increased year by year from 82 in 1980 to 127 in 1983. From 1979 to 1983, film viewing attendance grew to over 26 billion every year, and annual revenue of ticket sales increased to about RMB 2 billion.⁴⁷ In terms of cinematic technique, content and theme, from 1979, filmmakers started to distance themselves from the influence of the Cultural Revolution; the idea that films had to be closely attached to ideology and politics was revised. Film productions broke through the confinement of emphasising politics but ignoring artistic quality and returned to focusing on the theme of the human in real life, respecting the complexity of human nature and displaying humankind’s true feelings and emotions.

During this period, the Fourth-Generation directors made great achievements. These were film directors who had graduated from the Beijing Film Academy before the Cultural Revolution but were only able to start directing films independently from 1979. After studying films in the university, they had been about to embark on their filmmaking careers when they met with the Cultural Revolution and found their aspirations were destroyed. They had deeply experienced the pain and turmoil brought by the Cultural Revolution. Hence, the films they made displayed the disasters that ordinary people had suffered and reflected upon the causes of the ultra-left route and the misery brought about by the Cultural Revolution. The

⁴⁶ Ding, 210-211.

⁴⁷ Yu, 160.

representative films are *Xiaohua* (Huang Jianzhong & Zhang Zheng, 1979), *Lushan Lian* (Huang Zumo, 1980), *Tianyunshan Chuanqi* (Xie Jin, 1980), *Chengnan Jiushi* (Wu Yigong, 1982) and *Furong Zhen* (Xie Jin, 1986). For example, *Furong Zhen* presents the vicissitudes of the life of ordinary people influenced by various political campaigns since the foundation of the PRC in 1949. Hu Yuyin had opened a small tofu shop with her husband, made some money and built a new house. She was categorised into the “Rich Peasant Class,” as a result of political campaigns, the new house was sealed and her husband was forced to commit suicide. Once the Cultural Revolution began, Yuyin and the Rightist Qin Shutian were assigned to clean streets. Yuyin received care and support from Shutian, and they inevitably fell in love. When Yuyin became pregnant, they wanted to register and get married. However, Yuyin and Shutian were sentenced to be in jail for three years and ten years respectively. After the turmoil, Yuyin and Shutian were vindicated, opened another tofu shop and started a new peaceful life. Through its depictions of the sufferings of Hu Yuyin and Qin Shutian as a result of the Cultural Revolution, the film made a serious review of that horrible period of history and criticised the trauma brought to ordinary people, as well as lauding the love between these two characters.

Within the context of Reform and Open-up in China, an official diplomatic relationship between China and the United States was re-established in 1979. Subsequently, the exchange of films between the two countries also recovered in 1981 when China held an American film week. Five films were shown in China: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (William Cottrell & David Hand, 1937), *Shane* (George Stevens, 1953), *Singin' in the Rain* (Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, 1955), *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967) and *The Black Stallion* (Carrol Ballard, 1979). The five films were shown to the public in 15 theatres in Beijing, and the number of admissions were about 0.7 million.⁴⁸ Overall, the exhibition of Hollywood films to Chinese audiences was limited to cultural exchanges on a small scale, with several American films shown each year. In 1988, China hosted an exhibition of early American films, with 31 films produced in the 1930s showing in China.

Most of the films exhibited in foreign film weeks were classics from an earlier period, and were released on a relatively small scale. Still these foreign film exhibition weeks encouraged Chinese filmgoers to watch films in theatres and exposed them to different film types. The foreign film exhibition weeks were not motivated by market demand, however, but acted more like a kind of cultural political exchange programme.

⁴⁸ Ding, 211.

At the same time, the system characterised by political control and financial subsidies from the central government started to undergo a series of institutional reforms. In terms of distribution, before the reform, the state-run CFC bought films from film studios on a flat fee and then distributed them, which meant that the box office performance of a film had nothing to do with the studios. According to Rao, in order to break CFC's monopoly in purchasing and distribution, "in 1980, the Ministry of Culture decided that CFC paid film studios based on the number of film copies."⁴⁹ It seemed that the profits of studios would then depend somewhat on market demand. Nevertheless, the nature of the CFC monopoly on purchasing and marketing films had not changed at all. Finally, in 1984, at The Third Plenary Meeting of the Twelfth Central Committee of the CPC, *Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Jingji Tizhi Gaige de Jueding (Decision of the Central Committee of the CPC on the Reform of Economic System)* was approved, and the reform direction, tasks and policies were changed. Henceforth, the Chinese film industry was defined as a public institution and would be managed as enterprises, enjoying independent accounting and taking responsibilities for their own profits and losses.⁵⁰ Cinema was redefined as an integral part of the cultural industries rather than a political and ideological propaganda institution. Film studios enjoyed more creative autonomy, but still had to comply with the traditional highly centralised planned economy system. Thus, the enterprises were still restrained by administrative intervention to some degree. For instance, the screenplay of a film still had to be approved by the Party Committee of film studios, after which the director and shooting crew would be designated for the film. This indicates that the film studios were not in reality transformed into economic entities that could run autonomously and make films based on market demand. In the meantime, film production costs kept increasing and the quantity of new films declined year by year. These problems of institutional structure made the Chinese film system fall into massive disorder from management, production to distribution. As a result, the contradictions between production and distribution grew more severe.

Nevertheless, despite these difficult circumstances, the reputation of Chinese cinema started to grow internationally as a result of the emergence of the Fifth-Generation film directors. As previously mentioned, after the Cultural Revolution, filmmakers were much less limited by politics. However, the economic system in China had not been reformed thoroughly, and the planned economic system still dominated; hence, these filmmakers did not need to take the economic profit of one film into consideration, and they gained unprecedented creative

⁴⁹ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese book of Rao, 429.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 431.

freedom. Whereas the Fourth-Generation directors mainly depicted China with a delicate Jiangnan (south of Yangtze River) landscape, waters, trees, bridges, cultivated fields and cosy dwellings, the Fifth-Generation directors did not attach much importance to the content, characters and setting of their films but sought to convey their themes with striking imagery and a distinctive aesthetic style. The ground-breaking framing, the directness of visual expression, the harshness of the landscape and the grand spectacles of folk customs created an unprecedented sense of form in Chinese films. The directors emphasised that films should return to the images in a more attentive and self-consciousness way. Nonetheless, this innovative style caught the attention of film critics more than film audiences. Film critics highly praised these revolutionary films, while film audiences could not appreciate them, considering such films incomprehensible and unappealing, and thus did not buy tickets. The aesthetic revolution of the Fifth Generation reached its peak irrespective of market considerations and the satisfaction of local audiences. Zhu holds that the Fifth-Generation films carry “an elitist overtone that champions cinema’s artistic quality and filmmakers’ self-expression, discounting popular taste.”⁵¹ However, by means of their unique visual style, these films won awards repeatedly at international film festivals, which gained unprecedented attention and honour for Chinese cinema and promoted Chinese films to foreign audiences in the West. Chen Kaige’s *Yellow Earth* (1984) and Zhang Yimou’s *Red Sorghum* (1987) are the most typical representatives. The former won the Silver Leopard award at the Locarno International Film Festival in 1985, and the latter was the first Asian film to receive the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 1988. In terms of cinematic skill, the salient feature of the two films is their unique framing. In *Yellow Earth*, most of the scenes are frequently filled with extensive bleak landscapes of yellow earth, with just a strip of sky on top. In *Red Sorghum*, the vast Loess Plateau and sorghum fields are often displayed. This kind of depiction of earth emphasises the special emotion Chinese people attach to their roots in the land. Thus, Paul Clark claims that “the significance of this harsh representation of China seems to lie in a conviction that the nation needs toughness.”⁵² Because Chinese people have just recovered from the misery of the havoc of the Cultural Revolution and started to participate in international communication, they need to be strong to step on the new route. In addition, there are several large-scale ritual demonstrations of folk customs in each film. *Yellow Earth* features

⁵¹ Ying Zhu, *Chinese Cinema during the Era of Reform: The Ingenuity of the System* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 4.

⁵² Paul Clark, “Reinventing China: The Fifth-Generation Filmmakers,” *Modern Chinese Literature* 5 (1989): 124.

a magnificent waist-drum dance and grand rain-praying ceremony, while *Red Sorghum* depicts the jolting of the bride's palanquin and an alcohol-fermenting ceremony. The innovative means used by the Fifth-Generation directors of recounting stories with pure visual images would become the pinnacle in the creation of art-house films in China.

After the film studios were transformed into enterprises, they had to assume responsibility for their own profits and losses. Therefore, in order to survive, film studios tried to make commercial and entertainment films that were popular with most filmgoers. Even representative art-house film directors started to make commercial films, such as Zhang Yimou's *Daihao Meizhoubao* (1989) and Tian Zhuangzhuang's *Yaogun Qingnian* (1988). However, the films were not successful at the box office. There appeared to be some successful films in terms of box office, such as *Dongling Dadao* (Li Yundong, 1986) and *Huanghe Daxia* (Zhang Xinyan & Zhang Zi'en, 1988). But even though the films sold very well in ticket receipts, the revenue and profit did not have much to do with the filmmaking crew. As analysed previously, at that time, the film studios were not transformed into market-driven enterprises in nature, but the production of films were still designated as tasks of film studios under the planned economy system. In general, the film circle held a critical attitude towards entertainment films, which catered to the market. Only making art-house films could gain the opportunity to participate in international film festivals and win prestige and reputation for film directors. Thus, filmmakers' enthusiasm for commercial films could not be stimulated, and few high-quality commercial films were produced.

The rise of the art-house film with the emergence of the Fifth-Generation directors, alongside a weak entertainment and commercial sector, became worrisome for the administration department of Chinese films. In particular, the "Main Melody" films seemed to become more marginal. In general, "Main Melody" films refer to the films that support and advocate the mainstream ideologies, values and traditional cultures in China, such as patriotism, collectivism and the spirit of devotion and sacrifice for a socialist or communist career. Normally, these films highly praise the hard struggle of the early leaders of the CPC for the liberation of the Chinese people and the foundation of the New China, for defending and protecting their homeland against foreign invasions, or for the dedication of civil servants to the happy life of the common people. Thus, in March 1987, at a national conference about the creation of feature films held by the China Film Bureau, the slogan of "Highlighting Main

Melody, Maintaining Diversity” was put forward.⁵³ The government supported the production of “Main Melody” films not only in terms of policy and funding, but also in terms of distribution, promotion and exhibition; the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television and the Ministry of Finance granted more funds for making “Main Melody” films. State-run media would promote these films and all levels of government institutions would organise the theatres to exhibit the films and call on audiences to watch them. With this support, a number of films performed quite well at the box office; but the result was not due to market demand. In fact, most of the “Main Melody” films could not get access to the mainstream consumption market. As for the reason, Chinese film and culture scholar Yin Hong argues that,

The narration method and audio-visual language of a fair portion of [Main Melody] films are relatively monotonous and dull, moreover, the characters in those films are defined transcendently as natural good people who will not be motivated by personal profit nor be tempted by outside interest, and become flatten ethic symbols. The contradictions between the politics/ morality ideal of [Main Melody] films and the psychology of mass culture, between the intention of propaganda education and the principles of artistic fabrication are not solved. Thus, the path of popularising Main Melody films is not opened up.⁵⁴

Yin’s remarks about Main Melody films indicate that Chinese films should not be managed as the carrier of ideology or the instrument of political propaganda any longer. Chinese film regulators should loosen the control over the property of films and let films act as a category of art or a mode of mass culture entertainment independently.

Other issues were threatening the film industry at this time. Production costs had been increasing since the beginning of the 1980s. The costs for hiring extras had doubled, and expenditures on raw materials had gone up between 15% and 36%, as Chris Berry shows.⁵⁵ In addition, due to the Reform and Opening-up policy, many more novel forms of leisure and entertainment ways had been introduced to China. The recreation options of Chinese people were enlarged in the late 1980s, to include playing pool, discos, karaoke bars, and fast food restaurants. Television also became the biggest competitor for films. According to Chris Berry, in 1988, 48% of households owned TV sets, and a variety of programs were popular, such as Mexican telenovelas, Italian league soccer matches and many domestic television series.⁵⁶

⁵³ Yu, 182.

⁵⁴ Hong Yin, “Shijizhijiao: 90 Niandai Zhongguo Dianying Beiwang (Turn of the Century: Memorandum of Chinese Cinema in 1990s),” *Contemporary Cinema* 1 (2001): 25.

⁵⁵ Chris Berry, “Market Forces: China’s ‘Fifth Generation’ Faces the Bottom Line,” in *Perspectives on Chinese Cinema*, ed. Chris Berry (London: BFI Publishing, 1993), 115.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

In summary, the Chinese film industry faced a multitude of problems by the early 1990s: the already-existing government intervention in film production, the emergence of new entertainment options in the 1980s, the increasing film production costs, the contradictions between distribution and production and exhibition, film production not being based on market demand and a lack of market competition. Audience attendance at the cinema plummeted from 29.3 billion in 1979 to 14.4 billion in 1991.⁵⁷ In 1991, box office revenue was RMB 2.36 billion. In 1992, film ticket sales decreased by 15% compared to the previous year. In 1993, the situation became much worse, with revenue dropping by 35% to about RMB 1.3 billion.⁵⁸ National box office revenue was plummeting, and audience attendance was decreasing sharply. Chinese cinema was facing a life-or-death problem: if it did not seek thorough reformation and innovation, Chinese cinema would collapse.

China's political and cultural context was also experiencing earth-shaking changes. After Deng Xiaoping's inspection visit to South China in the spring of 1992, he delivered a series of speeches about accelerating China's Reform and Opening-up. At the Fourteenth National Congress of the CPC in 1992, the transformation from a planned and centralised economy model to a socialist market economy was determined to be the target of reform. The establishment of this policy helped China enter a comprehensive and profound new stage of economic development. This economic reform also boosted structural transformation in the film industry. Due to previous economic reforms, Chinese people's consumption of mass culture had changed greatly when compared to the past. However, cultural industries, especially the film industry, had not adapted to these new market-oriented modes. Therefore, the transformation of the film industry became an urgent problem that needed to be solved in China.

1.3 Cultural Policies Hollywood Films Encounter When being Imported to the Chinese Film Market

Due to the aforementioned problems in the Chinese film industry, the China Film Bureau began to make changes from 1993. In January 1993, the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television released Policy Document No.3—*Guanyu Dangqian Shenhua Dianying Hangye Jizhi Gaige de Ruogan Yijian* (*Suggestions on Deepening the Institutional Reform of the Film Industry in*

⁵⁷ Rao, 460.

⁵⁸ Yu, 175.

China). It considered many avenues for changes, including institutional transformation, distribution reform, loosening control over ticket prices, cultivating the film-viewing habits of Chinese audiences, film industry optimisation and adjustment, and the establishment of film laws and regulations under the guidance of a market economy.⁵⁹ From a policy perspective, the biggest reform in film distribution was breaking the monopoly of the China Film Corporation on film purchase and distribution under the Planned Economy and then transferring the distribution autonomy to different film studios. However, the China Film Corporation was still responsible for the distribution of imported films. This reform permitted film production studios to negotiate with local distributors directly on the methods concerning distribution and profit-sharing. In this manner, market competition was introduced into the film industry via distribution.

In addition to initiating an internal institutional reform of the Chinese film industry in the context of economic reform, the film regulating sector began to consider external sources to activate the effete domestic film market, which involved importing foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis. Hollywood film studios had been waiting for the opportunity to enter China again. However, after almost half a century of a planned-economy system, especially in regards to Chinese authorities interfering with Chinese cinema in terms of production, distribution and exhibition, it was hard for domestic and imported films to remove the administration of the Chinese government, and it was never likely to have resulted in the immediate transformation of film into a market-oriented industry. Thus, it was inevitable that, when seeking to export their films to China, the Hollywood studios would encounter a set of restrictive cultural policies and regulations, mainly with regards to quota, censorship and release schedules. In the following sections, I will analyse each in turn.

1.31 Quota System

Since the previous reform of the Chinese film industry had not ameliorated the problems that the film industry was facing, in search of a breakthrough and new paths for making profit, the then-general manager of the China Film Corporation, Wu Mengchen, proposed a solution to the China Film Bureau in 1994 to revitalise the ailing Chinese film market. The most recent high quality foreign films should be imported to the Chinese film market on an internationally

⁵⁹ Zhen Ni, *Gaige yu Zhongguo Dianying (Reform and China Cinema)* (Beijing: China Film Press, 1994), 51.

agreed revenue-sharing basis. The China Film Bureau approved the proposal and decided that from 1995 the China Film Corporation could import 10 foreign films which reflected excellent global cultural achievements and contemporary cinematic art and technical accomplishments on a revenue-sharing basis each year. This in effect resulted in the establishment of the quota system.

Suddenly, the theatres in China became as crowded as markets and recovered their old prosperity. Chinese audiences swarmed into theatres to watch Hollywood blockbusters, thus revitalising the Chinese film market. On 12 November 1994, the first Hollywood film, *The Fugitive* (Andrew Davis, 1993), was released on a revenue-sharing basis and reaped RMB 25 million ticket receipts, becoming the box office champion that year. *True Lies* (James Cameron, 1994) received about RMB 102 million, ranking at the top of the box office chart in 1995 and accounting for 10% of the national revenue that year. In 1998, *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) was released in China and became a national craze. Ticket receipts were RMB 360 million, accounting for almost one quarter of that year's total national revenue, which set a new historical revenue record for films released in Chinese theatres.

Besides the official channel of importing foreign films, many overseas films had been spread among ordinary people during the 1990s through underground channels as pirated VCDs. According to Shujen Wang, for the circulation of pirated films, "one of the popular routes entails a master originated in the United States, a stamper made in Malaysia or Taiwan region, replication done in Hong Kong region, and distribution first in the PRC, then going for the global markets."⁶⁰ However, in order to gain accession to the WTO, China had made considerable efforts to improve its system of intellectual property (IP) rights laws. The Chinese government joined a number of international IP rights organisations and copyright conventions, and promulgated a series of copyright laws while simultaneously launching large-scale anti-piracy campaigns around the country. However, the piracy rate remained at a high level. Although the effects were not obvious, some critics agree that piracy will decline as China's economy matures. Shujen Wang holds that "piracy is an issue of disparity, influenced by the processes of globalization and uneven market developments which define the current state of emerging economies."⁶¹ Douglas Clark, on the other hand, attributes the problem of

⁶⁰ Shujen Wang, *Framing Piracy: Globalization and Film Distribution in Greater China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 85.

⁶¹ Shujen Wang, "Dreaming with BRICs? On Piracy and Film Markets in Emerging Economies," in *Post-colonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South*, ed. Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 112.

counterfeiting media products to the liberalisation of China's economy and freer international trade, the increasing power of domestic Chinese consumers and the shift of manufacturing centres from Hong Kong region and Taiwan region to Mainland China.⁶² Moreover, Clark claims that piracy is not a problem unique to China, and that all developing countries experience a stage of widespread copyright breach: "as China's economy develops, companies demand protection for their rights, and international pressure encourages China to improve enforcement of its IP laws, the problems should eventually subside."⁶³ Llewellyn Gibbons also holds a similar view that "free-riding on the intellectual property of more developed nations by lesser developed nations is quite common in the process of maturing into a developed economy."⁶⁴ These statements indicate that with the gradual growth and flourishing of the Chinese film market, pirated films will gradually decline and disappear from the market. The fact is that the piracy situation of motion pictures in China has greatly reduced. According to annual Special 301 Reports issued by International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA), the piracy rate was around 90% and the piracy losses at USD 1.85 billion in 2002,⁶⁵ one year after China's accession to the WTO, while the Special 301 report issued in 2020 has not mentioned the piracy rate or piracy losses in terms of motion pictures, but focused on China's regulations about market access, such as urging China to further enlarge the quota, increase American film producers' share of revenues, loosen control over film release dates, response timely to film content review.⁶⁶

The importation of Hollywood films yielded such unexpectedly high box office revenue, a fact that was considered at the 1996 National Film Conference. The "9550" Excellent Film Project was launched at the conference, which declared that during the ninth Five-Year Plan, film studios in China must produce 50 excellent domestic films, 10 each year, most of which were to be "Main Melody" films. The intention of this Project was to counterbalance the success of Hollywood films which had already occupied a large share of the Chinese film market. "Main Melody" films would be supported by all levels of the Chinese government in terms of production, distribution and exhibition. However, the effect was not as expected.

⁶² Douglas Clark, "IP Rights Protection will Improve in China — eventually," *The China Business Review* 27 (2000): 22 & 26.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁴ Llewellyn Gibbons, "Do as I Say (not as I did): Putative Intellectual Property Lessons for Emerging Economies from the Not So Long Past of the Developed Nations," *SMU Law Review* 64 (2011): 931.

⁶⁵ "IIPA 2003 Special 301 Report," The International Intellectual Property Alliance, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.iipa.org/files/uploads/2017/12/2003SPEC301PRC.pdf>.

⁶⁶ "IIPA 2020 Special 301 Report," The International Intellectual Property Alliance, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.iipa.org/files/uploads/2020/02/2020SPEC301CHINA.pdf>.

Hollywood releases were and remain the tent-pole films in the Chinese market. The question is: Why are Chinese audiences so fascinated by Hollywood blockbusters? What kind of glamour do they possess that attracted Chinese filmgoers to watch them in theatres?

First of all, in terms of film genre, most of them are action, adventure, science fiction or fantasy films. Apart from the aforementioned *The Fugitive*, *True Lies* and *Titanic*, in the 1990s there were *The Lion King* (Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff, 1994), *Speed* (Jan de Bont, 1994), *Die Hard: With A Vengeance* (John McTierman, 1995), *Twister* (Jan de Bont, 1996), *Broken Arrow* (John Woo, 1996), *The Rock* (Michael Bay, 1996) and *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1997). They greatly enriched the diversity of film genres in the Chinese film market, rapidly attracted the attention of Chinese audiences and achieved quite good box office revenues. In the following years, an increasing number would come, and most of them come in series, including super hero series, like *Superman* series, *Spiderman* series, *Ironman* series, *Captain America* series; fantasy series, like *The Lord of Rings* series, *Harry Potter* series, *Pirates of the Caribbean* series and *Transformers* series; and animations, like *Ice Age* series, *Despicable Me* series, and *Kung Fu Panda* series. Most of them have ranked on the list of top ten grossing films in the release years respectively. The various film genres have exerted great influence on the film viewing tastes of Chinese audiences and changed the aesthetic trends of films in China. Stanley Rosen remarks that “Hollywood films have been successful in China because of their entertainment value.”⁶⁷ Compared to most didactic films or films heavily loaded with ideology in the past, the biggest difference of these film genres is that they could make Chinese audiences feel relaxed, bringing more pleasure and amusement to them. Because entertaining audiences is also one of the most important functions of films.

Secondly, regarding the characteristics of these imported films, most of the films are high concept Hollywood blockbusters. According to Justin Wyatt, “high concept can be conceived as a product differentiated through the emphasis on style in production and through the integration of the film with its marketing.”⁶⁸ The President of Columbia Pictures Entertainment Peter Guber states that “high concept can be understood as a narrative which is very straightforward, easily communicated, and easily comprehended.”⁶⁹ Both definitions

⁶⁷ Stanley Rosen, “The Wolf at the Door: Hollywood and Film Market in China from 1994-2000” in *Chinese Cinema: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Chris Berry (London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2012), 89.

⁶⁸ Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 20.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

emphasise the simplification and straightforwardness of high concept films in terms of narrative and theme that allow filmgoers to easily comprehend them. This is why the golden formula of high concept films is associated with star-studded casts, thrilling and gripping plots, grand spectacles and vivid and breath-taking special effects — these elements offer film audiences the most direct feelings and sensory stimulation and can be marketed easily and straightforwardly. Since all mainstream Hollywood filmmaking is market-oriented and profit-driven, high concept films are the most suitable type of films to make and are concerned with commerce more than art. Indeed, most Hollywood films introduced to the Chinese film market are still equipped with these features.

The characteristics of commercialism and entertainment value have distinguished Hollywood films from domestic Chinese films. In the past, Chinese filmgoers did not have many viewing options, for domestic films were much too dull and of the same type. They also incorporated elements of ideological propaganda and the indoctrination of socialist values. However, now Chinese filmgoers could see something utterly new, which made them feel refreshed, surprised and excited. In addition, the themes represented in Hollywood blockbusters are generally considered to be universal values in humanity, such as family affection, friendship and love, the triumph of good over evil and the pursuit of freedom and equality. Since many ordinary people have a heroic dream and a natural affinity towards heroes, they can fulfil their heroic dreams through viewing these Hollywood blockbusters. Nevertheless, on the other hand, these supposed “universal” values are in fact another means of ideological propaganda that largely reinforces specifically American social, cultural and political beliefs. Chinese film scholar Chen Xiaoyun has criticised these themes as hypocrisy with the title of a quite successful Hollywood blockbuster *True Lies*, that “the American hero always must represent the ‘will’ of mankind, including freedom, justice and equality... the discourse hegemony is a true lie that characterised American films and American spirit.”⁷⁰ Despite, this kind of imperceptible instillation of the ideas in Hollywood blockbusters has gradually influenced the viewing habits and aesthetic tastes of Chinese filmgoers, cultivating the potential film market for Hollywood blockbusters.

However, the decision to import Hollywood blockbusters is like a double-edged sword: challenges co-exist with opportunities. The importation of Hollywood films has stimulated the

⁷⁰ Xiaoyun Chen, “‘Zhenshi Huangyan: Meiguo Dianying de Huayu Baquan’ (True Lies: Discourse Hegemony of American Films),” *Zhongguo Dianying Bao (Chinese Film News)*, August 12, 1999, quoted in Rosen.

resurrection of the national box office, revitalised the Chinese film market and attracted filmgoers back to the theatres. On the other hand, the powerful market performance of Hollywood films has placed great pressure on local films. This has motivated the domestic film industry to accelerate its systematic reform and produce domestic films that Chinese filmgoers would be interested in seeing, thus competing for the market share with Hollywood.

The importation of Hollywood films has brought with a new concept and mode of operation in terms of administration, which has greatly boosted the marketisation of domestic films. In the past, both outdated foreign films and domestic films were bought on a flat fee; even if the distribution mode for domestic films changed, the nature of universal purchase and distribution did not. No matter how well a film performed in terms of ticket sales, the profits of producers, distributors and exhibitors would not be raised correspondingly. In contrast, the box office revenue-sharing mode means that the ticket receipts of a film are divided based on a proportional basis between producers, distributors and exhibitors who are closely linked together to assume the risks and share the profits. It ties the production of films more closely with market demand. Through this mode, market competition was introduced into the Chinese film industry. As a result of this change, the state-owned film production companies were reformed and recombined into several film corporations, such as the China Film Group Corporation and the Shanghai Film Corporation Ltd, which transformed the properties of film production companies in China from the past state-run companies. The success of importing Hollywood films on a revenue-sharing basis also offered new opportunities, therefore, for the distribution of Chinese domestic films.

Indeed, the importation of Hollywood films actually facilitated the birth of Chinese blockbusters. *Yangguang Canlan de Rizi* (*In the heat of the Sun*, Jiang Wen, 1994), *Hong Fen* (Li Shaohong, 1995), *Hong Yingtao* (*Red Cherry*, Ye Daying, 1996) and other films reached a wide audience and gained strong returns. However, it was not until the release of *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2002) that the first real national blockbuster appeared. This film was produced according to the model of Hollywood high concept: big budget film; starring the most popular actors and actresses from Mainland China and the Hong Kong region, including Jet Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Zhang Ziyi and Chen Daoming; filled with magnificent spectacles; and having pervasive and overwhelming promotion. The film reaped RMB 250 million ticket sales, ranking at the top of the box office list in 2002. In the following years, more Chinese high concept films were released, such as *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004), *The*

Promise (Chen Kaige, 2005), *The Banquet* (Feng Xiaogang, 2006), *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang Yimou, 2006). All have the same features in common, as listed above, and returned significant profits at the box office. Nevertheless, these films possess the same shortcomings as their Hollywood counterparts — inane dialogue, vapid stories and ambiguous themes. In any case, they indicate that Chinese cinema has begun to place greater emphasis on the commercial property of films and shift to a market-oriented approach for local productions.

The high concept mode has also been employed in the production and distribution of “Main Melody” films so as to attract Chinese filmgoers to the theatres. In order to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the PRC in 2009, the China Film Group Corporation, together with several film companies, jointly presented *The Founding of a Republic* (Han Sanping & Huang Jianxin, 2009). This film recounts a series of significant events from the end of the Resistance War against Japan to the foundation of the PRC. More than 100 well known film and television stars were invited to play the roles of various historical figures without any remuneration as well as limited screen-time, in some cases as little as several seconds or minutes. There were also a variety of spectacular scenes in the film and as well as a large-scale promotional campaign. In the end, its national revenue ranked third place on the box office list in 2009.⁷¹ In memory of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the CPC and the People’s Liberation Army in 2011 and 2017 respectively, the China Film Group Corporation also presented *Beginning of the Great Revival* (Han Sanping & Huang Jianxin, 2011) and *The Founding of An Army* (Andrew Lau, 2017) based on the model of *The Founding of a Republic*. Thus, in order to counterweigh the prevalence of Hollywood films, Chinese domestic cinema has had to adopt Hollywood’s golden rule to compete for the market share in China.

China’s relationship with the WTO has also affected the film industry. In order to become more fully integrated into the international trade and communications, China made great efforts to be accepted into the WTO, and after 15 years of work and negotiation with existing member countries, China obtained access to the WTO in December 2001. In the signed agreement, there are mainly two articles concerning films. The quota of foreign films per year to be imported on a revenue-sharing basis doubled to 20 and foreign investment was permitted in joint ventures with regards to the establishment and upgrade of Chinese theatres, but the share cannot exceed 49%.

⁷¹ “Yearly Box Office 2009,” Endata, accessed February 22, 2020, <http://www.endata.com.cn/BoxOffice/BO/Year/index.html>.

In order to strengthen the administration of the national film industry, develop the film business, satisfy the needs of the masses in terms of cultural life and promote the construction of socialist material civilisation and spiritual civilisation, *Dianying Guanli Tiaoli (The Film Administration Regulations)* was issued by the State Council on February 1, 2002. The *Regulations* have specific articles about film production, distribution and exhibition, film censorship, film importation and exportation, guarantees for the film industry and penalties. Based on the *Regulations*, some private companies are certified to produce films independently. Also in the same year, the establishment of cinema chains became the major task in terms of film institutional reform. On June 1, 2002, there were 30 cinema chains officially open for business, covering almost all the provinces in China. In June 2003, Huaxia Film Distribution Corporation Ltd., the first large joint-stock film distribution company, was established, which broke the China Film Group Corporation's monopoly in distributing revenue-sharing and flat-fee imported films. In the following year, more film regulations were issued with regard to screenplays, censorship, the administration of co-productions between China and foreign countries and regulations concerning film production, distribution and exhibition. These series of measures have deepened film institutional reform and accelerated the process of industrialisation to cope with the impact on domestic films brought by Hollywood films and to help domestic films grow stronger. As a result of ongoing reforms, the Chinese film market gradually recovered. Since 2003, ticket sales and viewing attendance have increased by 20%-30% on average each year.

Meanwhile, Hollywood was interested in further opening the Chinese film market. According to the record of trade disputes between the US and China in the WTO:

On 10 April 2007, the United States requested consultations with China concerning certain measures that reserve, to certain Chinese state-designated and wholly or partially state-owned enterprises, the right to import films for theatrical release, audiovisual home entertainment products, sound recordings and publications; and certain measures that impose market access restrictions or discriminatory limitations on foreign service providers seeking to engage in the distribution of publications and certain audiovisual home entertainment products.⁷²

In 2009, a panel from the WTO concluded that some Chinese measures were inconsistent with China's obligations to grant trading rights as a WTO member, because such measures restricted the rights of enterprises in China and, in some cases, foreign enterprises not registered in China

⁷² "China — Measures Affecting Trading Rights and Distribution Services for Certain Publications and Audiovisual Entertainment Products," World Trade Organization, accessed February 22, 2020, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds363_e.htm.

and foreign individuals to import reading materials, foreign films for theatrical release, audio-visual home entertainment products. Since this dispute involved many regulations on cultural products, China needed a reasonable period to implement the recommendations and rules from the Dispute Settlement Body, which was set to expire on 19 March 2011.

A major change occurred in February 2012, when Xi Jinping made his first major visit to the United States as vice president of China, and he and his US counterpart, Joe Biden, announced together that China and the United States had signed a Memorandum of Understanding regarding films for theatrical release. China confirmed that enhanced format films would not be subject to the 20-film commitment set in 2001, and further agreed that it would allow the importation of at least 14 enhanced format revenue-sharing films per calendar year beginning in 2012. Furthermore, in any contract for the distribution of a revenue-sharing film between a US enterprise and a Chinese state enterprise, the US enterprise would be allocated 25% of gross box office receipts instead of the previous 13%, and the Chinese state enterprise would be responsible for the payments of all taxes, duties and expenses.⁷³ According to the Memorandum of Understanding, an enhanced-format film refers to any film that is to be exhibited in China in IMAX, in 3D format and/or in any other enhanced format, whether or not currently in existence, and this also encompasses the film's other formatted versions, if any, that are to be exhibited in China during the same release period. The agreement also mandated further consultations be held in 2017 regarding additional compensation to the United States in terms of the number of enhanced format films to be imported each year and the share of gross box office receipts for American enterprises. It may be asked why enhanced format films were not subject to the limit, and here I examine IMAX as an example. First of all, IMAX films help increase box-office revenues, since IMAX tickets typically cost 30% more than standard admission. Secondly, IMAX films promote the development of new technologies, given that the proprietary cameras, patented sound system, theatre space and screen size are totally different from the standard film projecting equipment and all need to be matched to project IMAX films. However, the cost for IMAX products is quite high. According to Cheng Yang, general manager of the digital film company under the China Film Group Corporation, the cost for IMAX equipment in a cinema is about RMB 10 million (about USD 1.59 million), and the cinema has to share 15% of the box office revenue with IMAX. In addition, the cinema needs to pay USD 70,000 for copyright fees and USD 50,000 for maintenance fees per film each

⁷³ “Memorandum of Understanding between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America Regarding Films for Theatrical Release,” <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/202987>.

year.⁷⁴ For these reasons, many domestic companies started to develop their own large screen technology. For instance, the CFGC researched and developed a new version of a large screen called DMAX. The lowest cost for DMAX equipment is only one-tenth that of IMAX, and cinemas do not need to share the profit with DMAX or pay for any copyright or maintenance fees, as converting a film to DMAX version only costs half that of converting to IMAX's. In addition, the stereo system of DMAX with an 11.1 channel system is superior in terms of sound to that of IMAX's 7.1 channel system.⁷⁵ With these advantages, DMAX has gradually won recognition at home and abroad. In the future, the monopoly of IMAX may be broken.

In addition to the China-US MOU signed in 2012, during the state visit of President Xi Jinping to the US in September 2015, further two agreements were made. The first one was to permit an international party to oversee and audit ticket sales in the Chinese film market and to supervise the possible fraud of some films. The second one was to increase the number of foreign films imported on a flat fee. The foreign films imported on a flat fee are also called "buyout" films, which means that the films are bought by the China Film Group Corporation from foreign studios at a fixed price, and the foreign distributors do not participate in the box office sharing after those films are released in China no matter how much revenue the films make. Normally these films are not the blockbusters produced by big Hollywood studios. Before foreign films could be released in China on a revenue-sharing basis, the only foreign films that Chinese audiences could see were the "buyout" films. However, the quota for the "buyout" foreign films is not so clear; in the past few years, there have been about 30 to 40 films bought on a flat fee basis that are allowed in the Chinese film market every year.

The quota for imported films in the Chinese film market is being increased due to the constant interplay between China and the US. As my analysis shows, we can see that each time the quota is increased, the governments from both countries have intervened in the situation to different degrees. In fact, it is a kind of game between China and the United States in terms of politics, economy and culture.

⁷⁴ "DMAX Plans D-Day," *Global Times*, April 18, 2012, <http://www.chinesefilms.cn/141/2012/04/18/241s8907.htm>.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

1.32 Film Censorship System

China does not have a film rating system but rather a film censorship system, and all films need to be appropriate for an audience of different ages. This means that the Chinese film regulating sector decides which films can be released in Chinese theatres and, if necessary, which parts of the films need to be modified or deleted.

All films, including foreign films, must be submitted for approval to the administrative department of radio, film and television in the State Council, which is the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (hereinafter SAPPRFT), before distribution and exhibition. SAPPRFT was formed in 2013 out of the combination of the former State Administration of Radio, Film and Television and the General Administration of Press and Publication. As an executive branch of the State Council of the PRC, SAPPRFT is responsible for administering state-run media, which mainly includes drawing up the guiding principles and policies of the propaganda of press, publication, radio, film and television; steering correct public opinion and creative directions; drafting the laws and regulations of the management of press, publication, radio, film, television and copyright; formulating rules, policies, and industry standards; organising the implementation, supervision and inspection of them; and managing the imports of overseas publications, radio, films and televisions.⁷⁶ The China Film Bureau under SAPPRFT is in charge of film affairs in China. However, SAPPRFT has recently been restructured into the National Radio and Television Administration as a result of the “Two Sessions”⁷⁷ held in March 2018. The Chinese Film Administration, subordinated to the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, was constructed again and took over all the responsibilities from the previous SAPPRFT in terms of film administration affairs. The Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the CPC also took charge of the affairs concerning press and publication. This operation indicates that the film affairs in China probably will receive more interference from the government, since the Publicity Department is chiefly in charge of the affairs of political matters.

The film censorship system implemented in China determines that films which have not been censored and approved with licenses by the film censorship organisations of the

⁷⁶ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese regulations. “Guojia Xinwen Chuban Guangdian Zongju (Guojia Banquanju) Zhuyao Zhize Jieshao (Introduction of the Duty of the SAPPRFT),” The SAPPRFT, accessed on February 22, 2020, <http://www.gapp.gov.cn/govpublic/65/184180.shtml>.

⁷⁷ “Two Sessions” refer to The National People's Congress (NPC) and The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in China, the annual meetings of China's top legislative and advisory bodies, which are held in March every year.

administrative department of radio film and television in the State Council cannot be distributed, exhibited, exported or imported. The film censorship organisations in China are composed of two committees: the China Film Censorship Committee and the China Film Review Censorship Committee. The general censorship procedures are as follows. Films are first submitted to the China Film Censorship Committee; if they pass the censorship, they will receive a permit to be released in Chinese theatres. If a film does not pass, the committee will provide revision suggestions. After being revised, the film will be submitted to the China Film Review Censorship Committee until it receives a release permit. After censorship, these films, including foreign films, can be distributed and released in Chinese theatres.

As the Publicity Department has not yet released the specific regulations concerning film censorship, so we will refer to some film administration regulations. According to *Dianying Juben (Genggai) Bei'an, Dianyingpian Guanli Guiding (Administrative Provisions on Record Filing of Film Scripts (Summary) and Film Censorship)*, which came into effect on 22 June 2006, the following are standards regarding what kind of content cannot appear or needs to be altered or deleted in films. Films cannot contain the following content:

violating basic principles regulated by the constitution; infringing state unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity; disclosing national confidential information; jeopardising national security; damaging national honour and interests; inciting national hatred and discrimination; undermining the unity of different nationalities; infringing the custom and habits of different nationalities; propagating cult organisations and superstitions; disturbing social order; damaging social stabilities; propagating obscenity, gambling or violence; abetting crime; insulting or defaming other people; encroaching the lawful rights and interests of other people; harming social morality or excellent national cultural traditions; and other content forbidden by national laws, regulations and stipulations.⁷⁸

There are further standards regarding appropriate content. Films which contain the following content should be cut or altered:

distorting Chinese civilisation and Chinese history and seriously departing from the historical facts; distorting the history of other countries; disrespecting the civilisation and social customs and habits of other countries; disparaging the image of revolutionary leaders, heroic figures and important historical figures; tampering with Chinese and foreign classics and the image of important characters in those classics; maliciously disparaging the image of the people's army, armed police, public security and judicial departments; including obscenity and pornography and vulgar content; showing scenes of promiscuity, rape, prostitution, sexual acts, and perversion; showing the sex organs and other private parts of the body; containing filthy vulgar dialogues, songs, background

⁷⁸ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese regulations. "*Dianying Juben (Genggai) Bei'an, Dianyingpian Guanli Guiding (Administrative Provisions on Record Filing of Film Scripts (Summary) and Film Censorship)*," The SAPPRFT, accessed February 23, 2020, <http://www.sapprft.gov.cn/sapprft/govpublic/10550/332943.shtml>.

music and sound effects; including the content of murder, violence and terror; inverting the value orientation between truth and falseness, good and evil, and beauty and ugliness; confusing the basic properties of justice and injustice; deliberately expressing the threatening and arrogant attitudes of committing a crime, specifically displaying the details of criminal behaviours and exposing special investigation methods; containing plots which could evoke the thrill of murder, bloodiness, violence, drug abuse and gambling; containing plots of maltreating the captured or extorting a confession by torturing criminals and suspects; including excessively scary and horrible scenes, dialogues, background music and sound effects; propagating a passive and decadent outlook on life, the world and values; deliberately exaggerating the ignorance and backwardness of nationalities or the dark side of society; advocating religious extremism; instigating the contradictions and conflicts between different religions and sects or between religious believers and non-religious believers; harming the feelings of the masses; propagating the destruction of the ecological environment; maltreating animals; hunting, killing and eating nationally protected animals; excessively displaying drinking, smoking and other bad habits; and violating certain laws and regulations.⁷⁹

The above standards focus only on the film content associated with politics and morality, but ignore the content from the perspective of film art itself. Film content cannot damage the national image of China. Chinese filmmakers are encouraged to only display a positive, optimistic and healthy view of humanity rather than a negative or dark portrait of society. However, under those guidelines, thematic choices and cinematic expression of Chinese filmmakers are limited to different degrees, thus, many films with themes that are critical, realistic or introspective cannot be produced.

In fact, with regards to those censorship standards and restrictions on Chinese filmmaking, many Chinese domestic directors have expressed grievances or dissatisfaction. Feng Xiaogang, one of the most successful commercial film directors in Mainland China, and also a committee member of Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (hereinafter CPPCC), appealed for loosening policies on literature and art at a consultation conference concerning deepening reform for cultural system organised by the CPPCC in 2011. He analysed the predicament of film censorship:

in current society, films have more and more influences on people's life, and all walks of life focus more and more on films, subsequently, the criticism from them becomes sharper. Thus, situations of excessive negatively associating with certain film take or shot, even baselessly surmising the intention of filmmakers emerge frequently. Besides, any public sentiment on certain film excerpt or any film review from one irresponsible entertainment reporter could possibly catch the eye of censorship committee members, and exert influence on the censorship result of a film. While censorship committee is tired of explaining various questions or queries, hence, they have to be very cautious, in order not to cause any problems, films being positive or negative becomes the only criterion of

⁷⁹ Ibid.

determining a film is good or bad for censorship committee. However, I would like to ask which literature or film masterpiece at home and abroad is measured with the criterion being positive or negative, such as *A Dream of Red Mansions*, *Teahouse*, *The Red and the Black*, and *Les Misérables*.⁸⁰

Feng continued to put forward suggestions concerning the censorship system in a group discussion of the literary and art field at the “Two Sessions” in 2013. He suggested the censorship committee should loosen control over the thematic choices of filmmakers with his own films *A World without Thieves* (2004) and *Assembly* (2007) as examples. He explained that “the protagonists of *A World without Thieves* are thieves, which had never appeared previously in Chinese films, however, after being released, no negative consequence has emerged in public; likewise with *Assembly*, before making the film, many people disapproved of the subject, whereas, after its release, this film did not bring about any negative impact on military.”⁸¹ Hence, although film censorship system will not be replaced with a rating system in short term in China, the shackles imposed on film production could be loosened. At least, the standards could be restored into those in 1980s, for at that time, a series of classic films were produced, such as *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984), *Furong Zhen* (Xie Jin, 1986), *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, 1987), not one film could be simply considered as positive or negative. The focus of censorship committee should not be on what kind of film themes or subjects filmmakers choose, but on how filmmakers represent the story.

Besides, the censorship does not have unanimous standards. For instance, many of the censorship committee members had fierce discussions and divergent opinions over the bloody and erotic scenes *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang Yimou, 2006). Some thought those scenes should be cut, while others thought the director dealt with them quite acceptably and that the film possibly would represent China to compete for awards at the Oscars. After evaluation and repeated discussion, none of those violent or erotic scenes were cut at all, whereas the film was rated R (restricted) in the United States when it was released there.⁸² On the other hand, *Lost in Beijing* (Li Yu, 2007), contained sex scenes and only passed censorship after being revised five or six times. Similar examples show that, even when they include

⁸⁰ “Shanghai he Zhigu: Feng Xiaogang Tongchen Dianying Shencha Kunju (Damage and Fetter: Feng Xiaogang Laments the Predicament of Film Censorship),” *news.mtime.com*, August 30, 2011, <http://news.mtime.com/2011/08/30/1468937.html>.

⁸¹ “Feng Xiaogang jiu Neidi Dianying Shencha Zhidu Tiyi (Feng Xiaogang Offers Suggestions on Film Censorship System in Mainland China),” *news.sina.com*, March 6, 2013, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2013-03-06/155226447513.shtml>.

⁸² Wei Zhang, “Jiema Dalu Dianying Shencha (Decoding the Censorship in Mainland China),” *Phoenix Weekly*, June 6, 2012, http://news.ifeng.com/shendu/fhzk/detail_2012_06/06/15086064_0.shtml.

violent or objectionable scenes, the blockbuster films of prominent directors could pass censorship while lesser known directors' films have to be repeatedly revised or rejected. However, the views of committee members diverge radically toward different films because the current censorship standards are not detailed enough for them to refer to; furthermore, the censorship committee does not treat each filmmaker equally even under those general standards, thus discouraging the enthusiasm of Chinese film practitioners to make films.

In the case of imported films, the following examples illustrate the range of scenes that can be censored. *Titanic* was re-released in a 3D version in 2012. In the Chinese version of the film, the nude scene with the lead female character was cut, even though that scene was not cut in the original release of the film in China 14 years earlier. In *Mission Impossible 3* (J. J. Abrams, 2006), a scene in which Tom Cruise passed through the modern cityscape of Shanghai continued an image of a building with clothes hanging and drying on a clothesline on the balcony. Upon release, the scene displaying the clothesline was cut. "The censors felt that it did not portray Shanghai in a positive light, so that scene was removed from the movie," says T. J. Green, CEO of Apex Entertainment, which owns and builds movie theatres in China.⁸³ The censors do not like to see China cast in a negative light or portrayed as a backward society. Similarly, in *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012), one of the James Bond films, an assassin walks into a skyscraper in Shanghai and kills the security guard at the entrance: "My speculation would be they didn't like the fact that a foreign perpetrator comes in and a Chinese security guard just gets shot and looks weak," says Green, who adds that the scene amounts to a loss of face. From the censors' perspective, the movie is saying: "they can't secure their most prized assets in China."⁸⁴ The censors do not want viewers to see that Chinese people are weak or cannot defend themselves.

China's censorship standards, therefore, remain quite general and abstract and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. In addition, members of the censorship committee have their own opinions concerning certain scenes and often present ambiguous or controversial attitudes towards different films when implementing censorship guidelines. Thus, it is quite hard for film practitioners to follow censorship rules. On the one hand, the censorship standards are being used to maintain and protect the traditional values and moralities in Chinese society. On the other hand, film censorship acts a means of ideological control and supervision, because

⁸³ Frank Langfitt, "How China's Censors Influence Hollywood," *National Public Radio*, May 18, 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/05/18/407619652/how-chinas-censors-influence-hollywood>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

once a film refers to something politically sensitive, such as the Cultural Revolution or issues regarding Tibet, Taiwan, or ethnic minorities, the censorship standards are strictly imposed. After all, since the founding of the PRC, the film regulating sector has intervened in film production, distribution and exhibition to varying degrees. When the importation of foreign films is involved, the attitudes of the censorship committee become strict and more sensitive, which is not beneficial to transcultural exchange.

1.33 Uncertain Release Schedule

Apart from the quota system and censorship system, deciding release dates poses another significant challenge for Hollywood productions. *Jinkou Yingpian Guanli Banfa (The Measures on Administration of Imported Films)* published by the SAPPRFT, specifies that all films or preview copies imported from foreign countries and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR) must be managed and distributed by the China Film Group Corporation.⁸⁵ In 2003, the Huaxia Film Distribution Co. Ltd. was established and broke the CFGC's monopoly on distributing foreign films, but it only has the right to distribute, not to import, foreign films, which is still held by the CFGC. The release schedules of Hollywood films have to be coordinated with their Chinese importers and the Chinese film regulating sector.

In order to reduce pressure of competition on domestic films from Hollywood productions, the *Film Administration Regulations* state clearly that the screen time of domestic films cannot be less than two-thirds of the screen time of all films showing in one year.⁸⁶ Thus, two or more foreign films are often scheduled on quite close release dates to let them fight against each other. In 2004, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (the SARFT was restructured into the SAPPRFT in 2013) handed down a verbal order to theatre chains in China which supported domestic films by restricting the screening of foreign films during the period between 10 June and 10 July each year, because this period normally belongs to the summer holiday, one of the peak periods for viewing films. The media and film business circle refer to this period as “domestic film protection month,” especially after the 2012 China-US MOU,

⁸⁵ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese regulations. “*Jinkou Yingpian Guanli Banfa (The Measures on Administration of Imported Films)*,” The Central People’s Government of the PRC, accessed February 23, 2020, http://www.gov.cn/govweb/fwxx/bw/gjgbdydszj/content_2262989.htm.

⁸⁶ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese regulations. “*Dianying Guanli Tiaoli (Film Administration Regulations)*,” The Central People’s Government of the PRC, accessed February 23, 2020, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2002/content_61864.htm.

more Hollywood films have been imported to the Chinese film market and squeezed the market share of domestic productions. The Film Bureau regularly operates this “blackout period,”⁸⁷ which often lasts one or two months at peak film viewing periods during the year. They normally fall in the summer vacation (July and August) and Chinese New Year period (January and February) which means that new Hollywood releases are not permitted.

As a result, some films have been released at the beginning or the end of these peak film viewing periods or have been postponed for one or two months to give way to domestic films. For instance, in 2004, *Spider-Man 2* (Tomo Moriwaki, 2004) gave way to *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004). Due to the delayed entries of *Inception* (Christopher Nolan, 2010) and *Transformers 3* (Michael Bay, 2011), Feng Xiaogang’s *Aftershock* (2010) and Huang Jianxin’s *Beginning of the Great Revival* (2011) were able to gain advantageous release dates and good ticket sales.

Another common practice is to arrange several foreign films to be released in a concentrated period, and the gap between every two blockbusters is usually five to seven days. For instance, in June 2014, *Edge of Tomorrow* (Doug Liman, 2014), *Godzilla* (Gareth Edwards, 2014), *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014) and *Transformers 4* (Michael Bay, 2014), four films were consecutively released on June 6, June 13, June 20 and June 27.⁸⁸ One extreme example is that of *The Amazing Spider-Man* (Marc Webb, 2012) and *The Dark Night Rises* (Christopher Nolan, 2012), which opened on the same day, August 27, 2012.⁸⁹ The purpose of the arrangement is to consume each other’s box office, reducing the competitiveness of Hollywood films among Chinese audiences.

Uneven box office revenue was also seen as a problem affecting domestic film productions. In the first half of 2015, *Fast and Furious 7* (James Wan, 2015) received USD 391 million in box office revenue from the Chinese film market, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Joss Whedon, 2015) received USD 240 million and *Jurassic World* (Colin Trevorrow, 2015) received USD 228 million. The Film Bureau had to do something to balance the revenue of

⁸⁷ Patrick Frater, “China’s Overdue Payments to Hollywood Could Happen This Week,” *Variety*, August 13, 2013, <http://variety.com/2013/film/asia/hollywood-studios-expect-to-be-paid-every-penny-in-china-tax-dispute-1200577325/>.

⁸⁸ “Chinese Box Office for 2014,” Box Office Mojo, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2014/?area=CN&sort=rank&sortDir=asc&grossesOption=totalGrosses>.

⁸⁹ “Chinese Box Office for 2012,” Box Office Mojo, accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2012/?sortDir=asc&grossesOption=totalGrosses&sort=rank&area=CN>. For more information about release dates in following years, please still refer to the website.

domestic productions.⁹⁰ Therefore, almost all of July and August became the protectionist months for local films without any foreign films released in Chinese theatres during this period. After this period, *Minions* (Kyle Balda & Pierre Coffin, 2015) opened on September 13, and two days later, *Pixels* (Chris Columbus, 2015) was released. In November, there were three Hollywood films released consecutively: the James Bond sequel *Spectre* (Sam Mendes, 2015) on November 13, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2* (Francis Lawrence, 2015) on November 19 and *The Martian* (Ridley Scott, 2015) on November 25.⁹¹

The purpose of such a tight release schedule arrangement is to let Hollywood films fight against each other and mutually cannibalise the market share, since China is able to accomplish this situation by virtue of its administrative power. The Chinese government's intention is to protect domestic films and offset the impact of Hollywood films on domestic films. However, this kind of operation is not a result of market demand. On the contrary, it indicates that Chinese domestic cinema has a long way to go to contend with Hollywood films.

The focus in this chapter on the relations and communications between China, the US and American films, as well as the development and reform of Chinese cinema, provides a clearer picture of the properties of Chinese cinema. Chinese cinema has been closely linked with the political and economic context, especially since the founding of the PRC. Films have not been regarded as pure commercial products, but rather as items that enable certain functions of the propaganda apparatus. Choosing to import Hollywood films on a revenue-sharing basis is a result of China making compromises to the mechanisms of marketisation and globalisation.

In essence, the issue of the Chinese government's importation of Hollywood films on a revenue-sharing basis is not only a simple cultural matter, but also one closely associated with the two countries' economic, political and diplomatic relationships. Initially, China wanted to introduce Hollywood films to revitalise the collapsing Chinese film market. At the same time, China had to take into account the consequences of opening the film market to Hollywood, because other Asian countries that have opened their own film markets to Hollywood offer bitter and painful lessons. The market share of local films in those countries was squeezed and crushed substantially after their markets were opened to Hollywood. For instance, in Japan the

⁹⁰ Brent Lang and Patrick Frater, "China's Box Office Boom Continues despite Economic Woes," *Variety*, September 16, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/film/news/china-box-office-boom-continues-1201594372/>.

⁹¹ "Chinese Box Office for 2015," Box Office Mojo, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2015&p=.htm>.

film market was completely dominated by Hollywood films in the 1950s and 1960s, and the Japanese film industry relied on soft pornography to maintain itself. After dozens of years of effort, it has recovered somewhat. The market share of domestic films in South Korea has risen in recent years; however, this is due to Korean filmmakers' lengthy resistance campaign against Hollywood. The Korean government has been forced to issue policies to support national films, even though this was not because of natural market rules or a demand for national films. Hence, Chinese film scholar Dai Jinhua has compared the importation of Hollywood films to the wolves coming to the Chinese film market. She asserts that

The gravest possibility for introducing Hollywood films is that they will utterly devastate the foundation of the Chinese national film industry... Films cannot be equated with other commodities. Films are industrial products and commodities, but also cultural products, and the convergence of scientific technology, culture, and society. Only under diversity status, culture can manifest its charm and significance, realise communication, and offer new space and motivation for human being's imagination. If culture becomes unitary or unipolar, that will be a tragedy for human being. I can accept Hollywood films as one pattern in world films, but refuse to accept entire world films become Hollywood. If Hollywood rules the screens of the whole world, it is time for Hollywood to die.⁹²

China understands the potential consequences once its film market is completely opened to Hollywood. Therefore, it has chosen to place some restrictions in order to offer space for its own domestic films to develop in light of other countries' experiences.

The degree of negotiation or gaming between China and Hollywood is the extent of the openness of the Chinese film market to import foreign films. However, the relationship between the circulation of cultural products and free trade has been a heatedly debated issue since the 1920s when Hollywood began to dominate the global film industry (as I will discuss in greater detail in the following chapter). In fact, many countries in Europe have expressed concern over cultural homogenisation due to the overwhelming prevalence of Hollywood films around the world. For instance, in 1990s, whilst filmmaking began to revive in Europe, the fact was that roughly 90% European film markets including Germany and Britain were controlled by American film distributors; moreover, most of the investment in cinema modernisation and film productions derived from America studios.⁹³ One of the leading independent film producers in Britain, Jeremy Thomas, also the chairman of the British Film Institute, cautioned

⁹² "Cong Lang Lai le dao Langqun Lai le — Xuezhe Dai Jinhua Tan Jinkou Dapian (From Wolf has Come to the Wolves have come — Scholar Dai Jinhua Talks about Imported Blockbusters)," *Sina.com*, March 1, 2002, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/f/2002-03-01/74242.html>.

⁹³ John Tagliabue, "Film Redux in Europe: Actions!; New Signs of Life after a Long Decline," *New York Times*, February 24, 1996, <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/24/business/film-redux-in-europe-action-new-signs-of-life-after-a-long-decline.html>.

that “by the Year 2010 films and multimedia and television will be the largest single employer in Europe... America’s film industry is increasingly behaving like when you have a predator fish in a pond.”⁹⁴ Thus, they have been making various efforts to maintain their cultural identity and cultural sovereignty, such as setting import quotas or providing state subsidies for domestic films. In addition, they endeavour to exclude cultural products from the negotiation of international trade agreements. According to Article IV of the 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), quantitative regulations of member states relating to cinematographic films could be realised in the form of screen quotas under some conditions.⁹⁵ According to Article 2005 in the 1989 Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (CFTA), “cultural industries are exempt from the provisions of this agreement.”⁹⁶ In addition, Article 2012 stipulates the scope of cultural industry, which includes enterprises engaged in “the production, distribution, sale or exhibition of film or video recordings...”⁹⁷ In addition, in the upgraded version of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a provision that was reproduced under Canada’s insistence.

Internationally, the concept of the “cultural exception” was first discussed during the Uruguay Round (1986-1993) of multilateral trade negotiations.⁹⁸ Furthermore, in 2005 UNESCO ratified the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. In accordance with the Convention, “the global community formally recognised the dual nature, both cultural and economic, of contemporary cultural expressions produced by artists and cultural professionals.”⁹⁹ Moreover, “the sovereign rights of States to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory” is reaffirmed in the Convention.¹⁰⁰ Even though the United States and Israel voted against the Convention

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ “The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947),” World Trade Organisation, accessed February 28, 2020, https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/gatt47_01_e.htm#articleIV.

⁹⁶ “The Canada U.S. Free Trade Agreement,” 296, <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/assets/pdfs/agreements-accords/cusfta-e.pdf>.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 301.

⁹⁸ Marlen Bartsch, “The Return of the Cultural Exception and Its Impact on International Agreements,” *Global Media Journal* 4 (2014): 4.

⁹⁹ UNESCO, “The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of the Cultural Expressions,” accessed February 29, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/convention>.

¹⁰⁰ UNESCO, “Basic Texts of the 2005 Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions,” https://en.unesco.org/creativity/sites/creativity/files/convention2005_basictext_en.pdf#page=15.

compared to 148 countries voting in favour and four in abstention,¹⁰¹ the Convention has offered another legitimate foundation to exclude cultural goods and services from bilateral or multilateral trade negotiations and counteract the powerful dissemination of American cultural products. Thus, in subsequent bilateral or multilateral trade negotiations, concerned parties could gain support from the Convention. Before the negotiation of the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the EU and the US, after long negotiations among the European countries, the EU itself firstly reached a consensus on 14 June 2013 in which all the EU member states agreed to exclude the audio visual sector from the mandate of trade negotiations with the United States.¹⁰² However, the TTIP ended without a conclusion at the end of 2016.¹⁰³ As Kokas asserts, “protecting cultural industries from Hollywood has been the subject of multilateral negotiations around the world.”¹⁰⁴

So far, there has not been any film market that could rival Hollywood, a film behemoth. Hence, the Chinese cultural policies set for Hollywood films — namely the quota system, censorship system and control over the release schedule — have been used to protect Chinese domestic cinema and offer as long a time as possible for Chinese cinema to grow to counterbalance the prevalence of Hollywood films in the Chinese film market. However, behind this contest is a complicated interplay and game between China and the United States in terms of politics, economy and culture.

¹⁰¹ Alan Riding, “U.S All but Alone in Opposing UNESCO Cultural Pact,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/20/world/americas/us-all-but-alone-in-opposing-unesco-cultural-pact.html>.

¹⁰² “France Backs EU–US Trade Talks after Winning Culture Battle,” *Euractiv*, June 15, 2013, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/trade-society/news/france-backs-eu-us-trade-talks-after-winning-culture-battle/>.

¹⁰³ “The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership,” The European Commission, accessed February 29, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/>.

¹⁰⁴ Aynne Kokas, *Hollywood Made in China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 23.

Chapter 2 Hollywood's Domination in the Global Film Industry and the Growth of the Chinese Film Market

The previous chapter provided a brief history of Chinese cinema and the communication between China and the American film industry. It also discussed the reform of the Chinese film system and Chinese cultural policies of importing foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis, including the quota system, the censorship system and the uncertain film release schedule. The Chinese film market partially opening to Hollywood represents one significant step of Hollywood's expansion in the global film industry.

In fact, the Hollywood film industry has maintained a long-term hegemony since the 1920s. Over the past 100 years, no other film market has seriously challenged its hegemonic position in the global film industry. Recently, however, the rise of China's economy has bolstered the growth of the Chinese film market, which is likely to change the landscape in the global film market. In this chapter, I will analyse how and why Hollywood has evolved into a world film hegemon and discuss the potential that China possesses to shake the dominant position of Hollywood.

2.1 Hollywood's Domination in the Global Film Industry

The story goes that France was the birthplace of film. On 28 December 1895 in Paris the commercial screening of motion pictures to an audience by the Lumière Brothers in a café announced the first birthday of films.¹ However, film thrived, flourished and witnessed a golden era in Hollywood in the United States. World War I gravely affected film production in France, Italy and Germany, and the United States took advantage of this situation to fill the gap in the international market. Kristin Thompson has analysed a number of factors for the success of Hollywood in the 1920s and 1930s which led to the long-term dominance of American films. First, "the success of the American film industry in maintaining its hold abroad was attributable primarily to its huge domestic market."² This large domestic market with adequate theatres and a large number of filmgoers insured profitable returns: it could cover the cost of film productions and consume a large amount of films produced every year, further forming a

¹ Lu, 1.

² Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market, 1907-1934* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1985), 1.

productive cycle between the demand and supply of films. Even if the overseas film market share was relatively small, the domestic market could still support the development of its domestic film industry. Secondly, in the mid-1920s Hollywood created a sophisticated oligopoly structure combined with the major film studios at home, and “they instituted new distribution procedures abroad; rather than selling primarily through agents, they open their own offices in a variety of countries.”³ Thirdly, Hollywood cinema formed its own production mode and stylistic approach.⁴ By the mid 1910s, the division of labour had been formulated in the film industry, which facilitated the efficiency of the Hollywood studio system. Tino Balio observes that “filmmaking in the era of the studio system was a group of effort involving a strict division of labour with a producer at the helm.”⁵ Under the helm of producers, there are directors, screenwriters, actors, and other departments, ranging from story acquisition to editing. The process of filmmaking has become an assembly line, and films are industrial products. As a result, the procedures of film production in Hollywood became the standard in all of America. America’s own strong and mature domestic film market, the sophisticated distribution networks of films at home and abroad, as well as the efficient and systematic industrial mode of film production, solidified the foundation for Hollywood to maintain a long-range hegemony on the world film market.

According to statistics from Box Office Mojo, Hollywood films have greatly depended on the international market, a primary reason why Hollywood has endeavoured to promote its films around the world. Over the period of a century, almost all of the top 10 or top 20 grossing films have been produced in the United States by Hollywood film companies.⁶ How has Hollywood dominated the world film industry and what strategies has it adopted to grow into the world’s film giant? These questions will be analysed in terms of politics, aesthetics and economics in the following sections.

2.11 American Government Support for Hollywood

The American government offers great political and diplomatic support to promote Hollywood films and increase their market share around the world. For instance, plots about

³ Ibid., x.

⁴ Ibid., 88.

⁵ Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1930-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 10.

⁶ “Top Lifetime Grosses,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 5, 2020, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top_lifetime_gross/?area=XWW.

the Pentagon and the White House are frequently seen in Hollywood blockbusters, as in the *Transformers* series, *The Terminator* series, the *Ironman* series, the *G.I. Joe* series and many super hero film series. Matthew Alford reports that the Pentagon established an entertainment liaison office in 1948, and the CIA founded a similar office in 1996. Moreover, by means of the US Freedom of Information Act, he found that the files show that from 1911 to 2017, more than 800 feature films had received support from the US Department of Defence.⁷ This indicates a close relationship between the US government and Hollywood. The powerful military strength of the United States could be markedly demonstrated through globally prevalent Hollywood blockbusters. Hollywood and Washington DC have been mutually dependent and reciprocal, a perfect demonstration of the extension of hard power by means of “soft power.”

Yin and Xiao argue that the American government considered films as commodities from the beginning; the role of the American government was not to manage how to make films or instruct filmmakers on what they should make, but to offer and create favourable conditions for the production, distribution, exhibition and exportation of Hollywood films.⁸ As early as the beginning of the 20th century, the US government started to attach importance to the flow of films in and out of the United States. As Kristin Thompson notes, “in July 1910, the Department of Commerce and Labor began keeping customs figures on film imported and exported.”⁹ According to Kerry Segrave, “government involvement in the [film] industry began in the fiscal year 1912-1913 when the US Commerce Department began keeping records on the export of films, as it did for most commodities.”¹⁰ An American consul in Mexico pointed out that French films still dominated there in 1915, while his compatriot in Breslau, then a part of Germany, reported that American dramas, comedies and Westerns were doing well. After the United States became involved in World War I in April 1917, in order to market America abroad and positively influence public opinion overseas about America’s participation in the war, the American Congress established the Committee on Public Information. The goal

⁷ Matthew Alford, “Washington DC’s Role behind the Scenes in Hollywood Goes Deeper than You Think,” *Independent*, September 3, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/hollywood-cia-washington-dc-films-fbi-24-intervening-close-relationship-a7918191.html>.

⁸ Hong Yin and Zhiwei Xiao, “Haolaiwu de quanqiuhua celüe yu zhongguo dianying de fazhan (Hollywood’s Global Strategy and the Development of Chinese Films),” in *Quanqiuhua yu Zhongguo Yingshi de Mingyun (Globalization and the Destiny of Chinese Films and Television)*, ed. Fengzhu Zhang et al (Beijing: Beijing Guangbo Xueyuan chubanshe, 2002), 115.

⁹ Thompson, 26.

¹⁰ Kerry Segrave, *American Films Abroad: Hollywood’s Domination of the World’s Movie Screens* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997), 9.

of the so-called Creel Committee, named after its chairman, George Creel, was to utilise films, books, English language classes and advertisements to spread “the Gospel of Americanism.”¹¹ At the same time, the Division of Films was established as part of the Creel Committee. President Woodrow Wilson took the occasion of the establishment of the Division of Films to give his government’s blessing to the American film industry: “The film has come to rank as the very highest medium for the dissemination of public intelligence, and since it speaks a universal language, and it lends itself importantly to the presentation of America’s plans and purposes.”¹² Wilson’s assertion can be considered as a counterpart to Lenin’s famous claim that “cinema is the most important art,” which implies that the American government planned to cooperate with the film industry to tap into the propaganda potential of films as a significant form of communication media within the culture industry. Indeed, the Division of Films worked closely with American commercial film companies at home and abroad, promoting educational and commercial American films in markets around the world. Segrave has enumerated several examples of the Creel Committee’s function; for instance, all of the films exported overseas, including documentaries on health and education, had to have a War Trade Board license, which the Creel Committee was responsible for issuing. The Creel Committee also aided film shipments through communicating with foreign bureaucracies and guaranteeing shipping space. In addition, representatives of the Division of Films visited numerous countries in late 1917 and 1918 to establish channels for the American film industry, facilitating the distribution of their films overseas.¹³

Additionally, the overseas consuls and embassies of the US government offered a great deal of information about the film markets in different countries. Kevin Lee notes that “[I]n 1916, prior to the MPAA’s creation, the US consuls were ‘instructed to report on the market for American movies,’ and ‘the government, in turn, made this information available to the industry.’”¹⁴ The required information included the number of theatres in a certain country or region, the scale of theatres, the admission price, the distributors of the films and even the rent of the theatres. Kristin Thompson offers numerous examples of American consuls in foreign countries who collected information about the market share of Hollywood films and foreign films. For instance, in English-speaking countries, such as Great Britain, South Africa,

¹¹ Ibid., 15.

¹² “Helping the Moving Pictures to Win the War,” *Bio*, July 18, 1918, 8, quoted in Thompson, 94.

¹³ Segrave, 15.

¹⁴ Kevin Lee, “‘The Little State Department’: Hollywood and the MPAA’s Influence on U.S. Trade Relations,” *Northwest Journal of International Law & Business* 28 (2008): 379.

Australia and New Zealand, the market share of American films could at least occupy 75%, even higher to 90%-95%.¹⁵ Even in non-English speaking countries, like Argentina, 60% of the films in theatres were imported from America.¹⁶ These reports show that the US government offered help and support for the American film industry through surveys about the international film markets and the tastes of the filmgoers worldwide; accordingly, they developed a plan for the overseas growth and expansion of American films and the Hollywood industry by means of diplomatic methods.

According to W. Ming Shao, “by the 1920s, many countries had already noticed that Hollywood products accounted for approximately four fifths of all film screenings in the world.”¹⁷ Therefore, many major film markets started to set quotas to restrict the importation of American films and protect their local film industries. As a result, “the State Department intervened on behalf of the US film industry in France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia by emphasising the need for freer trade.”¹⁸ In 1922, major Hollywood production studios established the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (hereinafter MPPDA), which was a trade association to protect and support the nascent American film industry, whose first president was the notorious Will H. Hays. Thompson notes that in 1924 Hays began to lobby the Department of Commerce to create a special Motion Picture Section, which the US Congress established in 1916 with the appropriation of USD 15,000.¹⁹ The Section collected information and figures about the film industry overseas from 60 foreign offices of the Department of Commerce and 300 consular offices.²⁰ In 1945, the MPPDA was re-established as the Motion Picture Association of America (hereinafter MPAA). The international department of the MPAA, the Motion Picture Export Association, was also established that year. The MPEA facilitated the marketing of American films in post-war Europe and Asia after a European tour by studio heads arranged by the government in 1945.²¹ Kerry Segrave notes that “the MPEA was formed under the protection of the Export Trade Act,

¹⁵ Thompson, 84, 146, 81, 138.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁷ W. Ming Shao, “Is There No Business like Show Business? Free Trade and Cultural Protectionism,” *Yale Journal of International Law* 20 (1995): 128.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁹ Thompson, 117.

²⁰ Segrave, 63.

²¹ “Report of Motion Picture Industry Executives to Major General A. D. Surles, Chief, Bureau of Public Relations of War Department, Following their tour of European and Mediterranean Theatres of Operations as Guests of the Army,” Agency for International Development, Media Guaranty Case Files, RG 286, National Archives, August 10, 1945, quoted in Paul Swann, “The Little State Department: Hollywood and the State Department in the Postwar World,” *American Studies International* 29 (1991): 7.

known as the Webb-Pomerene Act after the bill's co-sponsors Senator Pomerene and Congressman Webb. Under that law, US firms were granted exemption from all American anti-trust laws which regulated business domestically."²² The formation of the MPEA served as an umbrella for the flow of Hollywood's films abroad, and an agent for price control and negotiation of trade agreements for Hollywood cartel members, offering a legal excuse for Hollywood's monopoly overseas. By permitting American film companies to operate together in foreign countries, "the formation of the MPEA marked the other major change in the structure of the Hollywood cartel."²³ Peng Kan contends that the aim of MPEA was to cope with the rising protectionism of other countries, and to prevent other countries from regulating barriers and restricting the importation of American films.²⁴ Kevin Lee argues that the goal of MPEA was "re-establishing American films in the world market aftermath of World War II, and in response to growing barriers to the importation of American films."²⁵

The MPAA and MPEA worked closely with the American government, and many of the senior spokespersons of the two organisations were recruited from or assigned by different departments of the US government. For instance, the first president of the MPPDA, Will H. Hays, was a former Postmaster General and a former chairman of the Republican National Committee.²⁶ Hays's successor, Eric Johnston, had served four terms as president of the American Chamber of Commerce and been a special envoy to the President of the United States in the Near East with the rank of ambassador in the early 1950s. Furthermore, as Segrave's research reveals, after his appointment, Johnston incessantly lobbied the White House to strengthen the support toward eliminating trade barriers and aiding a free flow of films into foreign countries. He proclaimed that he had established a liaison with the then-President Truman and Secretary of State Marshall, and he appealed to the Department of State frequently to ensure that the government realised the importance of Hollywood films to export American ideas of political democracy and free economic enterprises.²⁷ The vice president of the MPEA for Europe in the 1950s, Griff Johnson, was also recruited from the government and was an undersecretary at the State Department in the late 1950s and early 1960s.²⁸ The MPAA president from 1966-2004, Jack Valenti, was a former adviser to President Lyndon Johnson.

²² Segrave, 143.

²³ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁴ Kan Peng, "U.S. Government Support and the Global Expansion of Hollywood," *Global Media Journal* 8 (2011): 73.

²⁵ Lee, 375-376.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 378.

²⁷ Segrave, 141.

²⁸ Swann, 4.

These are not isolated cases. It appeared to be necessary for the American film industry to recruit officials from the American government in order to negotiate the taxes and tariffs on importing American films and to deal with the regulation of the flow of American films into foreign markets. The MPAA thus cooperated closely with the US government to negotiate or reach bilateral and multilateral agreements with other countries in terms of the exportation of American films. As Colin Sparks argues, “this body engages in political lobbying designed to gain favourable terms from the governments of foreign countries, and in recognition of that role it dubs itself the ‘Little State Department.’”²⁹ The existence of this mutual relationship is also verified by Jack Valenti’s vivid declaration that “politicians and Hollywood are sprung from the same DNA.”³⁰

After World War II, the strategic aim of the American film industry — to promote and sell cultural commodities to the world, especially to Europe — was consistent with the policies and interests of the American government. In order to assist Europe’s economic recovery from the war’s devastation and prevent it from turning Communist, the American government carried out the European Recovery Program, also known as the “Marshall Plan.” According to Paul Swann, the involvement of Hollywood in the Economic Recovery Administration’s Informational Media Guaranty Program was in direct response to the objectives of the “Marshall Plan,” for one of the goals of this program was to support the information policy of the United States by guaranteeing remittances for American cultural exports to Europe.³¹ The Program helped with the conversion of foreign currencies in Europe into US dollars at favourable exchange rates. There were three categories of cultural exports which warranted guaranties: “technical information, objective news reports, and information of a general and inclusive nature which will present to Europeans a faithful and well-rounded picture of American life.”³² The last category covers the possibility of incorporating “blocks of feature films with subject matter illustrative of the American scene, customs, history, institutions and people, conveying an appreciation of the American way of life.”³³ Clearly, then, the American government has always endeavoured to propagandise positive American ideas and values to the rest of the world.

²⁹ Colin Sparks, “What’s Wrong with Globalization,” *Global Media and Communication* 2 (2007): 138.

³⁰ Jack Valenti, “It’s Lights, Camera, and Politics,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1996, http://articles.latimes.com/1996-09-06/local/me-41045_1_political-consultants.

³¹ Swann, 9.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “Statement of Principles to Guide Consideration of Application for Guaranties of Investments in Informational Media Projects,” A.I.D., Special Media Section, General Subject Files, RG 286, National Archives, September 13, 1948, quoted in Swann, 9.

Through the promotion of American cultural products to Europe, it can be seen that the US government made great efforts to break trade barriers and advocate the “free” flow of information. Freedom of information was originally recognised in Resolution 59 of the United Nations General Assembly in 1946: “freedom of information is a fundamental human right and is the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated. Freedom of information implies the right to gather, transmit and publish news anywhere and everywhere without fetters.”³⁴ Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”³⁵ Vincent B. Fesher has remarked that “the doctrine of the international free flow of information or free expression stems from the human right to receive and impart information.”³⁶ However, these statements can be interpreted from different perspectives based on the political purposes of different countries. The doctrine of the free flow of information has provided an official reason for the United States to protect its audio-visual products and to open up overseas markets or gain further access to these markets. Herbert Schiller clearly illustrates this concept in the following argument:

Free flow is the ultimate embodiment of corporate speech. Included are familiar media products such as film, TV programs, magazines, records, cassettes, books, and advertising, as well as the huge volume of financial, economic, and organizational data that allows the transnational corporate order to function.³⁷

Thus, the principle of the free flow of information acted as an alibi for the dissemination of American values and ideals to the rest of the world. Shao observes that, in order to curb the spread of Communism in Europe, “President Truman secretly supported propaganda schemes that included the promotion of US film exports.”³⁸ For instance, after World War II, Germany proposed to import 100 American films per year. However, in order to gain access to the German market without any restriction, the MPEA lobbied the Department of State and argued that “Germany is the focal point in the current battle of ideologies” and that it would be “illogical to restrict the powerful message that American pictures could carry to the Western

³⁴ “Calling of an International Conference on Freedom of Information—Report of the Third Committee,” United Nations Digital Library, accessed March 1, 2020, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/829682?ln=en>.

³⁵ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” The United Nations, accessed March 1, 2020, <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>.

³⁶ Vincent B. Fesher, ““Television without Frontiers”: Possible U.S. Responses,” *Entertainment & Sports Law Review* 9 (1992): 104.

³⁷ Herbert Schiller, “The Privatization and Transnationalization of Culture,” in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), 327.

³⁸ Shao, 129.

zone of Germany.”³⁹ At last, after a diplomatic negotiation, a so-called mutual agreement was reached in which America managed to double the quota to 200 Hollywood films per year.

The U.S did not choose to occupy territories or resources in Europe by means of colonisation, but rather to adopt a new strategy of inculcating American ideas, values, customs, and ways of life into other countries to expand its influence via a variety of cultural products and services. Hence, Herbert Schiller argues that “the late 1940s and the 1950s constituted the brief era in which the free flow principle was elaborated and promoted at the government level and which offered full state support to the export of American media goods and services.”⁴⁰ Schiller’s analysis of the doctrine of the free flow of information corroborates Nicholas Garnham’s view of cultural industries. Garnham claims that “cultural industries refer to those institutions in society which employ the characteristic modes of production and organisation of industrial corporations to produce and disseminate symbols in the form of cultural goods and services, generally, although not exclusively, as commodities.”⁴¹ This elucidation confirms the essence of the Hollywood film industry: that is a representative type of cultural industry, advocating free trade of Hollywood motion pictures as commodities, while disregarding the effect of films’ transmission of American ideas and values to other countries. In addition, under the lobbying of the MPAA, the United States Congress and Department of Commerce decided to add the issues concerning films into the process of negotiation with other countries for their accession to the World Trade Organization. They accomplished this by including clauses protecting intellectual property and opening local film markets to American products. For example, the American Congress and Embassy supported the MPAA’s request to Korea to permit Hollywood to establish distribution companies there.

Besides the MPAA, another agency which endeavours to support the expansion of American products worldwide is the United States Trade Representative. According to the introduction on its official website, “USTR is part of the Executive Office of the President” and “the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) is responsible for developing and coordinating U.S. international trade, commodity, and direct investment policy, and overseeing negotiations with other countries.”⁴² These statements reveal that the USTR is the spokesperson for the American President in terms of implementing US trade policies in

³⁹ Segrave, 173.

⁴⁰ Schiller, 327-328.

⁴¹ Nicholas Garnham, “Concepts of Culture: Public Policy and the Cultural Industries,” in *Studies in Culture: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (London: Sage Publishing, 1987), 56.

⁴² “Mission of the USTR,” Office of the USTR, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/about-ustr>.

international markets and monitoring and negotiating issues concerning investment, economic disputes and commercial agreements with foreign countries on behalf of the American government.

As part of its aim to expand access to foreign markets for American products and to deal with any commercial disputes or frictions with foreign countries in the process, the USTR was granted the authority to administer Section 301 procedures in 1974.⁴³ Under the terms of Section 301, US private parties have the right to “attack, in the United States, the acts, policies, or practices of foreign governments or their instrumentalities that adversely affect U.S. commerce including, but not limited to, barriers to U.S. export commerce.”⁴⁴ Moreover, Section 301 grants the US President the ability to “‘take all appropriate and feasible action’ to enforce ‘U.S. rights under any trade agreement’ and to counter any foreign trade practice that is ‘unjustifiable, unreasonable, or discriminatory and burdens or restricts United States commerce.’”⁴⁵ In other words, Section 301 allows the American private sector and citizens to petition the US government to deal with problems that arise when facing limitations on commerce in terms of exportation to foreign countries. It also permits the American President to exert trade pressure unilaterally on foreign governments in order to guarantee access to foreign markets and protect the intellectual property interests of American cultural products.

Indeed, in order to create favourable conditions for Hollywood films to gain access to foreign markets, sometimes the American government will adopt special diplomatic measures through the USTR or even use trade sanctions to enlarge the overseas market share of American films. In the case of China, after China’s Reform and Opening-up in 1978, in order to integrate itself into the affairs concerning IP copyright in international community, China signed the *Agreement on Trade Relations* with the US in 1979, joined the World Intellectual Property Organization in 1980 and joined other international copyright conventions (such as the Berne Convention and the Geneva Convention). Moreover, China enacted a series of IP laws such as the Trade Mark Law of the PRC, Patent Law of the PRC, and Copyright Law of the PRC in the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, in order to respond to Hollywood’s concerns over the piracy of their audio-visual products, “[the USTR] threatened Beijing multiple times by means of trade wars, economic sanctions, non-renewal of most-favoured-nation status, and opposition

⁴³ Susan K. Sell, “Industry Strategies for Intellectual Property and Trade: The Quest for TRIPS and Post-TRIPS Strategies,” *Cardozo Journal of International and Comparative Law* 10 (2002): 82.

⁴⁴ Bart S. Fisher and Ralph G. Steinhardt, III, “Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974: Protection for U.S. Exporters of Goods, Services and Capital,” *Law and Policy in International Business* 14 (1982): 573.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 573.

to China's entry into the WTO."⁴⁶ The USTR placed China on the Special 301 list of "Priority Foreign Country" in 1991, 1994, 1996 respectively, and threatened China with \$1.08 billion and \$2 billion in tariffs on Chinese products in 1994 and 1996. In the end, the threatened trade wars were avoided through painful negotiations and the signing of China-US Memorandum of Understanding on the Protection of Intellectual Property in 1992, China-US Agreements Regarding Intellectual Property Rights in 1995 and Chinese Implementation of the 1995 Intellectual Property Rights Agreement.⁴⁷

Therefore, as Bart S. Fisher and Ralph G. Steinhardt III assert, when dealing with trade or economic disputes with other countries, "Section 301 works through feints and threats, rather than through formal legal processes."⁴⁸ Besides, "the President may retaliate against a foreign trade practice that in some sense injures U. S. commerce, even though it is legal under international law."⁴⁹ According to Susan Sell, "amendments to Section 301 in the Trade Agreements Act of 1979 institutionalized private sector participation in foreign trade policy."⁵⁰ Fisher and Steinhardt further assert that "[T]he expanded jurisdictional scope of Section 301 to include all services as well as products makes Section 301 a potentially powerful weapon for a U.S. industry aggrieved by foreign trade practices."⁵¹ In my understanding, Section 301 is a unilateral mechanism established to negotiate trade agreements and deal with economic frictions in the international community, and to gain further access to foreign markets for American commodities on behalf of the American government; it allows the American private sector and citizens to seek aid from the US government when encountering commercial issues. Hence, it is a kind of instrument with which to employ economic coercion to boost the exportation of American commodities, and a vehicle with which to retaliate against American trade partners when encountering restrictions in commerce.

On the other hand, the US government has always advocated free trade and a liberal market and opposed the exclusion of audio-visual products from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and later from WTO negotiations. Early in the 1940s, at the beginning of GATT negotiations, the US sought to remove restrictions on the circulation of

⁴⁶ Carl E. Heinberg, "American Films in China: An Analysis of China's Intellectual Property Record and Reconsideration of Cultural Trade Exceptions amidst Rampant Piracy," *Minnesota Journal of International Law* 15 (2006): 225.

⁴⁷ Shujen Wang, 80-81.

⁴⁸ Fisher and Steinhardt, 578.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 597.

⁵⁰ Sell, 82.

⁵¹ Fisher and Steinhardt, 598-599.

motion pictures; however, due to opposition from other countries, America made a compromise and agreed that any country could establish some policies, like a quota system, to guarantee screen time for their own domestic films. Before the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations in 1993, 112 European directors and producers participated in a film forum in France to appeal to European GATT negotiators to hold the line for excluding audio-visual products from the GATT.⁵² Finally, as a result of the European negotiators as well as an appeal by the French President, audio-visual products were made exempt from the GATT, permitting nations to establish their own cultural policies.

When GATT could not act as a canopy for the free circulation of American cultural products, the US started to develop a new method to achieve its goal, which was to seek free trade agreements with other countries. This has become the main approach to crack the cultural markets of other countries. For instance, as a premise for the US-South Korea FTA, South Korea had to reduce the screening time of its domestic films from 146 days to 73 days from 2006 onwards. After the signing of the FTA in 2007, the film market share of South Korea's domestic films dropped from 63.8% in 2006 to 42% in 2008.⁵³ As for English-speaking countries like Australia, the largely Hollywood-occupied Australian film market became worse after the signing of the US-Australia FTA in 2004, with the Australian domestic market share plummeting from 7.8% in 2001 to 1.3% in 2004.⁵⁴

As I have shown, support from the American government has been indispensable for the prevalence and expansion of Hollywood motion pictures throughout the world. In order to guarantee the profitability of the Hollywood film industry and disseminate American messages and values to the rest of the world, different departments and institutions in the American administration have seemingly spared no effort to offer a variety of methods and mechanisms to crack the film market of other countries by means of implementing various diplomatic and trade policies.

⁵² Segrave, 271.

⁵³ Dal Yong Jin, "A Critical Analysis of US Cultural Policy in the Global Film Market: Nation States and FTAs," *The International Communication Gazette* 73 (2011): 658-659.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 663.

2.12 Hollywood's Efforts to Bridge the Cultural Gap

As we have seen, Hollywood has maintained a long-term hegemony in the world film market since the 1920s by virtue of its industrial production mode, a wide range of distribution networks at home and abroad and effective marketing strategies; thus, many film talents from all over the world have been attracted to Hollywood to fulfil their film dreams. In 1954, the former president of the MPAA, Eric Johnson, explained the global appeal:

Hollywood is the Mecca of Moviedom... Great actors and actresses, outstanding directors, technicians and writers, have flocked to our shores from distant lands, drawn to the world's film center by their ambition and aspirations... This cosmopolitan attitude of Hollywood has reinforced the universal appeal of its production... Our films are designed for consumption everywhere, and for that reason are appreciated everywhere.⁵⁵

During the golden age of Hollywood, the comic master Charlie Chaplin, the master of suspense Alfred Hitchcock, Vivien Leigh, Audrey Hepburn and many others came from Great Britain, and Greta Garbo and Ingrid Bergman emigrated from Sweden. In recent decades, more international film directors, producers and actors have been attracted to Hollywood, including Kate Winslet, Jude Law, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley, Emma Watson and Tom Hiddleston from Great Britain; Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman and Chris Hemsworth from Australia; John Woo and Jackie Chan from Hong Kong SAR; Ang Lee from Taiwan region; Zhang Ziyi from Mainland China; and many other filmmakers from Europe, Latin America and Asia. In particular, the incorporation of filmmakers from non-English-speaking countries into Hollywood has reinforced the impression that Hollywood offers equal opportunities for all, a place with multi-ethnic inclusiveness and heterogeneous cultures. Hence, instead it becomes a kind of promotion for Hollywood to attract more international film practitioners, reinforcing Johnson's point that Hollywood "films are designed for consumption everywhere."⁵⁶

In terms of incorporating foreign cultural elements and themes to target international film markets, Disney possesses a great deal of experience. Many of its animations are adapted from the fairy tales of other countries and cultures. For example, *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements, John Musker, 1989) is based on a Danish fairy tale. *Beauty and the Beast* (Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise, 1991) originates from a French story. *Aladdin* (Ron Clements, John Musker, 1992) is inspired by an Arabian folk tale from *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*. *Mulan* (Tony Bancroft, Barry Cook, 1998) is adapted from a Chinese folk ballad. *Tangled* (Nathan

⁵⁵ Eric Johnson (speech, Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Omaha, NE, May 24, 1954), quoted in Peter Miskell, "International Films and International Markets: The Globalisation of Hollywood Entertainment, c. 1921-1951," *Media History* 22 (2016): 178.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Greno, Byron Howard, 2010) is based on a German fairy tale. *Frozen* (Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee, 2013) is inspired by Andersen's fairy tale *The Snow Queen*, which takes place in Norway.

In addition, Hollywood has always adopted a conventional method of making films in different film locations globally. This approach serves to de-Americanise the backdrop and content in its films, which aligns with ideas of interculturalism and pluralism. Some Hollywood films excel in playing down the obvious depiction of American cultural or geographical backgrounds. For instance, in the *James Bond* film series and *Mission: Impossible* film series, almost every sequel occurs in a different place in the world. The film locations in the twenty-five Bond film series over a period of fifty-six years include numerous exotic sites in every continent on Earth.⁵⁷ Hollywood indeed appears more like a global industry.

Hollywood is not only good at producing films, but also excels at promoting them to target audiences and markets. Dal Y. Lin considers the marketing strategy employed by Hollywood when applied to international filmmakers as a variant of the mantra: "think globally, act locally."⁵⁸ For instance, when *Kung Fu Panda 3* (Alessandro Carloni & Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2016) was screened in Mainland China, apart from the original version, a Chinese-dubbed version was created. In fact, it is quite common for Hollywood films to have one version dubbed with the local language. In this case, what was special was that the Chinese-dubbed version was customised. Firstly, the voice actors and actresses in the Chinese version were the most popular and prestigious celebrities in Mainland China, with Huang Lei as Po, Jacky Chan as Po's biological father Li Shan, Jay Chou as Monkey, Bai Baihe as Tigress, Yang Mi as Mei Mei and Zhu Zhu as Viper. Secondly, according to *China Daily's* interview with the director of the Chinese version, Teng Huatao, "the mouth movements and facial expressions of the characters have been adjusted to make them look natural when speaking Chinese."⁵⁹ Thirdly, DreamWorks' CEO Jeffrey Katzenberg announced that "the Chinese-version was a redesign and rewrite of the script, and the Mandarin version adds some elements of dialect in order to help [the] Chinese audience understand the film and get the punchlines."⁶⁰ *Zootopia* (Byron Howard, Rich Moore & Jared Bush, 2016) provides another example. In a scene in which two

⁵⁷ "Bond Movies in Order of Release," IMDB, accessed March 2, 2020, <https://www.imdb.com/list/ls004489992/>.

⁵⁸ Dal Yong Jin, "Reinterpretation of Cultural Imperialism: Emerging Domestic Market vs Continuing US Dominance," *Media, Culture and Society* 29 (2007): 763.

⁵⁹ Fan Xu, "Chinese Stars behind *Kung Fu Panda 3* Revealed," *Chinadaily*, December 21, 2015, http://m.chinadaily.com.cn/en/2015-12/21/content_22765250.htm.

⁶⁰ "*Kung Fu Panda 3* to Make Extra Mandarin-Customized Version," *Chinadaily*, December 13, 2015, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2015-12/13/content_22701818.htm.

animals host a news programme, one of the anchors was a snow leopard, while the other varied depending on where the film would be released. The co-news anchor was a moose in the US, Canada and France, a tanuki in Japan, a koala in Australia and New Zealand, a jaguar in Brazil, a corgi in the UK and a panda in China.⁶¹ In fact, these methods effectively allow Hollywood films not only to bridge the cultural gaps between different countries but also fully embody the marketing strategy of thinking globally and acting locally.

Hollywood has always been adept in absorbing foreign filmmakers and foreign cultural elements and incorporating themes and subjects from foreign countries to both reduce the side effect brought about by “cultural discount” and attract foreign audiences. The concept of cultural discount was developed by media economists Hoskins and Mirus. They coined the term after examining the American dominance of the international trade in television programmes. They contend that “a particular programme rooted in one culture, and thus attractive in that environment, will have a diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, institutions, and behavioural patterns of the material in question.”⁶² This suggests that since the audience of some cultural products that are exported to the target country and markets do not share the same language, cultural background, value system, traditions or lifestyles with the source country, viewers cannot completely appreciate or understand the cultural products, and communication effects will be discounted. Therefore, in order to reduce the cultural discount as much as possible and ensure the international distribution and exhibition of Hollywood productions is as broad as possible, Hollywood has gradually encouraged films which incorporate non-American actors and exotic themes to cross national boundaries and cater to the target audience. Yet Hollywood is also an expert in obscuring the location or the era of some films and fabricating a non-existent place and time for the stories, thereby reducing their cultural specifics, especially in science fiction films such as the *Star Wars* series, *Star Trek* series and *Avatar* (James Cameron, 2009). In these films, the audience is less likely to know where or when the story happens, meaning that every viewer can imagine and identify with the stories. In addition, Hollywood can eliminate specific cultural complexities belonging to American culture so that they become universal in their appeal to a foreign audience. The superhero films are good examples of this, since they

⁶¹ “Zootopia Features Localised News Anchors,” *Irish Examiner*, March 8, 2016, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/entertainment/zootopia-features-localised-news-anchors-724244.html>.

⁶² Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus, “Reasons for the US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes,” *Media, Culture and Society* 10 (1988): 500.

highlight the super powers of the protagonists, visual special effects, spectacular scenarios and gripping plots. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 1 (pp. 47-48), the theme of these films is usually simple and easily conveyed: protecting human beings, resisting evil forces from the earth or outer space, upholding justice, conquering evil, and praising friendship, love and peace. When viewing this kind of film, the audience does not need to know much about the specific cultural background for the story while unconsciously imbibing the ideological message of the American producers. Hence, the blockbuster formula with universally accepted values has become an efficient and effective tool for the expansion of Hollywood films. I will discuss these strategies in greater depth in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, with particular emphasis upon the incorporation of Chinese elements into Hollywood blockbusters in recent years to appeal both to the Chinese audience and film regulators.

2.13 Hollywood's Economic Mode of Oligopoly

The systematic economic oligopoly of Hollywood film companies is the fundamental competitive advantage in the maintenance of its status as the leading centre of the motion picture industry in the world today. In the late 1910s, the big film studios in Hollywood acquired small theatres and small film studios and formed the original oligopoly in film industry — the three “Majors” and five “Minors” — which controlled most of the capital and the best resources in the film industry and exerted considerable influence on the entire market. The basic structure of this early Hollywood oligopoly has evolved into the “Big Six,” the major studios in Hollywood: Disney, Paramount, Universal, Warner Bros., Sony, and 20th Century Fox. However, as reported in *USA Today* in July 2018, “shareholders at Disney and Twenty-First Century Fox approved Disney’s USD \$71.3 million acquisition of the Fox movie and TV studios and other assets including Fox’s 30% stake in streaming service Hulu.”⁶³ The Hollywood oligopoly possesses a mature operational system in the film industry, its conglomeration of film studios, its transnational distribution networks and its organisational film production complex. Allen Scott provides a useful description of the Hollywood production complex as a series of overlapping production networks:

The nodes of these networks are composed of Majors, Independents and providers of specialized services from script writing to film editing. A local labour market comprising a large number of individuals differentiated according to skills, sensibilities and forms of

⁶³ Mike Snider and Brian Truitt, “Disney Gets Shareholder OK to Acquire Fox Movie and TV Studios, and Stake in Hulu,” *USA Today*, July 27, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/media/2018/07/27/disney-gets-ok-acquire-fox-movie-and-tv-studios-and-stake-hulu/841721002/>.

habituation. This labor market is constantly replenished by new talents from all over the rest of North America and the world. An institutional environment made up of many organizations and associations representing firms, workers and governmental agencies.⁶⁴

These are the prerequisites for the globalisation of Hollywood. Effective distribution is the crucial element in the motion picture industry. The distribution system disseminates cultural products to overseas markets and obtains revenues and information from abroad to be sent back to Hollywood, which provides a sustained economic and informational cycle for the conglomeration of the Hollywood production and franchising complex. Especially, at present, each Hollywood Major is an entertainment empire, and “these empires often include several film production and distribution companies (which may in fact compete with each other as well as with those from competing empires); movie theater chains; broadcast, cable, and satellite TV networks; publishing houses; music companies; theme parks; video stores; and a variety of other commercial operations.”⁶⁵ This synergistic model of entertainment has almost monopolised all the procedures from the birth of a film to its subsequent commercial development, reinforcing the hegemonic position of Hollywood in global film industry.

Against the backdrop of globalisation and the free market, Hollywood has attained a cultural hegemony in the global film industry as a result of the favourable conditions illustrated above. Yet in spite of Hollywood’s current hegemony, the formula of its success cannot be locked in, and its ascendancy cannot be absolute and permanent. It is quite possible for other regions to mount challenges to its international market dominance, most conspicuously, in recent years, the Chinese film market. According to an MPAA report, China surpassed Japan and became the second largest film market in the world in 2012, with a box office of USD 2.7 billion (about RMB 17 billion).⁶⁶ China has continued to maintain this position, indicating that the Chinese film market is set to exert a profound influence on the shifting dynamics of the cultural landscapes of worldwide film consumption. Furthermore, the Chinese audience is the largest in the world, accounting for one fifth of the world’s population, which offers an enormous foundation for the consumption of cultural products. More than a decade ago Michael Curtin suggested that “this vast and increasingly wealthy market will serve as a

⁶⁴ Allen J. Scott, “A New Map of Hollywood: The Production and Distribution of American Motion Pictures,” *Regional Studies* 36 (2002): 965.

⁶⁵ Stanley Rosen, “Hollywood, Globalization and Film Markets in Asia: Lessons for China,” (paper presented at Zhongguo Yingshi Gaoceng Luntan (High-Level Forum of China Film and Television), Shanghai, November 23, 2002).

⁶⁶ “Theatrical Market Statistics,” Motion Picture Association of America, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.motionpictures.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2012-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-Report.pdf>.

foundation for emerging media and conglomerates that could shake the very foundation of Hollywood's century-long hegemony."⁶⁷ His assumptions were based on the development of the Chinese film market and commercial media enterprises, the increasing investment in mass media and cultural services by foreign media tycoons in the Greater Chinese regions, and the increasing wealth and influence of the Chinese overseas: "What if Chinese feature films and television programs began to rival the substantial budgets and lavish production values of their Western counterparts? What if Chinese media were to strengthen and extend their distribution networks, becoming truly global enterprises?"⁶⁸ His speculations have gradually become reality. In the following sections and chapters, I will expound on these two particular issues.

2.2 China's Approaches to Countervail Hollywood's Dominance in World Film Industry

In a speech at the Busan International Film Festival in 2002, David Bordwell explained three film strategies used in Europe, South America and Asia to counteract Hollywood's domination in the world film industry: "First, they sought to cooperate with the U.S. majors. Second, they sought to compete with Hollywood for local markets. Third, they began to nurture alternatives to the Hollywood global films."⁶⁹ Using the three strategies, China has begun to challenge Hollywood's dominance both domestically and internationally.

With regard to cooperation with Hollywood studios, Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia has been cooperating with Chinese films since the 1990s in terms of capital investment in some significant Chinese films, such as *The Road Home* (Zhang Yimou, 1999), *Not One Less* (Zhang Yimou, 1999), *Big Shot's Funeral* (Feng Xiaogang, 2001) and *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004). Gradually, more Chinese film companies have invited Hollywood special effects teams to work with them. In addition, in recent years, more China-Hollywood co-produced films have appeared, such as *Kung Fu Panda 3* (Alessandro Carloni & Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2016), *The Great Wall* (Zhang Yimou, 2016) and *The Meg* (Jon Turteltaub, 2018), a strategy that I will analyse in detail in Chapter 4. The point of co-operation with Hollywood is not only to learn Hollywood's filmmaking techniques, but also the administration and

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Films and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4.

⁶⁹ Quote from Stanley Rosen, "Hollywood, Globalization and Film Markets in Asia: Lessons for China," (paper presented at Zhongguo Yingshi Gaoceng Luntan (High-Level Forum of China Film and Television), Shanghai, November 23, 2002).

marketing tactics and distribution modes of the major studios. The potential benefit of cooperating with Hollywood is to enhance the production competence of Chinese domestic films, upgrade the Chinese film system comprehensively, gradually produce the replacements of Hollywood productions and compete for the market share with Hollywood.

In terms of competing for local market share with Hollywood, China can take advantage of the range of different film genres. The Chinese audience associates “high concept” Hollywood blockbusters with science fiction films, action, adventure, fantasy and disaster films, which are filled with intriguing and thrilling plots, stunning visual effects and grand spectacles. These are the most popular genre films worldwide in terms of the box office. Therefore, China can produce comedy films, costume-drama films, or martial arts films to contend with Hollywood and win audiences, for these genres require greater local cultural knowledge to appreciate and are more sharply differentiated from their Hollywood counterparts. In fact, this method has worked fairly well in recent years. According to data from Box Office Mojo, in the past seven years (2013 to 2019), the top ten grossing films of the Chinese film market have included several costume-drama and comedy films.⁷⁰ Lists about ranking details can be seen in Appendix I (Page 205). On average, costume-drama and comedy films account for 30% to 40% of the list, which indicates that the direction Chinese filmmakers strive for is reasonable and effective.

Why is it easy for costume-drama films or martial arts films and comedies to prevail over other genres? Costume-drama is a relatively broad concept in Chinese cinema as it includes ancient fantasy, historical drama and Kung Fu films. As long as the film is set in ancient times or revolves around a story about gods or mythical heroes, it can be categorised as a Chinese costume-drama. China possesses a strong tradition of literature on myths, legends, and swordsmen.⁷¹ Just as American children grow up with Disney animations or super hero comic

⁷⁰ In 2013, two costume-drama films, *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (Stephen Chow & Chi-Kin Kwok) and *Young Detective Dee: Rise of the Sea Dragon* (Hark Tsui), and one comedy *Personal Tailor* (Feng Xiaogang). In 2014, one costume-drama film *The Monkey King* (Soi Cheang) and two comedies, *Breakup Buddies* (Ning Hao) and *The Breakup Guru* (Deng Chao & Yu Baimei). In 2015, one costume-drama film *Monster Hunt* (Raman Hui) and four comedies, *Lost in Hong Kong* (Xu Zheng), *Goodbye Mr. Loser* (Peng Damo & Yan Fei), *Jianbing Man* (Dong Chengpeng), and *The Man from Macau II* (Jing Wong). In 2016, two costume-drama films, *The Monkey King 2* (Soi Cheang) and *The Great Wall* (Zhang Yimou), and two comedies, *The Mermaid* (Stephen Chow) and *From Vegas to Macau 3* (Andrew Lau & Jing Wong). In 2017, one costume-drama film *Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back* (Hark Tsui) and two comedies, *Never Say Die* (Song Yang & Zhang Chiyu) and *Kung Fu Yoga* (Stanley Tong). In 2018, one costume-drama film *Monster Hunt 2* (Raman Hui) and one comedy *Hello Mr. Billionaire* (Peng Damo & Yan Fei). In 2019, two comedies *Pegasus* (Han Han), *Crazy Alien* (Ning Hao).

⁷¹ Since the Warring States period (B.C. 475 – B.C. 221), mythical classics and legends have appeared, and in different dynasties there were always some writers who were interested in composing this kind of literature.

books, Chinese people are cultivated by this kind of literature during their youth to some extent. These texts have provided great inspiration and raw materials for film creation in the genre of costume-drama. Since Chinese filmmakers began making them in the 1920s, a great number of excellent and representative Kung Fu films have emerged, such as Chang Cheh and King Hu's Kung Fu films from the 1960s and 1970s, Tsui Hark's *Once Upon a Time in China* film series (also known as *Wong Fei Hung* film series) from the 1990s, and Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000) and Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) in the 21st century. Thus, Kung Fu films have been a traditional genre in the development of Chinese cinema and represent a special contribution made by the Chinese filmmakers to the diversity of the world's film genres.

Given this cultural background, it is quite easy for Chinese audiences to identify with costume-drama films. For instance, the *Journey to the West* film series and *Monkey King* film series were adapted from and inspired by one of the most popular mythological and supernatural novels in Chinese literature, *Xi You Ji (Journey to the West)* by Wu Cheng'en. This classic story has enjoyed popularity for hundreds of years in China. In addition, in 1986, the novel was adapted as a TV drama, which immediately became a mega-hit in China. *Journey to the West* achieved mass familiarity, for almost everyone in China knows about Sun Wukong (Monkey King). As a result of the tremendous influence of these forms of media, every time the novel is adapted into a film or television product, it becomes a sensation.

The main reason for the popularity of comedies, however, is related to the concept of "cultural discount." If audiences are not familiar with the cultural background and language context, they cannot understand the humour in comedies. For instance, in one of Feng Xiaogang's profitable films, *Big Shot's Funeral* (2001), before passing out, Tyler (Donald Sutherland) authorised Yoyo (Ge You) to arrange his comedy funeral, but did not offer any money to fund it. In order to organise the funeral, Yoyo and his friend held an auction to attract advertisement placements. An actor was hired to place a kind of calcium tablet on the funeral.

These include the biographies of swordsmen and assassins in *Shi Ji (Records of the Grand Historian)* by Sima Qian in the West Han Dynasty (B.C. 202 – A.D. 8), the mythical stories in *Sou Shen Ji (In Search of the Supernatural)* by Gan Bao in the East Jin Dynasty (A.D. 317 – A.D. 420), the legendary stories in the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618 – A.D. 907), the script for folk story-telling in the Song Dynasty (A.D. 960 – A.D. 1279) and Yuan Dynasty (A.D. 1271 – A.D. 1368), the representative *Shui Hu Zhuan (Water Margin)* by Shi Nai'an and *Xi You Ji (Journey to the West)* by Wu Cheng'en in the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368 – A.D. 1644), the representative *San Xia Wu Yi (Seven Heroes and Give Gallants)* by Shi Yukun in the Qing Dynasty (A.D. 1644 – A.D. 1912), and popular modern and contemporary swordsmen novels by Louis Cha Leung-Yong, Gu Long, and Liang Yusheng.

In the designed scenario, when he attended the funeral, he wept mournfully and said, “泰勒，泰勒，我们中国演员早就集体补过钙了，就差一步，就差一步啊，泰勒，没来得及给你们美国文艺界补钙，你就，就差一步，就差一步，你就是因为缺钙才死的呀。(Tyler, Tyler, our Chinese actors have been supplemented with calcium collectively, just one step, just one step, Tyler, you American literary and art circle did not be supplemented with calcium in time, and you, just one step, one step, you died due to calcium deficiency).” Finishing the lines, the actor took out a bottle of calcium tablets and put it beside Tyler’s casket. Only Chinese audiences can understand the humour, because in the early 2000s, various advertisements for calcium tablets flooded China’s TV screens. If a filmgoer does not know the reference, he or she would not laugh at the joke. Thus, comedy is another film genre that can be utilised effectively by Chinese filmmakers to win more local audiences. The two film genres, costume-drama and comedy, therefore, represent effective tools to be used to compete for the domestic market share with Hollywood films.

The third strategy — nurturing alternatives to Hollywood films — is the most challenging task for Chinese filmmakers and producers, as “high concept” films are the most successful products of the Hollywood film industry. However, in recent years, a new trend has emerged. A few Chinese films or Mainland-Hong Kong co-productions have begun to appear on the list of top grossing films worldwide since 2016.⁷² These films are examples of the new Chinese high concept commercial blockbusters, with big stars and budgets, magnificent scenes and impressive special effects. More than 90% of the ticket receipts of these films were generated from the Chinese film market; this significant development indicates the potential challenge that the Chinese film market poses to Hollywood’s hegemony in the global film market. This trend conforms, by implication Kerry Segrave’s statement that “with a large, affluent population, the American market was able to stand the costs – as other markets could not – and return them with profits to the producers.”⁷³ This has been one of the most significant conditions for Hollywood’s dominance in international film market. A country whose domestic market has sufficient theatres and filmgoers can digest and absorb the films it produces even if it cannot export its films to overseas film markets; the huge domestic market can provide a

⁷² In 2016, a Chinese film, *The Mermaid* (Stephen Chow, 2016), ranked number 14 on the list of world top 15 grossing films. In 2017, *Wolf Warrior 2* (Wu Jing, 2017) ranked number 7. In 2018, *Operation Red Sea* (Dante Lam, 2018) ranked number 13, and *Detective Chinatown 2* (Chen Sicheng, 2018), number 14. In 2019, *Ne Zha* (Jiao Zi, 2019) and *The Wandering Earth* (Frant Gwo, 2019) ranked number 12 and 13. See ranking details on Box Office Mojo, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/world/2016/>.

⁷³ Segrave, 8.

springboard for its global operation. As for this aspect, journalist Charles Merz explains that “the ability to spend money on production and to recoup it here at home which — rather than any technical excellence or genius in the matter of acting ... gives the American picture its commanding lead abroad.”⁷⁴ Another journalist, Victoria de Grazia, holds a similar view, stating that “in all cases, European firms were dependent on export markets, whereas in the United States the costs of production were amortized on the vast home market, enabling firms to market their products abroad at very low cost.”⁷⁵ From this perspective, at present, China has begun to possess this trait by having a large domestic market and tremendous film consumption capability, as I will explore further in the following discussion of how China has grown its giant home market.

2.3 Growth of the Chinese Film Market in Recent Years

The Chinese film market has witnessed break-neck growth in terms of box office revenues in recent years. China began the institutional reform of the Chinese film industry in 1994, when it also began to import foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis. The national box office began to increase; however, before 2003, the yearly national box office was still around RMB one billion Yuan. Since 2003, when China began to reform the cinema chains and distribution system, annual ticket receipts have increased by 20%-30% each year on average. In 2010, the annual box office in China surpassed RMB 10 billion Yuan. A report published by MPAA acknowledges that China became the second largest film market in the world in 2012 with a box office of USD 2.7 billion (about RMB 17 billion).⁷⁶ The annual film revenue of 2014 in China almost reached RMB 30 billion Yuan, and in 2015, total ticket sales increased by a stunning 46% compared with the previous year’s revenue.⁷⁷ In 2016, the speed of the box office revenue in the Chinese film market slowed down, but in 2017, ticket sales increased by 22%, with a total number of RMB 55.9 billion Yuan.⁷⁸ In 2018, national box office revenue reached RMB 60.9 billion Yuan.⁷⁹ If this speed of growth is maintained, many media institutions predict

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ “Theatrical Market Statistics,” Motion Picture Association of America, accessed March 5, 2020, <https://www.motionpictures.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2012-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-Report.pdf>.

⁷⁷ “1905 Year-End Plan: Data Report of Chinese Film Market in 2015,” *1905.com*, January 5, 2016, <http://www.1905.com/news/20160105/965909.shtml>.

⁷⁸ “Please Answer 2017: Year-End Summary of Chinese Film Market,” *nbd.com.cn*, January 1, 2018, <http://www.nbd.com.cn/articles/2018-01-01/1178011.html>.

⁷⁹ “2018 Summary of National Box Office,” *Sohu.com*, January 5, 2019, http://www.sohu.com/a/286975727_100008019.

that the Chinese film market will have surpassed the United States and become the largest film market in the world by the end of 2020. *The Hollywood Reporter* provides one example of such reports, stating that “according to the new projections from PricewaterhouseCoopers, in 2020, China’s fast-growing sales at the box office will exceed that of the US, \$12.28 billion to \$11.93 billion.”⁸⁰ However, the outbreak of Covid-19 has exerted severe impact on world film industry, including China, thus, this process will not be that smooth.

Besides the increase of box office revenue in the Chinese film market, a new phenomenon has appeared in recent years. The box office performance of several Hollywood productions in China has contributed significantly to their international receipts. For instance, in 2015, the box office of *Cinderella* (Kenneth Branagh, 2015), *Jurassic World* (Colin Trevorrow, 2015) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Joss Whedon, 2015) in China accounted for almost 25% of their international gross receipts. *Fast & Furious 7* notably received 34% of its international revenue from the Chinese film market.⁸¹ Some Hollywood blockbusters that bomb in terms of the box office and public praise in the West nonetheless receive large compensation in the Chinese film market. For instance, *World of Warcraft* (Duncan Jones, 2016) cost USD 160 million to make and received less than USD 25 million in the American market on its opening weekend, while the film — adapted from a video game that was popular with Chinese gamers — reaped USD 156 million within the first five days in Chinese theatres.⁸² At the end of its exhibition, its total profit in Chinese theatres was four times that of the American film market. This phenomenon offers further evidence for annual box office receipts of the Chinese film market exceeding that of the American film market in the near future. Especially when facing more competitive Chinese domestic blockbusters, Hollywood attaches increasing importance to the Chinese film market and sees the need to utilise various methods to please Chinese audiences and film regulators to gain access to it, such as producing Chinese-themed films, incorporating positive plots concerning China, casting renowned Chinese actors as cameo roles, placing Chinese products, adding Chinese film locations, seeking co-production with China, which will be illustrated in detail in the following two chapters.

The momentum for this rapid growth in the Chinese film market is the result of China’s rising economy and the increasing disposable income of its middle class. China’s per capita

⁸⁰ Paul Bond, “China Film Market to Eclipse U.S. Next Year: Study,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 5, 2019, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/china-film-market-eclipse-us-next-year-study-1215348>.

⁸¹ Gather information from Box Office Mojo.

⁸² Hannah Beech, “How China is Remaking the Global Film Industry,” *Time*, January 26, 2017, <http://time.com/4649913/china-remaking-global-film-industry/>.

gross domestic product grew from less than USD 1,000 in 2000 to over USD 8,827 in 2017, a nearly eight-fold increase in just 17 years.⁸³ Therefore, the growth in disposable income has boosted the consumption of luxury goods and lifestyle choices, such as travelling abroad, shopping at big department stores and eating at restaurants, as well as going to film theatres. However, according to the statistics from Wharton marketing in 2016, Chinese filmgoers attend the theatre, on average, less than once per year, compared to four times a year for American audiences.⁸⁴ The disparity between China and the US is primarily due to the severe imbalance of economic development within China between the underdeveloped regions (generally the Western China) and the relatively developed regions in Eastern China. Chinese film companies have also noticed the potential. Qiaowei Shen, a Wharton marketing professor, notes that, “Big cities are very mature already. Now those smaller cities are becoming very important. [Studios are increasingly] marketing in those small cities. They bring the movie stars to do promotional appearances in more than 20 cities, not just in major urban cities.”⁸⁵ The film market in the first-tier and second-tier cities has already become saturated. The real potential lies in the underdeveloped areas, which require more thorough economic enhancement to be able to support people going to film theatres. China’s population is almost four times larger than that of the United States, which accounts for the huge potential for box office growth.

Another factor behind the increase in box office revenue in China is the boom in the construction of theatres and screens. The film market in the first-tier cities, like Beijing or Shanghai, has been well established, and now the film studios are attaching more importance to the second, third or fourth-tier cities. They bring film stars to the smaller cities to make promotional appearances, rather than just concentrate on urban centres. Hence, the audience in smaller cities has made a great contribution to the explosive growth of the national box office revenue in recent years. But it is the increase in newly built cinemas and screens that has made such a significant contribution to the explosive growth of ticket sales in China. In 2014, 1015 cinemas were built nationwide, which amounts to 5397 additional screens. More cinemas and screens were built in the third-tier and fourth-tier cities and 8027 screens were added, adding almost 24 screens on average every day in 2015, which helped the number of screens

⁸³ “GDP Per Capita,” The World Bank, accessed March 3, 2020, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>.

⁸⁴ “China’s Film Industry: A Blockbuster in the Making,” *Knowledge @ Wharton*, February 17, 2016, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/lights-china-action-how-china-is-getting-into-the-global-entertainment-business/>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

nationwide reach 31,627 in total.⁸⁶ According to the statistics released by the Film Bureau of SAPPRT, in 2016 the number of cinema screens in the Chinese film market reached 40917 with an increase of 26 screens on average every day, and China overtook the United States and became the film market equipped with the most cinema screens in the world.⁸⁷ The constant increase in new venues and screens has become a key factor in the booming growth of the box office in the Chinese film market.

This chapter has elaborated on the reasons for Hollywood's hegemonic dominance in the worldwide film industry. It has shown how Hollywood has achieved prosperity and a worldwide presence by benefitting from the American government's political, military and policy support, its own methods to bridge the cultural gaps with other countries, and its own economic mode of oligopoly developed in the last century. I have also suggested that Hollywood's experiences have offered abundant lessons for the Chinese film market. Indeed, the flourishing climate for growth of the huge potential of the Chinese film market poses a major challenge to Hollywood's domination. The following two chapters will examine the various methods and techniques that Hollywood films have developed in the attempt to win over the largest film audience in the world, and how it anticipates further opening the Chinese film market and occupying a larger share in it.

⁸⁶ "1905 Nianzhong Cehua: 2015 Nian Zhongguo Dianying Shichang Dashuju Baogao (1905 Year-End Plan: Data Report of Chinese Film Market in 2015)," *1905.com*, Jan. 5, 2016, <http://www.1905.com/news/20160105/965909.shtml>.

⁸⁷ "Number of Cinema Screens in China Leaps to No. 1 in the World," *mtime.com*, December 20, 2016, <http://news.mtime.com/2016/12/20/1564631.html>.

Chapter 3 Hollywood's Strategies to Circumvent the Cultural Policies of the Chinese Government from an Artistic Perspective

In view of the booming Chinese film market, in recent years almost every Hollywood blockbuster has been making great efforts to be associated with China. Even though the film itself could not find a way to contain any Chinese element, they find another way to connect that film with China, which is to invite Chinese stars to be the spokesperson for a Hollywood blockbuster. For instance, in 2015 before the release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (J. J. Abrams, 2015), Disney announced that one of the most popular celebrities in China, Lu Han, would be the promotional ambassador for the film in China. Lu Han's song "The Inner Force" would be the promotional theme song for the film, and he also would star in the music video of the song.¹ Likewise, in 2016 another Chinese star Li Yifeng was hired as the spokesperson for *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (Zach Snyder, 2016) after the film's release schedule was confirmed in China. This fresh mode is a brand-new promotional method for Hollywood blockbusters in China. Depending on the strong public appeal of the invited spokespersons, the films could attract more audiences to cinemas. The previous instances have also indicated that films, as artistic works, could be treated as commodities and be merchandised through advertisements. Because films, particularly Hollywood productions, possess two properties at the same time: commodities and art.

Since their inception, films have possessed the property of commodities. Before the Lumière brothers, pioneers like Thomas Edison and his assistant William Dickson invented the kinoscope, but moving pictures could only be seen by one viewer at a time through this peep-show device. They had failed to develop and demonstrate the motion picture commercially. Although the kinoscope had not been introduced to Europe, the Lumière Brothers were inspired by the device and invented the cinématographe, the first commercial viable projector, which could serve as a camera, printer, and projector.² Hilary Radner believes that the public projection of the Lumière brothers' films was a kind of advertisement for their invention of the cinématographe and that they "recognized its commercial potential, and moved into film

¹ "Xingqiu Dazhan: Yuanli Juexing Neidi Dingdang, Lu Han Daiyan (*Star Wars: the Force Awakens* is Scheduled in Mainland China, Lu Han be the Spokesperson)," *ent.sina.com*, December 1, 2015, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/f/2015-12-01/doc-ifxmcnkr7718662.shtml>.

² David A. Cook and Robert Skylar, "History of the Motion Picture," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/history-of-the-motion-picture>.

production, distribution and exhibition.”³ Prakash Younger’s research shows that “within a year of the first screening of Lumière Brothers films in 1895, the projection of film as a form of commercial entertainment had spread around the globe.”⁴ Thus, one important factor signifying the birth of films is the commercial exhibition of motion pictures to an audience.

Early cinema is only considered to be a form of mass entertainment due to “its direct appeal to the working-class spectators’ desire to see cinematographic reproductions of celebrities, curiosities, attractive human bodies, comic gags, exotic locations, special effects, chases, and so on.”⁵ The Société Film D’art has played a decisive role in the process of elevating cinema into a form of art, by adopting the method of borrowing renowned theatre actors and producing filmed plays based on the adaptation of classic literature, opera and ballet. With the development and refinement of early cinema, Italian poet Ricciotto Canudo, who was considered amongst the first aestheticians of films, named cinema as “the Seventh Art” in *Manifesto of the Seven Arts* in 1911.⁶ Canudo asserts that cinema permitted the total fusion of all art forms and thus should be considered as the Seventh Art.⁷ Prakash Younger holds that two revolutionary filmmakers, D.W. Griffith and Charles Chaplin, achieved great success with both a global audience and critical intellectuals in the 1910s, because they endowed an aesthetic dignity to films equal to that of the traditional arts.⁸ With the advancement of film production technologies in terms of sound, colour, editing, films developed into a comprehensive art form.

On the other hand, as David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith note, “in most modern societies, no art floats free from economic ties.”⁹ No matter what kind of art it is, it needs people to appreciate or watch it. Audiences and markets can support the further development and motivation to create art. Art and commerce do not conflict with each other, but complement each other. The film theorist Christian Metz also argues that “[film] is our product, the product of the society which consumes it.”¹⁰ This indicates that films possess both

³ Hilary Radner, “Film as Popular Culture,” in *The Routledge Companion to Film History*, ed. William Guynn (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 17.

⁴ Prakash Younger, “Film as Art,” in *The Routledge Companion to Film History*, ed. William Guynn (London & New York: Routledge, 2011), 28.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James M. Welsh, “Documents of Film Theory: Ricciotto Canudo’s ‘Manifesto of the Seven Arts,’” *Film Quarterly* 3 (1975): 252-253.

⁷ Ibid., 254.

⁸ Younger, 28.

⁹ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2017), 4.

¹⁰ Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and the Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), 92.

commercial values as commodities and artistic values concurrently. Thus, as for various strategies to integrate Chinese elements, Hollywood has also been attentively trying from both artistic and commercial aspects.

My next two chapters are organised accordingly: they view the incorporation of Chinese elements into Hollywood films from both artistic and commercial perspectives. Chapter 3 is primarily concerned with the image of China or the Chinese in the eyes of the West, and thus concentrates more on the changes in the portrayal of China and Chinese culture from early Hollywood films to the present day. I offer a number of case studies of representative films with a strong thematic Chinese element or, as in more recent examples, with positive plots concerning China, along with prominent cameo roles for renowned Chinese actors. Chapter 4 explores the commercial benefits of appealing to the Chinese audience and film regulators through the careful choice of Chinese film locations, Chinese product placements and the creation of co-productions between Chinese companies and Hollywood studios. All of these efforts cater to the local conditions of the Chinese film market and effectively reduce the production cost of films destined for release in China in order to achieve a larger share of box office revenue.

3.1 Chinese-Themed Films

According to Edward Said, “anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient, either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism.”¹¹ Hence, filmmakers who make films about the Chinese or China could also be regarded as Orientalists. An analysis of the vicissitudes of the representation of the Chinese and China in such films reveals how some Orientalist impressions and stereotypes may or may not have changed over time. Although my research objects are drawn from Hollywood films released in Chinese theatres on a revenue-sharing basis after 1994, early Chinese-themed films made in America offer another perspective from which to assess the underlying reasons for the changes of the portrayal of the Chinese and China.

Broken Blossoms (David W. Griffith, 1919) is one of the earliest films made in the US to prominently feature Chinese themes and characters. D. W. Griffith was a pioneer in the techniques in film art including “the invention of the close-up, the long shot, the fadeout, night

¹¹ Said, 2.

shots, high and low photographic angels, cross-cutting, backlighting, the moving camera, and many other devices that are now taken for granted.”¹² He made the first feature-length film and has been credited with “developing the techniques through which motion picture became an art form — an instrument able to express emotions and ideas.”¹³

Broken Blossoms concerns the interracial love between a white girl and a Chinese man. It tells a story of a Chinese man (Richard Barthelmess) whose missionary goal was to bring the peaceful teachings of Buddhism to England. His dream, however, was shattered due to the cruel reality of life in the slums of London and he became a storekeeper to earn his living. He fell in love with an English girl, Lucy (Lilian Gish) who often was abused by her prize-fighter father, Battling Burrows (Donald Crisp). Once, after a severe beating, Lucy left her house and fell unconscious in front of the Chinese man’s shop. He looked after her and kept her safe. However, after someone told Battling that Lucy was in the Chinese man’s store, he was infuriated, broke into the shop, smashed everything in the room, took Lucy back home and beat her to death. When the “Yellow Man” found the destruction and Lucy’s loss, he also became enraged, ran to Lucy’s home, shot Battling, and brought Lucy’s body back to his shop and laid her on his bed. Watching over his love sorrowfully, he stabbed himself.

The film opens with a sequence of shots demonstrating the boisterous daily life at a treaty port in China (Figure 2), which shows the peaceful and prosperous side of China. A scene in a Buddhist temple with a priest giving advice about the Chinaman’s conduct before his journey to a foreign land indicates the serene and spiritual dimension of China (Figure 3). An intertitle card — “the Yellow man holds a great dream to take the glorious message of peace to the barbarous Anglo-Saxons, sons of turmoil and strife” — stresses the peaceful nature of the Chinese as opposed to the uncivilised behaviour of the Anglo-Saxons. This is underlined in the following scene when the “Yellow Man” encounters a group of quarrelling American sailors and attempts to stop them fighting by appealing to Buddhist principles of non-violence.

¹² “David Wark Griffith,” *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/history/historians-miscellaneous-biographies/dw-griffith>.

¹³ Robert M. Henderson, “D. W. Griffith,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed March 3, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/D-W-Griffith>.



Figure 2



Figure 3

The Orient has been an image produced and imagined by Westerners, full of mysteries and fantasies, a distant and exotic place. As Edward Said has remarked, “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”¹⁴ The opening scenes of *Broken Blossoms* satisfies the curiosity of a Western audience about the mystery and exoticism of the East with a concrete image of a faraway and ancient China. The bustling street, the vendors, the palanquin, and the people with Chinese-style clothes provide a vivid picture of life in China at the beginning of the 20th century. The scenes in the Buddhist temple represent the mysterious East. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, Western writers and philosophers such as Aeschylus, Samuel Coleridge, Victor Hugo and Karl Marx have depicted the East as a mysterious land. A positive image of China emerged from the accounts of Western travellers to China in the medieval period. Marco Polo recounted a prosperous, peaceful and civilised Chinese empire with diligent subjects, alongside his descriptions of other Asian cities and countries. According

¹⁴ Said, 1.

to Jeffrey Richards, “Sinophilia reached a zenith in the eighteenth century, particularly in France, with admiration and imitation of the style dubbed Chinoiserie.”¹⁵ Westerners embraced items in a Chinese style, such as blue and white porcelain, Chinese lanterns, lacquered furniture, pagodas, pavilions and embroidered silk. During that period, an attractive image of China appealed to Western connoisseurs.

Nevertheless, this all changed in the nineteenth century due to the overwhelming development caused by the Industrial Revolution in the Western world. China, which had carried a ban on maritime trade with foreign countries for almost 500 years, was forced to open its borders, and hence its market, to the dynamically developing European countries. In the 1840s and 1850s, numerous Chinese labourers flowed into California during the Gold Rush and then helped build the transcontinental railways in the US. During that time, “a toxic combination of attitudes (the competition for jobs with the native white population, the presumed inferiority of Asiatics prescribed by the prevailing theories of racial hierarchy, the fear of miscegenation diluting the pure blood of the dominant white race)”¹⁶ towards Chinese emerged: “From the 1850s onwards, negative stereotypes of the Chinese developed in fiction, theatre, cartoons, fed by a steady stream of negative accounts by American traders, diplomats, and missionaries stressing the moral degeneracy of the Chinese.”¹⁷ The Chinese were characterised as possessing a mixture of “deceit, cunning, idolatry, despotism, xenophobia, cruelty, infanticide and intellectual and sexual perversity.”¹⁸ Westerners began to see Chinese with an Orientalist perspective that became increasingly tainted with hateful and racist stereotypes.

This becomes increasingly evident in *Broken Blossoms* after the “Yellow Man” arrives in London. The characterisation of the Chinese as depraved gamblers and opium addicts represents a reversal of their depiction in China (Figures 4). The portrayal of the “Yellow Man”, who is never assigned a proper name, showcases this comparison. In a medium shot, he huddles against the wall of his store, with arms wrapped around his body and half-closed eyes cast down pathetically, clad in a black Chinese skullcap, old cloth shoes and a Chinese-style tunic (Figure 5). He looks pitiful and disillusioned, suffering from hunger and cold. His fallen life in

¹⁵ Jeffrey Richards, *China and Chinese in Popular Film: From Fu Manchu to Charlie Chan* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2017), 1-2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850-1940* (Connecticut: Archon Books, 1982) 7.

London is confirmed in the scene in the opium den, offering the typical stereotype of the Chinese people as sick and feeble drug addicts (Figure 6).



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

The subtitle of the film is *The Yellow Man and the Girl*, and the intertitles often refer to the male lead as the “Yellow Man.” Battling Burrows, the most racist and violent character in the film, calls the “Yellow Man” “chink” or “dirty chink,” obviously pejorative words for the Chinese. The main character is played by an American actor (Richard Barthelmess), which implies that in Hollywood an actor of Chinese origin is not even eligible to play a Chinese role.

The racially motivated casting verifies Said's argument that "Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"¹⁹ has exerted enormous influence over the deeply held view that "Orientals" are different and therefore inferior. The public in Europe and America "have accepted the distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, mind, destiny, and so on."²⁰ They think they have the right to represent or restructure what they imagine about the East. Cromer, the consul-general in Egypt at the turn of 20th century, believed that:

Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, 'devoid of energy and initiative,' much given to 'fulsome flattery,' intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; ... Orientals are inveterate liars, they are 'lethargic and suspicious', and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race.²¹

Moreover, Cromer used further derogatory terms to express the relation between the East and the West, believing that "the Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'."²²

In *Broken Blossoms*, however, the depiction of the "Yellow Man" is not necessarily in accordance with the negative features summarised by Cromer. In fact, D. W. Griffith has expressed complex emotions towards the Chinese. In general, he depicts the "Yellow Man" sympathetically. He has broken the "Yellow Peril" stereotype while retaining some conventional Orientalist impressions, including the pejorative depiction of the Chinese as morally depraved and racially inferior. On the one hand, Griffith has demonstrated the ambition of the "Yellow Man" to bring a message of peace to the barbarous Anglo-Saxons as a pious Buddhist, and shown his sympathy, caring, kindness and cherished love for Lucy and his bravery to avenge Lucy, even though sacrificing his own life. On the other hand, the director has also depicted the depraved side of the "Yellow Man" after his mission failed and his life was shattered by the sordid reality in London. Essentially, this kind of distorted stereotype resulted from the Orientalist tradition of the West.

In the 1930s and 1940s, there were not many revolutionary Chinese-themed films; rather, most were stereotypical films with distorted characterisations of China and Chinese people, and most of the time the Chinese protagonist roles were played by Euro-American performers

¹⁹ Said, 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 2-3.

²¹ Ibid., 38-39.

²² Ibid., 40.

with heavy make-up, such as in the *Fu Manchu* and *Charlie Chan* film series. Even though the films with actress Anna May Wong were somewhat different, most of her characters were sinister and conniving, apart from a few positive protagonists which coincided with the alliance period between China and the US during World War II (she will be analysed as an representative figure from early Hollywood films in the process of changing Chinese images in Section 3.3). During the Cold War, in view of the fear of communism and the ideological and military conflicts between the US and China, the stereotypical images of China were resuscitated on screen. For instance, from the 1950s to the beginning of the 1980s, dozens of *Fu Manchu* films and TV series were produced once more. It was not until China's Reform and Opening-up and the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in the late 1970s that different films began to appear. Bernardo Bertolucci's 1987 film, *The Last Emperor* is worthy of analysis. The film tells the story of Pu Yi (John Lone), the last Emperor of China, starting from his arrest at the border between China and the Soviet Union where, after being captured, he attempted suicide. He was then brought to the Forbidden City and chosen as the heir to the throne. The entire film is interwoven with a series of flashbacks which recount Pu Yi's life and connect it with the destiny of China, from his luxurious childhood and youth, to his time as the puppet emperor of Manchuria, to his experience as a political prisoner and, finally, to his becoming an ordinary citizen in the PRC.

The Last Emperor was not officially a Hollywood film but a co-production between Italy, the UK, France and China (China assisted in providing the film location, extras and equipment). However, the production team, including the director and screenwriters, who were in charge of the general direction and themes of the film, were predominantly Europeans. In addition, when working on the screenplay, Bertolucci referred to *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, whose author was Reginald Johnston, Pu Yi's English teacher in the Forbidden City. Thus, Pu Yi's life as the last emperor of China was depicted wholly from a Western perspective. In the following discussion, I will analyse a variety of scenes by focusing on the use of lighting to illustrate the image of Chinese people and China through Western eyes.

The application of lighting in the film is worthy of careful analysis due to its importance in impacting the viewing audience. According to Graeme Turner, "there are two main objectives to film lighting; the first is expressive — setting a mood, giving the film a 'look' or contributing to narrative details such as character or motivation."²³ Film lighting plays a

²³ Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 78.

significant part in rendering the atmosphere of different environments and events, depicting the characters and promoting plot development. The general tone of *The Last Emperor* is dim, gloomy and dismal, giving the audience a sense of depression. Yet after Pu Yi's English teacher, Mr. Johnston (Peter O'Toole), arrives in the Forbidden City, the lighting and the tone of the film brighten immediately, which implies a contrast between China and the West.

After little Pu Yi is summoned to the Forbidden City, he presents himself before the dying Empress Dowager Cixi (Lisa Lu). A long shot displays the creepy mise-en-scène of the dying Empress Dowager Cixi's palace (Figure 7). The lighting in the palace is dim and the smoke from the incense burner creates a gloomy atmosphere like in the underworld. The camera tracks in for a series of medium close-ups of Empress Dowager Cixi (Figure 8). Her face is as white as a sheet, and the conspicuous wrinkles on her face give the audience an eerie feeling. In addition, the side lighting used on the Empress Dowager's face makes her look like a ghost, stressing the deathly atmosphere.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Another example of lighting creating a gloomy atmosphere occurs in a wedding scene in the film. In China, as in most cultures, getting married is a happy event. Chinese people

celebrate with the colour of bright red. At Pu Yi's wedding, however, the long shot of greeting the Empress presents a gloomy atmosphere (Figure 9) rather than a bright festive tone (Figure 10),²⁴ so that the wedding appears to be held at twilight. Moreover, in the bridal chamber (Figure 11), the lighting is dim, and the curtains, sheets, decorations, bridal veil of the Empress, and wedding clothes of the Emperor and Empress are all dark red rather than bright red. Dark red does not give people the feeling of vigour and vitality. On the contrary, the dark red colour foreshadows the decline and fall of the Qing dynasty as the last feudal dynasty in the history of China.



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

²⁴ A still from a Chinese costume TV series, *Donggong* (Li Muge, 2017).

Although the general lighting and colour used in this film are gloomy and sombre, after the Westerner Mr. Johnston (Peter O'Toole) comes to the Forbidden City, the tone becomes clear and bright, which forms a striking contrast with the previous lighting.

One scene which displays contrasting lighting between Mr. Johnston and Pu Yi is over Pu Yi's lunch. The official taster samples the dishes before the Emperor eats, as Pu Yi is explaining to Mr. Johnston in response to Mr. Johnston questions. Their dialogue is presented in shot/reverse shot (Figures 12 & 13), yet the lighting noticeably differs from shot to shot. Pu Yi sits in natural light, while half of his face is left in shadow. Even though the other half is clearly visible, his face is neither bright nor sharply defined. Meanwhile, Mr. Johnston is shot in focus and with three-point lighting. He is highlighted as the protagonist, although Pu Yi, the leading role in the film, should presumably be enjoying the spotlight.



Figure 12



Figure 13

The depiction of the declining feudal dynasty forms an obvious contrast with the depiction of the enlightened Westerner, Mr. Johnston. The ancient dynasty is associated with darkness and shadow. It seems that all the buildings and people are shrouded in darkness, creating a weird atmosphere, which indicates that China is an enclosed, hidebound and conservative

country. On the contrary, Mr. Johnston is presented as luminous figure, a symbol of progress and modernity, who brings light to the dark Forbidden City.

In addition, the character of Mr. Johnston also demonstrates that the West is more advanced culturally than the Orient. Mr. Johnston not only teaches Pu Yi knowledge of the humanities and science, but also is concerned about the Emperor's daily life and exerts a strong influence on his beliefs and behaviours. For instance, he gives Pu Yi a bicycle and discovers his eyesight problem and advises him to wear glasses. Mr. Johnston represents the civilised West, bringing its advanced knowledge and ideas to the closed and unenlightened feudal dynasty. Under his teaching and guidance, Pu Yi becomes more Westernised. He dreams of going to Oxford University, he wants a modern wife who can speak English and French and dance the quickstep, and he plays tennis in the Forbidden City with his wife and his concubine.

Thus China always appears as the image of "the Other," a conception has been entrenched in the mind of Westerners. China's remote geographic location further underscores the perception of difference. *The Last Emperor* only confirms the Western imaginary of China. Raymond Dawson believes that "the polarity between Europe and Asia and between West and East is one of the important categories by means of which we think of the world and arrange our knowledge of it."²⁵ Said also states that "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience."²⁶ Furthermore, the Chinese scholar Zhang Longxi asserts that, "China, India, Africa, and the Islamic Orient have all served as foils to the West at one time or another, either as idealized utopias, alluring and exotic dreamlands, or lands of eternal stagnation, spiritual purblindness, and ignorance."²⁷ Thus *The Last Emperor*, and other films like it, embody the eurocentrism of the West. The film reveals a mysterious picture of Chinese imperial life, to some degree satisfying the curiosity of the West and reinforcing orientalist conceptions about China.

Nevertheless, in the era of globalisation, exchanges between different cultures have become more frequent, and the sparks resulting from the clashes between them, therefore, have become more intense. Any country or culture cannot separate itself from the development of the whole world; thus it appears that Hollywood has begun to revise the stereotypes generated

²⁵ Raymond Dawson, "Western Conceptions of Civilization," in *The Legacy of China*, ed. Raymond Dawson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 22.

²⁶ Said, 1-2.

²⁷ Longxi Zhang, "The Myth of the Other: China in the Eyes of the West," *The University of Chicago Press Journals* 15 (1988): 127.

by the old tradition of Orientalism through exploring cultural “nutrients” from other countries in order to nourish its own cultural products. Fredric Jameson contends that “Hollywood owes its success in particular to the way in which the American system itself undertakes to incorporate exotic elements from abroad.”²⁸ American culture has inherited the inclusiveness and openness of Western civilisation since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. These features have laid the foundation for American films to absorb diverse cultural nutrients. In addition, the United States is a nation of immigrants, a melting pot, and has been willing to include, absorb and integrate other cultures.

Thus, Hollywood has been expert in successfully incorporating foreign themes. The list includes mummies from ancient Egypt, stories about Greek or Roman myths, and fairy tales like *The Little Mermaid*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Frozen*. After China started to import foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis in 1994, Disney made the first Chinese-themed Hollywood animation, *Mulan* (Tony Bancroft, Barry Cook, 1998). This film was released in Chinese theatres in 1999. It focuses on the story of a young lady in ancient China who disguised herself as a man, joined the army instead of her old and ailing father, defeated Shan-Yu and saved the Emperor. However, for various reasons, the first Chinese Disney princess did not receive a good response from the Chinese film market.

One objective reason was that the Chinese release was about a year behind the premiere in the United States; some of the Chinese audience, therefore, may have already seen the film via other channels. This was a common factor in the early stages of the revenue-sharing model due to the complex importing procedures and the small quota allocated for each year. Besides, Disney, the production company for *Mulan*, had also produced and distributed *Kundun* (Martin Scorsese, 1997). *Kundun* referred to sensitive topics concerning Tibet and the Dalai Lama and, in the view of Chinese authorities, defamed the Chinese army and government. As a result, Disney was banned from doing business in China. In order to soothe relations with China, Disney produced *Mulan*, a story adapted from a Chinese ballad. Hence, compared with other films, this film took a longer time to get approval to enter Chinese theatres.

Apart from the external political and objective factors, the fundamental reasons for the film’s lack of popularity can be drawn from within the film itself. On the one hand, the artistic design of the film embodies the aesthetic taste of Westerners, especially in regard to the

²⁸ Fredric Jameson, “Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” in *The Cultures of Globalization*, ed. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 63.

appearance of Mulan. Mulan possesses the typical Chinese features assumed by Westerners: mono-eyelids, thin and narrow phoenix eyes, hanging eyebrows, a small and flat nose and a round face (Figure 14). All of the other main characters of Chinese origin are represented similarly, with the addition of goatees for males. Their facial features are clearly different from the European characters. Mulan, in conventional Orientalist style, is presented as “the Other.”



Figure 14

Mulan, as might be expected, also features Oriental iconography. Many familiar Chinese symbols and signs pervade the film, such as the Great Wall and the Forbidden City. The construction of the Forbidden City, however, began in 1406 in the Ming Dynasty. Although Mulan’s birth date is a point of controversy (the most likely date falls somewhere in the period of the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589)), it would be impossible for the Forbidden City to appear within Mulan’s lifetime. Sheng-mei Ma points out that “in between the well-known historic sites, tired Orientalist objects are repeatedly deployed.”²⁹ The Chinese dragon appears the most frequently: the dragon logo under the film title in the beginning, the dragon flags on every watch tower of the Great Wall, the dragon pattern decorated on the gates of the imperial palace, the dragon decoration on the top of the monument and the dragon that comes to life and becomes Mulan’s companion in the ancestral hall, the dragon statue in Mulan’s family courtyard, the dragon cannon which triggers the avalanche, the dragon dance covering the henchmen of Shan-Yu and the dragon pendant conferred on Mulan by the emperor. In fact, the dragon pattern is usually exclusive to imperial attire or construction in ancient China. The Chinese do not decorate everything with the pattern of the dragon, therefore most of the dragons

²⁹ Sheng-mei Ma, “Mulan Disney, It’s Like, Re-Orients: Consuming China and Animating Teen Dreams,” in *The Emperor’s Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney’s Magic Kingdom*, ed. Brenda Ayres (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 152.

which appear in the film are not appropriate, especially the ones appearing in the ancestral hall and courtyard of Mulan. In addition to the dragon, Kung Fu is repeatedly employed as a cliché of Orientalism, including the martial arts training of the new soldiers in the military and the final fight between Shan-Yu and Mulan on the roof of the palace. Other typical Chinese signs also abound throughout the film, such as Chinese lanterns, fireworks, chopsticks, writing brush, calligraphy and so forth. Although Hollywood has tried to reduce the influence of Orientalism upon the representation of China, their way of thinking has become inveterate.

Another reason why *Mulan* underperformed in the Chinese market, perhaps, is that Disney's adaptation differs in terms of plot and theme from the original ancient Chinese ballad. The film provides a different explanation from the traditional tale for why Mulan enlists in the army. Because she messes up the interview with the matchmaker, the audience are led to believe that she does not possess the traditional qualities of a young girl who will become a perfect wife, such as assisting her husband and bringing up their children. Mulan disgraces her family because of the failure of the interview. She feels frustrated that she cannot find her own value. As the Emperor is recruiting soldiers for the war, she impersonates a man and joins the army in place of her father, aspiring to bring honour to her family and prove her self-worth in the military. In the original Chinese ballad, Mulan disguises herself as a man and enlists in the army instead of her aged and ailing father who has been conscripted by the Emperor. Thus, her motivation is primarily filial piety towards her parents and patriotism towards her motherland, which are regarded as traditional virtues by the Chinese people.

In the film, when Mulan leaves her home for the military, she steals her father's armour, takes away the imperial edict of conscription, leaves her hair comb and runs away furtively at night without bidding farewell to her parents. Sheng-mei Ma observes that "each episode closely mirrors the routine behaviour of rebellious [American] teenagers, slouching and pouting by oneself, tiptoeing to sneak off."³⁰ This kind of representation is frequently seen in Hollywood coming-of-age films. Mulan behaves like an American teenager who makes mistakes and falls out with her family and runs away from home. On the contrary, in the ballad, Mulan volunteers to enlist in the army because her father is old and she does not have an elder brother. Furthermore, she prepares everything by herself for joining the military before leaving for the battlefield, purchasing a horse, saddle, bridle, and whip, and bidding farewell to her parents in the morning.

³⁰ Ibid., 157.

In addition, further incidents were added to the film to embody Mulan's wisdom, bravery and integrity. During a battle, Mulan triggers an avalanche and annihilates the Huns with a cannon. Due to her injury, however, her identity is discovered, and she is discharged from the military by General Li Shang. She does not bear any grudges towards the army or the general, but endeavours to save the Emperor after learning of the conspiracy of Shan-Yu and his henchmen. She conceives a tactical plan to kill Shan-Yu and save the Emperor. In terms of plot, this kind of narrative is more intriguing and thrilling for filmgoers, being full of suspense and conflict. Nevertheless, none of these dramatic incidents exists in the original Chinese ballad.

In terms of theme, the Chinese ballad praises Mulan's filial piety towards her father and her obligation to protect her motherland, placing emphasis on Mulan's collectivism and patriotism. In contrast, the film accentuates Mulan's realisation of her individual value and her pursuit of honour for her family through her military prowess, courage and wisdom, which eventually saves the Emperor and protects China. The song "Reflections," which occurs after the failure of her interview with the matchmaker, serves as an internal monologue that reveals Mulan's thoughts: "who am I inside," "what's inside my heart," "I won't pretend that I am someone else for all time." The lyrics clearly indicate that Mulan aspires to find and prove her own value. In light of this motivation, Mulan is depicted as a girl full of adventurous spirit and individualistic heroism, and her bravery, intelligence, strength and independence are highlighted in the film. Thus, the core values of American society, which include respecting individuals and realising one's own value, are embodied thoroughly in *Mulan*. Mulan has been transformed into an American girl with Chinese looks. The story has been Americanised and, for that reason perhaps, did not receive a positive response from Chinese audiences.

However, there have been more successful examples of Chinese-themed Hollywood films that were popular with a Chinese audience. DreamWorks Animation produced the *Kung Fu Panda* series, (Mark Osborne and John Stevenson, 2008) and (Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2011), with the third sequel (Alessandro Carloni and Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2016), being a co-production between China and the United States.

The *Kung Fu Panda* series are set in ancient China and tell the story of Po, a panda, how he grows into the real Dragon Warrior after a series of challenges and difficulties with the guidance from Master Shifu and Master Oogway, and defeats evil villains together with his friends, Furious Five, interweaving the process of exploring his origin and families. The film series attempts to create an authentic Chinese feeling through its art design, as well as in its

fidelity to Chinese cultural values. According to a report from the *New York Daily News*, the production designer Raymond Zibach and the Art Director Tang Heng spent eight years researching Chinese painting, sculpture, architecture and Kung Fu movies.³¹ The films are saturated with references to traditional Chinese styles and *Chinoiserie* in the design of characters, sets and costumes.

All of the characters in the series are cleverly designed and carefully selected from a number of animals with special meanings in Chinese culture. The main protagonist, Po, is a panda, a species which only exists in China and is a national treasure and the internationally recognised symbol of China. In addition, Po becomes a Kung Fu master and is chosen as a Dragon Warrior. The dragon has significant meaning in Chinese culture, and is quite different from the evil, flying, fire-breathing monster in European folklore. Rather, it is a traditional totem and auspicious beast worshiped by the Chinese ancestors. The Chinese refer to themselves as the descendants of the dragon. The image of the dragon is a typical decorative motif in Chinese imperial palaces. In the film, it appears around the pillars in the Jade Palace and in its centre where the Dragon Scroll is placed. The identities of the Legendary Furious Five — a tiger, monkey, crane, viper and mantis — also reflect one of the traditional Chinese martial arts, Xiangxing Quan, which is inspired by the movements and fighting styles of different animals. The filmmakers also select an elderly, wise tortoise, Master Oogway, as the supreme master and founder of Kung Fu. He is regarded as a sage due to his wisdom, abundant experience and knowledge, and is respected by Master Shifu, the Legendary Furious Five, Po and the inhabitants of the Valley of Peace. In traditional Chinese culture, the tortoise is the symbol of longevity and regarded as one of the four Spirit Beasts (Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, and Black Tortoise).

The Valley of Peace, the central location of the film series, is designed like a traditional Chinese painting, with mountains soaring into the clouds and a palace with Chinese architectural style on their peaks. The Valley is also the home of all the inhabitants including Po, Master Shifu, Master Oogway, the Furious Five, bunnies and pigs. In *Kung Fu Panda 2*, Gongmen City is depicted as a town built on a mountain and beside the water, the prototype of which is the city of Chengdu in Sichuan Province, the hometown of the panda in reality. According to a report from *China Daily*, after the success of *Kung Fu Panda*, the Chengdu

³¹ “‘Kung Fu Panda’ Gets Cuddly,” *nydailynews.com*, May 30, 2008, <https://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/kung-fu-panda-cuddly-article-1.296608>.

municipal government invited a production team from DreamWorks Animation to come to the city to visit real pandas.³² Raymond Zibach, the production designer of *Kung Fu Panda 2*, said that “we got a lot of inspiration from Chengdu, from the architecture, the scenery and the weather. Many elements of Chengdu will be depicted in the movie, including the province’s landmark Mount Qingcheng, Taoist Culture, and the province’s ubiquitous Sichuan-style noodles.”³³ Thus, the film depicts the palace of Lord Shen as the representative pagoda with Chinese features, crisscrossing alleys with ancient houses and shops, various vendors selling Chinese food and some daily necessities, full of vitality. In *Kung Fu Panda 3*, the Panda Village, Po’s birthplace and hometown, is introduced as an eastern Shangri-La, a harmonious and peaceful retreat away from the turmoil of the outside world, located amongst high mountain ridges and lofty hills, with a plank road between different mountains, gnarled trees and tall bamboo bushes, clear streams, flat and spacious fields where pandas transplant rice seedlings, ancient wooden houses, and a country full of a boisterous atmosphere. In addition, the most common of Chinese food appears throughout the films, such as noodles, dumplings and bean buns. Mr. Ping, Po’s adopted father, runs a restaurant that specialises in noodles and tofu. Po loves dumplings and bean buns and when his biological father first appears, he too is eating bean buns. Master Shifu even teaches Po Kung Fu through picking a bun fight. Various folk customs and traditional arts and objects such as chopsticks, chinaware, firecrackers, the Lantern Festival, the lion dance, Chinese drums, divination, acupuncture, and shadow puppetry, all feature prominently throughout the series. With regards to the costume design, Master Shifu, Tigress and Lord Shen wear a typical Han-nationality robe, and Po also wears such a robe after he masters Chi. Citizens in the Valley of Peace all wear similar kinds of Chinese robes.

The *Kung Fu Panda* series also incorporates concepts and beliefs from one of the most traditional Chinese philosophical schools, Taoism. Taoism advocates that humankind should coexist in harmony with nature as an integral part of it and should obey natural laws. Master Oogway prefers to meditate by himself and is not used to meeting secular people. Master Oogway tells Shifu to believe in Po, to guide him and nurture him. Master Shifu then brings Po to the Pool of Sacred Tears where Kung Fu was founded by Master Oogway. Po cannot learn Kung Fu in the martial arts studio like the Furious Five but must instead learn it in nature, which corresponds to the Taoist thought that advocates humans are an integral part of nature.

³² “‘Kung Fu Panda 2’ to Hit Silver Screen in China,” *Chinadaily*, May 27, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-05/27/content_12594833.htm.

³³ *Ibid.*

Master Oogway's sayings also often embody the metaphysical implication of Taoism. For instance, when he has a vision that Tai Lung will return to take revenge and Master Shifu states that "this is impossible," Master Oogway replies that "nothing is impossible" and that "one often meets his destiny on the road he takes to avoid it." After Tai Lung breaks out of prison and is on the way to the Valley of Peace, Master Shifu reports it to Master Oogway, worrying about how to stop Tai Lung. Master Oogway peacefully tells Master Shifu: "your mind is like this water, my friend, when it is agitated, it becomes difficult to see, but if you allow it to settle, the answer becomes clear." The Dragon Scroll is then reflected on the surface of the water, which means it is the destiny of the Dragon Warrior to stop Tai Lung. Master Shifu says choosing Po as the Dragon Warrior is an accident, to which Master Oogway says "there are no accidents" and that Master Shifu needs to believe in him and guide him.

Taoists believe that when you find your inner peace, you will know clearly what you are pursuing. Po is upset on the first day when he is chosen as the Dragon Warrior. He meets Master Oogway under the Sacred Peach Tree of Heavenly Wisdom, who advises him: "Quit, don't quit. Noodles, don't noodles, you are too concerned with what was and what will be. Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift, that is why it is called the present." Master Oogway's attitude conforms to the Taoist principle of governing by doing nothing against nature, by letting go of control or interference. In explaining why Po becomes the Dragon Warrior, Master Oogway takes the peach tree as an example: "I cannot make it blossom when it suits me nor make it bear fruit before its time... but no matter what you do, that seed will grow to be a peach tree. You may wish for an apple or an orange, but you will get a peach." The idea is that one should not force anything to happen, that everything has its own destiny. After these philosophical conversations with Master Shifu, Master Oogway peacefully declares that "my time has come" and ascends into the Spirit Realm among the floating and swirling peach blossom petals. He thus becomes immortal, the ultimate goal of Taoism.

Another Taoist principle is embodied in Master Oogway's conversation with Kai. After taking the Chi of every master in the Spirit Realm, Kai wants to take the Chi of Master Oogway. Then Master Oogway tells Kai that "when will you realise the more you take, the less you have." At last, Kai dies of taking too much Chi from the other masters. The principle implied in this conversation originates from a saying from *The Book of Change* that when the sun is at noon, it starts to set; when the moon becomes full, it starts to wane. Just like filling water in a container — when the container is full, the water starts to spill, which means people cannot do

things in an extreme way, otherwise things will develop in the opposite direction. Like Kai, he has taken too much Chi from other masters, and his body like a container and cannot absorb more, so he dies of bearing too much extra Chi.

In addition to the principles of Taoism, Tai Chi is one of the most significant concepts in Taoist philosophy. It refers to the flow of existence in the universe from chaos to order. Heaven and earth are not separated and are expressed in terms of Ying and Yang. The concept of Tai Chi has been widely influential on different philosophical schools throughout Chinese history, and has been applied in the martial arts (Tai Chi Chuan) as well as Chinese meditation and health practices.

There are a number of designs that refer to Tai Chi in the film series. Firstly, Master Oogway's style of Kung Fu is set as Tai Chi. The tenet of Tai Chi Kung Fu is to conquer the strong with the supple, to stay clear of one's opponent's main force and to strike at their weak points, to use the opponent's strength against them. Oogway is designed to be the perfect Tai Chi master as he speaks slowly and patiently and is never in a hurry. When Master Oogway fights against Kai, a huge Tai Chi Diagram presses down on Kai. The personal belongings of Master Oogway are also decorated with a Tai Chi Diagram, such as the cloak covering Master Oogway's shell as well as the handle of his cane. Secondly, Po himself is in fact a hidden Tai Chi Diagram. A panda is black and white, the two colours that compose a Tai Chi Diagram. This is implied in *Kung Fu Panda 2*, when the soothsayer in Gongmen City predicts that Lord Shen will be defeated by a black and white warrior, as a Tai Chi Diagram rises from her divination bowl. When Po goes together with Kai to the Spirit Realm, the floating peach blossom petals form the pattern of a Tai Chi Diagram. After Po defeats Kai in the Spirit Realm, Master Oogway gives his cane to Po, and Po draws a Tai Chi pattern and returns to the mortal world.

On the whole, the production team of the *Kung Fu Panda* film series have attentively researched every detail ranging from artistic design to the employment of Chinese cultural values. The film series presents an authentic China both visually and intrinsically instead of incorporating Chinese elements superficially and mechanically.

From *Broken Blossoms* to the *Kung Fu Panda* series, we can see the changes over the course of a century in the Orientalist portrayal of China. Traditional Chinese culture is more thoroughly integrated narratively and thematically, especially in the *Kung Fu Panda* series. As

Zhang Longxi notes:

to demythologize the Other is surely not to deny its distance, its alien nature, or the possibility of its poetic charms, but to recuperate real rather than imaginary differences. The beauty of real difference or the aesthetic of the Other cannot be truly appreciated unless various misconceptions are exposed and the false polarity between East and West is totally dismantled.³⁴

One must immerse oneself attentively in a culture in order to genuinely discover and appreciate its charm. Films such as the *Kung Fu Panda* series can demystify an unfamiliar culture and offer a path to embrace different conceptions, break stereotypes, and advance a mutual understanding between the East and the West. In this way, as Zhang Longxi points out, “China’s true Otherness will be appreciated as contributing to the variety of our world and the totality of what we may proudly call the heritage of human culture.”³⁵ Only films which accept the different features of Chinese culture and attach importance to a real appreciation of the charm of China and Chinese culture can achieve success in the Chinese film market.

3.2 Positive Plots about China in Hollywood Films

The incorporation of positive plots about China is a relatively new but common phenomenon in recent Hollywood blockbusters. Military and economic might often make others change their position, as the example of the United States shows. The American government, as discussed in Chapter 2, can offer comprehensive support for the promotion of Hollywood films internationally through laws and policies, reinforced by its hegemonic position as an economic, military and political power. The American film industry is not only a powerful money-making machine but also a vehicle which conveys American lifestyles, ideas and values. Bruno Luovic holds that “Hollywood uses cinematic images to inspire the dreams of both the American public and foreigners alike while also contributing to the international enhancement of the country’s soft power capacities.”³⁶ Most of the Hollywood blockbusters represent the US as a paradise for ordinary people to realise their own dreams through their efforts. Life in America is depicted as happy, full of freedom, and audiences around the world are yearning for it even though some of them have never been to the United States. This is the powerful enchantment of Hollywood.

³⁴ Longxi Zhang, 130-131.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Bruno Lovric, “Soft Power,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 10 (2016): 31.

However, in recent years, Hollywood has demonstrated how it gradually changes its attitude toward all things concerning China due to China's increasing economic and political power. Hollywood's pursuit of commercial profit, to some degree, has counteracted the ideological differences between China and the United States. Due to the lucrative economic interest, political concerns can be downplayed. Thus, the plots which are associated with China in Hollywood blockbusters have been changing from the pejorative to the laudatory. In the following section, several typical films will be analysed in detail.

2012 (Roland Emmerich, 2009) can be regarded as the pioneer high concept blockbuster in Hollywood that incorporates a positive plot-line about China. The film topped the Chinese box office in 2009.³⁷ Apart from the spectacular visual special effects and a thrilling plot, I believe the plot about China played an important part in drawing Chinese audiences into cinemas. Either displaying Chinese Army's rescue action after an earthquake, or setting China as the haven for human beings, the film offers a positive image of China, even as a saviour of the world, not a conventional view in Hollywood films. Thus, such a plot, as the selling point of the film, will stimulate the curiosity of Chinese audiences and motivate their national pride.

In an early scene in the film, a Chinese army official in charge of the rescue after an earthquake in Cho Ming Valley, Tibet, addresses the people waiting for evacuation: “党和国家一定会帮助大家重建家园。” The English subtitle (“Party and country will assist in your re-location”) differs in translation from the original Chinese version (“Party and country will help everyone rebuild your homeland”). The emotional resonance of the English subtitle is weaker than that of the original Chinese version. The differences mainly lie in two translation choices. The first one is “大家(dajia).” The English subtitle just uses “your,” whereas in Chinese “大家” means everyone. “Everyone” emphasises all the people who have suffered in the earthquake, whereas “your” does not necessarily mean “everyone.” “重建家园 (chongjian jiayuan),” should be translated as “rebuild or reconstruct homeland,” rather than “re-location.” The former translation sounds warmer and more sincere by offering the hope of new life to those who have lost their homes in the earthquake, while the latter translation is more impersonal and merely provides a sense of a secure future. In general, the Chinese line conveys more comfort to the people who have just experienced disaster. Furthermore, in China whenever natural disasters or accidents which threaten the life and possessions of the public

³⁷ “Chinese Box Office for 2019,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 8, 2020, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2009&p=.htm>.

happen, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) will always rush to the front line to implement disaster rescue and relief. Therefore, a foreign audience with no background knowledge about China's situation will not understand the full meaning of this line; it is particularly designed for a Chinese audience. Later in the scene, three Chinese army officers appear (Figure 15) who are in charge of recruiting volunteers to help in the rescue effort. They spoke Mandarin with a foreign accent (presumably something to do with the dubbing) and the extras playing officers did not look very righteous, but compared to the vicious and cruel villains or the submissive maidens and prostitutes in early Hollywood films, the incorporation of high-ranking officers of the Chinese army could be regarded as a kind of positive representation.



Figure 15

Tibet is set as the construction base for the Arks which are designed to save the survivors of the apocalypse, and Chinese workers are chosen to build them. When the protagonist opens the map of the Ark's destination, a map of China appears (Figure 16). Generally, in Hollywood disaster and superhero films, an American hero always saves humanity from danger or destruction in the end. Here, the Chinese workers are credited for making the reliable Arks for the human elites and other living species to survive the catastrophe. Nevertheless, Professor Dai Jinhua, a prestigious Chinese scholar of cinema studies and cultural studies, in her speech at the forum "Zhongguo Shuo (China Speaks)" contended that,

in the film, China's role in saving the world is part of our wishful imagination, and China remains an unknown space in this film. Despite the fact that the Arks are made by Chinese workers, I do not regard this as a compliment to the image of China. Even though the Arks are made in China by Chinese workers, the Japanese Self-Defence Forces maintain order on the site, and the Russian president and American engineers preside over the plan for saving humankind. The Chinese play the subservient role of "World Factory". Hollywood is paying respect to Renminbi, the Chinese currency, rather than Renmin, the Chinese people.³⁸

³⁸ Translated by the author based on Dai Jinhua's speech, Jinhua Dai, "Zhongguo Dianying Baolu Zhongguo Wenhua Zhongkong Wenti (Chinese Films Expose the Hollowness of Chinese Culture)," *qq.com*, December 9, 2014, <http://cul.qq.com/original/sixianghui/sxh302.html>.

A number of details in the film support Professor Dai's thesis on "China as World Factory." After an Indian American geologist reports an unusual solar flare to the American government, the American president immediately organises the G8 summit. The G8 members plan and decide on the Cho Ming Operation, the task of making the Arks in China at the Summit. The task is like an order for goods from developing countries. Moreover, when making the decision, they do not discuss it with China at all and just treat China as a supplier of goods. From this perspective, the film regards China as just a huge factory for the world.



Figure 16

The film raises the question: Why does the West have the impression of China as a "World Factory?" According to data from the World Bank, "Since initiating market reforms in 1978... GDP growth has averaged nearly 10 percent a year — the fastest sustained expansion by a major economy in history."³⁹ Although the growth rate has slowed from 2012, it has maintained an increase of around 6%-7%,⁴⁰ which the World Bank reports "is still impressive by current global standards."⁴¹ Chinese manufacturing industry has also been booming and has accounted for around 30% of GDP in the past 15 years,⁴² China has increased its output from 2.7% in 1990 to 19.8% in 2010 and it has ranked the first place in world manufacturing by output since 2010.⁴³ Wang Bijun and Li Xiang state that "Chinese economic growth is export-led; trading

³⁹ "The World Bank in China," The World Bank, accessed March. 8, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>.

⁴⁰ "GDP Growth (annual %)," The World Bank, accessed March. 8, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2017&locations=CN&start=1961&view=chart>.

⁴¹ "The World Bank in China," The World Bank, accessed March. 8, 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>.

⁴² "Manufacturing, Value Added (% of GDP)," The World Bank, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.IND.MANF.ZS?locations=CN>.

⁴³ "Tongjiju: Zhongguo Zhizaoye Zongliang Lianxu Duonian Wenju Shijie Diyi (Statistics Bureau: The Total Amount of Chinese Manufacturing Industry has Kept Number One in the World for Many Years)," *people.com.cn*, September 4, 2018, <http://industry.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0904/c413883-30271299.html>.

with other countries is a pillar of economic development.”⁴⁴ In the context of economic globalisation, manufacturing exports to developed economies offers an easy method for China to integrate itself into international trade and global capitalism. However, in the eyes of the public, manufacturing is a low-technology process industry. In essence, the “World Factory” is more like a fabrication plant, a situation which reinforces the conventional impression of China as the producer of cheap consumer goods. However, the proportion of China’s high-technology exports in terms of total manufactured exports increased from 6.44% in 1992 to 23.81% in 2017.⁴⁵ These figures suggests that, over the last two decades, the manufacturing industry has been central to transforming and upgrading China’s image as a “World Factory.” The “World Factory” image in 2012, therefore, is basically in accord with the current situation of the Chinese manufacturing industry. This setting cannot be regarded as a kind of commendatory representation, but it at least indicates a shift in focus and attitude towards China from the stereotypical characterisation of China in the past.

In addition, Tibet serves as the construction base for the Arks, a fact which deserves reflection and analysis. Tibet, the roof of the world, has always been a mysterious land for the Western world. Hongmei Yu contends that “cinema has played a crucial role in spreading the exotic image of Tibet in the west. Not only has the explosive development of the mass media industry in the 1980s constructed Tibet into a part of the Western popular culture, but it has also strengthened the Orientalist discourse of Tibet on a global scale.”⁴⁶ Orville Schell states that “on the one hand, it (Tibet) retained all its associations of being a paradisiacal Shangri-La; on the other hand, after China’s occupation in the 1950s, it also came to be viewed as a victimized land and culture laid waste by an invading colonializing power.”⁴⁷ For political and cultural reasons, European and American filmmakers have been interested in Tibet, especially in the last two decades of the 20th century, with films such as *The Golden Child* (Michael Ritchie, 1986), *Little Buddha* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1993), *Seven Years in Tibet* (Jean-Jacques Annaud, 1997) and *Kundun* (Martin Scorsese, 1997). The latter two films are ideologically loaded and convey strong anti-Communist messages. The Tibetan people and the Tibetan leader, Dalai Lama, were depicted as the oppressed subjects of the Chinese government and the

⁴⁴ Bijun Wang and Xiang Li, “From World Factory to World Investor: The New Way of China Integrating into the World,” *China Economic Journal* 10 (2017): 175.

⁴⁵ “High-Technology Exports (% of Manufactured Exports),” The World Bank, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/TX.VAL.TECH.MF.ZS?locations=CN>.

⁴⁶ Hongmei Yu, “From *Kundun* to *Mulan*: A Political Economic Case Study of Disney and China,” *Asian Network Exchange* 22 (2014): 15.

⁴⁷ Orville Schell, *Virtual Tibet: Searching for Shangri-La from the Himalayas to Hollywood* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 8.

Chinese army. Although these films were not released in Chinese theatres, Brad Pitt, who played the leading role in *Seven Years in Tibet*, together with the director, Martin Scorsese, were still banned from entering China. Disney, whose subsidiaries Touchstone Pictures and Buena Vista Inc. had been the production and distribution companies of *Kundun*, was also banned from doing business in China. The Chinese government had such a strong reaction to the two films because the theme and purpose of the films were to criticise the Chinese government's way of coping with the Tibetan issue and to support Tibet's religious leader, Dalai Lama, to separate Tibet from the PRC territory. The films commented negatively upon the image of the Chinese government and meddled in the internal affairs of China at the level of film. Having made a negative interpretation concerning Tibetan issues, the films could not be accepted by the Chinese government. However, in the end, neither of the films performed as well in the North American film market as the producers had expected. Hongmei Yu considers that the reason for the failure "lies in its clichéd Cold War narrative, which has long been at odds with the culture of globalization. The post-Cold War global market has been expecting new, apolitical discourses with universal values such as love, family, and friendship."⁴⁸ The ideological conflicts have been magnified in these films, which runs counter to the mainstream desire for peace and development in the international community, and does not conform to the universal values in modern society.

In this context, it is noticeable that *2012* starts to tentatively shift the focus from ideological differences concerning Tibet to a depiction of current Chinese society that, while still being loaded with a conventional mind-set about China's relationship with the developed countries of the West, generally portrays the Chinese government and the Chinese army in a less critical light. In an interview in 2009, Emmerich admitted that the initial ending was different from the one that appears in the film. After the catastrophic earthquake which struck Wenchuan, China in 2008, he was moved by the stories of rescue and survival reported by the media and wished to express his respect for the Chinese people, so he decided to change the script so that China became the chosen land where all of humankind came together to confront a crisis and save the world.⁴⁹ In fact, the comments from the director could be possibly considered as a publicity stunt, another form of promotion for the film, which verifies Hollywood's scales tend to tilt towards the profitability of the Chinese film market.

⁴⁸ Yu, 13-22.

⁴⁹ Translated based on an email interview of Roland Emmerich with ifeng.com. "Haolaiwu Zainanpian Xinjieju: zheci Lundao Zhongguo Zhengjiu Shijie (New Ending of Hollywood Disaster Films: It is China's Turn to Save the World)," *ifeng.com*, November 13, 2009, http://news.ifeng.com/society/2/200911/1113_344_1433414.shtml.

Hollywood can no longer ignore China's cinematic influence and is thus faced with a difficult problem: how to achieve a balance between ideological and political differences and economic profits. But it seems that, in recent years, the situation is shifting from ideological conflicts to economic interests. The following two films convey more of a clear intention to focus on a more positive portrayal of the Chinese.

On 19 November 2013, *Gravity* (Alfonso Cuarón, 2013) was released in China. In the plot, debris from a Russian missile hits an American space shuttle and except two surviving astronauts, Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock) and Matt Kowalski (George Clooney), other crew members die. The two make various attempts to reach the international space station, but Matt ultimately sacrifices himself to help Ryan reach Tiangong station, a Chinese space station, where she takes the Chinese spacecraft, Shenzhou, and finally returns to Earth. China does not play the role of "World Factory" in this film but is displayed, rather, as an advanced nation with cutting-edge astronautical technology. The Americans need support from China to get back to Earth by means of a Chinese space shuttle. The plot supports Joseph Nye's point that "the distinction between them (hard power and soft power) is one of degree, both in the nature of behaviour and in the tangibility of the resources."⁵⁰ He also believes that "a strong economy not only provides resources for sanctions and payments, but can also be a source of attractiveness."⁵¹ China has indeed made great achievements in the field of the astronautical and space technologies in recent years. In 2003, China's first manned spacecraft, the Shenzhou-5, was launched, followed by another six manned space crafts. Two space labs, Tiangong-1 and Tiangong-2, were launched in 2011 and 2016 respectively, along with Tianzhou-1, an unmanned cargo spacecraft. In addition, four Chang'e lunar probes have been launched since 2007; the Chang'e-4 probe became the first to land on the far side of the moon on 3 January 2019.

When promoting the film in Beijing, the director, Alfonso Cuarón, told *People's Daily* that "when we were mapping out the story, we had to base it upon current elements in space." Cuarón added, "We had the Hubble Space Telescope, the International Space Station, *Tiangong* station and a *Shenzhou* escape pod. That's what was in space."⁵² Cuarón has denied deliberately pandering to the Chinese market, saying his storyline had nothing to do with winning over

⁵⁰ Nye, 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁵² Bai Shi, "China to the Rescue: Hollywood Blockbuster *Gravity* Reveals the Rise of China's Soft Power," *Beijingreview*, December 12, 2013, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/print/txt/2013-12/09/content_583043.htm.

China's film regulators and fans. Regardless of Cuarón's denial, the reality is that he could not avoid the influence of the current international political and economic situation. At present, the United States, Russia and China are the sole nations in the world that possess the technology for manned space flight, and the situation in the film justifies the arrangement between the Americans and the Chinese space station. Yet the producers cannot ignore the booming Chinese film market; the role that China's space station and space craft play in the rescue mission accords with the preference of China's film regulating sector and increases the possibility that the film will be selected into the fixed screening slots for foreign films.

Besides the positive plot with regards to China, other Chinese elements that appear in the film. These include the interior of the Chinese Tiangong Space Station, a floating ping-pong bat and ping-pong ball (Figure 17) and the Chinese spring onions being cultivated in the craft (Figure 18). When Dr. Stone prays for a safe return to Earth, a sitting Buddha figure is prominent on the top of a platform (Figure 19), a visual reminder that Asians normally will pray to Buddha for good fortune. Although Hollywood has tried to depict China with positive images, the ping-pong bat, Chinese spring onions, and Buddha statue are still stereotypical conceptions about China (albeit in an updated form).



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

In *The Martian* (Ridley Scott, 2015), too, which was released on 25 November 2015 in China, China was cast in a more positive light. Again, a Chinese space project saves the protagonist so that he can return to Earth safely. In a mission on Mars, astronaut Mark Watney (Matt Damon) is presumed dead after a storm hits the space shuttle. However, he survives by means of ingenuity and courage and manages to send a signal to Earth that he is alive. Soon afterwards, NASA decides to launch a rescue action and works jointly with scientists around the world to rescue Mark. However, due to the destruction of NASA's Iris supply probe, they have to figure out another solution. In the meantime, China National Space Administration learns the news and offers its own classified booster rocket to NASA. Only China has the appropriate booster ready to successfully complete the rescue mission. At last, Mark returns to Earth with the help of the Chinese space programme, Taiyangshen.

However, despite the general similarities in terms of plot, there are some significant differences from *Gravity*. Here, the image of China is more concrete, positive and lofty. Firstly, the officials of China National Space Administration, including the Chief Scientist and the Deputy Chief Scientist, are granted considerable screen time. They discuss whether to help the United States, as the Taiyangshen programme was prepared secretly and nobody knew of its existence. The Deputy Chief Scientist thinks if China offers the booster to the United States, China's Mars exploration programme will have to be terminated. However, for the sake of respecting human life, the Chief Scientist decides to offer help anyway. Secondly, as the rescue mission is broadcast live worldwide, people from all over the world know that Mark is returned home with the help of a Chinese space programme.

The film was adapted from a novel in which in return for help from the China National Space Administration, NASA included a Chinese astronaut on the next Ares mission. However, in the film, China learns about the stranded astronaut on Mars from the TV news; a decision is made to help the US on the Chinese authorities' own initiative — “我们从航天的角度解决问题，寻求合作 (we will solve the problem from the perspective of aerospace, seeking cooperation)” — and an offer to save Mark's life with the resupply rocket. It is clear at the end of the film that a Chinese astronaut was in fact included in Mission Ares V (Figure 20). Although the negotiation process is not presented explicitly in the film, a compromise has clearly been made. This detail can be analysed from different perspectives. On the one hand, the ideological conflict between China and Western countries is not the main theme in current global society. On the other hand, it was the Hollywood producers who decided to rearrange the plot concerning the deal between China and the US in the novel into cooperation between the two countries in the film, which embodies Hollywood's intention to minimise the possibility of offending Chinese film regulators and Chinese audiences. Cooperation always looks loftier than deal-making, which also accords with the general trend of win-win cooperation between the two countries.

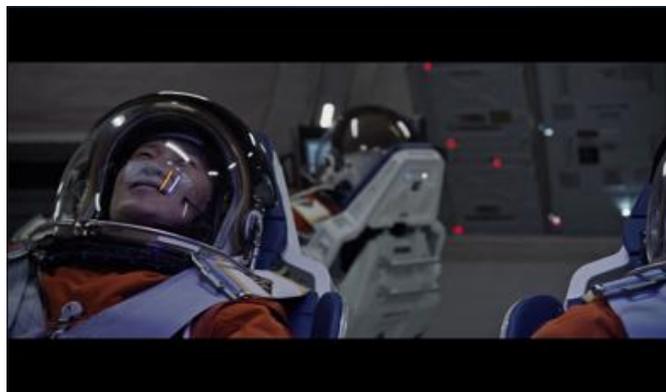


Figure 20

The increased emphasis in *The Martian* on China's strength in terms of aeronautics and astronautics, alongside the economic growth of the Chinese film market, shows how the influence and effects of hard power and soft power are mutually dependent and not necessarily separated by a distinct boundary. This factor could alter the attitude of the United States towards China. Nye's thesis asserts that “the types of behaviour between command and co-option range along a spectrum from coercion to economic inducement to agenda setting to pure attraction.”⁵³

⁵³ Nye, 7.

The rising strength in the economy and scientific technology of China could reinforce its influence in terms of soft power on the US. Hard power can shift to the co-optive end of the spectrum of behaviour and be transformed into soft power. China has amassed hard power by means of the progress achieved in terms of manned astronautics. Evidence of this hard power can be seen in the plots associated with China in such recent Hollywood blockbusters as *Gravity* and *The Martian*. Furthermore, this hard power was transformed into an expression of soft power in terms of the commercial profit of the US in the Chinese film market.

Indeed, even though the portrayal of a positive image of China in the plots of such films seems more like a commercial tactic employed by Hollywood filmmakers to pander to the newly booming Chinese film market, the fact is that Hollywood's attitude towards China has indeed started to change. The images of Chinese people are quite different from those in early Hollywood films, which mostly were lower-class labourers, prostitutes, and cunning and sinister villains. A global audience has felt the enhancement of China's international status by virtue of Hollywood's prevalent influence on the world. From this perspective, China has benefited from the international dissemination of a more positive public image. Nye and Wang assert that "soft power is not a zero sum game in which one country's gain is necessarily another country's loss."⁵⁴ In this case, it is a reciprocal strategy for both China and the US in which the two countries both achieve the outcomes that they want. China's hard power is enhanced by means of the soft power of Hollywood films, for as Nye claims: "power always depends on the context in which the relationship exists."⁵⁵ In the context of globalisation, the generation of cultural phenomena is always the result of a synergy of different forces which are inseparable from the changes of political and economic relationships between countries in the international community.

3.3 Cameo Roles for Renowned Chinese Actors in Hollywood Films

Apart from the increasing number of positive plots about China in recent Hollywood blockbusters, more Chinese celebrities are appearing in cameo roles in Hollywood blockbusters. In fact, in early Hollywood productions, most Chinese characters were presented as uncivilised, backward, ignorant, deceitful or treacherous or not even played by actors of Chinese descent. In general, Chinese roles were either people of low classes, villains or prostitutes.

⁵⁴ Joseph Nye and Jisi Wang, "Hard Decisions on Soft Power: Opportunities and Difficulties for Chinese Soft Power," *Harvard International Review* 31 (2009): 22.

⁵⁵ Nye, 2.

The negative portrayal of China and Chinese people is greatly associated with two historical events. Genghis Khan's looting hordes conquering from central Asia to Eastern Europe in the 13th century provides the origin of the Yellow Peril stereotype for Westerners. Gina Marchetti holds the view that the Yellow Peril is "rooted in medieval fears of Genghis Khan and Mongolian invasions of Europe, [and] the Yellow Peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East."⁵⁶ The second source for the negative image of China as a backward country was the decline of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) in the late 19th century. After the Industrial Revolution, many Western countries, as well as Japan, stepped onto the road of modernisation, while the Qing government still stuck to the old feudal governing concepts, unwilling to fundamentally reform the political system. China was no longer the strong and prosperous country it had been in ancient history. In 1840 through the first Opium War, China's gate was forced to open by the powerful boats, guns and cannons of Western invaders. Since then, the Qing government was defeated by various Western countries, signed many unequal treaties, and was forced to open the trade ports and allow foreign traders, diplomats and missionaries into China. Thus the image of China and the Chinese people as backward, hidebound, conservative, ignorant and vulnerable was spread in the West. In the meantime, out of dissatisfaction towards the Qing government's rule and the foreign invasion of China, various uprisings emerged, such as the Taiping Rebellion (Taiping Tianguo Revolution) and the Boxer Rebellion (Yihetuan Movement). The series of uprisings in the late Qing Dynasty emphasised the image of the Yellow Peril originating from the fear of the West towards the Mongolian invasion of Europe, and reinforced the stereotype of the Chinese people as evil and brutal. The negative characterisation of China and Chinese people has been reinforced under this historical backdrop.

After the Qing Dynasty was overthrown in 1911, the Republic of China was established; however, the newly-born regime was quite fragile, and China fell into turmoil again due to warlordism, and there were also other conflicts including the resistance war against Japanese invasion and the civil war between the CPC and the KMT (Kuomintang) over the following three decades. During this period, a large number of missionaries came to China and sent back accounts about China to their own countries, which became an important channel for foreigners' knowledge about China. Their stories containing a backward, feeble, impoverished image of

⁵⁶ Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the "Yellow Peril": Race, Sex, and Discursive Strategies in Hollywood Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 2.

the Chinese people in the late 19th century exerted a profound influence on the West. The information sent back by the missionaries, Paul A. Varg contends, “did more to give form to the American image of China than all the other factors combined.”⁵⁷ Harold Isaacs expresses a similar opinion that the missionaries who went to China “placed a permanent and decisive impress on the emotional underpinning of American thinking about China.”⁵⁸

Furthermore, beginning in the 1840s, a large number of Chinese labourers were attracted by the Gold Rush and flocked to California as well as countries like New Zealand. Because the Chinese labourers worked harder and longer and asked for less payment than any other group, the local white populations there feared for the jobs taken by the Chinese labours and feared for miscegenation with the Chinese people, which provoked the hostile attitudes of Americans toward the Chinese. As Gina Marchetti remarks, “the yellow peril became a flood of cheap labor threatening to diminish the earning power of white European immigrants.”⁵⁹ In 1882, the *Chinese Exclusion Act* was implemented, prohibiting the immigration of Chinese labourers to the United States, which reinforced the negative impressions of Americans about Chinese people. As Edward Said contends, “the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other.”⁶⁰ Therefore, China and the Chinese appeared on the screen only as a misread image of “the Other,” which contrasted with the positive images of the civilised and rational West.

Under this disadvantageous background of racial discrimination in the United States, Chinese roles in Hollywood films could only be played by non-Chinese actors and actresses; for instance, in films like *Broken Blossom* (D. W. Griffith, 1919) and *The Good Earth* (Sidney Franklin, 1937), Chinese characters were played by white actors or actresses who were made up heavily. The most representative and notorious characters in this period were Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan. Fu Manchu originally appeared in a series of novels created by an English author named Sax Rohmer, and went on to feature in many films, television shows and comics in the early 20th century. In films, he wore a dark, long robe associated with the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). He was bald, tall, thin and high-shouldered, with long thin eyes, arched eyebrows

⁵⁷ Paul A. Varg, *The Closing of the Door: Sino-American Relations, 1936-1946* (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1973), 3.

⁵⁸ Harold Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (New York: The John Day Company, 1958), 67-68.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Said, 1.

and two tufts of a drooping moustache. He was depicted as a mysterious, sinister, treacherous, cunning, vicious and brutal scientist who had mastered Western science and Eastern mysterious magic and conspired to destroy Western civilisation. Rohmer had created the most visible and recognisable Yellow Peril stereotype in the eyes of Westerners, and the image of Fu Manchu has exerted a profound influence on the subsequent characterisation of Chinese people in Western films. During the same period, American writer Earl Derr Biggers created a character, Charlie Chan, who was, in many ways, the opposite of Fu Manchu. Charlie Chan was a benevolent, intelligent and heroic detective from the Honolulu police. He featured in dozens of films which were popular with American audiences. Some critics thought Charlie Chan offered a positive image compared to the evil, stereotypical Fu Manchu. However, some Chinese-American critics, like Guiyou Huang, argue that “Charlie Chan embodies the stereotypes and stigmas of Chinese Americans, particularly of males: smart, subservient, effeminate.”⁶¹ Although the character of Charlie Chan is much more positive than Fu Manchu, it still reinforces another stereotype, that of subservient Chinese or Asians. In addition, within the context of racial discrimination and anti-miscegenation at that time in America, Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan were never played by Chinese actors: Fu Manchu was always played by white actors, while Charlie Chan was originally played by Japanese or Korean actors, but the characters in the films were minimised. The film series achieved success until a white actor started to play the role of Charlie Chan.⁶²

However, there was one sole exception, Anna May Wong, who became the first Chinese American actress in Hollywood. Although she was a breakthrough for Chinese performers, due to the severe racial discrimination and prejudice at that time in America, her roles in films could only be either the tragic Oriental charmer who fell in love with a Euro-American man but had to commit suicide due to the fear for miscegenation, like Lotus Flower in *The Toll of The Sea* (Chester M. Franklin, 1922); or the seductive, conniving Chinese American girl who desired to be a white girl and win the love of a European or an American man, like Annabelle Wu in *Forty Winks* (Paul Iribe & Frank Urson, 1925). Wong played the role of Fu Manchu’s daughter in *Daughter of the Dragon* (Lloyd Corrigan, 1931), and became the prototype of the “Dragon Lady” for Chinese female roles in later Hollywood films. In addition, Anna May Wong played Mongolian slave, Native American and Eskimo in Hollywood films; however, the destiny and

⁶¹ Guiyou Huang, *The Columbia Guide to Asian American Literature Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 211.

⁶² Balio, 336.

character of these roles were quite similar, which did not provide much performance space for Wong. She had already been associated with stereotypical Chinese roles in Hollywood's eyes, though she had earned some fame through these roles. She protested this phenomenon in an interview with British film journalist Doris Mackie: "You see I was so tired of the parts I had to play...Why is it that the screen Chinese is nearly always the villain of the piece?...Why should we always scheme-rob-kill? I got so weary of it all — of the scenarist's conception of Chinese character..."⁶³

From the late 1920s to the 1930s, Wong shifted her performing career from America to Europe. European audiences were much more receptive to her performance and rewarded her with more applause than in America. Moreover, she went to China in 1936 for the first time and stayed there for almost one year to learn Mandarin and experience the real China. In the past, because of Wong's Chinese heritage, she could not get any female Asian protagonist roles from Hollywood, only the pathetic or treacherous Orientalist roles. She had been trapped in the contradiction between her own racial identity and her national identity. However, the stay in Europe and the experience in China made Wong reconcile with her Chinese and American backgrounds. Karen Leong notes that "she would attempt to use the fame she had earned through portraying stereotypical Chinese role to publicize the 'real China.'"⁶⁴ In fact, in the late 1930s, Wong appeared in two films, *Daughter of Shanghai* (Robert Florey, 1937) and *King of Chinatown* (Nick Grinde, 1939). The former was quite an unusual Asian-focused film with Asian performers in the leading roles instead of Euro-American actors cast in Asian roles. In the latter film, Wong played a physician who raises funds for the Chinese people suffering from war, which also embodied a positive representation of Chinese people. During World War II, she only acted in two films, *Bombs over Burma* (Joseph H. Lewis, 1942) and *The Lady from Chungking* (William Nigh, 1942), both demonstrating the Chinese peoples' heroic deeds against the Japanese invasion. Meanwhile, Wong devoted most of her time to raising goods and funds to support the Chinese people's resistance against Japan by means of her fame and influence. However, that Wong could represent the positive picture of Chinese people in Hollywood films was in large part due to the relations between China and the United States. During World War II, Japan's invasion of China and Chinese people's resistance had won

⁶³ Doris Mackie, "'I Protest,' by Anna May Wong in an interview with Doris Mackie," *Film Weekly*, August 18 1933, quoted in Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 83.

⁶⁴ Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 94.

sympathy from the American public and brought about a positive depiction of China and Chinese people on the Hollywood screen. As Leong points out, “Hollywood’s interest in positive portrayals of China reflected international relations with China rather than audience demand.”⁶⁵ China and the United States became allied against fascism, especially after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941. Nevertheless, apart from the alliance period between China and the US during World War II when the depiction of China and Chinese people tended to be positive, most of the rest of the time the representation was prone to be stereotypical and Orientalist.

In any case, no matter whether stereotypical or relatively realistic, the roles that Wong played have exerted a great and profound influence on the characterisation of Chinese people on American screens.

Over the following forty to fifty years, there were few changes in the way Chinese characters were represented in Hollywood films, but this situation shifted in the 1970s, when Bruce Lee began to break previous stereotypes of Chinese people as being weak and subservient or barbarous, untrustworthy, callous and devious. By means of the rising popularity of Kung Fu films, Western audiences discovered that the Chinese could also be kind, powerful, and righteous; however, the success of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li, as positive a phenomenon as it may be, has reinforced another popular stereotype of the Chinese as Kung Fu masters. After the huge success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000), even the character design of Chinese actresses came to be associated with Kung Fu skills, as evident with Zhang Ziyi in *Rush Hour 2* (Brett Ratner, 2001) and Lucy Liu in the *Charlie’s Angels* (McG, 2000 & 2003) series and *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003 & 2004). In the first decade of the 21st century, there were no revolutionary changes in the diversity of Chinese characters. After successfully playing a Kung Fu master in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Chow Yun-Fat played an antagonist captain in Singaporean area in *Pirates of Caribbean: At World’s End* (Gore Verbinski, 2007), and his image in the film was a copy of Fu Manchu with the representative two tufts of drooping moustache. Meanwhile, Jet Li played the cruel Dragon Emperor in *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (Rob Cohen, 2008). These roles still conform to the stereotypical features of Chinese people in the eyes of the Western audience as being evil, treacherous and scheming or skilled at Kung Fu.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 66.

However, the situation has begun to change since 2013. As analysed in Chapter 2, in light of the rapid growth of the Chinese film market, the national box office revenue of China surpassed Japan, and China became the second largest film market in the world in 2012. Since Hollywood has found greater market potential in China, Hollywood blockbusters have started to offer roles to domestic stars who are very popular with Chinese audiences but have not yet achieved fame in Hollywood. For instance, in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Bryan Singer, 2014), one of the mutants, Blink, who can create portals to teleport subjects, was played by a popular Chinese actress, Fan Bingbing. Although she only made a cameo appearance — her screen time was only a few seconds against the backdrop of a Chinese temple in the beginning of the film, and she only had one line — this character can be considered a breakthrough from the stereotypical role of antagonist or Kung Fu master, as she is cast as a superhero, an unimaginable role in the past.

Transformers: Age of Extinction (Michael Bay, 2014) includes a more diverse range of Chinese celebrities, though most of them make only cameo appearances in the film. The righteous and brave boxer in the elevator is played by Zou Shiming, a genuine world champion in boxing, the second-hand motor dealer by Hong Kong actor Ray Lui, and the musician in the car by popular singer Han Geng. The Minister of the Ministry of National Defence of the PRC also delivers a line in Chinese after he received the news that Hong Kong has been attacked by Galvatron and his drones: “我是国防部长，中央政府一定全力支援香港 (I am the Minister of the Ministry of National Defence of the PRC, and Chinese central government will definitely support and help Hong Kong with all-around methods).” In addition, the female CEO of KSI’s Chinese facilities is played by renowned Chinese actress Li Bingbing (Figure 21). In the film, she is also multilingual, delivering her lines in English, Cantonese and Mandarin, and demonstrates her combat and high driving skills, as well as having graduated from the Police Academy before doing an MBA.



Figure 21

In *The Martian* (Ridley Scott, 2015), the Chief Scientist of the China National Space Administration and his Deputy are played by a Hong Kong actor, Eddy Ko, and an actress from Mainland China, Chen Shu (Figure 22), respectively. They discuss the mission to help Mark return to Earth and decide to use the Chinese project; together they witness the successful launch of Ares V together with the American scientists in the film.



Figure 22

In *Independence Day: Resurgence* (Roland Emmerich, 2016), which opened on 24 June 2016 in Chinese cinemas, Angelababy Yang, a very popular star in China, plays a Chinese female pilot and member of the International Legacy Squadron. At the beginning of the film, in the first appearance of the International Legacy Squadron, she stands in the middle of the squadron (Figure 23), an arrangement which indicates the significance of a Chinese pilot and, by implication, the Chinese film market. She also joins the counterattack against the aliens but is baited to enter the Alien Queen Ship together with the Earth Space Defence aerial fleet. She is one of the survivors after hijacking the aliens' crafts and escaping from the Queen Ship, and one of the pilots who destroy the alien Queen in the end (Figure 24).

In *Kong: Skull Island* (Jordan Vogt-Roberts, 2017), a biologist in the resource exploration team is played by a Chinese actress, Jing Tian (Figure 25). She explores the island for evidence of the monsters' existence with the other leading members of team, though she mainly takes a background role.



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25

These films show that the representation of Chinese characters has changed significantly over the course of a century, shifting from lower class workers, peasants, villains, prostitutes, and people with Kung Fu skills to the recent CEO of a high-tech company, chief scientists in space administration, a brave pilot participating in an international aerial fleet and a biologist in an exploration team on a wild island. Though the recent characters have little screen time, we still can observe changes and improvement in breaking with previous stereotypes of the Chinese.

Almost half a century ago, American political scientist Harold Isaacs conducted empirical research about images of China and India as perceived by Americans. He classified the American response toward China along historic lines, depending upon the cultural and diplomatic relations between the two countries: “the Age of Respect (Eighteenth Century), the Age of Contempt (1840-1905), the Age of Benevolence (1905-1937), the Age of Admiration (1937-1944), the Age of Disenchantment (1944-1949), and the Age of Hostility (1949-).”⁶⁶ In general, the turning points of America’s attitude toward China in different stages have aligned with the detailed historical information discussed earlier, such as the First Opium War in 1840, the breakout of China’s Resistance War against Japan in 1937, the end of World War II in 1945, and the founding of the PRC in 1949. Thus, it can be inferred that the changes in America’s images of China have been greatly influenced by the constant variations in Sino-American relations. As Zhang Longxi observes, “Americans have two sets of images, of which the modulation, with one advancing and the other receding alternatively, is tuned into the social and political atmosphere of the time. China is seen as both static and restlessly chaotic; the Chinese are both wise and benighted, strong and weak, honest and devious, and so on so forth.”⁶⁷

However, Isaac’s study, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India*, was published in 1958, his classification of phases about the Sino-US relationship cannot be applied adequately to describe the shift in American images of China over the following decades as the Sino-American relationship has changed considerably. In 1972, President Nixon signed the *Joint Communiqué of the People's Republic of China and the United States of America* on his first official visit to China. Since then, the Sino-American relationship has entered a phase of normalisation. Diplomatic relations were established between the two countries with the signing of the *Joint Communiqué of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America* in 1978, the year that China also established its Reform and Open-up policy. Gradually, the status of China in the international community has been enhanced, especially after successfully hosting the Beijing Summer Olympic Games in 2008. In 2010, the World Expo was held successfully in Shanghai, China. That same year, China overtook Japan in terms of GDP and became the second largest economy in the world. Thanks to rapid economic growth in China, the box office in the Chinese film market has increased 30% on average every year since 2008. The Chinese

⁶⁶ Isaacs, 71.

⁶⁷ Longxi Zhang, 124.

film market became the second largest film market in the world in 2012, despite the rate slowing in 2016 and 2017. Hence, as the preceding case studies show, the changes in the depiction of China and the Chinese in Hollywood films indicate that China’s development as an international power has exerted an influence on how its image is presented on screen.

My conclusions about the relationship between a country’s power and the depiction of its image in cultural products have been inspired by Joseph Nye’s theory about hard power and soft power. Nye contends that “Hard power can rest on inducements (‘carrots’) and threats (‘sticks’). Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others.”⁶⁸ He goes on to note that “the ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority.”⁶⁹ Nye claims that “hard power and soft power are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behaviour of others... The types of behaviour between command and co-option range along a spectrum from coercion to economic inducement to agenda setting to pure attraction,”⁷⁰ as the following table illustrates.

Table 2: Power⁷¹

	Hard	Soft
Spectrum of Behaviours	Coercion Inducement Command ←	Agenda Setting Attraction → Co-opt
Most Likely Resources	Force Payments Sanctions Bribes	Institutions Values Culture Policies

Coercion normally represents hard power, while pure attraction represents soft power, but they are not extreme opposites; the two concepts range along a spectrum with a gradual transition from one pole to the other. The rising strength in the economic and political power of a country can reinforce its influence in terms of soft power on other countries. Hard power can shift to the co-option end of the spectrum of behaviour and be transformed into soft power.

⁶⁸ Nye, 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁷¹ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 7.

Therefore, I contend that the changes in the representation of Chinese characters from a largely negative to a more positive image is closely related to the enhancement of China's status in the international community, its rapid economic growth and the huge boom in its film market. Naomi Greene holds that "in the case of American perceptions of China, screen images bear on a relationship between two countries — that is, China and America — that is as deeply problematic as it is critically important."⁷² As shown through the analysis in the previous sections, whether the portrayal of China and Chinese people is negative or commendatory relies much on the relationship between China and the United States. As Hollywood would like to increase its share in the Chinese film market, it cannot afford to make films that the Chinese authorities or the Chinese audiences would not receive favourably.

⁷² Naomi Greene, *From Fu Manchu to Kung Fu Panda: Images of China in American Film* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 1.

Chapter 4 Hollywood Strategies to Circumvent the Cultural Policies of the Chinese Government from a Commercial Perspective

This chapter will focus on Hollywood's commercial strategies to gain access to the Chinese film market. My discussion in the previous chapter of the artistic motivations of Hollywood incorporating Chinese elements focuses more on the cinematic characterisation of the films' plots and themes in order to resonate with Chinese audiences psychologically, while with regard to the commercial imperatives, the tenet of Hollywood blockbusters to pursue profit and offset the cost of making films will be manifested fully in what follows. The commercial strategies which will be expounded in this chapter include adding Chinese film locations, placing Chinese products, seeking co-productions between China and the US, the aims of which overlap to some extent, appealing to more Chinese audiences and occupying larger share in the Chinese film market. Hollywood's artistic motivations and commercial imperatives to incorporate Chinese elements complement each other, reinforcing its goal to circumvent cultural policies and to be slotted into the flourishing Chinese film market.

4.1 Chinese Film Locations in Hollywood Films

In ancient times, few people could have a personal experience of the world beyond the confines of their towns or villages. Even now, in a society with such convenient and efficient transportation, not everyone has the chance to directly experience a different place. People obtain most concepts, information and ideas from books, newspapers and mass media. The knowledge gained from these secondary sources is often deeply rooted in people's minds. For instance, the most widespread book about China in the Western world was *The Travels of Marco Polo* (written between 1298-1299). In the chapter about the Khan's palace at Shandu, Marco Polo describes that

In the centre of these grounds, where there is a beautiful grove of trees, he (Khan Kublai) has built a royal pavilion, supported upon a colonnade of handsome pillars, gilt and varnished. Round each pillar a dragon, likewise gilt, entwines its tail, whilst its head sustains the projection of the roof, and its talons or claws are extended to the right and left along the entablature. The roof is of bamboo cane, likewise gilt, and so well varnished that no wet can injure it...¹

¹ Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Venetian* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 153.

This book stimulated the perceptions, and emotions of the people in the West towards China for several centuries and exerted a great influence on the Age of Discovery and European colonisation due to Marco Polo's description of his epic journey to China.

The use of Chinese locations in Hollywood productions demonstrates the deep-seated Orientalist prejudices and preferences in the minds of Western filmmakers and audiences. Looking at Hollywood films that have been imported to the Chinese film market, the Chinese locations and settings such as palaces, temples and pagodas often serve merely as an Orientalist background, lending an exotic atmosphere to Western stories. One example is *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* (George Lucas, 2005), which was released on 19 May 2005 in Chinese theatres. George Lucas has created a brand new universe in the *Star Wars* series, and the variety of planets in the universe has required a diverse range of film locations, such as Matmata in Tunisia, Salar de Uyuni in Bolivia, Reynisfjara in Iceland, Laamu Atoll in the Maldives, Seville in Spain, Mount Etna in Italy, Wadi Rum in Jordan and Hardangerjøkulen Glacier in Norway.² In the film, several long shots of the Wookiees' planet, Kashyyyk, were filmed in Guilin, Guangxi Province, China (Figure 26). The picturesque limestone Karst landscape of Guilin is analogous with the traditional Chinese mountains-and-waters painting with its freshwater lagoons and tree-covered mountains (Figure 27), and Lucas is clearly referencing this pictorial tradition. The landscape in Guilin is in line with the otherworldly setting, which means the landscape is exotic enough to build a mysterious environment for the planet Kashyyyk. Here, the exotic scenery of the East has become the Orientalist concept for Western people.

² Griffin Shea, "'Star Wars' Locations that Actually Exist," *CNN Travel*, May 5, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/star-wars-destinations/index.html>.



Figure 26



Figure 27: Part of the *Qianli Jiangshan Tu* (Wang Ximeng, The Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127))

Gradually, changes are occurring though. The modern side of China was displayed for the first time in a Hollywood blockbuster in the third sequel of the *Mission Impossible* film series, *Mission: Impossible III* (J. J. Abrams, 2006). One third of the film takes place in Shanghai, the most modern city in China in terms of urban development and architecture. However, the film still combines the traditional and exotic sides of China in the scenes in Xitang, a small water town in the Zhejiang Province near Shanghai. The audience sees Tom Cruise not only in the prosperous metropolitan cityscape of Shanghai (Figure 28), but also in the bustling alleys of the water town with its Chinese-style houses, stone bridges and flowing water (Figure 29). Because the modern side of Shanghai had for the first time appeared in a mainstream Hollywood blockbuster, the news was reported widely in China, and the filming in Shanghai became one of the selling points of the film, which helped it list within the top 10 grossing films of 2006 in China. Owing to Tom Cruise’s dangerous leap from the 53-storey Bank of China Tower to its adjacent Tower of China Pacific Insurance Company, John Berra notes “the jaw-dropping stunt executed in *Mission: Impossible III* established the city as a prime location for global spectacle.”³

³ John Berra, “Mission: Impossible III” in *World Film Locations Shanghai*, ed. John Berra and Wei Ju (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2014), 76.



Figure 28



Figure 29

In light of the positive effect brought by *Mission: Impossible III*, Shanghai has appeared frequently in Hollywood blockbusters, including *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (Michael Bay, 2009) and *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012). In the former film, the opening battle between the Autobots and Decepticons provides a bird's eye view of the nightscape in Shanghai. At a critical moment, Optimus Prime leaps from an airplane and descends along the Oriental Pearl Tower (Figure 30). Similarly, in *Skyfall*, the resplendent Shanghai nightscape is presented in an aerial shot of a minute's duration, before Bond lands from his plane (Figure 31).



Figure 30



Figure 31

In *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (Michael Bay, 2014), more Chinese locations appear. As Beijing and Hong Kong are the main locations where the story takes place, landmarks like the National Stadium — the Bird’s Nest, National Swimming Centre — the Water Cube and Pangu Plaza in Beijing, as well as old buildings in Hong Kong are displayed on screen. The headquarter of Chinese facility in the film is located in Guangzhou, but the magnificent building is the Tianjin Grand Theatre in reality. The gathering place of the dinosaur transformers is actually filmed in Wulong, Chongqing, but is transplanted to Hong Kong in the film.

Through changes in the choice of film locations over the past decade, it is evident that in earlier films the Chinese landscape or setting serves as more of a traditional backdrop in the Orientalist sense, while more recent Hollywood blockbusters display the modern and metropolitan side of China. In light of the growth of the Chinese film market, as discussed in Chapter 2, these changes indicate that Hollywood has made a compromise in its desire for bigger commercial profits by means of demonstrating an image of an advanced and modernised China in order to please Chinese film regulators and gain access to the Chinese film market.

4.2 Chinese Product Placements in Hollywood Films

The practice of product placements has existed since the early development of film marketing. According to Wasko, “by the 1920s fashions seen in films were being promoted by stars and retail establishments and the cigarette industry was lobbying performers to smoke on screen.”⁴ It works as a method to add revenue and offset the production budget for filmmakers.

⁴ Janet Wasko, *Hollywood in the Information Age* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 187-188.

It was in 1982 that a significant event occurred in the history of product placement. Reese's Pieces, the candy, were used in the film *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) to attract a frightened alien out of the place where he was hiding. Within weeks, because of the huge success of the movie, sales of Reese's Pieces went up more than 65%.⁵ But *E.T.*'s phenomenal boost to Reese's Pieces was not the only event in 1982 that changed Hollywood's notions about product placement. That same year, Coca-Cola purchased Columbia Pictures.⁶ Since then, Hollywood and manufacturers have found there can be enormous commercial profit in product placements.

Early research on product placement occurred in late 1980s. Different scholars have considered the practice of product placement from different perspectives. According to E. M. Steertz, "product placement was initially defined as the inclusion of trademarked merchandise, brand-name products, or signage in a motion picture."⁷ In terms of commercialisation, product placement is defined by Graeme Turner as "contracting to insert a partner's products into an appropriate context on screen as a means of offsetting production costs."⁸ From the perspective of the audience, Balasubramanian asserts that "product placement is a paid product message aimed at influencing movie (or television) audiences via the planned and unobtrusive entry of a branded product into a movie (or television program)."⁹ D'Astous and Chartier provide a relatively general definition: "product placement is the inclusion of a product, brand or firm in entertainment programming for promotional purposes."¹⁰ Entertainment is an efficient medium to promote a product or a brand, and at the same time, product placements can help audio and visual producers cut the production budget.

Product placements have existed in Hollywood films for many years, and the products placed have not been limited to American goods; however, the first Chinese product was placed in Hollywood films only in 2009. Since then, more Chinese products have been placed in different Hollywood blockbusters, ranging from mineral water and milk to computers. From

⁵ Aljean Harmetz, "Fox to Sell Rights to Plug Goods in Films," *The New York Times*, December 21, 1983, <http://www.nytimes.com/1983/12/21/arts/fox-to-sell-rights-to-plug-goods-in-films.html>.

⁶ Steven L. Snyder, "Movies and Product Placement: Is Hollywood Turning Films into Commercial Speech?" *University of Illinois Law Review* 1 (1992): 304.

⁷ Jay Newell, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang, "The Hidden History of Product Placement," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 50 (2006): 577.

⁸ Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.

⁹ Siva K. Balasubramanian, "Beyond Advertising and Publicity: Hybrid Messages and Public Policy Issues," *Journal of Advertising* 23 (1994): 31.

¹⁰ Alain d'Astous and Francis Chartier, "A Study of Factors Affecting Evaluations and Memory of Product Placements in Movies," *Journal of Issues and Research in Advertising* 22 (2000): 31.

the Chinese perspective, companies would like to enlarge their brand awareness at home and abroad by virtue of the extensive and enormous influence of Hollywood films. For Hollywood studios, the best advantage of incorporating Chinese products is to increase the probabilities of being chosen for the limited screen slots of the Chinese film market, since the placement of Chinese products can enhance the attractiveness of Hollywood blockbusters to Chinese film regulators.

One brand choosing this product placement strategy is a Chinese casual wear brand, Meters/bonwe. It appears briefly in a fight scene at the beginning of the Chinese release of *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (Michael Bay, 2009). A van with the logo and slogan of Meters/bonwe survives the battle between the Autobots and Decepticons on a Shanghai freeway. As the battle happens at night and the van is quite small compared to the huge Decepticon, the logo is only visible for a matter of seconds amidst the general carnage of the chase sequence. However, a large billboard advertising Meters/bonwe falls on the Decepticon as it crashes into an overpass.

Meters/bonwe also released a range of T-shirts with the theme of “transfashion 变形看我 (see me transform)” in China to tie in with the promotion of the film. Optimus, Bumblebee and Megatron, along with the Transformers’ logo, featured on the T-shirts. In addition, a series of advertisements with these characters were also released online, on TV, on newspapers and on billboards. Though Meters/bonwe has not entered the international market, it holds a strong association in the minds of Chinese consumers. With the film showing in theatres on a large scale, this range sold more than one million T-shirts.¹¹ The revenue of Meters/bonwe also increased greatly that year. Paramount also benefited from the successful marketing and promotion of the film, as ticket sales of the second sequel ranked the second place in the 2009 Chinese box office list.

The reciprocal cooperation between Paramount and Meters/bonwe has led to further collaboration in *Transformers 3* (Michael Bay, 2011). Sam (Shia LaBeouf), the protagonist, wears an MTEE T-shirt (from Meters/bonwe range), around the house. During a three-minute sequence, Sam wears the MTEE T-shirt from getting up until leaving home, and in several medium long shots and medium shots, the T-shirt can be seen fully and clearly (Figure 32).

¹¹ Tudou Fang, “Meitesi Bangwei Wan le Bianxing Jingang (Meters/bonwe Plays with Transformers),” *Sina.com.cn*, November 17, 2011, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/leadership/mroll/20111117/173910836674.shtml>.



Figure 32

In addition to Meters/bonwe, other Chinese products have been placed in the film. A Chinese computer brand, Lenovo, appears throughout, most prominently in a scene where Sam enquires at the reception of the company where he will be interviewed (Figure 33). A Lenovo computer also appears on the desk of Sam's interviewer, as well as in a number of other scenes throughout the film. In a later sequel, Lenovo computers continue to be placed in prominent positions, especially in the headquarters of the KSI Company, all the computers are from Lenovo, although the Lenovo logo is only visible in medium shots or in the foreground of the frame.

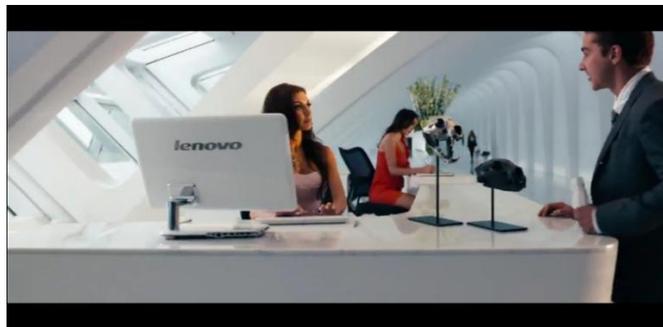


Figure 33

A Chinese milk brand, Yili shuhua, is also placed in an eye-catching position in this film. In a scene where Jerry Wang, one of Sam's co-workers, is drinking milk in an elevator. When a character asks him a question, he mentions the name of the product directly:

“May I finish my shuhua milk?”

“I don't care about your exotic milk; I care about respect.” (Figure 34)

After everyone leaves the elevator, Sam and Jerry Wang remain, and the milk can be seen clearly again in a medium shot.



Figure 34

Compared to the positioning of the MTEE T-shirt and Lenovo computer in the film, the placement of the carton of Yili shuhua milk has received the most criticism and ridicule from Chinese audiences. According to an interview with Liu Siru, the chief Chinese delegate of the NMA Group, the largest product placement agency in the United States, after many rounds of negotiation between the Chinese manufacturer and the producer of *Transformers*, Michael Bay proposed that Jerry, a character of Chinese origin, would love to drink the Yili shuhua brand and decided to display the milk for a humorous purpose.¹² However, after *Transformers 3* was released in Chinese theatres, several media websites in China, including Tencent.com and NetEase.com, issued articles concerning the placement of Chinese products in this sequel, mainly focusing on the placement of the Yili shuhua milk. Some audience were displeased, because the placement of the milk was unnecessary, and was simply for the sake of promoting the product.¹³ It seems that the audience did not appreciate the director's humorous design. They laughed not because the scene was funny but because of the clumsiness of the product placement.

Nevertheless, Yili deepened its cooperation with Paramount in *Transformers 4* (Michael Bay, 2014). In one of the more glaring examples, Joshua (Stanley Tucci) escapes to the top of a Hong Kong building, finds some milk in a fridge and drinks it (Figure 35). Joshua, unlike Jerry in the previous film, plays an important supporting role, rather than acting as a comic foil to the lead character. Despite this, audiences laughed out loud when they saw him drinking the milk.¹⁴

¹² Liping Mo, "Bianxing Jingang 3 Zhongguo Guanggao Zhiru Jiemi (Demystify the Chinese Product Placements in *Transformers 3*)," *ent.163.com*, <http://ent.163.com/special/transformers3zt/>.

¹³ "Bianxing Jingang 3 Zhiru Guanggao Miji Zhibai Chengdu re Zhengyi (*Transformers 3* causing controversy due to intensive product placements)," *ent.163.com*, July 22, 2011, <http://ent.163.com/11/0722/16/79J2MK9G00032DGD.html>.

¹⁴ "Bianxing Jingang 4 Guanggao Zhiru Guoduo zao Tucao Weishenme yao Zhemeduo Guanggao (Excessive Product Placements in *Transformers 4* Ridiculed, Why So Many Advertisements)," *sohu.com*, September 1, 2016, http://www.sohu.com/a/113117120_442649.



Figure 35

Jeffrey Katzenberg has asserted that “one way to reinforce the feeling of reality in a film is by using real products.”¹⁵ Thus, product placements can enhance the realism and verisimilitude of a film, and the appropriate use of certain products can strengthen the authenticity of the story. Jean-Patrick Flandé, the PDG de Film Média Consultant, believes “the appearance of a product will be successful inasmuch as it melts into the story and the moment.”¹⁶ A successful product placement should not interrupt the flow of the story and should appear naturally. Therefore the placements of different car brands which appear in an autobot film is fairly justifiable. The placements of a Chinese T-shirt and computer may be noticed by Chinese filmgoers, but do not cause any undue discomfort or displeasure. Their appearance is normal and thus does not disturb the rhythm of the film. As for foreign filmgoers who cannot recognise the brands, these placements do not influence their film viewing at all. However, the placement of the milk triggered laughter and discomfort for a Chinese audience because it appeared improperly and illogically. At that moment in the plot, Joshua had been chased by killers, escaped to the roof of a building with great difficulty and temporarily lost his pursuers. Maybe he was thirsty and wanted to relax at that time, but according to the common sense of a Chinese or foreign audience, it is unlikely that he would choose to drink milk rather than, say, a beer (there were also several bottles of beer in the fridge). Even if the placement of Yili shuhua milk in *Transformers 3* was designed to be a joke, as the director proposed, it does not appear to serve a humorous purpose in the scene from *Transformers 4* and thus has incurred many negative reviews and comments from Chinese filmgoers. They

¹⁵Snyder, 309.

¹⁶ The original text is in French, which is “l'apparition d'un produit est d'autant plus réussie qu'elle se fonde dans l'histoire et dans l'instant,” from Joël Brée, “Le Placement de Produit dans les Films: Une Communication Originale,” *Décisions Marketing* 8 (1996): 70. The English translation is from Alain d'Astous and Francis Chartier, “A Study of Factors Affecting Consumer Evaluations and Memory of Product Placements in Movies,” *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising* 22 (2000): 34.

believe that the appearance of the milk at that point does not conform to the logic of the film; on the contrary, it is both awkward and clumsy. However, it is likely that the scene is designed to provoke this effect by foregrounding the obvious act of placing a product to advertise and promote the product in a postmodern fashion.

Another company, TCL, entered into active negotiations with the producers of the *Transformers* series in order to present their products in a good light. In *Transformers 3*, a TCL smart TV transforms into a Decepticon, and kills Jerry. Initially, TCL wanted the TV to become a good robot, but due to the requirements of the script, TCL had to make a compromise and it took the form of an evil robot. And the brand logo was not in a close-up and not clearly visible but they were accommodated in *Transformers 4*. This is why a TCL computer monitor is prominently positioned in a shot in the office where Joshua introduces the transformium to Darcy (Sophia Myles) (Figure 36).



Figure 36

Most of the story of *Transformers 4* takes place in the United States, however, there is one glaring exception: the blatant reference to China Construction Bank. The main character, Cade (Mark Wahlberg), uses a mini drone to insert a bank card into an ATM; both the card and the ATM are for the China Construction Bank (Figure 37), an extremely unlikely coincidence as Cade lives in Texas, the United States. This obvious anomaly has sparked a fierce discussion on Sina Weibo, a social media platform similar to Twitter. Most of the netizens thought “the placement of the China Construction Bank is so clumsy and awkward.”¹⁷

¹⁷ See details on

https://s.weibo.com/weibo?q=%E5%8F%98%E5%BD%A2%E9%87%91%E5%88%9A%204%20%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD%E5%BB%BA%E8%AE%BE%E9%93%B6%E8%A1%8C%E6%A4%8D%E5%85%A5&wv_r=6&b=1&Refer=SWeibo_box.



Figure 37

A similar reference to Amway Nutrilite protein powder, which is produced in the US but sold in China as well, has also been received with ridicule. Cade discusses the brand at length with his daughter Tessa (Nicola Peltz) after she steals several bottles from the supermarket (Figure 38). It is clear from a close-up that the bottle has both a Chinese and an English label, but this is a product unlikely to be found in an American supermarket.



Figure 38

In *Transformers 4*, when the setting of the film shifts to China, for one third of the action occurs mainly in Guangzhou and Hong Kong, as a result, more Chinese brands are placed and highlighted, which seems more reasonable and realistic. At the Chinese facilities of KSI in Guangzhou, the female CEO, Su Yueming (Li Bingbing), drinks a bottle of C'est bon mineral water in a close-up. In a later scene when Joshua makes a call to Cade, the bright red logo of Chinese luxurious liquor brand "Jiannanchu (剑南春)" appears against a black background. All of the cars that the characters drive in Guangzhou and Hong Kong are different models of Trumpchi from Guangzhou Automobile Group. In the scene where Joshua escapes to the roof, besides the case of Yili shuhua milk, there is also a case of C'est bon mineral water and a yellow Zhouheiya pack, the latter from a manufacturer producing food made from ducks. A vehicle

with the logo of the Chinese TV brand LeTV is seen briefly in the chaotic final battle between Autobots and Galvatron on the streets of Hong Kong.

Overall, more than 10 kinds of Chinese products, ranging from mineral water to cars, are scattered throughout the film, some of which are displayed in detail or referred to directly in the dialogue, while others appear quite cursorily. Many Chinese media journalists interviewed filmgoers after its release in Chinese theatres and found that most of the audience complained about the excessive Chinese product placements. A fan of the film series made fun of too many product placements in the film, “I feel like watching a pretty good series of advertisements, occasionally some film fragments are inserted. So many product placements make me feel out of the play, and I couldn’t follow the plot.”¹⁸ Another commented, “Awkward and blatant product placements, inexplicable Chinese cameo passers-by, chaotic Chinese elements, making *Transformers 4* almost a domestic film. Just as the slogan on the poster, ‘it’s not a war, but destruction’. That’s right, and it completely ruined the sequel of *Transformers* series.”¹⁹ According to a survey by a journalist from yicai.com, 70% of the film’s audience believed that the appearance of the Chinese products within the film were not successful.²⁰ In general, this sequel “left a negative impression on audiences for frequent showing off the Chinese brands.”²¹

Kineta Hung, a professor from Hong Kong Baptist University, when interviewed by the *South China Morning Post*, commented that “companies always want to put more information into a placement opportunity, but [too much] will turn audiences off.” She contends that “Product placement, unlike an ad, should be natural, so audiences can accept a product or learn more about it. If you jam a lot in, you will achieve the exact opposite.”²² Based on the feedback of Chinese audiences on the Chinese product placement, they responded to most of them unfavourably. On the one hand, the appearance of most of the products is quite stilted and awkward. The products cannot be placed harmoniously into the development of the film plot, hence bringing about an uncomfortable and unpleasant film viewing experience to Chinese

¹⁸ “Bian 4 Shouying Po Siqianwan Tucao: Guanggao Chabo Dianying (Premiere Box Office of Transformers 4 over 40 Million RMB, An Advertisement Inserted with a Film),” *people.com.cn*, June 28, 2014, <http://media.people.com.cn/n/2014/0628/c14677-25212913.html>.

¹⁹ “Bianxing Jingang 4 Zhiru Guanggao Yiban Zhongguo Zao Wangyou Tucao: Quanhuile (Half of the Product Placements in Transformers 4 were Made in China, Netizens Ridiculed: Completely Ruined),” *sina.com*, July 2, 2014, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/20140702/020219578768.shtml>.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Xi Wei, “Chinese Audiences Unhappy with Clumsy Product Placement,” *Global Times*, June 29, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/991371.shtml>.

²² Alan Yu, “Transformers Movie Highlights Mainland Product Placement Trend,” *South China Morning Post*, July 29, 2014, <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/arts-culture/article/1561214/transformers-movie-highlights-mainland-product-placement>.

audiences. On the other hand, this lazy and blatant product placement is just a method of offsetting the investment in producing films.

Thus, the Chinese product placements prompted a ream of criticism from Chinese viewers, while offering many punch lines for bad jokes amongst Chinese audiences. The fundamental reason for the failure of these product placements is that they are illogical and do not have any bearing on the story line. Placing Chinese products is just a market-driven mechanism to make news towards the promotion of Hollywood films in China.

Yet perhaps this is what the producers would like to see, since more discussion and criticism mean more ticket receipts. After all, in recent years, the box office revenue in the North American film market has remained stagnant. Despite various critical responses from Chinese filmgoers, the ticket sales of *Transformers 4* still ranked at the top of the Chinese box office list in 2014.²³ It became the highest-grossing film in the history of China with a box office of USD 320 million,²⁴ a record which has, however, been broken by other films in the following years.

Transformers: The Last Knight (Michael Bay, 2017) was shown in Chinese cinemas on 23 June 2017. In view of the plethora of Chinese brands placed in the previous sequels and the criticism received from the audience concerning product placement, *Transformers 5* only included five Chinese brands. Nevertheless, the Chinese product placements are still quite awkward, unreasonable and unbelievable.

In one of the early sequences of the film, a character plays music on his cell phone with a Chinese music streaming service, Kugou, whose logo is clearly visible. In addition, when the application programme is operated, the audience hears it play a jingle, “Hello, Kugou.” It seems inexplicable that an American would use a Chinese music streaming service in the United States. Another implausible example is the use of a Chinese used car trading website, xin.com, which is geared specially towards a Chinese audience. In another brief scene at a junkyard, a kitchen appliance falls to the ground and transforms into a small fly. The logo of a Chinese appliance company, Vatti, is clearly visible as Bumblebee pats the fly to death. Similarly, in a short and easy to miss shot, Izabella (Isabela Moner) drinks a carton of Mengniu chunzhen

²³ “Chinese Box Office for 2014,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 9, 2020, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2014&p=.htm>.

²⁴ Ibid.

yogurt. Sir Edmund Burton (Anthony Hopkins) is picked up by his butler Cogman in a futuristic car, a LeSEE from a Chinese company; the advanced electronic system of the car is also displayed a few times on screen. None of these scenes is important to the plot, but these small details cater to the Chinese advertisers and are recognisable to Chinese audiences.

The response on Chinese media websites, as noted, was generally unfavourable to the prevalence of Chinese product placements; comments and headlines included “bad word-of-mouth of *Transformers 5*,” “cannot bear to look at the product placements,”²⁵ and “blatant and clumsy product placements.”²⁶ On the social media site Sina Weibo, users reacted particularly negatively to the appearance of the LeSEE car, which is not even well known in China, let alone to foreign audiences. Abid Rahman suggests in *The Hollywood Reporter* that the Chinese audience has learned to play the game of spot-the-brand throughout the film. They giggle when seeing the Chinese dairy drink Mengniu, and the biggest laugh arrives at the appearance of the used car website, xin.com.²⁷

When promoting *Transformers 5* (Michael Bay, 2017) in China, the producer, Lorenzo di Bonaventura, was asked a question about product placement in an interview with a journalist from one of the main online media companies in China, sina.com:

Q: “Just like the last sequel, there were many Chinese product placements, is it because you want to please Chinese audience?”

A: “Yes, it is. When we were about to make the second sequel of *Transformers*, I came to China once. I was so surprised that *Transformers* were so popular in China. When I returned to the States, I told Michael Bay, ‘you cannot imagine how much this country loves *Transformers*!’ From then on, we decided to put something which could represent China into the film series. We think there are our fans there, and we hope we could put something our fans love to see in the film series.”²⁸

²⁵ “Bianxing Jingang 5 Shangying Koubei Cha, Guanggao Zhiru Liangle Jianzhi Burenzhishi (Bad Word of Mouth of *Transformers 5*, Striking Product Placements Cannot Be Seen Directly),” *China.com*, June 23, 2017, https://news.china.com/news100/11038989/20170623/30811940_all.html.

²⁶ “Bianxing Jingang 5 li Qichen de Kuijia Gouying, dan Gengyingde shi Zhiru Guanggao (Armour of Autobots in *Transformers 5* is Hard, but the Stiffer is Product Placements),” *sohu.com*, June 23, 2017, http://www.sohu.com/a/151482814_162238.

²⁷ Abid Rahman, “Has Pandering to Chinese Audiences Hurt ‘Transformers 5’?” *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 2, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/transformers-last-knight-has-pandering-chinese-audiences-hurt-transformers-5-1016926>.

²⁸ Translated by the author based on the Chinese interview. “Bian 5 Zhipianren: Luanru Zhongguo Pinpai shi xiang Zhongguo Fensi Shihao (Producer of *Transformers 5*: Messy Product Placements is Pandering to Chinese Audience),” *sina.com*, June 29, 2017, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/f/2017-06-29/doc-ifyhrxtp6311403.shtml>.

As every *Transformers* film could become a hit in that year's film market, the confidence of the producers was boosted, and they looked for ways to increase sales in the Chinese film market by directly appealing to the audience through including Chinese cultural and commercial products in the films.

Though the product placements normally just flash by briefly in the film, the brands and the film can have deeper cooperation offline; generally, brands will make various relevant promotions or advertisements about the film in their retail stores. For instance, trailers for the film are played constantly as an effective method of promotion in the TV stores. In the meantime, brand awareness and revenue of Chinese products have received a significant increase after appearing in Hollywood blockbusters. For instance, owing to its appearance in *Transformers 3*, customer attention to Yili shuhua milk was raised by 900% and the revenue of the milk increased by 12% within one month.²⁹

Therefore, product placement will be more favoured by Chinese merchandisers and Hollywood producers because it is a method for both sides to receive what they need. On the one hand, Chinese merchandisers would like to increase their brand awareness at home and abroad and enhance their brand image by means of this kind of promotion. On the other hand, for Hollywood, incorporating Chinese product placement is truly an effective expansion strategy which can attract Chinese filmgoers, offset the production cost and make a healthy profit in the Chinese film market.

There is an obvious evolution throughout the *Transformers* series from having the early brand logo as background give way to the products being placed in the plot. Some products have even been demonstrated by the leading characters or referred to specifically, though often in a contrived manner. Nevertheless, given the previous examples, Chinese product placements in the Hollywood blockbusters are not appropriate, which can only cause the film to appear unrealistic. Hollywood is selling Chinese products back to the Chinese audience. Hence, the Chinese audience has criticised and ridiculed the unnatural and awkward product placements. But meanwhile, these images and commodities have become selling points to attract more people to the cinemas.

²⁹ Jian Yang, "Zhongguo Pinpai Fengyong Zhiru Haolaiwu (Chinese Brands Swarming to be Placed in Hollywood)," *infzm.com*, June 29, 2012, <http://www.infzm.com/content/77904>.

However, in the end, the last sequel of *Transformers* received the opposite effect intended by means of placing Chinese products to cater to the Chinese film market and Chinese audiences. Its revenue was down by nearly USD 100 million compared with the previous sequel.³⁰ With the decline of the box office, the word-of-mouth about the *Transformers* series has also decreased. The review website Douban in China, which is similar to Rotten Tomatoes, reports that the average ratings of the film series have been falling, going from 8.2 (*Transformers 1*), 7.6 (*Transformers 2*), 7.1 (*Transformers 3*), and 6.6 (*Transformers 4*) to 4.9 (*Transformers 5*).³¹ Jeffrey Katzenberg, the founder of DreamWorks Studio, has remarked that “what is crucially important is that the decision to use a product should be dictated by creative, not commercial, considerations.”³² However, the Chinese product placements in the *Transformers* series have already become a kind of simple collage which obviously panders to the Chinese film market. A film producer commented that “the abusive use of product placement would earn a film deservedly bad reviews and poor box office sales.”³³ By taking the market into consideration, it is evident that this tactic has already backfired on the *Transformers* series in terms of word-of-mouth and box office revenue. It should be noted that the *Transformers* series are designed purely as a commercial venture which explains the prominence of branding cars and other products. It is a ruthless and rampant example of a Hollywood studio exploiting the potential of a new market to the fullest. However, the decreasing ticket receipts and word-of-mouth indicate that the producers of the film series have almost exhausted the patience and tolerance of Chinese audiences. Without the favour from Chinese audiences, it is quite possible that next sequel of the film series will not be produced. After all, the film series are not as popular in the US and elsewhere as in the Chinese film market.

In fact, over the past several years, Chinese products placed in other Hollywood blockbusters have not received favourable responses either. According to a report from *Global Times*, when watching *Independence Day: Resurgence* (Roland Emmerich, 2016), most Chinese audiences laughed out loud when they saw the American protagonists communicated through video call on Tencent QQ. Because QQ is the biggest social media platform in China, the possibility for American youngsters to use it is quite low. There also appeared a type of

³⁰ “Chinese Box Office for 2017,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2017&p=.htm>.

³¹ “Bianxing Jingang,” Douban, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.douban.com/search?cat=1002&q=%E5%8F%98%E5%BD%A2%E9%87%91%E5%88%9A>.

³² Note 70 from Snyder, 309.

³³ *Ibid.*

Moon Milk from a Chinese dairy brand Mengniu in the film. But the Moon Milk was designed only for the film because the space base was set on the Moon in the film. Moon Milk does not exist in real life, though the dairy brand Mengniu exists in reality.³⁴

In an analysis of the results of an empirical study on an audience's reaction to product placements in films, Denise E. Delorme and Leonard N. Reid state that "brand props [are] judged to add authenticity to movies when associated with a particular setting, time period, or context."³⁵ Hence, product placements should function as props which support the imaginary film world and provide evidence of the real world, adding realism to the film scenery and making the film more believable. They are the economic version of cultural symbols, and they help the audience to accept the fictional world of the film. When products are employed appropriately or naturalistically, the placements can be interpreted as props. Otherwise, the incongruous or unrealistic use of the products in films can generate contrary effects. Once the product placements are excessive and inappropriate, becoming the sole focus of a film, they can produce the opposite result. It is likely that Hollywood producers think Chinese product placement is a new mode of incorporating Chinese elements which can please Chinese film regulators and help to get the film screened in Chinese theatres; nevertheless, how much box office revenue a film can receive depends on the audience. When the accumulated good word-of-mouth is exhausted, the consequence will be reflected through decreasing ticket sales. Thus, placing Chinese products is not a guaranteed method for appealing to the Chinese film market.

4.3 Co-productions between China and Hollywood

Another strategy for Hollywood producers to gain entry into the Chinese film market while reducing production costs and increasing profit at the same time is to seek co-productions with Chinese film companies that can be approved by Chinese film regulators. Once a film has qualified as a co-production, it will be treated as a domestic film and thus will not occupy one of the fixed slots for foreign films each year. Moreover, foreign producers can share 43% of the box office revenue after release, a much higher return than that of films imported on a revenue-sharing basis. Hence, more Hollywood studios are seeking opportunities to co-produce films with Chinese film companies.

³⁴ Xi Wei, "Chinese Audiences Unhappy with Clumsy Product Placement," *Global Times*, June 29, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/991371.shtml>.

³⁵ Denise E. Delorme and Leonard N. Reid, "Moviegoers' Experiences and Interpretations of Brands in Films Revisited," *Journal of Advertising* 28 (1999): 77.

There are two institutions which have been granted the authority to import and distribute foreign films to the Chinese film market: the China Film Group Corporation and the Huaxia Film Distribution Corporation Limited. The former is a state-run film conglomeration which was formed in 1999 and merged the original China Film Corporation with the China Film Co-Production Corporation, Beijing Film Studio, China Film Equipment Corporation Ltd. and four other companies. The latter was established in 2003 as the second film corporation with the qualification to distribute foreign films. I outlined the two primary approaches toward importing foreign films in Chapter One: the flat fee system, otherwise known as the “buyout” method, and the release of films on a revenue-sharing basis. Before 1994, foreign films were bought and imported on a flat fee, meaning that foreign film producers did not share the revenue of imported films no matter how successfully or poorly they performed in terms of box office sales. Most of the films bought on a flat fee were old ones or from socialist countries. The quota system was officially established in 1994 which permitted the importation of foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis. The development of co-productions between China and foreign producers, however, has introduced a third, and much more cooperative, approach to entering the Chinese market.

The history of co-production between China and foreign countries can be traced back to the 1930s. The first co-production between China and the United States was *The 400 Million* (John Fernhout, Joris Ivens, 1939), a documentary about China’s resistance against Japan’s invasion during World War II. The first co-produced feature film was between China and France, *Cerf-Volant du Bout du Monde, a.k.a. The Magic of the Kite* (Roger Pigaut, 1958), a children’s film about a French boy who makes friends with a Chinese child through a kite.³⁶ After *The Magic of the Kite*, China and the Soviet Union co-produced a feature film, *Wind from the East* (Efim Dzigan & Gan Xuewei, 1959). In the following years, China only co-produced a few feature films or documentaries with countries from the socialist camp.³⁷ However, the previous films were made under the banner of the cultural exchange programmes between China and other countries, and were not money making projects. In 1979, Italian filmmakers came to China in an attempt to co-produce a project on *Marco Polo*. As there was no institution to deal with this situation, the China Film Co-Production Corporation was established to

³⁶ Xun Zhang, “Zhongwai hepai dianying: tuiguang zhongguo wenhua de zuihao tongdao (China-Foreign Co-Produced Films: The Best Channel to Promote Chinese Culture),” *people.com.cn*, February 27, 2012, <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/87423/17224822.html>.

³⁷ “Xinzhongguo diyibu yu guowai hepai de gushipian (The First Feature Film Co-produced between China and Foreign Countries),” *China.com.cn*, July 1, 2005, http://www.china.com.cn/zhuanti2005/txt/2005-07/01/content_5904581.htm.

oversee cooperation between Chinese and foreign film studios which led to the production of such films as *Marco Polo* (Giuliano Montaldo, 1982), *The Last Emperor* (Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987), *Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), *Tonkô* (Jun'ya Satô, 1988), *Bethune: The Making of a Hero* (Phillip Borsos, 1990), *The White Countess* (James Ivory, 2005) and *The Painted Veil* (John Curran, 2006).³⁸ However, most of these films could only be considered as assisted productions, as the core production team was from overseas, and the Chinese team was only hired to offer the film locations, equipment, labour forces and other assistance.

In order to promote exchange between China and overseas regions and manage affairs concerning co-production, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT)³⁹ issued *Zhongwai Hezuo Shezhi Dianyingpian Guanli Guiding* (*The Provisions on the Administration of Sino-Foreign Cooperative Production of Films*) in 2004 and revised the regulations in 2016 to define specific provisions for cooperation between China and foreign film companies.

Joint production requires both Chinese and foreign parties to jointly invest in a film, including investing in capital, labour, service and materials; making the film together; and sharing the profit and risk. In addition, the proportion of foreign actors in lead roles cannot exceed two-thirds of the cast.⁴⁰ This mode is the only authentically approved form of co-production. The most tempting point for foreign producers is that if a film could be approved as a joint production, that film will not be counted in the limited quota and foreign studios could receive 43% of the ticket sales. This manner is a shortcut for foreign films to get access to the Chinese film market, and foreign producers have been endeavouring to do joint productions with China, however, under the strict conditions of joint productions, so far, approved China-US joint productions have been quite rare with only *Kung Fu Panda 3* (Alessandro Carloni, Jennifer Yuh Nelson, 2016), *The Great Wall* (Zhang Yimou, 2016) and *The Meg* (John Turteltaub, 2018) in recent years. Furthermore, it is even harder for approved co-productions to win both box office and audience appreciation at the same time, which will be analysed in later pages (pp.158-161).

³⁸ *Beijing Xianggang: Dianying hepai shinian huigu* (Beijing Hong Kong: Ten-Year Review of Film Co-Productions), ed. Yuanying Yang, (Beijing: China Film Press, 2012), 4-5.

³⁹ The SARFT merged with the General Administration of Press and Publication into the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) in 2013, but the SAPPRFT was restructured into National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) and Chinese Film Administration in 2018.

⁴⁰ *Zhongwai Hezuo Shezhi Dianyingpian Guanli Guiding* (*The Provisions on the Administration of Sino-Foreign Cooperative Production of Films*), The SAPPRFT, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.sapprft.gov.cn/sapprft/govpublic/10550/332931.shtml>.

Assisted production is the more favoured option, where the foreign party provides the capital to make the film within the territory of China, and the Chinese party is paid for providing equipment, film locations, venues, labour services and other assistance.⁴¹ These agreements were more prevalent during the early period of China-US co-production, for instance with *Empire of the Sun* (Steven Spielberg, 1987), *The White Countess* (James Ivory, 2005) and *Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation* (Christopher McQuarrie, 2015). The former two films were shot in Shanghai and the Chinese side just provided labour and location services needed in the process of making the films. With regards to the last film, China and Hollywood mainly co-operated in terms of the capital.

Entrusted production means that the foreign party entrusts the Chinese party with making a film within the territory of China, and China does not have the copyright of the film.⁴² The foreign party does not participate in any specific film production procedures. However, entrusted production is the least common mode, because too many uncertainties and risks are involved in the process and producers cannot guarantee they will receive what they expect.

These regulations also apply to the Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR and Taiwan region. In fact, strictly speaking, co-productions between Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR served as a prelude for co-productions between China and overseas regions. Before Britain handed over sovereignty of Hong Kong to Mainland China in 1997, Hong Kong cinema had experienced its golden period; the film industry had successfully exported Kung Fu films and other genres to Hollywood and the rest of the world. In addition, Hong Kong had co-operated with filmmakers from Singapore, Thailand, Japan and other neighbouring countries since the 1950s, accumulating abundant co-production experiences.⁴³ Hong Kong filmmakers initiated contact with the sector in charge of film affairs in Mainland China after the Opening-up and Reform in 1978; they were attracted by the historical sites, natural scenery, low-cost labour and the encouraging attitude toward cooperation between film studios from Hong Kong and Mainland China. They co-operated on a large array of Kung Fu films and costume dramas over the following two decades, including *Shaolin Temple* (Hsin-yen Chang, 1982), *The Burning of Imperial Palace* (Han Hsiang Li, 1983), *Reign behind the Curtain* (Han Hsiang Li, 1983), *Mu Mien Jia Sha* (Siu Ming Tsui, 1985), *Dragon Inn* (Raymond Lee, 1992), the *Wong Fei Hung* series (Hark Tsui, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994), *Fong Sai Yuk* (Corey Yuen, 1992), *King of Beggars*

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Yang, 4.

(Gordon Chan, 1992) and *Ashes of Time* (Wong Kar-Wai, 1994). Hong Kong production companies served as the principal partners, providing the filmmaking team and the capital, and overseeing the production and distribution of the films, whereas Mainland China provided services and assistance, such as labour, equipment and film locations. In fact, through cooperation with the Hong Kong industry, Mainland filmmakers acquired technical knowledge and gained experience in commercial marketing and distribution methods, which has promoted the reform and industrialisation of the film system in Mainland China and laid the foundation for future cooperation with other overseas filmmakers. Hence, it cannot be overstated that co-productions between China and foreign countries arose from the cooperation between Mainland China and the Hong Kong region.

However, from the middle of the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema began to undergo a process of recession. The quality of Hong Kong cinema declined drastically and its box office plummeted severely, mainly due to a desire to achieve quick success and profits and a lack of innovation in terms of filmmaking, as well as the rampant piracy of VCDs in Hong Kong. Thus, Hollywood films increasingly lost market share in the local Hong Kong film market. The most prominent Hong Kong filmmakers and movie stars also went to Hollywood to develop their careers, such as John Woo, Woo-Ping Yuen, Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Michelle Yeoh and Chow Yun Fat. In addition, the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 and the SARS epidemic in 2003 had a detrimental effect on the local film industry. In the meantime, however, the film sector in Mainland China had begun to reform film institutions from 1993. More favourable policies with regards to the film cooperation between Hong Kong and Mainland China were pursued and released. Hong Kong cinema sought revival and innovation, and the industry in Mainland China also hoped to enhance the quality of films and upgrade the film industry through cooperation with Hong Kong. Furthermore, both film industries aimed to counterbalance the hegemony of Hollywood films worldwide, for Mainland China had also begun to encounter pressure from the importation of Hollywood films. On 29 June 2003, the Central Government of Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR government signed the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (hereinafter CEPA),⁴⁴ which contains a variety of favourable policies in terms of trade in goods and services, investment, and economic and

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

technical cooperation between Hong Kong SAR and Mainland China.⁴⁵ According to CEPA, with regards to the provisions on films, films invested and produced by Hong Kong companies are completely considered as Hong Kong films, but if censored and approved by the film sector in Mainland China, they will not be limited by the quota but still will be imported as overseas films into the Mainland film market. If no less than one-third of the main performers in a film are from Mainland China, and as long as the plot and the characters in the film are associated with Mainland China, once past the censorship, the film will be considered as a co-production and can be distributed as a domestic film in the Mainland film market.⁴⁶ The difference between the two film types lies only in the revenue-sharing proportions: Hong Kong films can obtain 25% of the box office revenue like other imported overseas films, while co-productions between Hong Kong SAR and Mainland China can share 43%. CEPA has heralded a new stage in the cooperation between Hong Kong cinema and the Chinese film industry. Furthermore, a series of supplements to CEPA have been signed over the following years, which refer to a range of preferential policies with regards to Hong Kong investment in the construction of Mainland film theatres, the establishment of companies to distribute Mainland films and engagement in the marketing of audio-visual products.

In fact, as the film market underwent continuous reform and growth in Mainland China, in the first decade of the 21st century, cooperation between Hong Kong SAR and Mainland China started to change subtly. Filmmakers and capital from Mainland China began to play a more prominent role in the negotiation of co-production deals. The most representative example is *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2002), which brought together the most popular and talented actors and actresses from Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR — namely Jet Li, Tony Leung, Maggie Cheung, Donnie Yen, Zhang Ziyi and Chen Daoming — with both the Hong Kong and Mainland China production companies jointly investing in the film. The director, Zhang Yimou, who has won prizes from the Berlin, Venice and Cannes International Film Festivals, is one of the most prestigious directors from Mainland China. *Hero* was based on the “high concept” Hollywood production model, with a big budget, star-studded cast, splendid visual effects and magnificent spectacles, as well as pervasive marketing and promotion. Within the high-concept formula of making this film, industry observer, Ting Wang, believes “marketing tactics were

⁴⁵ “Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA),” Trade and Industry Department, the Government of the HKSAR, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.tid.gov.hk/english/cepa/index.html>.

⁴⁶ *Beijing Xianggang: Dianying hepai shinian huigu* (Beijing Hong Kong: Ten-Year Review of Film Co-Productions), ed. Yuanying Yang, (Beijing: China Film Press, 2012), 20.

crucial to *Hero*'s success."⁴⁷ It is reported that the producer and distributor of *Hero*, Beijing New Picture Film Corporation spent unprecedented USD 2 million on various promotion activities, such as broadcasting film trailer on television for the first time, posters, billboards, on-line pop-up advertisements, cell phone messaging. In addition, grand premieres were held in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing and Super Brand Mall in Shanghai, which were also unprecedented, with 700 Chinese and foreign journalists and other 300 distinguished guests being invited, along with 100 "soldiers" in Qin-style costumes as in the film.⁴⁸ The film reaped RMB 250 million ticket sales in the Chinese film market, ranking at the top of the box office list in 2002 and accounting for almost one-third of that year's box office. Furthermore, when *Hero* was released in the United States in 2004, it ranked at the top of the box office list in its opening week,⁴⁹ an unprecedented record for a Chinese co-production. This was the first time that Zhang Yimou had directed a martial arts blockbuster and made a tremendous commercial success. Even *Time Asia* asserts that "On the shoulders of *Hero* ride the hopes of all Asian cinemas."⁵⁰ *Hero* stands as a landmark in the process of the industrialisation and commercialisation of the Chinese film market.

Responding to the success of *Hero*, in the early stages after the CEPA, co-productions mainly concentrated on martial arts films, the genre Hong Kong filmmakers were most familiar with and skilled in. A series of martial arts blockbusters emerged with similar configurations, such as *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004), *Kung Fu Hustle* (Stephen Chow, 2004), *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* (He Ping, 2004), *The Promise* (Chen Kaige, 2005), *The Banquet* (Feng Xiaogang, 2006), *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang Yimou, 2006), *Huo Yuanjia* (Ronny Yu, 2006), *The Warlords* (Peter Ho-Sun Chan & Wai Man Yip, 2007), *Painted Skin* (Gordon Chan, 2008), *Red Cliff I & II* (John Woo, 2008 & 2009) and *Bodyguards and Assassins* (Teddy Chan, 2009). The directors were either from Mainland China, such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, He Ping and Feng Xiaogang, or from Hong Kong SAR, such as John Woo, Gordon Chan, Peter Ho-Sun Chan and Teddy Chan, and the actors and actresses were from Mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, Taiwan region and even South Korea and Japan. All of these films both gained considerable box office revenue and generated huge influence in the year when

⁴⁷ Ting Wang, "Understanding Local Reception of Globalized Cultural Products in the Context of the International Cultural Economy: A Case Study on the *Hero* and *Daggers* in China," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12 (2009): 302.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ "Hero," Box Office Mojo, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=weekly&id=hero02.htm>.

⁵⁰ Stephen Short and Susan Jakes, "Making of A Hero," *TIME Asia*, January 21, 2002, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1962239,00.html>.

they were released. As a result of such co-productions, Hong Kong filmmakers have gained a deeper understanding about the cultural values in Mainland China, and have gradually explored the features of the film market and the taste of the audience in Mainland China; since then, co-productions between Hong Kong SAR and Mainland China have extended to more diverse genres, such as gangster films, romance, comedy, art-house films and even musicals.

Film co-production between Mainland China and Taiwan region has also entered a new phase. In order to deepen economic cooperation between Mainland China and Taiwan region, the Cross-Straits Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (hereinafter ECFA) was signed on 29 June 2010. As with the provisions in the CEPA, in order for the film to be approved and censored as a co-production and thus not be included in the fixed quota for imported films, the performers must be in accordance with certain proportions between Mainland China and Taiwan region and the story must relate to Mainland China. Before the ECFA, Taiwanese films were imported as overseas films into the Mainland film market. The policies outlined above are conducive to a deeper cooperation among Chinese-language speaking regions and also enhance mutual understanding and communication between the various film sectors and the cultural industries in the Greater China regions.

Since China became the second largest film market in the world in 2012, in terms of yearly Chinese national box office revenue, only one Hollywood-produced film, *Transformers 4*, has been a top-grossing film on the box office list between 2013 and 2018. Strictly speaking, this film was an assisted film since it incorporated Chinese film locations, Chinese performers and Chinese product placements, and included plots set in Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR. During the rest of the six-year time period, the box office champions were either a domestic film, such as *Wolf Warrior 2* (Wu Jing) in 2017, or a co-produced film between Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR, such as *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons* (Stephen Chow) in 2013, *Monster Hunt* (Raman Hui) in 2015,⁵¹ *The Mermaid* (Stephen Chow) in 2016 and *Operation Red Sea* (Dante Lam) in 2018. In the past six years, the number of Chinese domestic films and co-productions between Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR have accounted for 60%-70% of the top grossing films. Domestic films and co-produced films between Mainland China and Hong Kong SAR have thus become the core force in the mainstream film market

⁵¹ There exists a dispute about the box office champion in 2015 in the Chinese film market probably due to the mode of calculating the box office. According to the statistics from film data website Box Office Mojo, the box office champion in 2015 was *Furious 7*, and the second was *Monster Hunt*, but on Chinese film data website endata, the first and the second were switched with each other. However, the rankings in other years are consistent with Box Office Mojo.

and in the Chinese film industry. The genres of these successful films — fantasy, action and adventure — correspond to the most popular Hollywood blockbusters. Domestic films and co-productions within the Greater China regions possess clear potential, therefore, to compete with the Hollywood blockbusters and now pose a challenge in terms of market share to the hegemonic position of Hollywood films on the Chinese yearly box office list.

In view of the rapidly changing situation in the Chinese film market, Hollywood has started to actively look for opportunities to cooperate with Chinese film companies. Nevertheless, even if a film qualifies as a co-production and is therefore exempt from the quota system and will receive 43% of the total revenue, it still faces significant challenges. The film must bridge barriers in terms of culture, cope with copyright issues, and work well both in the Chinese and the international markets.

First, language will always pose a problem in Chinese-Hollywood film co-productions. Foreign audiences may struggle to watch a film made in Chinese that requires subtitles, while a film made largely in English would generate serious cultural conflicts for Chinese audiences. French director Jean-Jacques Annaud, who has considerable experience in co-producing films with different countries, holds that a film must be made in the local language: “in my films, I will collect various dubbing languages, Finnish, Danish, Indonesian, Malay, and we cannot only focus on the artistic problems. We should also be careful about language problems.”⁵² With regards to the exportation of Chinese films to other countries, he also proposed a solution: “If a Chinese film wants to be successful in the United States, it definitely should have an English version even if this film was made in Chinese.”⁵³ In fact, Annaud co-produced *Wolf Totem* (2015) and used Chinese actors whose characters speak Chinese in the film. After the film was released in Chinese theatres, it received a good reception from critics and customers alike. Another director, Renny Harlin, holds a similar opinion. He cooperated with Jackie Chan in a co-produced film, *Skiptrace* (2016), and stated in an interview that “I felt like the Chinese actors were stronger in their scenes when they were speaking their native language, so I chose to do those with subtitles. I thought the performances were much stronger and I felt that it was justified that when there’s Chinese people with Chinese people talking, it makes sense that they

⁵² Translated by the author based on the Chinese article. Tiandong Yang, “Jiedu Ba Da Zhongmei Hepaipian Xiangmu Qibu zhi Lu Kun nanchongchong (Interpreting Eight China-US Co-productions, Seven Steps of Difficulties),” Shanghai Culture Assets and Equity Exchange, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.shcaee.com/appReleaseInfo.action;jsessionid=A6C61F04FF5A13B81E350E1391310C76?id=201002360>.

⁵³ Ibid.

use their language.”⁵⁴ Terence Chang, John Woo’s producer, contends that

as far as co-produced films, the filmmakers cannot accommodate themselves to both Chinese and international markets and audiences. For example, if a co-produced film suits the taste of an American audience, of course, the filmmakers should focus more on the American market. If the co-produced film is a Chinese-language film, of course, filmmakers should concentrate more on the Chinese market. When we make a co-produced film, we should distinguish the major market and the minor market. It is really hard to give the same consideration to both markets.⁵⁵

As the filmmakers’ statements indicate, the choice of language, while crucial to the success of a co-produced film, does not completely overcome the difficult problem of satisfying local and international audiences. Thus, in terms of the selection of subject and language, choosing one major target market can increase the possibility of a co-production’s success. For instance, *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2002), which was filmed with Chinese language and for the Chinese film market, did not intend to cater to the American market yet managed to gain a positive reputation and considerable ticket sales in the US. Thus, before making a co-produced film, the language choice of a film is the priority to be decided, which is closely related to whether it will succeed in its future main market.

Apart from language choice for co-productions, another challenge is to incorporate Chinese elements into a co-produced film appropriately and suitably, as the Chinese government has strict requirements for co-productions. Yet so far, a few co-produced films have managed to create a natural synthesis between Western stories and Chinese plots.

In the initial stages of co-productions between China and the US, action or Kung Fu films were mainstream. Because of the success of the films of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan and Jet Li in Hollywood, Kung Fu films were the most familiar Chinese genre for American audiences; producers, therefore, tended to regard this genre as the safest recipe for both markets, such as *The Forbidden Kingdom* (Rob Minkoff, 2008), *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (Rob Cohen, 2008) and *The Karate Kid* (Harald Zwart, 2010). This was proven to be the case in the US where the returns at the box office for the above films surpassed USD 100 million, with the exception of *The Forbidden Kingdom*. However, in the Chinese film market, the performance of *The Karate Kid* was far from satisfactory. This indicates that one form of

⁵⁴ Fred Topel, “Interview: Skiptrace Director Renny Harlin on Working with Jackie Chan and Chinese vs. American Filmmaking,” *slashfilm*, August 29, 2016, <https://www.slashfilm.com/skiptrace-renny-harlin-interview/3/>.

⁵⁵ Translated by the author based on the Chinese article. Yang, “Jiedu Ba Da Zhongmei Hepaipian Xiangmu Qibu zhi Lu Kunnanchongchong (Interpreting Eight China-US Co-productions, Seven Steps of Difficulties).”

storytelling may not fit into two different film markets as the tastes and cultural backgrounds of the audiences differ. It may be possible to attract an audience from both markets, but it remains challenging.

Hollywood films have tried to qualify as co-productions by inviting renowned Chinese actors and actresses to make cameo appearances in blockbusters that have been customised for the Chinese market. However, this operation does not meet the requirement of an official co-production as regulated by the Chinese film regulating sector. *Looper* (Rian Johnson, 2012) and *Iron Man 3* (Shane Black, 2013) are two typical examples. They just wished to qualify as co-productions by circumventing the quota limitation through adding some Chinese faces in several scenes or shots. However, there were no cameo appearances for Chinese actors or actresses in the internationally released versions of these films. Thus, they did not receive the status of co-production and were classified accordingly as foreign films imported on a revenue-sharing basis or on a flat fee.

DreamWorks sought a better way to make co-produced films with China. Jeffrey Katzenberg, the CEO of DreamWorks, saw the potential in the Chinese film market and in 2012 partnered with China Media Capital (CMC), Shanghai Media Group (SMG) and Shanghai Alliance Investment Limited (SAIL) to establish Oriental DreamWorks in Shanghai. These Chinese companies held a stake of approximately 55% in Oriental DreamWorks, while DreamWorks Animation held 45%.⁵⁶ And then, the *Financial Times* reports that, “Universal inherited the 45% stake in Oriental DreamWorks, when it acquired Jeffrey Katzenberg’s DreamWorks — the studio behind the *Shrek* and *Kung Fu Panda* films — in 2016 for USD\$ 3.8 billion.”⁵⁷ However, “Universal Pictures is on course to offload its stake in Oriental DreamWorks following disagreements over strategy with one of the company’s other main backers, China Media Capital.”⁵⁸ What resulted was that CMC Capital Partners, previously known as China Media Capital, took full ownership of Oriental DreamWorks and relaunched it as the 100% Chinese-owned Pearl Studio.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ “Rising Dreams in the Orient: Oriental DreamWorks to Establish Headquarters in Xuhui,” *prnewswire*, August 6, 2012, <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/rising-dreams-in-the-orient-oriental-dreamworks-to-establish-headquarters-in-xuhui-165209436.html>.

⁵⁷ Henny Sender, Matthew Garrahan, and Charles Clover, “Oriental DreamWorks at Centre of US–China Split over Strategy,” *Financial Times*, September 4, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/65f87d28-8f3d-11e7-a352-e46f43c5825d>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Amid Amidi, “Oriental DreamWorks Relaunched as 100% Chinese-Owned Pearl Studio,” *Cartoon Brew*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.cartoonbrew.com/business/oriental-dreamworks-relaunches-100-chinese-owned-pearl-studio-156372.html>.

The first co-produced film made by Oriental DreamWorks was *Kung Fu Panda 3*. The film was considered to be a domestic release and did not, therefore, occupy the quota for revenue-sharing films; as a result, it could be released during the Chinese New Year holiday period. *Kung Fu Panda 3* reaped about USD 154 million in ticket receipts,⁶⁰ becoming the top-grossing animation released in Chinese theatres, though it was surpassed by *Zootopia* (Byron Howard, Rich Moore, Jared Bush, 2016) later that year. For a number of reasons, *Kung Fu Panda 3* is one of the few successful attempts at co-producing films between China and Hollywood. Firstly, *Kung Fu Panda* and *Kung Fu Panda 2* had achieved great success in terms of box office revenue, popularity and reputation, which laid a solid and excellent foundation for the new sequel. Secondly, *Kung Fu Panda 3* continued the exquisite production of the previous two films, as previously discussed in Chapter 3. The Chinese production crew could offer more advice and ideas in line with the perspective of the film's story in order to incorporate traditional Chinese culture more appropriately and meticulously and make it more suitable for the aesthetic taste of Chinese audiences. Toby Miller notes that “international co-productions cross-breed cultural preferences in order to position films on multiple national screens.”⁶¹ Thus *Kung Fu Panda 3* chooses two popular cultural elements — panda and Kung Fu — favoured by both Chinese and Western audiences to create a new hybridised image, a panda who performs Kung Fu. Unexpectedly, this film has won over both Chinese and Western film markets.

Seeking co-productions is not only the method adopted by Hollywood studios to access the Chinese film market. China, of course, is also seeking international influence and exporting Chinese culture, though the current cooperation between China and Hollywood is mainly in terms of capital. Co-productions supply an effective means for the Chinese government and Chinese filmmakers to acquire knowledge and experience with the advanced technology, industrial systems and film-making techniques of Hollywood, and to accelerate the development of market mechanism to increase the international influence of Chinese films and promote Chinese culture and values abroad. As a result, more co-productions have been approved by the Chinese government in recent years. In addition, more cases of acquisitions and transnational financial co-operations have also appeared between Chinese entertainment companies and foreign companies.

⁶⁰ “Chinese Box Office for 2016.” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 10, 2020, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2016/?area=CN&ref_=bo_y1_table_5.

⁶¹ Toby Miller et al., *Global Hollywood 2* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 269.

In 2012, according to *Reuters*, “Chinese conglomerate Dalian Wanda Group agreed to buy AMC Entertainment for USD \$2.6 billion, including financing its debt, making it the biggest theatre operator in the United States.”⁶² In 2015, Wanda Cinema Line Corp. acquired Hoyts Group, Australia’s second largest chain of film theatres.⁶³ The following year, Wanda paid USD 3.5 billion for Legendary Entertainment.⁶⁴ Wanda is the first Chinese company to own a major US studio and also has plans to pursue the acquisition of one of the “Big Six” Hollywood film companies. Wang Jianlin, the founder and chairman of the board of Wanda, states, “My goal is to buy Hollywood companies and bring their technology and capability to China.”⁶⁵ In November 2016, AMC Theatres, which is owned by the Wanda Group, completed its acquisition of London-based Odeon & UCI Cinemas, the largest movie exhibitor in Europe, from private equity firm Terra Firma in a deal valued at about USD 1.2 billion.⁶⁶ In January 2017, Wanda added a Scandinavian arm to its global cinema empire with the £745 million takeover of Stockholm-based Nordic Cinema Group.⁶⁷

In March 2015, Huayi Brothers Media, the leading private-sector film conglomerate in China, announced that it would co-produce 18 films in the following three years with STX Entertainment, which was founded by veteran Hollywood producer Robert Simonds in 2014. Almost at the same time, Hunan TV, the second-largest broadcaster in China, reached a deal with Lionsgate Films. “The \$1.5 billion deal will see the Chinese firm paying 25% of the production costs of at least 50 Lionsgate films in the next three years in exchange for 25% of all returns.”⁶⁸ Also in 2015, Chinese studio Bona Film Group signed a deal to invest USD 235 million in a series of Hollywood tent pole movies from 20th Century Fox.⁶⁹ These films

⁶² Terril Yue Jones and Thomas Denny, “China’s Wanda to Buy U.S. Cinema Chain AMC for \$2.6 billion,” *Reuters*, May 21, 2012, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-amcentertainment/chinas-wanda-to-buy-u-s-cinema-chain-amc-for-2-6-billion-idUSBRE84K03K20120521>.

⁶³ Patrick Frater, “China’s Wanda Buys Australia’s Hoyts Multiplex Chain,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, June 2, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/film/asia/chinas-wanda-buys-australias-hoyts-1201510298/>.

⁶⁴ Patrick Brzeski, “China’s Wanda Planning Two Billion-Dollar Film Deals this Year, Chairman Says,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 23, 2016, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/chinas-wanda-planning-two-billion-921985>.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Georg Szalai, “AMC Theatres Close Odeon & UCI Acquisition to Become Largest Exhibitor in Europe, World,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 30, 2016, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/amc-theatres-closes-odeon-uci-acquisition-become-largest-exhibitor-europe-world-951348>.

⁶⁷ Christopher Williams, “Wanda Buys Scandinavian Cinema Chain Nordic to Expand Odeon Empire,” *The Telegraph*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/01/23/wanda-buys-scandinavian-cinema-chain-nordic-expand-odeon-empire/>.

⁶⁸ “China’s Film Industry: A Blockbuster in the Making,” *Knowledge@Wharton*, February 17, 2016, <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/lights-china-action-how-china-is-getting-into-the-global-entertainment-business/>.

⁶⁹ Patrick Frater, “China’s Bona Film Invests \$235 Million in Fox Movie Slate,” *Variety*, November 4, 2015, <https://variety.com/2015/biz/asia/bona-film-fox-investment-1201633139/>.

included *The Martian*, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *War of the Planet of the Apes*, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children* and *Independence Day: Resurgence*.⁷⁰ In February 2016, Perfect World Pictures, a maker of films, television programs and online games based in Beijing, completed a USD 500 million debt-and-equity deal with Universal Pictures, which covers the co-financing of 50 films over the following five years. Perfect World is expected to receive a 25% share of most films released by Universal Pictures.⁷¹

The Great Wall (Zhang Yimou, 2016) was the first mega co-production between the United States and China after Wanda's acquisition of Legendary Entertainment. It was directed by Zhang Yimou, one of the most celebrated directors in China and one of the most renowned Chinese directors in the West, and starred Matt Damon, Willem Dafoe and Pedro Pascal along with many Chinese celebrities, such as Andy Lau, Zhang Hanyu, Jing Tian, Lu Han, Kenny Lin, Karry Wang, Eddie Peng, Huang Xuan and Ryan Zheng. The film made about USD 170 million in the Chinese market, but only around USD 45.5 million in the American film market.⁷² Considering its production budget of USD 150 million, its final box office total of USD 334.9 million⁷³ does not match the success of a Hollywood commercial blockbuster. The fundamental reason lies in the story itself.

Firstly, killing monsters is not a popular and traditional subject in the context of Chinese cinema, though it is a common subject in Hollywood films. Moreover, the monster, Taotie (Figure 39), does not appear particularly Chinese in look or design, even though it is drawn from ancient Chinese mythology, *Shanhaijing* (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*). According to the description in *Shanhaijing*, Taotie possesses a goat's body, human face, tiger's teeth, and human hands, with its eyes under its armpits. However, the image in the film does not differ notably from other monsters in traditional Hollywood monster films, such as *Aliens*, *Independence Day*, *Godzilla* and *Jurassic Park*, which conventionally combine the features of a dinosaur and a giant lizard. Chinese netizens have redesigned Taotie accordingly (Figure 40).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ James Rainey, "Universal and Perfect World Pictures of China Complete \$500 Million Film Slate Deal," *Variety*, February 17, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/biz/asia/universal-perfect-world-deal-complete-1201707633/>.

⁷² "The Great Wall," Box Office Mojo, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl2706802433/weekend/>.

⁷³ Ibid.



Figure 39



Figure 40

Secondly, similar flaws are evident in the narrative and characterisation, which often lacks explanation for important events and changes in the motivation and behaviours of the characters. For instance, the mercenary William Garin (Matt Damon) plans to steal the “black powder” and return to Europe, but after Commander Lin Mae recounts the deeds of devotion and the spirit of the Nameless troops, he unexpectedly decides to stay and resist the marauding Taoties, even sacrificing his life. This kind of major twist is too abrupt. Film reviewer Helen Roxburgh raises some questions concerning the film: “*The Great Wall* leaves you the feeling that it must be a metaphor — after all, the Taotie were, according to legend, brought down by their own greed — but hazy about what exactly the moral is. Is it a caution against marauding

foreigners and invading foreign values? A reminder about the power of collectivism over individualism?”⁷⁴ Roxburgh pointed out the weaknesses of the film clearly. Due to lacking specific theme and reasonable plot development, this film is just a typical demonstration of spectacle which Director Zhang Yimou creates under the cloak of the Western monster invasion story. Similar to Zhang Yimou’s previous Chinese blockbusters, *Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004) and *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), this film shows audiences several set pieces of grand spectacle, such as the fog-wreathed Great Wall, the highly ingenious weapons, five armies of neatly-ordered troops who are distinguished by different colours and represented by different animals, and floating sky lanterns filling the sky. Thus, *The Great Wall* attaches importance to the grand visual spectacle at the expense of telling a good story. It could be understood that the production team’s intention was to appeal to both Chinese and Western audiences. They inserted a Western subject into a Chinese-background story, demonstrating Chinese cultures and values to a Western audience. However, as discussed earlier in this section, if one film wants to cater to both Chinese and American film markets at the same time, the result is usually not very satisfactory.

The film was an aesthetic failure yet was a success in terms of marketing, production and financial cooperation, which is commercially and politically important. The significance of the film lies in implementing a new cooperation mode in terms of production crew and capital in the co-production of films between China and Hollywood. It was the biggest budget ever in a high concept co-production between China and the United States, costing around USD 150 million. It was the first time that a Chinese director directed what turned out to be the largest-scale English-language Chinese-Hollywood coproduction ever with a mostly A-list Chinese cast in the leading roles. It was also the first time that Hollywood actively approached a Chinese director to discuss the collaboration. Matt Damon expressed in an interview with *Straits Times* that “this is also the first time we’ve seen any Chinese-Hollywood film on this scale. I think everyone on this project, whether he was from the Hollywood or Chinese side, knew how unique this opportunity was. It’s like one giant experiment, but I think everyone went into it with a real sense of optimism.”⁷⁵ On the whole, it qualifies as a typical popcorn film produced and based on the Hollywood industrial assembly line, possessing all the elements of a megahit

⁷⁴ Helen Roxburgh, “The Great Wall Review – Matt Damon Epic Delivers Spectacle but not Soul,” *The Guardian*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/dec/16/the-great-wall-review-matt-damon-zhang-yimou>.

⁷⁵ Waiyee Yip, “Zhang Yimou Turns Director-for-Hire for *The Great Wall* to Export Chinese Culture,” *Straits Times*, December 28, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/entertainment/monsters-and-mayhem-on-the-great-wall-china-hollywood-deals>.

blockbuster, including a simple story, big budget, A-list stars, magnificent visual effects and grand spectacles.

The film brought the Chinese-Hollywood cooperation to a new stage. For in the past, China acted as an assistant role in its cooperation with Hollywood, generally offering film locations, equipment or labour services. This time, under the mode of further cooperation between China and Hollywood, because the director is from China, China has the power of discourse in shooting this film to some extent though still under the strict Hollywood's production mode, which indicates an enhancement of China's soft power. However, many problems are also revealed in the process, especially the creation of the screenplay and how Chinese values could be instilled in a conventional Western monster story harmoniously. In addition, Chinese and American crew need accommodate to each other's working style and rhythm, conquering each other's barriers in cultural conception and language.

In a word, the film is a pioneer in exploring the new coproduction mode between China and Hollywood within the context of the US and China being the two largest film markets in the world. The director said that he believes the cooperation mode of *The Great Wall* will be a trend in the future international film making business, and that there will be more collaborations between the two largest film markets in the world.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, through the film, the question of solving the contradiction between art and commerce is exposed again, which is to give equal consideration to both Chinese story and Hollywood style. I believe this situation will be improved gradually through more and more cooperations. Still, this film represents a courageous trial of a cooperation mode in greater depth for both Chinese and Hollywood filmmakers. It could pave the way for more thorough cooperation between China and Hollywood in the future.

After *The Great Wall* had tested the waters, *Pacific Rim* (Guillermo del Toro, 2013) produced its sequel, *Pacific Rim: Uprising* (Steven S. DeKnight, 2018) as a co-production between China and the United States, due to Wanda's acquisition of Legendary and the incorporation of Chinese story elements and a Chinese production crew in the film. However, it still did not receive a positive response in terms of box office revenue and reputation from either the Chinese or American film market. It received only USD 59.8 million in the American film market, with the Chinese film market performing somewhat better than its counterpart by

⁷⁶ Ibid.

taking in USD 99.5 million.⁷⁷ Thus, it still cannot be considered as a successful co-production which can cater to both Chinese and American audiences. There was a relatively successful China-US co-production released in 2018, *The Meg* (Jon Turteltaub, 2018). It made about USD 145 million from the American film market and about USD 153 million from the Chinese film market.⁷⁸ The success of the film was primarily based on a mature and successful screenplay. According to the Chinese producer of the film, Jiang Wei, after he read the novel in 2014, he and his team spent two and a half years preparing the screenplay and adapting the novel with a Hollywood screenplay team. After the screenplay was completed, he and his team started to look for a cooperative company from Hollywood, and at last, Warner Bros. was attracted by the screenplay.⁷⁹ The Chinese side has played a role equivalent to that of Hollywood in the process of completing this project, ranging from screenplay creation and film shooting to post-production and global distribution. China has achieved deep participation in this project, realising an authentic coproduction with Hollywood. It has offered a good start and set an example for future collaborations between China and Hollywood.

Out of the increasing number of co-productions between China and the United States in recent years, *Kung Fu Panda 3* and *The Meg* have been relatively successful, whereas *The Great Wall* and *Pacific Rim: Uprising* have not. The most significant conclusion to be drawn from these attempts is that it is important to tell a good story that can balance the proportion of Chinese and Western elements harmoniously and thus conform to the film-viewing tastes of both Eastern and Western audiences. Although in the process of co-producing China-US films companies have encountered many problems in terms of the creation of the screenplay, the compatible fusion of different cultures and divergences in film production modes, collaborations between Chinese and American filmmakers are likely to become a new trend in the international filmmaking business. From the Chinese perspective, collaboration with Hollywood is a long-term strategy, which in Chinese is referred as “jie chuan chu hai (going out to sea via borrowing a boat).” In her interpretation of this strategy, Wendy Su states, “by taking advantage of Hollywood resources, China hopes to transform its domestic film industry,

⁷⁷ “Pacific Rim: Uprising,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl3515188993/weekend/>.

⁷⁸ “The Meg,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/release/rl1781040129/weekend/>.

⁷⁹ “Zhongmei Hepaipian yaoxiang Hepai, Juchisha de Chenggong Nengfou Fuzhi? (If China-US Co-productions want to be in Harmony, whether the Success of *The Meg* could be replicated?),” *xinhuanet.com*, August 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/ent/2018-08/24/c_1123319360.htm.

export Chinese culture, and enhance its soft power in the world.”⁸⁰ Chris Homewood also points out that “the co-production model offers the Chinese authorities an opportunity to use Hollywood global reach to transmit favourable narratives and images about China to the Western (and Westernised) world.”⁸¹ Cooperation with Hollywood is also a shortcut to enhance the Chinese film industry in terms of production, distribution and exhibition. From the perspective of Hollywood, China-US cooperation is one of the main methods to further open the Chinese film market and achieve higher market profits, and Hollywood has begun to actively research ways of using an appropriate cooperation mode. In China-US media power dynamics, the power balance is gradually shifting to the Chinese side mainly due to the booming Chinese film market. As Aynne Kokas asserts, “the distribution of power underlying Sino-US film collaboration structures maps onto the complex, evolving relationship between Hollywood and China.”⁸² Stanley Rosen, an expert in Chinese politics and Chinese media, believes that “[the China-US collaboration] is a win-win situation...because the China market is really incredibly taking off and Hollywood has a real interest in that...Hollywood has what China lacks, which is storytelling ability, marketing, distribution.”⁸³ But it needs to be noted that the storytelling ability should refer to the ability to tell conventional Hollywood-style stories rather than stories suitable for co-produced films. Because the previous examples have indicated that Chinese and Hollywood filmmakers still have a long way to go to work out compelling stories compatible for co-productions between the two sides. They need to constantly do experiments and adjust each other. It is a process of trial and error before finding a cure for successful co-produced films. Nonetheless, the coproduction mode is a reciprocal mode, in which both Chinese and Hollywood filmmakers can achieve what they need. China can buy expertise in the filmmaking business and export Chinese culture, and Hollywood can benefit financially and commercially. Successful co-productions which are popular with both Chinese and American audiences not only can offer another method for Hollywood to circumvent China’s cultural policies and gain access to the Chinese film market, but also can communicate authentic Chinese culture, change foreign peoples’ stereotypical conceptions toward China and Chinese people and enhance China’s soft power in the world.

⁸⁰ Wendy Su, “A Brave New World? – Understanding US-China Coproductions: Collaboration, Conflicts, Obstacles,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34 (2017): 485.

⁸¹ Chris Homewood, “*Transformers 4*: China is Using Hollywood to Take on the World,” *The Conversation*, July 4, 2014, <https://theconversation.com/transformers-4-china-is-using-hollywood-to-take-on-the-world-28817>.

⁸² Aynne Kokas, “Predicting Volatility between China and Hollywood: Using Network Management to Understand Sino–US Film Collaboration,” *Global Media and Communication* 14 (2018): 243.

⁸³ “China Buys Soft Power with Hard Cash in Hollywood,” *South China Morning Post*, March 15, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/1925692/china-buys-soft-power-hard-cash-hollywood>.

Conclusion

The previous chapters have illustrated the communication and interaction between China and Hollywood in terms of the cultural policies regulated by China for importing Hollywood films, Hollywood's expansion in the global film market, and Hollywood's strategies to circumvent these policies. The complicated interplay between China and Hollywood is ongoing and ever changing. As I complete this thesis, a new Disney film with a Chinese theme is due to be released, *Mulan* (Niki Caro, 2020), a live action version of the animated film *Mulan* (Tony Bancroft & Barry Cook, 1998) from the 1990s. Originally, the film was scheduled to be released on March 27, however, the sudden outbreak of Covid-19 has become a pandemic and severely impacted the global film industry. Almost all scheduled films have been postponed, including the live action *Mulan*, which was first postponed to July 24 then to August 21 and then was postponed again. For now, the specific schedule has not been released due to the current pandemic situation. Thus, how the Chinese story and Chinese culture will be represented in the new live action *Mulan* remains unknown until it is released. Nonetheless, this new film will still exemplify the intertwined relationship of China and Hollywood.

The first promotional poster of the live action *Mulan* pays tribute to the animated *Mulan* (Figures 41 & 42). Both posters combine a girl's face with a soldier's face and create a strong graphic continuity between the two films in terms of marketing, iconography and theme. The new poster is a smart commercial strategy. It will easily remind audiences of the animated version of *Mulan* through similar composition to the old poster, provoking their sentiments towards Mulan. In the meantime, it is a strong statement of artistic identity and continuity. In the new poster, Mulan's girl face and soldier face directly reflect the main storyline of Mulan joining the army instead of her father. And compared to the slight smiling face of the animated Mulan, the more determined expression of the live action Mulan conveys her fortitude, resoluteness, and courage, which are the core spirits of Mulan in Chinese traditional culture. It could also be interpreted as a kind of symbol of the split in the Western world regarding whether to make compromises due to commercial profits or maintain its conventional model of producing films.



Figure 41

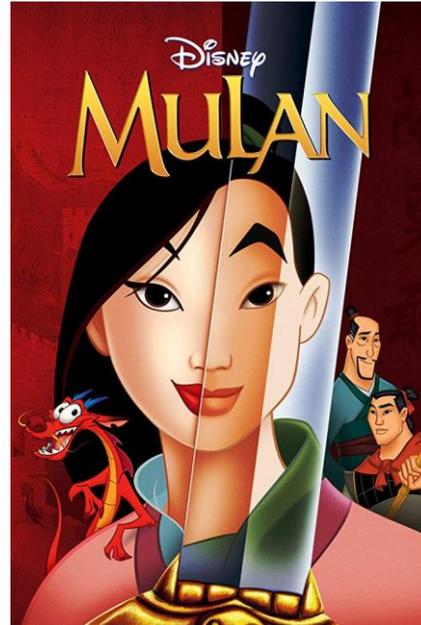


Figure 42

The content of the film has been unveiled slightly through its official teaser and trailer. There are some divergences and improvements relating to the faithful representation of Chinese culture compared with the animated *Mulan*. This is likely due to the fact that the burgeoning Chinese film market and increasing international influence of China have urged Hollywood to represent the Chinese story more squarely and objectively. The theme of the original ballad, loyalty to one's country and filial piety to one's parents, is conveyed clearly and accurately. Mulan decides to enlist in the military largely due to her motivation to save her ailing father from being conscripted into the army and to protect her family rather than to realise her self-value. The cast, too, corresponds more to the aesthetics of Chinese audiences. The film has an all ethnically Chinese cast rather than whitewashing non-Caucasian characters.¹ However, Mulan's exaggerated make-up when she meets the matchmaker still casts an Orientalist cloud on this film. Some details have also been changed. The ancestors' guardian is now a phoenix rather than a dragon, a traditional symbol of empresses or imperial females in ancient China. According to Mulan's father, the phoenix is the emperor's guardian and protector and she is both beautiful and strong, which reflects Mulan's mission and fate to some degree.

The trailer seems to indicate that the film is more geared to a Chinese audience rather than just being a Chinese shell with a Western core. It is a more faithful representation of Chinese

¹ A recent negative example is *Ghost in the Shell* (Rupert Sanders, 2017), which casts almost all white actors in the film adapted from a Japanese comic.

values and a realistic portrayal of Chinese culture. The director has also stated, “the live-action is based on that inspirational Chinese ballad and on the animated Disney classic.”² Thus, the live action *Mulan* appears more authentically Chinese in its cultural references and attentiveness and respect to local detail. However, it is still a mediated version that is a product of the global film industry. It is the perfect example of the crosscultural transaction between China and Hollywood.

On the one hand, Hollywood has followed its conventional market strategies of producing a Chinese-themed film. It has applied what it has learned from previous experiences to this film production, such as having an all ethnically Chinese cast and antique Chinese film locations. However, the live action *Mulan* is distinct from previous Chinese-themed Hollywood films. The story of Mulan joining the army in place of her ailing father is well-known to every household in China. The heroic deeds and spirit of China’s legendary female warrior, Mulan, have embodied two of the most significant virtues in China: being loyal to one’s country and showing filial piety to one’s parents, which have inspired Chinese people for hundreds of years. The animated *Mulan* did not receive positive responses for not highlighting the two points when it was released in China 20 years ago. Thus, Disney has treated the live action film discreetly in terms of casting, plots, theme and production design. In addition, from the trailer, the live action *Mulan* looks to be a martial arts epic blockbuster rather than a musical animation, which aims to appeal to both the Chinese and Western markets. After all, the most renowned and profitable genre of Chinese films in the American market so far has been martial arts films. Moreover, as a film genre that originated in China, martial arts films can always catch the eye of Chinese audiences.

On the other hand, the live action *Mulan* has shown another dimension of the relationship between China and Hollywood. It is not a simple Chinese story remade within the Western model. For Western audiences, the story of Mulan manifests a girl’s power, responsibility and value. The worldwide “Me too” movement and Disney’s *Frozen* (Chris Buck & Jennifer Lee, 2013), praising girls’ self-reliance and capability, echo the tendency to emphasise a girl’s power in current society. Even in Marvel’s or DC’s superhero universe, we can see a rising momentum of producing female superhero films, such as *Wonder Woman* (Patty Jenkins, 2017), *Captain Marvel* (Anna Boden & Ryan Fleck, 2019) and the forthcoming *Wonder Woman 1984* (Patty

² Ashley Lee, “Niki Caro on Directing ‘Zookeeper’s Wife’ and Stressing Cultural Authenticity in ‘Mulan’ (Q & A),” *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/niki-caro-directing-zookeepers-wife-mulan-cultural-authenticity-q-a-989993>.

Jenkins, 2020) and *Black Widow* (Cate Shortland, 2020). In the past, the female superheroes generally play the supporting roles in the wars of saving the world, even serving as background players. While all of the aforementioned female superhero films are led by women, exploring backstories of them, highlighting their capabilities and intelligence, and breaking the superhero landscape dominated by their male counterparts for a long time. Jane Hu remarks that “such representation of difference, however slow to come and however motivated, makes a difference.”³ Live action *Mulan* not only corroborates the rise of female leading role films in Hollywood, but also signifies Hollywood seeking to diversify its leading roles in terms of race as well. In addition, the live action *Mulan* is directed by a female director, Niki Caro, who is from New Zealand and has directed several films with female characters as leading roles. *Whale Rider* (2002), especially, tells a story about a young Maori girl, Pai, who breaks a thousand years of tradition to be the first female tribe chief through winning a contest of taiaha (fighting stick), accomplishing a traditional task of recovering the whale tooth, and successfully coaxing beached whales to return the ocean by climbing on the leader whale’s back. Just like *Mulan*, Pai did not accept the destiny that only males can inherit the leadership of the tribe. *Whalerider* praises Pai’s competence, intelligence, and perseverance, playing the same tune on different instruments with *Mulan*. Hollywood is applying the live action *Mulan* to tell Westerners’ own stories. In this context, the live action *Mulan* is not just a remake of one of Disney’s classic animations; instead, it is endowed with a mission to contribute to the rise of a girl’s power. While in the past most Hollywood films exported Western values and social norms to China, this time the core Chinese values of the film are being exported to the Western world in a notable reversal. From this perspective, the live action *Mulan* serves as a landmark of Hollywood’s film productions concerning China.

The live action version of *Mulan* is the latest link in the long running connection between China and Disney, and from all aspects, the relationship between the two displays a positive status. However, in the history, their connections have experienced ups and downs. Disney’s interactions with China date back to World War II when *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Pinocchio* (1940) were shown in Shanghai and Hong Kong. After the founding of the PRC and the Korean War, the PRC cut off business with Disney and other Hollywood studios. Nevertheless, since the 1980s Disney has been a pioneer in terms of accessing the

³ Jane Hu, “2020 Is (Finally) the Year of the Female Superhero,” *theringer.com*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.theringer.com/movies/2020/2/6/21126224/female-superheroes-harley-quinn-birds-of-prey-black-widow-wonder-woman>.

Chinese film market in spite of its anti-Communist stance. It managed to sign a contract in 1986 with China Central Television, the national TV station in China, which allowed *Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck* to screen on the televisions of many Chinese families.⁴ After China opened its market to foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis in 1994, Disney's *The Lion King* (Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff, 1994) was one of the first batch of Hollywood films to be released in Chinese theatres. However, in 1997, Touchstone Pictures, which was owned by Disney, produced and presented *Kundun* (Martin Scorsese, 1997). During the filmmaking, the Chinese government issued a statement warning Disney that the film would jeopardise its relationship with China. However, Disney continued the production of the film. Unsurprisingly, Disney and Martin Scorsese were banned from doing business in China due to the production and distribution of the film even though it was not released in China at that time. Other studios like Universal and Warner Bros. were afraid of losing their business in China and refused to distribute the film in North America. In the end, Disney had to pay the price by itself, and a subsidiary of Disney, Buena Vista, distributed the film on a small scale. According to Hongmei Yu, the film received less than six million US dollars, compared with its production cost of 28 million US dollars.⁵

The national revenue of China was a tiny share of the overseas box office for Disney at the end of the 1990s, but became a huge potential market for Hollywood after China entered into the WTO to integrate itself into the global free market. Hence, in order to repair its relationship with China, Disney hired Henry Kissinger, the key player in facilitating the normalisation of Sino-American diplomatic relations under the Nixon regime, to negotiate with the Chinese government to reopen the market to Disney.⁶ Coincidentally, the animated *Mulan* was already in production during the *Kundun* incident, which could be considered as a compromise or friendly overture towards the Chinese government, as the film was adapted from a traditional Chinese ballad. In the end, Disney managed to release *Mulan* in Chinese theatres due to Kissinger's intervention. Yet the release date of the animated *Mulan* was delayed for about half a year, and the film received negative responses from Chinese audiences and film reviewers due to the distortion of the original theme of the traditional *Ballad of Mulan*. Nevertheless, this strategic transformation of Disney can be interpreted as a dynamic shift from

⁴ "China TV to Get Disney Cartoons," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1986, http://articles.latimes.com/1986-10-24/entertainment/ca-7150_1_disney-cartoons.

⁵ Hongmei Yu, "From *Kundun* to *Mulan*: A Political Economic Case Study of Disney and China," *Asian Network Exchange* 22 (2014): 17.

⁶ Bernard Weinraub, "At the Movies; Disney Hires Kissinger," *New York Times*, October 10, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/10/movies/at-the-movies-disney-hires-kissinger.html>.

political concerns to economic opportunities against the backdrop of economic globalisation. This trend becomes more obvious within the current relationship between China and Hollywood.

Disney's previous chastising experience has been a lesson for other filmmakers. MGM planned to remake the film *Red Dawn*; in the original 1984 version, Soviet forces that invaded a Midwestern town. However, there was no longer a Soviet Union, so the studio opted to recast the enemy with a new antagonist — China. Even though the film would not be released in China at all, critics rushed to point out this flaw, and MGM digitally altered the film in post-production, replacing China with North Korea as the foe, because it worried about the situation Disney had experienced.⁷ In *Ironman 3* (Shane Black, 2013), a notorious villain in the comic book known as "The Mandarin" became an ethnically ambiguous figure played by an Anglo-Indian actor.⁸ During the production of *Pixels* (Chris Columbus, 2015), some scenes and content were eliminated prior to the viewing by Chinese censors, "including a scene where the Great Wall is destroyed, references to an e-mail hack attributed to a 'Communist' source, and a connection between the movie's antagonists and the Chinese government."⁹ In the Marvel film *Doctor Strange* (Scott Derrickson, 2016), a character in the original comic, the Ancient One, a Tibetan mystic and hermit, was changed into a Celtic woman.¹⁰ These alterations imply that ideological differences are being dismantled due to Hollywood's pursuit of economic interests in the Chinese film market.

A controversial episode surrounded the announcement of the live action *Mulan* release occurred in 2019. In August, Liu Yifei, who plays Mulan, the lead character, reshared a picture posted by China's *People's Daily* on China's social media platform, Sina weibo. The picture quoted the words of Chinese journalist Fu Guohao when he was beaten by violent protesters in Hong Kong SAR: "wo zhichi xianggang jingcha, nimen keyi da wo le (I support the Hong Kong police, you can beat me now), what a shame for Hong Kong." In fact, at that time, not

⁷ Michelle Boston, "Hollywood Sets out to Claim a Film Foothold in China," *University of Southern California News*, February 5, 2015, <https://news.usc.edu/74790/hollywood-sets-out-to-claim-a-film-foothold-in-china/>.

⁸ Scott Timberg, "Hollywood New China's Syndrome: The Country's Enormous Audience Means Money for Movie Studios and Some Restrictions," *Salon*, September 25, 2016, <https://www.salon.com/2016/09/25/hollywoods-new-china-syndrome-the-countrys-enormous-audience-means-money-for-movie-studios-and-some-restrictions>.

⁹ US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Research Report "Directed by Hollywood, Edited by China: How China's Censorship and Influence Affect Films Worldwide," October 28, 2015.

¹⁰ Hannah Beech, "How China is Remaking the Global Film Industry," *Time*, January 26, 2017, <http://time.com/4649913/china-remaking-global-film-industry/>.

only Liu Yifei but many public figures and celebrities in China reshared the picture in protest against the violence of Hong Kong protesters. However, that reshared picture triggered #BoycottMulan on Twitter. This episode clearly exemplifies the entangled relationship between film production, politics and commercial profit. Especially, when it comes to China and the US, films and politics become more inseparable than ever, and the situation becomes more complicated, just as the incident with *Abominable* (Jill Culton & Todd Wilderman, 2019) discussed in the beginning of the thesis. The fate of cultural products is very much subject to the current economic and political climate.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, it is evident that China's importation of foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis and Hollywood's strategies to circumvent Chinese cultural policies and gain access to the Chinese film market are part of a process of economic and cultural globalisation. Tang claims that globalisation is a process by which people constantly cross over social barriers in terms of space, institutions and cultures, to communicate materials and information fully and reach consensus and more common actions.¹¹ Globalisation has not only accelerated the flow and allocation of resources around the world, facilitating the formation of multi-lateral trade and expanding the scope of economic cooperation, but has also boosted cross-cultural interaction and communication and the flow of talents from different countries.¹² Hence, globalisation is not only an economic phenomenon, but also a cultural phenomenon. As different cultures have been optimised and reconfigured, globalisation is not totally equal for the West and the East, for developed countries and developing countries. It cannot eliminate the distinctiveness of diverse national cultures; on the contrary, it promotes the continuous reconstruction of national cultures, absorbing the excellent ingredients of other cultures and enriching their own internal cultural layers. This is verified by Hollywood films, which clearly show that in the era of cultural globalisation, only cultural fusion instead of cultural conflict can help the sustainable international growth of the Hollywood film industry. The fundamental opposition between the West and the East is no longer tenable in a world where political, economic and cultural information is exchanged and shared.

In addition, film communication between China and Hollywood is not only an activity in the cultural industry, but is also greatly associated with the economic and political relationships

¹¹ Translated by the author based on the original Chinese article. Rong Tang, "Quanqiuhua yu Shijie Dianyng Chanye Fazhan Xianzhuang ji Qushi: Dianyng Chanyehua Wenti Xilie Sikao zhi yi (Globalisation and the Current Situation and Developing Trends of World Film Industry: One of the Series of the Film Industrialisation Problems)," *Chinese Film Market* 5 (2006): 4.

¹² Ibid.

between the Chinese and American administrations. Both Chinese and American governments have played a significant role in the development of their respective film industry. The Chinese film regulating sector has made the decision to import foreign films on a revenue-sharing basis and established corresponding policies to allow time for its domestic films to grow, while the State Department and Commerce Departments of the US have played a significant part in the expansion of Hollywood films worldwide in terms of diplomatic and trade policies.

For China, introducing Hollywood films has stimulated the Chinese film market and accelerated the transformation and upgrading of China's domestic film industry. It is also a method to integrate China into economic and cultural globalisation. China-US film communications and collaborations offer the opportunity for Chinese filmmakers to learn Hollywood's film production skills, industrial mode and market strategies and to integrate China better into the global film industry. In addition, introducing Hollywood films has motivated Chinese filmmakers' competitiveness over the domestic market share. That more Chinese high concept blockbusters have ranked at the top of the Chinese box office lists is evidence of this.

Not only has the Chinese film market become the second largest film market in the world since 2012, but also the total number of film screens in China overtook that of the US in 2016.¹³ Owing to the thriving film market in China and the increasingly outstanding performance of China's domestic blockbusters, Hollywood has been attaching more importance to the Chinese film market and film collaborations with China. Thus, China has begun to have more initiative and discursive power about how China and Chinese culture are represented during the process of China-US film communications, which means that China has more opportunities to communicate realistic images of China, Chinese people and Chinese culture to overseas audiences and to change the Orientalist stereotypes commonly held by Western people.

In fact, noticeable changes have occurred in terms of the depiction of China and Chinese culture in recent Hollywood films. Compared to the general Orientalist or stereotypical characters in the past, Chinese characters hold more diverse roles at present. Although they only have limited screen time, it represents a breakthrough. Furthermore, Chinese locations do not appear only in the form of exotic scenery or background imagery any longer, while the more modern side of China is being displayed now. In addition, more and more positive plots

¹³ "China's Total Number of Cinema Screens Now Exceeds the US," *marketing-interactive.com*, June 20, 2017, <https://www.marketing-interactive.com/chinas-total-number-of-cinema-screens-now-exceeds-the-us/>.

concerning China are being integrated into recent Hollywood blockbusters. For China, Chinese culture and current Chinese images are conveyed to the rest of the world by virtue of popular Hollywood films. As Aynne Kokas observes, “film collaborations generate new expertise in the Chinese media industries and project images of contemporary China around the world.”¹⁴

These changes have demonstrated Hollywood’s pragmatic strategies towards localising its cultural products to appeal to its target audiences and guarantee its long-term market share in the Chinese film market out of commercial considerations. Thus, people who advocate free trade, oppose the intervention of the State Department and worry about China’s influence on Hollywood film production need not feel too anxious about the cultural policies established by the Chinese film regulating sector. Jameson notes other instances:

France has had intricate and valuable provisions for supporting young filmmakers out of commercial film profits; England current new wave, around Channel Four and the BFI, would not exist without the government and its older BBC and socialist traditions; Canada finally (along with Québec) offers a range of precedents for a really productive and stimulating role of the state in culture and even cultural politics.¹⁵

Therefore, the strategic incorporation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films is a business necessity. Jameson argues that “the becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural, has often been identified as one of the features that characterizes what is now widely known as postmodernity.”¹⁶ This explains why Americans have insisted on reducing film quota barriers in foreign countries like China. Hollywood’s principle of commercial profit has determined its expansion strategy in the global market. It is the result of the choice of economic rules promoted by globalisation.

On the other hand, the more sceptical Chinese audience and the lucrative Chinese film market have motivated Hollywood producers to convey a more objective image of China to the rest of the world rather than just employing Orientalist stereotypes or creating a superficial collage of different Chinese elements. It is necessary for Hollywood to see China objectively, equally and comprehensively, to explore Chinese culture in depth and to incorporate it into its films appropriately and compatibly.

As for the degree of the openness of the Chinese film market, according to the China-US MOU, China and America were supposed to start a new round of negotiations about importing

¹⁴ Aynne Kokas, *Hollywood Made in China* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 155.

¹⁵ Jameson, 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

foreign films after 2017. However, with the escalation of China-US tariff trade tensions from March 2018, negotiations over the quota and other policies concerning importing Hollywood films were stalled. Some practitioners in the film industry have expressed concerns about the impact of the escalating trade war on the possibility of widening access to the Chinese film market. Robert Cain, president of co-production company Pacific Bridge Pictures, told *Newsweek*, “Trump has exhibited no knowledge of or interest in what Hollywood needs, and an astonishing level of incompetence at dealmaking that has undermined what little leverage the U.S. negotiators had... it is not hard to imagine that Trump has destroyed jobs in Hollywood just as he has in so many other sectors.”¹⁷ Hollywood financing executive Todd Shoemack has expressed his concerns: “the backlash on Hollywood could be severe from both China and Trump. We’re negotiating new quotas with China even as we speak — that’s all up in the air now.”¹⁸ In fact, since February 2017, American trade representatives had been in talks with the Chinese side to hammer out a deal about enlarging the quota of foreign films.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the escalating trade conflicts have damaged the potential of this happening. Yet I still argue, given China’s Reform and Opening-up context, if negotiations resume, the Chinese film market will open further to Hollywood. Just as with the trade tensions between China and the United States, a peaceful and harmonious bilateral relationship will make both winners, while a confrontational one will make both losers in terms of film collaborations between the two countries. The transformation of the images of China and Chinese people in Hollywood films is closely related to the diplomatic relationship between China and America. Although the ups and downs of this relationship in terms of the economy and politics will exert an impact on their collaborations in the culture industry, the two biggest film markets in the world definitely will have more collaborations and the two sides will grow further interdependent with each other in the future. Until then, the complicated interplay between the two countries will go through various cycles regarding their economic and cultural co-operations. However, it is not a pessimistic trend, and in the process both sides can obtain what they need respectively through compromises, communications, competitions and collaborations.

¹⁷ Jason Lemon, “Hollywood Fears Financial Losses as Donald Trump’s Trade War with China Escalates,” *Newsweek*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/hollywood-fears-financial-losses-trump-trade-war-china-escalates-1010348>.

¹⁸ Julia Pierrepont III, “Spotlight: President Trump’s Trade Tariffs has Hollywood Seeing Red,” *xinhuanet*, April 2, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-04/02/c_137081398.htm.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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Appendix I

China Yearly Box Office 2013²⁰

Rank	Movie Title	Distributor	Gross	Release
1	Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons	n/a	\$196,740,000	2/10
2	Iron Man 3	China Film	\$121,200,000	5/1
3	Personal Tailor	n/a	\$115,520,000	12/19
4	Zhi wo men zhong jiang shi qu de qing chun (So Young)	China Film	\$114,710,000	4/25
5	Pacific Rim	China Film	\$111,940,000	7/31
6	Young Detective Dee: Rise of the Sea Dragon	n/a	\$96,400,000	9/28
7	Zhong Guo He Huo Ren (American Dreams in China)	China Film	\$86,450,000	5/17
8	Police Story 2013	Wanda	\$86,340,000	12/24
9	Finding Mr. Right	EDKO	\$82,680,000	3/21
10	Tiny Times	n/a	\$77,600,000	6/27

China Yearly Box Office 2014²¹

Rank	Movie Title	Distributor	Gross	Release
1	Transformers: Age of Extinction	HuaXia	\$320,000,000	6/27
2	Breakup Buddies	n/a	\$187,970,000	9/30
3	The Monkey King	n/a	\$167,840,000	1/31
4	The Taking of Tiger Mountain	HuaXia	\$141,020,000	12/23
5	Interstellar	China Film	\$121,990,000	11/12
6	X-Men: Days of Future Past	HuaXia	\$116,490,000	5/23
7	Captain America: The Winter Soldier	China Film	\$115,620,000	4/4
8	Dad, Where Are We Going?	n/a	\$111,870,000	1/31
9	Dawn of the Planet of the Apes	HuaXia	\$107,355,317	8/29
10	The Breakup Guru	n/a	\$106,590,000	6/27

²⁰ “Chinese Box Office for 2013,” Box Office Mojo, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2013&p=.htm>.

²¹ “Chinese Box Office for 2014,” Box Office Mojo, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2014&p=.htm>.

China Yearly Box Office 2015²²

Rank	Movie Title	Distributor	Gross	Release
1	Furious 7	China Film	\$390,910,000	4/12
2	Monster Hunt	China Film	\$381,860,000	7/16
3	Mojin: The Lost Legend	n/a	\$255,747,040	12/17
4	Avengers: Age of Ultron	n/a	\$240,110,000	5/11
5	Lost in Hong Kong	n/a	\$234,431,227	9/25
6	Jurassic World	n/a	\$228,740,000	6/10
7	Goodbye Mr. Loser	n/a	\$226,161,196	9/25
8	Jianbing Man	HuaXia	\$186,350,000	7/17
9	The Man from Macau II	Bona Light	\$154,130,000	2/19
10	Monkey King: Hero is Back	n/a	\$153,020,000	7/2

China Yearly Box Office 2016²³

Rank	Movie Title	Distributor	Gross	Release
1	The Mermaid (2016)	n/a	\$526,848,189	2/8
2	Zootopia	n/a	\$235,591,257	3/4
3	Warcraft	HuaXia	\$213,541,452	6/8
4	The Monkey King 2	n/a	\$185,402,420	2/8
5	Captain America: Civil War	Disney	\$180,794,517	5/6
6	Operation MeKong	n/a	\$172,477,764	9/30
7	From Vegas to Macau 3	n/a	\$172,104,369	2/8
8	The Great Wall	n/a	\$170,962,106	12/16
9	Kung Fu Panda 3	n/a	\$154,304,371	1/29
10	The Jungle Book (2016)	Disney	\$150,140,000	4/15

²² “Chinese Box Office for 2015,” Box Office Mojo, accessed February 25, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2015&p=.htm>.

²³ “Chinese Box Office for 2016,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2016&p=.htm>.

China Yearly Box Office 2017²⁴

Rank	Movie Title	Distributor	Gross	Release
1	Wolf Warrior 2	n/a	\$854,248,869	7/27
2	The Fate of the Furious	UPI	\$392,807,017	4/14
3	Never Say Die	n/a	\$333,937,573	9/30
4	The Ex-File: The Return of the Exes	n/a	\$306,449,457	12/29
5	Kung Fu Yoga	n/a	\$254,531,595	1/28
6	Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back	n/a	\$239,553,888	1/28
7	Transformers: The Last Knight	PPI	\$228,842,508	6/23
8	Youth (2017)	n/a	\$224,558,496	12/15
9	Dangal	n/a	\$193,050,870	5/5
10	Coco	Disney	\$189,226,296	11/24

China Yearly Box Office 2018²⁵

Rank	Movie Title	Distributor	Gross	Release
1	Operation Red Sea	n/a	\$575,849,199	2/16
2	Detective Chinatown 2	n/a	\$541,406,438	2/16
3	Dying To Survive	n/a	\$451,176,639	7/5
4	Hello Mr. Billionaire	n/a	\$366,961,907	7/27
5	Avengers: Infinity War	Disney	\$359,543,153	5/11
6	Monster Hunt 2	n/a	\$356,336,096	2/16
7	Aquaman	WB	\$298,333,496	12/7
8	Venom (2018)	Sony	\$269,196,633	11/9
9	Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom	n/a	\$261,224,207	6/15
10	Ready Player One	WB	\$218,471,784	3/30

²⁴ “Chinese Box Office for 2017,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2017&p=.htm>.

²⁵ “Chinese Box Office for 2018,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/china/yearly/?yr=2018&p=.htm>.

China Yearly Box Office 2019²⁶

Rank	Movie Title	Distributor	Gross	Release
1	Ne Zha	n/a	\$719,755,767	7/26
2	The Wandering Earth	Beijing Culture	\$690,994,017	2/5
3	My People, My Country	n/a	\$446,085,323	9/30
4	The Captain	n/a	\$416,246,690	9/30
5	Pegasus	n/a	\$255,510,705	2/5
6	The Bravest	n/a	\$244,259,105	8/1
7	Better Days	n/a	\$222,577,596	10/25
8	Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw	Universal	\$201,000,988	8/23
9	Spider-Man: Far from Home	Sony	\$198,999,549	6/28
10	Crazy Alien	n/a	\$327,598,891	2/5

²⁶ “Chinese Box Office for 2019,” Box Office Mojo, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2019/?grossesOption=calendarGrosses&area=CN>.