



The Globalization of the Film Sector of the People's Republic of China

Yuan Lin¹, Ke Gao², Ying Li³

¹Arts and Social Science, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

²School of Economics, Peking University, Beijing, China

³Weihai Commercial Bank Zaozhuang Branch, Zaozhuang, China

Email address:

yuanlinale@163.com (Yuan Lin), gkfly@pku.edu.cn (Ke Gao), leah5156@163.com (Ying Li)

To cite this article:

Yuan Lin, Ke Gao, Ying Li. The Globalization of the Film Sector of the People's Republic of China. *International Journal of Education, Culture and Society*. Vol. 8, No. 6, 2023, pp. 232-235. doi: 10.11648/j.ijecs.20230806.12

Received: August 17, 2023; **Accepted:** November 1, 2023; **Published:** November 8, 2023

Abstracts: The economic, political and cultural motivations for the Chinese film industry to participate in globalization have become even more important as China has become the world's market with the largest box office numbers. In essence, this article is dedicated to an in-depth discussion of how the Chinese film industry can effectively respond to the challenges and opportunities brought about by globalization. This article based on Pierce's assertion that globalization manifests itself through multiple media and dynamics, which examines the globalization of China's film industry through the research methods of literature review, case study and critical analysis. Firstly, the article reviews the process of globalization of China's film market and emphasizes the importance of telling Chinese stories with international appeal. It also analyzes the experiences and shortcomings of the Chinese film market going global, taking into account successful cases such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hello, Li Huanying*. The thesis also reflects on the obstacles that hinder the globalization of Chinese films, such as over-emphasis on national identity and the persistence of stereotypes. To cope with these challenges, the Chinese film industry must improve its business model and utilize the information revolution to enhance its soft power.

Keywords: Globalization, Soft Power, Cultural Perspective, China's Film Market, National Power

1. Introduction

Under the background of globalization in today's society, the film market is in a state of rapid development and blossoming. Although there was a two-year hiatus in the development of the film industry due to the impact of the COVID-19, both Hollywood and Marvel and other major studios have now resumed production and production one after another. China's film market has overtaken America to become the world's largest, as measured by box office revenues [10]. According to McLuhan's concept of global village, economic, political and cultural exchanges between countries have become increasingly close with the development of the times [2]. As an important carrier of cross-cultural communication, film carries the role of transporting cultural concepts. In modern societies, the globalization of the market economy is the greatest driving force of globalization, and the globalization of culture

develops against the background of economic globalization. The hybridization of culture and the hybridization of society are interdependent [6]. This essay will analyze the development of China's film market from localization to globalization from the perspective of the communication of cultural globalization. Firstly, we will analyze the necessity of globalization of the Chinese film industry respectively in three fields: economic, political and cultural, in the context of history and the times. The second part is to analyze the ways and means for the Chinese film market to achieve globalization, in the context of two successful cases of globalization in the different era of "*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*" and "*Hello, Li Huanying*". Finally, the paper will critically analyze the difficulties faced by the Chinese film market, reflect on them and make recommendations.

2. Why Chinese Film Industry Needs Go Global

First of all, from the economic and political perspectives, globalization is an inevitable trend of world development. Whether from the historical Silk Road or today's multinational banks, economic globalization is the inevitable result of the spread of the world market. Globalization is the next stage of conceptualization in the existing global conditions and is one of the important processes in the formation of social relations on a worldwide scale [7]. The industrial revolution of the last century promoted the mass diffusion of industrial production and also formed the mass expansion of trade in goods and the formation of the world market. In today's society, the new industrial revolution, centered on intelligence, networking, and digitization, is enhancing the mobility of the world with the same logic that is furthering the process of economic globalization. Three major characteristics are inherent to globalization, mobility, uncertainty and endlessness [7]. Globalization, on the other hand, represents the intensification of world relations, namely the birth of supranational alliances. With the deepening of globalization, countries around the world have become more closely connected, such as the creation of the European Union, which crossed national and regional political boundaries to form transnational organizations, and countries are increasingly involved in multilateral forms of international governance [3]. Most European countries are developed countries, but their geographical location limits their scope and limited productivity. The establishment of the European Union has contributed to the overall development of Europe, prompting the reform of various economic systems and maximizing the use of productive resources [1]. From this, in the political context of global inequality, the former world hegemons are strengthening their comprehensive national power by uniting, and it is inevitable that China, which is slightly behind in economic development, will march towards globalization if it wants to catch up with the developed countries.

Film is the benchmark of a country's cultural strength, and cultural soft power is the visual display of a country's comprehensive national power. The rise of a country and the rejuvenation of a nation cannot be supported by the economy alone, but also by the comprehensive revitalization of culture [8]. The important development factors of globalization in the last century were different from those of today, and the globalization of tomorrow may be different from that of today, for the fundamental reason that the driving forces have changed. With the deepening trend of globalization, China's international status has been increasing, and gradually developed into the world's second largest economy after the United States. As a result of China's closed-door policy in the last century, China's industrial development started late, and with the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, China's film industry suffered a serious blow and lagged far behind that of the West. This also caused the world's cultural dissemination to be centered on the West, forming Western cultural hegemony, and even the film export of the United States

became the pillar industry of its national culture [9]. The cultural environment on which people grow in today's society is no longer limited to nations and countries. Through the content of Hollywood, Disney and other famous movie production companies, we spread the American cultural concept to the rest of the world and subconsciously carry out cultural invasion. However, as China's comprehensive national strength grows, the nation's sense of national honor rises and it begins to tell its own stories and convey Eastern culture [4]. The Chinese film industry has learned from the filmmaking experience of Western countries and is quickly taking the best of its strengths to form its own film system. But despite the rapid development of China's film industry in recent years and the massive increase in annual film production, very few films have been truly accepted by the world environment. Although Chinese films have filled the gap in the domestic market and to a certain extent resisted the imperialist cultural invasion, they have not been able to make the world market accept the Eastern culture [8]. Strengthening the construction of a strong cultural nation and telling the Chinese story to the world requires the development of Chinese films towards globalization, which is also the mission of Chinese film industry.

3. The Progress of Globalization in the Chinese Film Market

The first step for local Chinese films to go global is to tell Chinese stories with Chinese voices, but with an international perspective, balancing universality and specificity. The globalization of Chinese cinema is not a recent phenomenon. As early as last century, Hong Kong martial arts films already occupied a place in the world, but due to language and cultural barriers, the audience was still not as good as Hollywood films [15]. It has become a constant goal of Chinese filmmakers to bring Chinese films to the world screen. Culture is a whole [7], and the more national the culture is, the more global it is. Chinese films need to find the commonality of world culture and convey Chinese national culture by establishing emotional resonance. Throughout the world, the only Chinese films that can really attract attention in the world are martial arts films. Therefore, Taiwanese director Ang Lee, who came from a literary background, also chose martial arts films in order to enter the world film market, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [12]. The martial arts genre was one of the first Chinese film genres to be embraced by the world because of its unique martial arts appeal that was seen as magically unique to the culture in the West. Coupled with Bruce Lee's commitment as a martial arts artist to preach Chinese kung fu to the world, he produced several kung fu movies. Injecting the national unique elements of Chinese kung fu in an era when Western culture was prevalent. The first martial arts film to conquer the world with Mandarin as the language of film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, became legendary in order to better enter the Western market [12]. This movie brought together the essence of Chinese martial arts art and showed the

world the unique charm of Chinese martial arts. However, martial arts are unfamiliar to audiences in Western countries, so it becomes even more important to find the universality of the film and make the story accessible to a wider audience. Ang Lee chose to highlight the outstanding character of the female characters to appeal to Western audiences [12]. They are kind and brave, combining traditional femininity with physical strength, striking a balance between uniqueness and universality. Despite the success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, Chinese cinema still relies on genre films with inherent historical Settings [8], making it difficult to make new progress.

Telling the world's common stories with Chinese voices can create "world cinema" and win "world audience". With the gradual improvement of Chinese film commercialization model, more and more Chinese universal films have been accepted by western countries in recent years, such as "Hello, Li Huanying". This movie is a refreshing stream among Chinese melodramatic movies in recent years. Instead of emphasizing socialist culture with Chinese characteristics to promote patriotism, it tells the story of a mother and daughter with a simple and easy to understand story background, but is able to convey Chinese culture in a subtle way while achieving commercial value. The movie grossed \$5.413 billion, successfully placing it in the top 100 of the global box office charts, not only making director Jia Ling the highest grossing female director in the world [5], but also showing the world the dramatic increase in China's cultural soft power. Hollywood movies are also rarely about American culture as the main theme, but people from many countries are willing to watch and understand it. Chinese films 'going out' need first make themselves a world culture, and the difference of Chinese culture is a difference in the universal pattern of world culture, otherwise Chinese culture will hardly be accepted by the world [14]. The film is adapted from the director's own personal experience, using the virtual means of time travel to meet his own mother in his youth, to draw closer to his parents, and to feel motherly love and affection. The local Chinese culture is different from the traditional Western culture, but they are emotionally connected [5]. This makes the story told in this film understandable on a cultural level to audiences from different cultural backgrounds. Moreover, filial piety, a traditional Chinese virtue, is told in this film. The essence of "Hello, Li Huanying" is a commercial film. It is because of China's increased cultural soft power that Western audiences are willing to listen to Chinese voices [8], which is a positive return to the globalization of Chinese cinema. Chinese cinema industry stands at the height of the world, advocates international consciousness, is based on the expression of common human emotions, is based on common human values, downplays ideological overtones, is not bound to local themes, and truly realizes world cinema [13]. Although this film does not explicitly convey socialist values, it equally promotes Chinese culture and demonstrates cultural confidence, it is a successful case of globalization in the Chinese film market.

4. Reflections and Recommendations

As we all know, the process of globalization of Chinese films is difficult. As mentioned in the previous part of the article, Chinese films have chosen to use elements of national identity to convey Eastern culture in order to open up the world market, but with a high cultural discount. Cultural discount refers to the extent to which audiences lacking complete cultural knowledge and background appreciate a particular media product, and Chinese filmmakers tell stories that often rely heavily on a limited storytelling context [5]. In the era of globalization, it is difficult to attract a world audience if too much emphasis is placed on nationalities, because overseas audiences lack knowledge of the relevant history and find it difficult to understand the story in depth, resulting in a cultural discount. In recent years, in order to meet the national policy, the high grossing movies made in China are "red movies" that promote positive energy and convey the spirit of patriotism, which is difficult to resonate in overseas markets [15]. A film containing certain national characteristics can increase the exotic atmosphere, but too straightforward promotion of national culture will be counterproductive.

Another major obstacle to the spread of Chinese film in today's society is that, in order to cater to the global market, some of the literary works are detached from the cultural identity of the nation and solidify the stereotypes of China in the West. In the past several years, some international brands have "insulted China", such as advertising campaigns that vilify Asian women and use squinting eyes to represent yellow female features [11]. And the origin of all this is that this is how women were portrayed in Chinese films in the last century. The image of China once propagated by Chinese movies to please the world market was poor and backward, ugly and humble. With the strengthening of China's national soft power, Chinese films carry the role of promoting China's image and are a demonstration of China's increasing comprehensive national power. But China's soft power development needs work if it is to match its economic and political influence [15]. In 2022 China produced a highly controversial literary film "Hidden in the Dust" about the lives of a couple in northern Shaanxi at the bottom of the social ladder. It seemed like a Chinese film that the world market would enjoy, but the CFPA did not choose the film to represent mainland China for the 95th Academy Award for Best International Film. Because this film is not suitable to be a propaganda film for China, it will solidify the stereotype of Chinese cowardice in the minds of Westerners.

If China's film industry wants to occupy a place in the world, it needs to strengthen its business model and ride on the tailwind of the information revolution to improve its soft power. The display of national soft power is not stronger than which country's military power, but better than which country's storytelling, information is power [6]. As part of the country's soft power, movies are the country's calling card and directly affect the national image. In order to build the image of China, Chinese films usually emphasize big ideas and have

educational significance [15], whether it is about war or common people's lives. Although the dissemination of melodramatic and literary films represents the level of cultural exchange in China, the commercialization process facilitates the rapid capture of the market. Firstly, choose film themes with small cultural discounts. Studies have shown that the smaller the scope of the story context, the more viewers it can attract, because the appeal of such films does not depend on a deep understanding of the historical context [5]. Secondly, and most importantly, it starts from the world common ground, lightens the formalistic overtones, subliminally spreads Chinese culture, demonstrates cultural confidence, and serves to enhance China's national image.

In conclusion, the globalization of China's film industry has been explored for a long time, and has produced a number of Chinese films recognized by the world, but there is still work to be done to break the status quo of Western cultural hegemony. In the context of economic globalization, if a country wants to have the right to speak, it needs to vigorously strengthen its national soft power and develop its cultural industry [6]. The globalization process of Chinese movies is also undergoing a transformation from nationalization to globalization, with melodramatic movies building up China's image, literary movies showing cultural diversity, and more importantly, commercial movies standing on a global level, broadening international vision and transmitting Chinese culture [13]. The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television should also issue supporting policies to serve as a strong backing for China's film industry in the international arena and help globalization.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the Chinese Society for Technical and Vocational Education. "Research on the Industrial Logic of World Vocational Education Development and the Regional Coordination Strategy of High-quality Development of Vocational Education in the New Era" (SZ22C08). Shandong Provincial Key R&D Plan (Soft Science Project) "Shandong Province Regional Digital Economy Development Level Evaluation System Innovation Research" (2022RZB02013).

References

- [1] Cappelen, A., Castellacci, F., Fagerberg, J., & Verspagen, B. (2003). The impact of EU regional support on growth and convergence in the European Union. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 41(4), 621–644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00438>
- [2] Choi, J. H., & Danowski, J. A. (2006). Making a global community on the net - global village or global metropolis?: A network analysis of usenet newsgroups. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 7 (3). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2002.tb00153.x>
- [3] HELD, D. & McGREW, A. (1993). 'Globalization and the Liberal Democratic State'. *Government and Opposition*, 28 (2), 261-288.
- [4] Kokas, A. (2019). Producing global China: The Great Wall and Hollywood's cultivation of the PRC's global vision. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 13 (3), 215-227.
- [5] Liu, J. L. (2021). A brief analysis of the export of Chinese film culture under the background of globalization. *News Dissemination* (pp. 35-36).
- [6] Nye, J. S. (2019). Soft power and public diplomacy revisited. In *The Hague Journal of Democracy*, 14 (1-2), 7-20. Brill Nijhoff.
- [7] Pieterse, J. N. (1994). Globalisation as hybridization. *International Sociology*, 9 (2), 161–184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026858094009002003>
- [8] Sparks, C. (2018). China's soft power from the BRICS to the BRI. *Global Media and China*, 3 (2), 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436418778935>
- [9] Su, W. (2016). China's encounter with Global Hollywood Cultural Policy and the film industry, 1994-2013. University Press of Kentucky.
- [10] Times, G. (2022). China overtakes North America as World's biggest movie market amid covid-19. *Global Times*. Retrieved November 9, 2022, from <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202101/1211591.shtml>
- [11] Wang, W. (2022). Examining Chinese beauty behind the controversy of the Chinese brand "the three squirrels": Racism, slanted eyes, and beauty. *Proceedings of the 2022 6th International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences (ISEMSS 2022)*, 27–33. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-31-2_5
- [12] Wu, H., & Chan, J. M. (2007). Globalizing Chinese martial arts cinema: The global-local alliance and the production of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. *Media, Culture & Society*, 29 (2), 195-217.
- [13] Yang, J. H. (2019). The difficulty of Chinese film "going out": "World film" is still Chinese film. *Journal of Arts Management*. DOI: CNKI: SUN: YSLG.0.2019-04-035.
- [14] Yi, H. & Tang, J. Y. (2008). Only by going out can we stand up -- the soft power of Chinese films under the background of globalization. *Contemporary Cinema*.
- [15] Zhou, X. (2017). Between national and international. In *Globalization and Contemporary Chinese Cinema: Zhang Yimou's Genre Films* (ch. 4). Springer. E book in lib.