

2019

Negotiating Transnational Collaborations with the Chinese Film Industry

Kai Ruo Soh

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses1>

University of Wollongong

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following: This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author. Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material.

Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

Negotiating Transnational Collaborations with the Chinese Film Industry

Kai Ruo Soh

Supervisors:

Senior Professor Susan Turnbull and Dr Quah Ee Ling Sharon

This thesis is presented as part of the requirement for the conferral of the degree:
Doctor of Philosophy

This research has been conducted with the support of the University of Wollongong's
University Postgraduate Award Scholarship

The University of Wollongong
School of the Arts, English and Media

<<July>> <<2019>>

Abstract

In recent years, Chinese international collaborations and co-productions with foreign film makers have flourished as reforms were implemented to create policies that made this more possible. As a result, Chinese and foreign filmmakers have embraced collaborative approaches, seeking mutually beneficial, feasible collaborations in terms of their respective markets. This thesis sets out to investigate the processes and outcomes of a number of significant productions in order to understand the role and impact of international co-productions and foreign collaborations on the Chinese film industry. Four specific industrial contexts were selected for analysis because of their on-going collaborations with China. They are Hollywood, Hong Kong and South Korea as well as Australia's film industry.

This thesis considers the ways in which international co-productions and foreign collaborations are transnational in their ability to forge connections across borders both culturally and economically. This is achieved through the mechanisms of production, distribution and exhibition as is evidenced by the research presented here. This research includes an analysis of government documents and news reports as well as of the content of the films themselves. This evidence is supplemented by empirical data derived from participant observation at industry forums, interviews with key stakeholders, as well as the reviews of Chinese audiences on the Chinese social networking site, Douban.

With the emergence of China in the vanguard of globalisation, this thesis argues that the acquisition of the different forms of knowledge about the Chinese film industry and Chinese culture of the context of film production is essential to a successful collaboration with Chinese filmmakers. The investigation highlights the importance of obtaining the cultural knowledge that may play a positive or negative role in the building of *guanxi* networks and the complex power dynamics that are operational in negotiating Chinese co-productions and collaborations. Foreign practitioners need to consider what they can offer to the Chinese film market at the same time as they reflect on how the Chinese might also benefit from this relationship. The success of a co-production and collaboration is not only dependent on the working relationships between producers, but also on the ways in which audience perceive the films in the context of the political relationship between China and the participating nations. Ultimately, this thesis interrogates transnational cinema productions and demonstrates the importance of maintaining old and established connections as well as the need to build new and strong relationships with China in order to achieve a successful co-production.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my primary supervisor Senior Professor Sue Turnbull for being a great mentor and providing me with invaluable support and guidance for my research and academic career. Without your guidance, this thesis would not have become what it is today. I would also like to thank my secondary supervisor Dr Quah Ee Ling Sharon for being a supportive mentor and friend in both my academic and personal pursuits. I would also like to thank Dr Roger Patulny for providing me with research opportunities within and outside the scope of my thesis and constantly giving me the opportunity to learn more about the academic world and the potential of research.

I remain grateful to Dr Brian Yecies and Dr Jie (Jack) Yang for providing the foundations to my research project. I would also like to show my appreciation to Dr Jonathon Hutchinson from the University of Sydney for great research discussions and all the support you have provided me over my PhD candidature.

I would like to give a special shout out to my PhD buddies Núria Lahuerta, Natasha Phillips, Cass Venn and Miguel Segundo Ortin. I am eternally grateful for all the support you have shown me, and I will never forget our wine and writing sessions! A big thanks to Jef Pennings, Sophie Wong and Ana Torres for being such supportive friends. The PhD journey has been so much easier because of your support and kindness outside of academia. Thank you to Winnie Chan, although you are all the way in Singapore, your support and friendship has encouraged me throughout my university years.

This project started out because of Joe Ng, who visited me in Wollongong while working on *Bait 3D* (2012) in Sydney. His fascinating stories on his experience working on the film sparked my interest in this research, which has now expanded to what it is today. Also, thank you to Chuck Chae for allowing me to experience your film journey with you and helping me build my thesis into what it is today. I would also like to thank Pristine Yoo for teaching me the Korean language which helped me immensely while conducting research in Korea. Last but not least, thank you to my parents, especially my mum for making sure I did all my Chinese homework. Without your patience and efforts, this thesis would not have been possible.

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| AFK | Away From Keyboard |
| API | Application Programming Interface |
| ATF | Asia Television Forum |
| ATO | Australian Tax Office |
| AUD | Australian Dollar |
| BIFF | Busan International Film Festival |
| CCP | Chinese Communist Party of China |
| CPCPD | Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China |
| CCTV | China Central Television |
| CEPA | Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economics Partnership Agreement |
| CFC | China Film Corporation |
| CFCC | China Film Co-production Corporation |
| CFG | China Film Group Corporation |
| CGI | Computer-Generated Imagery |
| CIH | Cultural Investment Holdings Co. Ltd |
| CMC | China Media Capital |
| CPAA | China Post-Production Alliance |
| CPPCCC | Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Committee |
| DI | Digital Intermediate |
| EU | European Union |
| FTA | Free Trade Agreement |
| ILM | Industrial Light & Magic |
| IMDA | Info-communications Media Development Authority of Singapore |
| IP | Intellectual Property |
| KMT | Kuomintang |
| KOFIC | Korean Film Council |
| LA | Los Angeles |
| MDA | Media Development Authority |
| MMORPG | Multiplayer Online Role-Play Game |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MPAA | Motion Pictures Association of America |
| MRFT | Ministry of Broadcasting, Film and Television |
| NFA | National Film Administration |

| | |
|---------|--|
| PDV | Post, Digital and Visual Effects |
| Q&A | Question and Answer |
| QAPE | Qualifying Australian Expenditure on Film |
| R&D | Research and Development |
| RAS | Research Activity Support |
| RMB | Chinese Yuan (Renmibi) |
| RPG | Role Playing Games |
| SAPPRFT | State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television |
| SARFT | State Administration of Radio, Film and Television |
| SMART | Simulation, Modelling, Analysis, Research and Teaching |
| Sci-Fi | Science Fiction |
| SNS | Social Networking Site |
| THAAD | Terminal High Altitude Area Defence |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UNESCO | United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UOW | University of Wollongong |
| USD | American Dollar |
| VFX | Visual Effects |
| WB | Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. |
| WOW | Word of Warcraft |
| WTO | World Trade Organisation |

Table of Content

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Abstract | 2 |
| Acknowledgements | 3 |
| Certification | 4 |
| List of Abbreviations | 5 |
| Table of Content..... | 7 |
| List of Tables | 9 |
| List of Figures | 9 |
| Introduction..... | 10 |
| Chinese-foreign collaborations | 11 |
| Breaking into the Chinese market..... | 14 |
| Thesis Structure | 18 |
| Chapter 1: International collaborations in the global film industry | 21 |
| Exploring the ‘transnational’ in transnational cinema | 25 |
| Transnational cinema and the role of cultural proximity | 28 |
| Moving towards Chinese transnational films ‘created in China’..... | 32 |
| Chapter 2: Approaches to researching international film co-production and foreign collaboration with China | 34 |
| Government documents and news analysis..... | 35 |
| Film text analysis..... | 37 |
| Industry forums..... | 38 |
| 2015 ATF and Screen Singapore | 41 |
| 2016 Australia-China Co-production Forum..... | 41 |
| 2016 and 2018 Beijing International Film Festival Sino-Foreign Co-production Forum | 42 |
| Interviews with industry players | 44 |
| Analysing audiences’ feedback through social networking sites | 47 |
| The role of Douban in China | 49 |
| Collection and Analysis..... | 51 |
| Chapter 3: Entering the Chinese market through joint productions..... | 55 |
| Australians working with China to understand the ‘method to the madness’..... | 60 |
| A good story badly executed in <i>Children of the Silk Road</i> | 64 |
| Strengthening the Chinese film industry through attempts to revive Hong Kong cinema | 71 |
| Fitting <i>The Mermaid</i> into the mould through hybridisation..... | 74 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| Gaining experiences from Hollywood..... | 82 |
| <i>Kungfu Panda 3</i> and significance of cultural nuance | 85 |
| Conclusion..... | 92 |
| Chapter 4: Chinese financial investment in foreign film productions | 95 |
| An Australian-Singaporean co-production with financial assistance from China..... | 97 |
| <i>Bait 3D</i> 's deceptive marketing and Chinese audiences' response | 99 |
| The analysis of <i>Bait 3D</i> | 103 |
| Hollywood made with a little help from China | 107 |
| A film for Chinese audiences? - The analysis of <i>Seventh Son</i> | 110 |
| Adapting China's most popular 'Western' game: The analysis of <i>Warcraft</i> | 115 |
| Conclusion..... | 121 |
| Chapter 5: Enhancing Chinese cinema with movie magic..... | 124 |
| The creation of Movie Magic..... | 125 |
| The growth of VFX in the Chinese film industry | 128 |
| Building post-production relationships through a joint production: The Korean case study | 131 |
| <i>Mr Go</i> : The official co-production with a VFX focus | 134 |
| Imitating Hollywood's quality through VFX: Australia and China's post-production relationship | 140 |
| <i>Hero</i> : 'China's first guide to creating an international commercial film' | 143 |
| Establishing opportunities through partnerships between Hollywood and China | 150 |
| Post-producing <i>Monster Hunt</i> with practitioners from Hollywood | 151 |
| Conclusion..... | 158 |
| Concluding Chapter | 162 |
| Implications and Limitations of Study..... | 165 |
| References | 168 |
| Appendices | 185 |
| Appendix 1: Participation Information Sheet and Consent Form | 185 |
| Appendix 2: Interview Questions | 192 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 2.1: List of forums and panels analysed for research | 39 |
| Table 2.2: Segmentation of English-language and Mandarin films | 43 |
| Table 2.3: List of interviewees | 45 |
| Table 2.4: Details of Dataset from Douban Film as of Time of Collection..... | 53 |
| Table 2.5: Example of Table for Frequently Used Words/Phrases | 53 |
| | |
| Table 3.1: Australian’s Point Test for co-production eligibility (Screen Australia, 2018) | 62 |
| Table 3.2: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Children of the Silk Road</i> | 66 |
| Table 3.3: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>The Mermaid</i> | 76 |
| Table 3.4: Case for English-language and Mandarin version of <i>Kungfu Panda 3</i> | 86 |
| Table 3.5: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Kungfu Panda</i> | 87 |
| | |
| Table 4.1: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Bait 3D</i> | 103 |
| Table 4.2: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Seventh Son</i> | 112 |
| Table 4.3: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Warcraft</i> | 117 |
| | |
| Table 5.1: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Mr Go</i> | 136 |
| Table 5.2: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Hero</i> | 145 |
| Table 5.3: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for <i>Monster Hunt</i> before the film release (original) | 154 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 5.1: Number of comments by Chinese Douban users on <i>Hero</i> from 2005 to 2016 | 144 |
| Figure 5.2: Average rating of <i>Hero</i> per year on Douban from 2005 to 2016 | 147 |
| Figure 5.3: Ratings of <i>Monster Hunt</i> before the official release date (original)..... | 155 |
| Figure 5.4: Ratings of <i>Monster Hunt</i> during and after release date (clean) | 155 |

Introduction

Bad Moms (Lucas & Moore, 2016), *Green Book* (Farrelly, 2018) and *Abominable* (Culton, 2019), besides being Hollywood blockbusters, what else do these films have in common? These three English-language Hollywood films either had financial investment, creative and/or production input from Chinese organisations unbeknownst to the mass audience. Since China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, Chinese international co-productions and foreign collaborations have flourished in numbers as policies were implemented to create more accessible policies for foreign filmmakers. The international film community has therefore begun paying close attention to the Chinese film industry as it has become one of the fastest growing industries with one of the largest potential audiences, climbing from sixth place in 2005 to third in 2011 (UIS, 2013). From 2005 to 2011, China's box office revenue increased by 731%, and in 2013 became the first market outside of America to exceed USD 4 billion (American dollars) in box office revenues (MPAA, 2014; UIS, 2016). In 2014, the Chinese box office earned USD 5.1 billion, with more than 800 million audiences visiting 5,500 film theatres over 23,000 projection screens through China (EntGroup 2015). In 2017, Chinese box offices reportedly collected USD 8,270 million placing them in second place behind America at USD 11,100 million (Screen Australia, 2017).

Whilst these are impressive statistics, international films made outside of China are finding it challenging to enter this emerging market. At present, China has a foreign film quota that only allows 34 foreign films to be screened nationally on a revenue-sharing basis. To combat this problem, many international film industries, including Hollywood, are seeking to collaborate with the Chinese in order to receive 'domestic' status for their production in China. However, as China is seeking to increase their soft power ambitions locally and globally, the industry has begun its aggressive lunge into the Korean, English-language and Chinese-language film markets, producing the intended consequence of collaborations including mergers, acquisitions and creative partnerships. The Chinese government is as a result taking greater control of this process by implementing policies, allowing approved collaborations to bypass the foreign film quota.

As a Chinese Singaporean woman fluent in both English and Mandarin, I have always been intrigued by various forms of media hybridity and the ways in which elements from different cultures can be applied to various mass communication channels, especially that of the cinema (Starubhaar, 2007). I am therefore particularly interested in the ways that international co-productions and collaborations have impacted on the Chinese film industry and how the Chinese audience is viewing this form of transnational cultural

production. Although the Chinese film industry has attracted considerable attention from industry personnel, media commentators, audiences and scholars, currently there is limited scholarly research on the social and cultural implications of these developments from the Chinese audiences' perspective. It is therefore timely to consider both how industry practitioners and Chinese audiences are negotiating Chinese-foreign co-productions, collaborations and the subsequent cross-cultural connections that have ensued. This thesis sets out to examine the impact of the Chinese film industry through the emergence of China in the vanguard of globalisation. To begin, I briefly explore the historical impact of international co-productions and foreign collaborations within China to provide a background of the role of this particular form of transnational cinema.

Chinese-foreign collaborations

Prior to the implementation of Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward (大跃进 *dayuejin*), the Chinese film industry was known as the Hollywood of China and almost made films on a weekly basis. Domestic film production and international film distribution was halted during the Great Leap Forward in 1958 (Ho & Tsou, 1986). During this period, Chinese films were used as a propaganda tool to promote communist ideology through the state-run China Film Corporation (CFC) established in 1949. Films were perceived as a tool for reform with the function of enlightenment and education as the government largely followed the Confucian idea of 'educating via entertainment' (Zhu, 2003, p. 200) and to 'promote socialist spiritual and material civilization' (Posner, 2017).

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping came into power and announced the need for Chinese economic reform (改革开放 *gaige kaifang*) that included the re-establishment of foreign co-productions and collaborations through the restructuring of the media and film industry. The China Film Co-Production Corporation (CFCC) was founded by the state in 1979 and appointed the official department responsible for managing co-productions, providing the government with a tight reign over the approval process and revenue streams. In 1986, the then Ministry of Broadcasting, Film and Television (MRFT) released a new policy which provided CFCC with full power to approve or reject a co-production before it reached the government's Film Bureau for endorsement (Zhu, 2008). This policy was in practice until the announcement of reforms in March 2018, after which it was then compulsory for all international co-productions to gain approval from CFCC from the pre-production stage in order to be considered for public release in China. As of writing (July 2019), it is unclear if CFCC still holds the same power or if new regulations will be put in place.

The strict regulations implemented by the then MRFT, saw a limited number of

international co-productions and collaborations in the domestic film market. Additionally, the 1980s, domestic productions struggled due to the rising cost of production and limited state subsidies. Additionally, the 1990s saw a growing popularity of pirated content, which resulted in the reduction of box office revenues. This resulted in the MFRT to rethink and implement more feasible solutions by introducing ways foreign important can contribute to the Chinese market based on a revenue sharing system. Although these imports did result in ambiguous censorship requirements based on political and ideologies as put forth by the Chinese government (Su 2016). Ambiguous changes within the government's organisational structure along with policies and regulations are not uncommon, and these unclear motives and outcomes could create uncertainty as nationalism plays a huge role in China's media system (Curtin, 2007; Donald 2011). Lee Chin Chuan (2009) describes this process of finding the right balance between promoting a 'nationalist' message and entertainment the unity of contradictions, which could significantly impact the research process for Chinese media scholars, due to the rapid and uncertain changes of policies impacting the reality of the relationships between the Chinese government, media organisations and content production. For instance, initially in the 1980s, co-productions were utilised as a vehicle to enhance propaganda as films such as the Chinese-Italian co-production *The Last Emperor* (末代皇帝; 1987) and the Chinese-Japanese co-production *The Silk Road* (敦煌; 1988) openly promoted socialist messages in line with the government's agenda. However, this practice shifted during the 1990s as the boundaries between propaganda, popular and art cinema in China began to blur since Chinese filmmakers encountered the pressures of the global commercialised film industry as they presented their own passionate projects to the international film market (X. Li, 2004; Zhu, 2003).

In 1998, MRFT changed its name to the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) as part of a reform of the nation's State Council. In 1999, the China Film Corporation renamed itself the China Film Group Corporation (CFG), as part of the Chinese government's effort to rebuild and modernise the Chinese film industry (Frater, 2014). CFCC then became a subsidiary of CFG in order to assist in the facilitation of overseas relations and to administer any issues involving foreign collaborations with Chinese companies. It is, however, important to note that foreign filmmakers are restricted by law in China from working independently without a Chinese partner.

The release of the internationally acclaimed co-production *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (卧虎藏龙)(Lee, 2000) involving Taiwan, Hong Kong and Hollywood in 2000 led to the emendation of the various policies and regulations. China's entrance into the WTO in 2001 also played a significant role in easing restrictions on foreign co-productions and

foreign collaborations. The motivation for China to be part of the WTO is to encourage Chinese companies and products (including the film industry) to “go out” (走出去 *zou chuqu*), which in turn also encourages foreigners to enter the Chinese market (请进来 *qingjin lai* – to go in or please enter). At the same time, the government decided to slowly shift away from using films explicitly as a propaganda tool for enlightenment (and education), to focus on the development of Chinese soft power (Vlassis, 2015). Soft power, a term coined by Joseph Nye (1990), is frequently used by the Chinese government as part of the nation’s political agenda to build their international and domestic reputation through cultural products such as films (Bar 2011; Li 2008; further examined in Chapter Three).

In 2002 the government released the amended Film Administration Regulations (电影管理条例 *dianying guanli tiaoli*) intended to strengthen and promote the Chinese film industry while meeting the need to promote Chinese culture and the building of a socialist civilisation (CFCC, 2001)¹. The Film Administration Regulation also encourages private companies to produce their own films and foreign producers and investors to participate in productions with China, subject to SARFT approval. Although the final say on green lighting a production still lies with the government, creating pathways beyond working with CFG and state affiliated companies demonstrates China’s attempt to welcome talents beyond its restrictive barriers. This led to the release of several feature films produced without CFG, such as the acclaimed film *Cell Phone* (手机)(2003) by Feng Xiaogang, which is produced by one of China’s largest private film production and distribution companies, the Huayi Brothers Media Corporation (hereafter Huayi Brothers; 华谊兄弟传媒股份有限公司). In 2006, the government authorised Huaxia Film Distributor (hereafter Huaxia; 华夏电影发行有限责任公司) as the second distributor for foreign movies; however, it is important to note that CFG owns 20% of Huaxia shares, creating a monopoly in this sector.

In 2011, there was further evidence of China’s soft-power ambitions during the October meeting of the 17th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party of China (中国共产党第十七届中央委员会 共产党第 17 届中央委员) (CCP). The agenda focused on the importance of enhancing Chinese soft power through popular culture including (but not excluding) films, television programmes and music. The government proposed the encouragement of international cultural exchange and continuous improvement through international influence on Chinese culture. This led to several policies and regulations relating to the approval of co-productions (PRC to the UN, 2012). One particular point of growing contention was the increasing social, cultural, economic and political transformation that

¹ This aim is translated from Article 1 of the Film Administration Regulation, which states (in Chinese): ‘为了加强对电影行业的管理, 发展和繁荣电影事业, 满足人民群众文化生活需要, 促进社会主义物质文明和精神文明建设, 制定本条例。’

resulted from Hollywood's closer relationship with Chinese private film companies. In 2013, SARFT was incorporated with the General Administration of Press and Publication. This led to a name change and they became the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT).

CFCC and SAPPRFT works closely together as CFCC is the primary facilitator and contact for co-productions and collaborations in China. According to the official CFCC (2019) website, there are three primary stage of co-productions. The first stage consists of placing an application for the potential co-production CFCC. The application includes submitting a proposed script, film title, synopsis, shooting locations, proposed schedule and personnel details. Once the application has passed the first stage of approval, SAPPRFT (through CFCC) will issue 'The Film Project Establishment Notice' and 'The Chinese-Foreign Film Co-production Permit.' The second stage of approval requires producers to submit 'The Official Shooting Plan' to SAPPRFT. Any changes to the film production including the film's title (in all languages) must be resubmitted for approval. The final stage comprises of the review and approval of the completed film, including the final cut of the film along with the film's soundtrack and lyrics (if any). However, the intervention of having to approve scripts before productions and ensuring that the final production follows the approved script, has led to 'a lack of certainty among filmmakers as their realisation of the script may draw in problematic elements (Walsh 2012, p. 306). Nonetheless, once the film has been approved, SAPPRFT provides the film with 'The Film Public Exhibition Permit', allowing the film to be released nationwide.

In March 2018, the Chinese government announced the abolition of SAPPRFT and instead established a new regulatory structure for China's film and television industry. This will now be overseen by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China (CPCPD; 中共中央宣传部), which directly reports to President Xi Jinping, providing the government with greater control (Brzeski, 2018a; Frater, 2018a). As of the time of writing (July 2019), details on the new reforms, policies and approval requirements have yet to be released to the public. Due to the sudden change of the regulatory body and the uncertainty of new policies, I will be focusing on SAPPRFT's previous policy in force until March 2018, as it is the most relevant to the analysis presented in this research based on the selected case studies.

Breaking into the Chinese market

Over the years, many foreign film companies have openly attempted to develop their relationship with China. The most significant development with China has thus far been

with producers working within Hollywood². Producers are attracted to the Chinese film industry due to its potential growth and the possibility of reaching a large audience. There are a variety of outcomes with Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations, which are dependent on the conditions of the enforced agreement during the production's development and distribution. For instance, collaborations between Hollywood and China, prior to 2015 including *Looper* (R. Johnson, 2012), *Iron Man 3* (S. Black, 2013) and *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (Bay, 2014) employed Chinese elements in the film's narrative in order to fulfil the conditions proposed by the CFCC.

For instance, *Looper* was intended to be shot in Paris, but this location was changed to Shanghai to appease Chinese stakeholders for the film's release in China (Goldstein, 2012; Pidd, 2012). Ultimately, the international version omitted many of the scenes shot in Shanghai as filmmakers were concerned about the pacing of the film; however, Chinese financiers insisted on including the Shanghai scenes to push for an official release on the Mainland. The filmmakers compromised and created a version specifically for the Chinese market. Similarly with *Iron Man 3*, a 'special' version was created for the Chinese audience, featuring scenes located and shot in China with local actors which were absent in the film's international version. Meanwhile, the release of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* did not include a 'special' version but included appearances by several Chinese celebrities including Chinese actress Li Bingbing, singer/actor Han Geng and Ray Lui, along with boxer Zou Shiming. The film also received financial support from several Chinese companies and included a string of Chinese product placements. For instance, Stanley Tucci's character Joshua Joyce is seen in several scenes sipping on Yili milk (a Chinese dairy product), while Mark Wahlberg's character, Cade Yeager, is seen withdrawing money out of China's Construction Bank in the middle of Texas, a scene that somewhat baffled Chinese audiences (Blum, 2014).

While the majority of these films were perceived to have done well through the measurement of Chinese box office revenues, there has been some public criticism of these strategies. Chinese co-productions and collaborations such as *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, *Looper* and *Iron Man 3* are significant steppingstones in China's process of learning from 'Hollywood' and building their own 'created in China' cultural products. At the time of their release, Hollywood was perceived as the dominant film industry with a reputation from which China could benefit from while learning how to produce content for international audience. This ambition was made clear when Fan Bingbing, one of China's

² Generally, Hollywood has been described to be America's motion-picture industry, but there are many aspects to the American film industry, such as independent films, short films, animation and documentaries (to name a few). This thesis I will be examining the commercial aspect of the American film industry that involves the use of the term 'Hollywood' production.

highest paying actresses (prior to her tax evasion scandal in 2018), publically claimed she was cast in *Iron Man 3* and *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Singer, 2014) because of America's aspiration to break into the Chinese market. However, thinking has shifted in recent years, with Fan Bingbing suggesting in a 2017 interview that she did not want to be simply known as the 'Asian army candy'. In this article she said 'in 10 years' time, I'm sure I will be the heroine of X-men' (Beech, 2017), suggesting that the power dynamics between both industries are beginning to shift as the Chinese are seemingly gaining more control of creative decisions and moving away from previous strategies.

However, as I shall demonstrate in the following chapters, the changing power dynamics are leading Chinese producers to implement new practices and explore new strategies in order to engage with foreign partners and stakeholders in the production of their films. In short, the shifting dynamics of power suggests that American producers, along with other key industry players across Asia including Greater China (Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), South Korea (hereafter Korea) and Australia, are now attempting to create new content that appeals to the Chinese audience and strategies (in terms of casting, narrative and/or film location) that will enable them to bypass regulations and the restrictive quota on the importation of foreign films. This begs the question, why are international film practitioners so keen to penetrate the Chinese market?

Arguably, the Chinese film industry has become extremely appealing over the past decade due to its rapid growth. In 2014, Chinese box office revenues stood at USD 5.1 billion and more than 800 million people visited 5,500 film theatres with over 23,000 screens across the country (Entgroup, 2015). Chinese companies have also started to invest in Hollywood production and companies, increasing the number of collaborations in recent years. One of the most notable deals is the purchase of 60% of AMC theatres (the second largest cinema chain in America) in 2012 by Dalian Wanda Group Company (also known as Wanda Group 万达集团)³, and their acquisition of Legendary Entertainment, leading to several blockbuster productions including *The Great Wall* (Zhang, 2016) and *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* (Bayona, 2018). In 2016 it was announced that Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Limited (阿里巴巴集团控股有限公司), and Steven Spielberg had signed a partnership deal to co-produce and finance films for international and Chinese audiences (Rahman, 2016).

The desire to collaborate with the Chinese is not only evident in some recent Hollywood productions, but also a significant number of other countries. As of July 2019, the Chinese

³ However in September 2018 it was reported that Wanda Group sold back their shares as they scale down on investment. Wanda group currently owns an estimate of 38% of AMC (Bond 2018).

government has signed 16 co-production treaties with Canada (1987); Australia (2008); France (2010); Netherlands (2010); New Zealand (2010); Singapore (2010); Belgium (2012); India (2014); Italy (2014); Korea (2014) Spain (2014); Malta (2015); United Kingdom (2015); Estonia (2016); Denmark (2017); and Japan (2018). This has resulted in several international co-productions including *20 Once Again* (重返 20 岁)(L. Chen, 2015) with Korea, *Wolf Totem* (狼图腾)(Annaud, 2015) with France, *Kungfu Yoga* (功夫愈加)(Tong, 2017) with India and *Guardians of the Tomb* (谜巢)(Rendall, 2018) with Australia. It would therefore seem timely to study the complexity of these Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations from the perspective of both the producers and the audience.

Previous scholarship focusing on Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations has primarily focused on the producer's role and/or how this has impacted on the national film industries of the participating nations. This approach, however, excludes the perceptions of the audience. For example, Stephen Chu Yiu-wai's (2015) study examines Hong Kong's potential future within the Chinese film industry as China open its doors to foreigners, encouraging other nations and corporate entities to participate. Stephen Deboer's (2015) study investigates the future of East Asian cinema and the role China plays within the East Asian film industry. Mike Walsh (2012) explores the difficulties foreign producers might face when co-producing with China and previous strategies employed by Australian and Chinese producers, while a thesis by Peng Weiyang (2015) investigates the political and economic effects of co-productions involving China, America and Australia. While Aynne Kokas' (2017) book examines the relationship between China and Hollywood along with the dynamics within the relationship. Prior research on Chinese-foreign co-productions and foreign collaborations therefore provides a pragmatic understanding of the influence of policies and producers, however there is currently a limited focus on the reception from Chinese audiences.

While the studies noted above are vital to our understanding of the Chinese collaborative efforts with foreign filmmakers and practitioners, it is also important for film and media scholars to understand 'the who, what, when and how of screen culture' (Miller, 2001, p. 306). This is supported by Ib Bondebjerg, Eva Novrup Redvall, Rasmus Helles, Signe Sophus Lai, Henrik Søndergaard and Cecilie Astrupgaard (2017, p. 9) when they highlight the merits of critically evaluating the role of cultural producers, audiences and critics in understanding 'actual transnational encounters', through an analysis of mediated cultural encounters.

This thesis will thus seek to expand on the current scholarship by addressing this gap through the analysis of data collected from producers and creative personnel behind

several significant productions, the films produced, and the responses of the Chinese cinema audiences online. To facilitate the investigation, the thesis seeks to ask the following research question: how have international co-productions and collaborations impacted on the Chinese film industry and audiences' taste? Based on the research question, thesis seeks to specifically examine how Chinese audiences are understanding and decoding these transnational productions and how are foreign practitioners assisting in producing these transnational films through their knowledge and expertise.

To answer these questions, the thesis will be including an analysis of the policies underpinning these co-productions and collaborations, the creative encounters that have ensued and the critical reception of the text. Chinese audience feedback included in the thesis will provide an understanding of the opinions that are expressed online to shed light on how international co-productions and collaborations are being perceived by Chinese film audiences through their interaction with the Chinese social networking site (SNS) - Douban. The overall intention of this thesis is to interrogate the emergence of China as a key player in the international film industry and how this has been achieved through international co-productions and foreign collaborations.

Thesis Structure

The thesis begins by establishing an analytical framework for thinking about the transnationality of Chinese foreign co-production and collaborations. In the first chapter (Chapter One), I discuss the role of international co-productions and foreign collaborations in the global film industry and how this results in cultural hybridisation through the blending of new practices and content with existing ones. I also explore the concept of transnational cinema to provide an overview of the discussions and debates around this concept and how it will be used to provide a theoretical framework in understanding the transnationality of the production process of the selected case studies. The concept of cultural proximity is addressed in relation to transnational films as the Chinese film industry seek foreign partnership through their productions. seeks to hybridise their industry through international co-productions and foreign collaborations.

Chapter Two considers the methodological challenges of this project and how these were managed. John Thornton Caldwell's (2008) integrated cultural-industrial mode of analysis provides a useful model involving a range of different data collection methods. These included in the context of this study, a close reading of government documents and news reports, a textual analysis of the films selected as case studies, along with participant

observation through attendance at industry forums, interviews with stakeholders, and user comments on the Chinese SNS, Douban. Three types of collaborations were identified including, (1) joint productions (Chapter Three); (2) films with Chinese financial investments (Chapter Four); and (3) post-production collaborations (Chapter Five).

Chapters Three to Five thus present the findings derived from a number of case studies and identify the themes discovered through the case study analysis. In Chapter Three, I focus on examining the category of 'joint productions' from the perspective of the Chinese government and identify three film productions that officially fall within this category. These are: the Australian-Chinese co-production *Children of the Silk Road* (Spottiswoode, 2008); the Hong Kong-China co-production *The Mermaid* (Chow, 2016); and the Hollywood and Chinese collaboration *Kungfu Panda 3* (Carloni & Nelson, 2016).

Chapter Four explores the motivations underpinning financial investments from Chinese stakeholders and identifies the possible benefits of this strategy. This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section I discuss the significance of *Bait 3D* (Rendall, 2012), an official co-production between Australia and Singapore, and the marketing strategies that the Chinese employed during the release of the film. The second section describes Chinese financial investment in a number of Hollywood films, with a focus on two films from Legendary entertainment and their collaboration with CFG – *Seventh Son* (Bodrov, 2014) and *Warcraft* (D. Jones, 2016).

Chapter Five considers the post-production industry in China and the emerging relationship with foreign practitioners as they seek to build their technological expertise. The chapter examines three different strategies: (1) post-production developed with a partnering country through an official co-production with *Mr. Go* (Y.-h. Kim, 2013); (2) *Hero's* (Yimou Zhang, 2002) strategy of hiring a foreign post-production company to provide Hollywood-like VFX; and (3) *Monster Hunt's* (Hui, 2015) use of foreign post-production practitioners who have already established themselves in the Chinese market.

The concluding chapter provides a summary of the key findings. Here, I also reflect on some of the hurdles I encountered when undertaking this study, and how these might inform future research. The thesis concludes with suggestions for further study that might build on these findings that will assist academics and foreign practitioners alike in gaining a better understanding of China's rapidly emerging role in the global mediasphere.

Chapter 1: International collaborations in the global film industry

Scholars and social commentators have provided various definitions of what globalisation means in modern culture. On the one hand, it has been argued that globalisation causes dominant cultures to overpower local cultures, with the effect of cultural homogenisation. This argument suggests that globalised culture is an extension of Western culture (Euro-American experiences) (Ritzer, 2012; Robertson & Lechner, 1985). Cultural homogenisation therefore relates to the concept of cultural imperialism which implies that culture only flows one-way from rich to poorer countries with the culture of 'rich countries' being perceived to be of 'superior quality' (Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; H. Schiller, 1969; Waterman, 2005). The idea here is that the global mass media is established by advanced capitalist countries creating a 'global homogenisation of media systems' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 25). This proposition, however, is not useful when it comes to understanding the current environment within Chinese film industry, as will be demonstrated in this thesis. Although the Chinese film industry did learn (and still is learning) from other commercial film industries (such as Hollywood), there is evidence that Chinese producers are adapting what they learn to their own commercial and cultural context.

On the other hand, it has been argued that globalisation leads to cultural hybridisation. Tomlinson (1996) believes that culture is not unidirectional, and that homogenisation is too broad a concept. Instead, Tomlinson and others (including Appadurai 1990; Dreher 2006; Giddens 1990; McGrew, 1992; Robertson 1992; Tomlinson 1999) argue that globalisation encourages cultural hybridisation that enables the interconnectedness of cultures with an impact on national culture. The process of cultural hybridisation is described as a process that is enhanced by globalisation in which cultural products blend different global practices, including those of their own context (Pieterse, 1994).

Globally, films are regarded as influential cultural products and are considered to play a significant role in the globalisation of culture. The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) highlights the importance of film as a representation of cultural expression and diversity through its 2005 *Protection and Promotion of the Diversity Cultural Expression* convention. The convention recognises the importance of films as cultural products and encourages governments to implement policies to promote and protect cultural expressions (UNESCO, 2005). Since 31 November 2016, 144 countries have approved the convention, including Australia, China and Korea. America however, has

refused to sign the convention and lobbied against this policy. Instead, the American government created its own Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in response which is currently in force in 20 countries. In the context of this thesis, it is critical to take note that China has not signed an FTA with America.

The primary aim of the American FTA is to reduce restrictions on American exports and to ensure America's interest is protected in partner countries (International Trade Administration, 2019). American exports listed in the FTA include Hollywood films that should be exempt from the participating nation's foreign film quota and/or the restrictions foreign films would have to face otherwise. The FTA has continuously supported the global dominance of Hollywood productions that have arguably had a negative impact in countries with small film industries (Crane, 2014; Jin, 2011). In 2016, 19 films in the global Top 20 list were Hollywood productions, accumulating 71% of the global box office revenue (MPAA, 2017; The Numbers, 2017).

The American FTA has created challenges for other national governments as it affects the interest of transnational businesses (Jin, 2011; Mosco, 1990). The motivation behind the FTA (at least within the film industry) fuels the concept of cultural homogenisation, as America imposes its own cultural relationships and influence on participating nations who need assistance from the FTA to sustain their economy (Tomlinson, 2012). America's attempts to dominate the global economy and cultural industries thus exemplifies Hebert Schiller's (1991) argument about cultural imperialism, in which he argues that Americanisation is the direct result of global capitalism. While Wendy Su's (2011) account of Americanisation within the film industry demonstrates how Hollywood films are playing a role in colonising international audiences leading to the kinds of cultural homogenisation that result in audiences embracing a single culture that supplants other cultural systems (Gramsci, 1971; Tomlinson, 1999).

The FTA may also play a role in promoting cultural homogenisation through the distribution of American popular cultural productions including film, television programs and music as they may also influence or threaten local cultural identities (Lui & Stack 2009). Looking specifically at Hollywood productions, the concept of cultural homogenisation enacted through film is not a farfetched idea. Indeed, the various industry forums that I have attended (see Chapter Two) revealed just how powerful some Hollywood practitioners believe they are, based on Hollywood's success globally. Ian Smith, producer of several Hollywood blockbusters, including *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller, 2015) and *The Fifth Element* (Besson, 1997), suggested in the 2016 6th Beijing Film Festival's *Foreign Film Co-Production Forum*:

‘... One big thing of disagreement is methodology, how you make film, the language the film uses. There is a way of storytelling in Europe and America that China can learn from and include them as a choice in the story they can tell. What needs to happen is that China needs to be influenced by the international film industry, so that our [Hollywood] services can help China with development.’

Ultimately producers like Smith still perceive Hollywood as the dominant industry and a role model, believing that a ‘successful’ production only happens if it is an extension of Western storytelling methods. Cheryl Boone Issacs, former President (2013 – 2017) of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (hereafter the Academy), dismissed an Asian film delegate at the 2016 Screen Singapore (see Chapter Two) forum when he asked for advice on how to create a similar academy and network for Asian film practitioners in order to help develop the Asian film industry. She replied that she would prefer the American Academy to be the main networking source for filmmakers and that she had aims to internationalise this. She did not provide any suggestions or encouragement for an Asian version, revealing that she considers herself as belonging to the dominant Hollywood filmmaking culture.

Although it may seem as if Hollywood practitioners are encouraging the global homogenisation of the media system (in this case film production), modernisation has also accelerated the effects of globalisation, although this occurs at an uneven pace in different parts of the world. This is a result of the very different effects of local culture, politics and technology (Robertson, 1992; Steger, 2009). Stuart Hall (1995) suggested that there were four factors that might play a role in this acceleration process: (1) the international integration of markets and transnational organisations, such as the film industry and production companies working across national borders; (2) the advancement of communication technologies that help to ease interconnectivity around the world (with the internet and social media this has greatly increased); (3) the emergence of a wealthy middle-class in non-Western countries; and (4) the increase of migration and travel access across national borders. Over the last twenty years, this process has escalated as a result of the communication technologies that have shrunk the globe, leading to acceleration in the distribution of cultural commodities internationally (Iwabuchi, 2002).

Although these factors are no doubt apparent through globalisation, Tomlinson (1997) argues against cultural homogenisation and Americanisation by stating that globalisation has now resulted in a movement away from the West. According to Koichi Iwabuchi (2002), who refers to Hall (1995), this is happening in the global film industry through

integration, networking and co-operation within transnational media industries worldwide, including non-Western ones. International governments have recognised the negative effects of the FTA, the dominance of Hollywood, and the role film production and consumption play in the negotiation of cultural identity. In the interest of developing their national film industries, some governments, including (but not limited to) Australia and Korea, have allocated specific funds for the production of films in order to encourage international collaborations that will serve national interests (Crane, 2014; Gao, 2009). A key strategy here involves the signing of a treaty with another nation to produce international co-productions that will promote the national cinema and culture of the participating nations.

Generally, films produced based on a signed treaty or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) are known as international co-productions. These films are produced in an association with other nations to enhance the economic and creative capital of the national cinema of the participating nations and are conducted in an official capacity. They are also described as official co-productions (Miller et al. 2001; Wei 2011). A treaty here is defined as an official agreement between the governments of two or more countries, while an MOU is an understanding between government agencies. To gain co-production status, films are required to follow a long and complicated process of meeting regulations and seeking approval from the government agencies of all the participating nations. This includes the observation of censorship and distribution regulations of the participating nation's competent authority. However, once co-productions overcome these hurdles, the film is considered a domestic cultural product in all the participating countries, allowing the production to be viewed as domestic content in each national context. This guarantees the co-production a range of benefits usually reserved for domestic productions, including government subsidies and priority in distribution (Hoskins, McFadyen & Finn, 1998; 1999; Miller *et al.*, 2001; Wei, 2011).

Although there is a clear distinction in the definition between official and unofficial co-productions, filmmakers and the media tend to use the term 'co-production' interchangeably (Baltruschat, 2010). Unofficial 'co-productions', or rather collaborations, take place in an unofficial capacity and involve private sectors across the globe. However, it is important to be precise in determining the definition of what counts as an official or an unofficial co-production. In the Chinese context, a film is only regarded as an official co-production if a treaty is signed between China and the participating nation. To avoid confusion between the terms, I will therefore refer to official co-productions as 'international co-productions', while an unofficial co-production will be identified as a 'collaboration'.

Ideally, international co-productions and collaborations should be entirely beneficial to all parties involved, but these processes are not without their issues and challenges. International co-production treaties are therefore designed to achieve several benefits, including financial pooling with all participating nations, tax subsidies, and access to the collaborator's market (Hoskins, McFadyen, Finn, & Jäckel, 1995). Through a combination of efforts, co-productions can therefore be seen as a strategy to combat Hollywood's dominance in the international film industry as governments seek to hybridise their industries by building on each nation's strengths. The accelerating effects of globalisation have also made working across national borders more convenient, leading to the transnational flow of films, finance and creative personnel.

Exploring the 'transnational' in transnational cinema

Transnational cinema as a concept is closely associated with the practice of international co-production and collaboration as both necessitate the circulation of financial, technical and artistic personnel across national borders to produce a film (Berry, 2010; Higbee & Lim, 2010). The concept of transnational cinema within the context of the sinosphere was initiated in the 1990s by Sheldon Lu. Transnationalism may also be associated with cultural hybridisation and media hybridity, as different cultural elements may be combined. Studying transnational cultural flows, as Iwabuchi (2002, p.51) suggests, allows us to 'articulate the dynamic, ongoing, uneven but creative process of cultural interconnection, transgression, appropriation, re-working and cross-fertilisation'.

According to Chris Berry (Berry, 2003, 2010), the term 'transnational' emerged around the same time as the widespread discourse about globalisation towards the end of the 20th century. Similar to the term cultural globalisation, 'transnational' is a complex term with different definitions depending on the context of the research. Within the context of Chinese and Chinese-language cinema studies, Berry (2010; 2013) along with Will Higbee and Lim Song Hwee (2010), has argued that scholars tend to use the term 'transnational' too generally, with little attempt to provide a definition. I am therefore careful to avoid this slippage and seek to engage more specifically with the concept of 'transnational cinema'. With this research I will attempt to understand the 'transnational' within the context of this research by exploring the various elements involved in the 'transnationality' of Chinese-foreign international co-production and collaborations in the case studies to be discussed in this thesis.

To study the effects of cultural hybridisation in Chinese international co-productions and

collaborations, we need to first examine the cultural flows of film production. Specifically, within studies of Chinese cinema, scholars in Western academia believe that Chinese cinema can only be understood in a transnational context (Berry & Pang, 2008; Higbee & Lim 2010; Lu, 1997; Zhang, 2010). Academics (Berry 2010 and Higbee & Lim 2010 to name but a few) have argued that Chinese cinema has always been transnational as Chinese films are produced and distributed not only within China, but across Greater China and the Sinosphere, including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan, along with countries to which specific Chinese Diasporas have migrated to with their shared cultural heritage, such as Singapore and Malaysia (Klein, 2007; Lu, 1997).

One problem that emerges is that of defining what exactly is meant by *Chinese* cinema as the term 'Chinese' may not necessary refer to China but could be in reference to the Chinese diaspora or territories within the Sinosphere. The issue with adopting English terms and concepts in the study of Asian media and cultural studies is not uncommon, as various academics (see Chua 2010; Iwabuchi 2014) have noted while offering suggestions on how to overcome this barrier. For instance, Chua Beng Huat (2010) suggests refining the use of local terminologies and concepts and explaining these terms within their cultural context rather than using a similar concept in English. I have therefore attempted to decentre Western hegemony of knowledge production throughout my thesis by introducing relevant concepts from the cultural context of my research (Iwabuchi 2014). In particular with this research, as suggested by James Curran and Park Myung-Jin (2000, p. 10) , media systems are not only influenced 'by national regulatory regimes and national audiences' preferences, but by a complex ensemble of social relations that have taken shape in national contexts.' The political and social complexity behind the term 'Chinese' and what constitutes to 'Chinese-ness', highlights the importance of not considering 'Chinese' cinema as a single entity, but to be more specific. I adopt a more specific term by translating Chinese cinema from the Chinese term 中国电影 (*zhongguo dianying*) as China (Chinese) cinema, while the term Chinese-language films (华语电影 *huayu dianying*) will be use to describe films presented in a Chinese dialect (including Mandarin) produced outside of the Mainland.

Returning to the discussion of the 'transnational', transnationalism has been generally defined as the 'multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation states' (Vertovec, 1999, p. 447). The 'nation' in transnationalism, on the other hand, has been defined as the 'territorial, social and cultural aspects of the nations' concerned' and is present when a cultural product is anchored within and transcends on one or more nation states (Kearney, 1995, p. 548). Comparable to the concept of cultural hybridisation, the 'nation' in transnationalism is significant as cultural products are

reproduced across national borders (Smith, 2001).

Though mainly used in migration studies, 'transnationalism' has now been routinely applied in Asian popular culture studies to describe various forms of globalisation (Berry, 2003; Berry, Iwabuchi & Tsai, 2017; Fung, 2013; Chua, 2004; Iwabuchi, 2002; 2004; Joo, 2011 to name but a few). Ong Aihwa (1999) suggests that the term 'transnational flows' may have become a more popular term to use than 'globalisation', as powerful Western societies such as America and England may perceive globalisation as a threat, while the concept of transnational flows is not. This could be a result of perceiving 'transnational flows' as a more positive term in relation to cultural products from the Asia Pacific.

After considering the different implications of the terms globalisation and transnationalism, I argue that within the context of this research, 'transnational' is the most relevant concept. In the case studies that I have identified for this research (see Chapter Two), examining forms of cultural re-production and political engagement are particularly apt in discussing the role and impact of international co-productions and collaborations in the Chinese film industry, pointing to the characteristics of the transnational (Vertvoec 1999). However, the term transnationalism may be problematic in relation to cinema studies as the production and cultural flows of films may operate somewhat differently from other forms of popular culture.

As it is, the concept of transnational films has been used by many to describe various forms of globalisation within the film industry. In Higbee and Lim's (2010) inaugural issue in the academic journal *Transnational Cinemas*, they argue that there are currently three approaches to transnational cinema studies. The first examines the national and transnational binary of cinema production, distribution and/or exhibition, focusing on an understanding of the cross-border cultural and economic formation of a film's production (Higson, 2000). However, due to the increasing forces of globalisation and the effects this has on the international film industry, academics are now aware of the limitation of conceptualising films from the perspective of a national cinema due to the changing nature of film production and distribution (Shaw, 2013). The second approach explores film culture and national cinema within the context of the production and the narrative input from personnel across a shared cultural heritage and/or geo-political boundaries (Higbee & Lim, 2010). This includes the study of Chinese transnational cinema by Sheldon Lu (1997), which directed attention to China and the Sinosphere (including Taiwan, Hong Kong and nations with large Chinese diaspora). A third approach explores diasporic exilic and postcolonial cinema and how these features challenge both western ideology and the concept of a homogenous national culture. This approach mainly concentrates on

diasporic or postcolonial filmmakers working in the Western film industry (Appadurai, 1990; Gilroy, 1993; Higbee & Lim, 2010).

In this study I focus on the first approach through the examination of collaborative productions between China and its foreign partners. Although this approach does not address the issue of migration and diaspora in relation to the production of transnational cinema, it nevertheless investigates the states and organisations involved in this transnational flow. I will therefore be applying the term 'transnational cinema' to transnational projects that have forged connections across borders. This includes official international co-productions and collaborations involving financial, technical and artistic personnel globally (Higbee & Lim, 2010; Tsing, 2000). Berry (2013) further deconstructs the term by offering his thoughts on Anna Tsing's (2000) argument that we should understand 'global' as an ideology, while transborder projects are the reality (in practice). More precisely, the research follows Berry's (2010) argument that transnational films cannot be considered only in terms of economic forces but that we should also be aware of how these productions 'have also allowed a host of other cinematic activities to develop and thrive, often with no primary consideration of profitability at all' (Berry, 2010, p. 124). This research highlights this aspect of transnationalism as I examine how China is building a Chinese film industry through collaborating with stakeholders and practitioners across national boundaries.

Transnational cinema and the role of cultural proximity

This thesis explores the ways in which transnational films would appear to be challenging the global dominance of the American film industry as ideally, transnational films disconnect from existing practices and create new practices and perhaps content. Producing transnational film productions, especially international co-productions, could be challenging. One of the biggest challenges faced by international co-production is the ability to attract audiences across national borders. Films have to address the diverse culture of their audiences, which may lead to a varied level of success. According to Angus Finney and Eugenio Triana (2015), international co-productions face the challenge of finding an appropriate formula in the expression of cultural specificity, national identity and creative integrity. International co-productions and collaborations also face challenges as producers need to consider the different cultural aspects that operate across participating nations to appeal to a larger and more diverse audience. This includes finding an appropriate script that will appeal to diverse audience tastes, while satisfying the requirements of the participating governments (Peng, 2016). Producers themselves may face issues as they deal with cultural and language barriers, leading to increasing costs and duration in the production due to different management styles, not forgetting the

additional levels of bureaucracy with which the filmmakers have to contend (Hoskins et al., 1995).

As this thesis will argue, this is a challenge for China in collaborations with the West, as producers are pressed to find the middle ground of 'Chinese' and 'Western' cultural elements. Producers are not able to simply segment cultural content based on the broad definition of 'Chinese and 'Western', as specific national cultures and practices need to be taken into account. The Australian film *Mao's Last Dancer* (Beresford, 2009) highlights this complexity, as the film failed to gain official co-production from China as Australian producers resisted requests for the changes from the film's Chinese stakeholders. *Mao's Last Dancer* was initially planned to be an official co-production but ended up being described as 'shot on location in China'. In an interview with the film's director Bruce Beresford, he mentioned that the Chinese government wanted to censor the script and to include scenes demonstrating 'how China is now very modern' (Gonzalez, 2009). The producers decided to ignore the directions from the Chinese, which resulted in the film failing to pass official requirements and not securing a release date.

Producers working across national boundaries may also disagree on what constitutes a 'good' film. Based on his experience, Mario Andreacchio (2013), director of the Chinese-Australian co-production *The Dragon Pearl* (Andreacchio, 2011), believes that Chinese producers are more market driven as they are concerned with the film's marketability and competitive advantage, while Australian producers are more concerned with the film's narrative.

Other than issues faced through managing the production process, cultural proximity also plays a significant role in creating the right film narrative for a target audience. A film's narrative flow and character representation on screen can have different impacts on audiences' reaction to the film based on the different experiences present in their own cultural narratives. Such considerations underline the importance of balancing content for a diverse audience. The French-Spanish co-production *L'Auberge Espagnole* (*The Spanish Apartment/Pot Luck*) (Klapisch, 2002) succeeded in this respect. The film was intended to appeal to European audiences as it explores the lives of a group of international university students from Europe living in Spain. The film's narrative engages with various audiences, especially within Europe, as it reflects the experience of various university students across cultures, living and studying together in a foreign country. The film received critical praise, winning various international awards with a rating of 7.3 out of 10 by 33,911 users on IMDb (*Pot Luck*, 2019).

Unfortunately, in some international co-productions and collaborations, attempts made to

appeal to audiences from the participating nations end up pleasing no one (Khoo, 2014). A key example here is the Hollywood blockbuster *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, produced as a collaboration with China's state broadcaster China Central Television's (CCTV) China movie Channel and Jiaflix Enterprises (Lang, 2014). While the producers intended to appeal to Hollywood and Chinese audiences by including Chinese elements such as Chinese product placements and the casting of Chinese celebrities, these were often misplaced and did not fit with the film's narrative flow or location (see Introduction). The film also contained pro-Chinese propaganda messages, which were noticeable to audiences leading to negative reviews (Blum, 2014).

Both *L'Auberge Espagnole* and *Transformers: Age of Extinction* used various strategies to address the cultural diversity of their audiences with varied outcomes. Given that appealing to audiences within a specific culture is already a difficult process, appealing to audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds may only introduce further complications. Learning from past mistakes by listening and understanding audiences' opinions is a crucial element in creating a potentially successful transnational film.

There are agreements about producers' perception on what constitutes a good film that would appeal to audiences across national borders, as audiences from different cultures (including nationalities) have different tastes and varied levels of cultural capital. The concept of cultural capital refers to the accumulation of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that enables an individual to navigate a culture and demonstrate their cultural competency (Bourdieu, 1986). The concept of cultural capital thus aligns with the concept of cultural proximity as both imply that audiences will prefer media content that they can navigate and understand (Cunningham, Jacka, & Sinclair, 1998; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Straubhaar, 2003, 2007). Access to cultural knowledge including language, and social norms across borders) differs across various cultural groups (including those across national borders, creating a varied level of cultural capital amongst films producers and audiences alike.

Ithiel de Sola Pool (1977) is usually credited with the concept of cultural proximity while Joseph Straubhaar (1991; 2003) popularised the idea in relation to notions of cultural imperialism and economic theory. Straubhaar's (1991) first major study of cultural proximity demonstrates audiences' preference for national content, with regional content that is closest to the audiences' experience being the next choice. Straubhaar's (1991; 2003) theoretical framework has been applied by others who have researched the reception of specific media content. Thomas Ksiazek and James Webster's (2008) study of the reception of media content among Hispanic audiences demonstrates the importance of language.

Wayne Fu's (2013) study also demonstrates the importance of cultural proximity by exploring the correlation between culture and genre consumption. This latter study shows that audiences from nations with a similar language and cultural profile to that of American audiences will also share a similar taste in films, while those that differ markedly do not. Following Fu, Ingyu Oh's (2009) study suggests that cultural homogenisation is widely believed to be an effect of a 'push' by outside forces. Here he introduces the concept of forward learning, which is 'motivated by expectations of economic and other tangible gain' when people seek to acquire new knowledge from within countries that are perceived to be more advanced (Oh, 2009, pp. 436-437). This creates a 'pull' as Chinese audiences' reception of Korean popular culture could result in the homogenisation of content as producers respond to what audiences want.

While the research cited above has demonstrated that cultural proximity may play a major role in an audience's acceptance of media content from somewhere else, the rapid effects of globalisation have rendered the world even smaller. The internet has increased accessibility, both legally and illegally to different media texts, regardless of one's location and – to an extent – social status (Kokas, 2014). As a result, there is a reason to try and satisfy a broader range of audience taste. For example, the Hollywood blockbuster does this by depending on expensive special effects rather than on the film's narrative in order to attract a global audience (Finney & Triana, 2015). Once again it has been suggested that this may eventuate in a form of cultural homogenisation as there may be an avoidance of cultural diversity in film content (Crane, 2014; Lee, 2008; Pells, 2004; Xue, 2008).

Fears of homogenisation include an anxiety that 'weaker' cultures may have to conform to the expectations of the dominant cultures. Over the years, globalisation has also played a huge role in making the consumption of foreign culture content more convenient, largely due to the technological advancement of the internet. Shim Doobo (2016) cites the international popularity of Japanese animation (as part of *クールジャパン*; Cool Japan or Gross National Cool), as well as the Korean Wave (*한류 hallyu*), and the global success of the Hong Kong and Bollywood cinema as examples of how globalisation has impacted on the popularity of Asian media internationally. Access to popular culture has never been more convenient as a result of the internet, which enables audiences to consume entertainment both legally and illegally with ease (Kokas 2014). Arguably, this has led audiences to 'accept' content from somewhere else as global audiences are more likely to be exposed to other forms of cultural products. An employee sitting at a directorial level of a major Hollywood media company interviewed for this thesis mentioned that as a result of a screen test, they discovered that audiences outside of America, especially where English is not the first language, accept foreign content more readily since they are used to reading

subtitles when watching a film. When it comes to films at the cinema, however, American audiences are less exposed to foreign content because of the dominance of American films. As American cinema audiences are less exposed to foreign content, they are likely to have a lower level of cultural knowledge, which widens the cultural proximity gap, making it difficult for non-English language films or films in multiple languages to do well in America.

Moving towards Chinese transnational films ‘created in China’

In attempts to attract audiences to local film productions and to attract global audiences, many film practitioners, especially in East Asia, have attempted to emulate Hollywood’s blockbuster ‘formula’ because it is perceived to be a fail proof strategy to attract a larger audience. However, Berry (2003) offers an important corrective here arguing that although East Asian film industries are imitating Hollywood’s strategies, they are also ‘de-westernising’ this format as they add their own local elements. In this regard, Berry’s (2003) concept of ‘de-westernisation’ has some affinities with the concept of ‘glocalisation’ proposed by Ronald Robertson (1994). Glocalisation is described as an evolution of globalisation, as international cultural products include local elements based on their target market. The term is inspired by the Japanese agricultural term *dochakuka* (土着化), which means one should adapt one’s farming methods to local conditions. The term is also used in Japanese businesses to describe how global products are adapted to the environment of the local market (Miyokshi & Haratoonian, 1989; Roland Robertson, 1994). Arguably, the glocalisation of cultural products could be perceived as a form of de-westernisation as the power is given to the local producer as they select the best global practice and localise it for their target market.

The concept of glocalisation might well be applied to Chinese cinema, however, the working and production culture in China demonstrated in this research seems to lean towards a hybridised approach. Practitioners working within the Chinese film industry are experimenting with various strategies to build their own ‘created in China’ productions. However, the concept of ‘created in China’ has led to debates on what industry this policy is in reference to. According to Michael Keane (2007), the term ‘created in China’ was used to promote the idea of China’s creative industry (direct translation: 创意产业 *chuangyi chanye*), but the government prefers to describe this as a cultural industry (文化产业 *wenhua chanye*) during official discussions and programs (Keane 2007; 2010). Creativity in China has been associated with foreign content imported from industries such as Hollywood, South Korea and Japan, while culture is associated, as Keane (2016, p. 2) describes as the ‘hegemony of the state’.

This suggests that the Chinese are using cultural industries as an umbrella term that encompasses the creative industry, as China seeks to build their own *creativity*. However, there are debates in the Western context about this distinction as they both evoke different meanings and that have ‘implications for theory, industry and policy analysis’ (Cunningham, 2002, p. 54), but in China this distinction is not operational. Cultural industries include the concept of ‘high culture’, and could include high art, elite and non-commercial industries that evoke ‘a more national and civic articulation of cultural identity’ (Keane, 2007, p. 4), while creative industries consists of the commercialisation of creative practices. As China seeks to build its soft power ambitions, the concept of cultural industries seems to include the creative industry as the government pushes the promotion of popular culture along with Chinese literature and fine arts. The debate over the distinction between ‘creative’ and ‘culture’ will not be discussed here as it increases the complexity of the term beyond the focus of this thesis. Despite these distinctions, China’s creative and cultural industries fall under the government’s jurisdiction as part of the country’s national cultural policy in which film and its production play a significant role in placing China’s film (and creative) industries on the global map. Additionally, the Chinese film industry became embedded within China’s cultural industry planning, which resulted in designated film bases, including bases that specialises in co-productions such as Hengdian World Studios in Zhejiang (Keane, Yecies, Flew, 2018).

Chapter 2:

Approaches to researching international film co-production and foreign collaboration with China

While conducting this research, one of the major challenges facing this project (and in creative production studies in general) is the secretive culture of the film industry that often prevents the gathering of industry data other than box office revenues (Bondebjerg et al., 2017). Analysing the success of a film purely on its box office revenues can at times be problematic. Within the context of the Chinese film industry, this was highlighted in exposé reports released in 2015, 2016 and 2017 which uncovered evidence of Chinese film distributors bulk purchasing tickets for 'ghost screenings' to increase the apparent sales of their films. This was further underlined by the underreporting of box office figures for foreign films, revealing how untrustworthy these figures can be in the Chinese film market (Burkitt, 2016; R Cain, 2017; Frater, 2016; Wildau, 2015). With these subterfuges in mind, it is clear that there is a need for other kinds of indicators to determine the success of a film. These I have attempted to apply through my research for this project.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, most of the current literature on international co-productions focuses on the ways in which policy decisions may benefit and/or hinder the industry, rather than on how audiences' experience the films (DeBoer, 2015; Hoskins et al., 1998, 1999; Hoskins et al., 1995; Miller *et al.*, 2001; Goldsmith & O'Regan, 2008; Finney, 2015; Walsh, 2012). Within this field of research, Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations are gradually becoming significant in the international film industry, with film producers keen to experiment with various types of working relationships with China as they seek to find the most beneficial formula for transnational success. In order to understand this process, it is important to consider the policies, as well as producers and audiences' opinions about international co-productions and collaborations with China as these may help to shed light on the ways in which transnational business ventures respond to market demands and consumers taste.

This project is informed by John Caldwell's mixed method approach to production studies and employs 'an integrated cultural-industrial method of analysis' to provide a 'multiperspectival form of analysis' (Caldwell, 2008, p. 4 & 375). This allows for a consideration of the complexity of film production and distribution as a 'socially interactive process [that is] carried out by individuals within institutional, organisation, technological and other structural context[s]' (Newcomb & Lotz, 2002, p. 26). The case studies in this thesis adopt this approach by providing a detailed analysis of the variety of encounters that take place in Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations

(Bondebjerg et al., 2017). This integrated approach also includes an analysis of government documents and news reports; an analysis of the available statistical data including box office revenues; an analysis of the film themselves, along with data obtained through participant observation at industry forums, interviews with key stakeholders, and user comments on the Chinese SNS – Douban.

In this chapter, I discuss the analysis of government documents and news reports, which provided background knowledge on the different forms of partnerships relevant to this research. Secondly, I explain the approach to the analysis of the film text, situating the available audience feedback within the specific contexts of this project. Next, I outline the various industry forums that I attended as a participant observer. I then discuss the method employed and the value of the interviews conducted for this research. Lastly, I explore audience participation on Douban as a form of audience research, albeit with a very select audience group. All of these methods are combined in the generation of key themes through a form of discourse analysis (Brown & Yule, 1983).

Government documents and news analysis

To be kept informed on the rapid changing climate of the Chinese film industry, in particular with international co-productions and collaborations, I conducted an analysis of relevant government documents and news to build foundational knowledge on the political and economic factors impacting collaborative decisions with China. This necessitated regular updates on policies, mergers and new productions in development. Conducting this analysis was very valuable as it helps researchers to expand their interpretive perspectives and epistemological position (Stoke, 2003). As Alasuutari (1995) notes, it is important when studying a cultural product to reflect on the political context that may impact on its creation, in this case a film text.

The government documents I used for this research encompassed policies on international co-productions between China and the partnering countries; a synopsis of the production; and official evaluations of the working partnership. This included government documents released publicly and several international agreements. These include the Australian and Chinese co-production treaty, the Australian and Korean co-production treaty, and the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Other government documents include film regulations and guidelines on collaborating with China released by Chinese authorities. The relationship between Hollywood and China was analysed through news articles and the agreements between the Motion Pictures Association of America (MPAA) agreement with Chinese authorities in 2012 and 2015.

News sources were used to provide up-to-date information on the development of public debate on the topic. This involved an exhaustive search of news articles on Factiva regarding collaborations with China from 2012 to 2015, while Google Alerts was used to keep track of news articles published during the research and writing of this thesis (from 2016 to 2019). In particular, I focused on industry news sources including: *China Film Insider*, *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*. The news analysis also consisted of articles published about the case studies, which assisted me in the identification of the marketing and distribution strategy of the films selected for this research.

Based on the analysis, I identified three distinct forms of Chinese-foreign collaborations commonly used in the industry:

1. **Joint productions:** films awarded joint production status, regardless of whether a treaty or MOU was signed between governments;
2. **Post-production collaborations:** Chinese films with post-production work conducted by a foreign firm with a specific focus on the visual effects (VFX) sector;
3. **Financial Investment:** foreign films with financial investment from Chinese companies. Not all of the films in this category are considered to be domestic (Chinese) films to the Chinese authorities.

Following the three collaboration methods listed above, I decided to structure my thesis' findings and discussions around these three categories and selected nine films for analysis. The films were selected based on their significance to the debate about international co-productions and collaborations with China relevant to my research as discussed through Chapter Three to Five. The films selected for each category are listed below:

1. Joint production:
 - *Children of the Silk Road* (黄石的孩子; 2008) – Australia;
 - *The Mermaid* (美人鱼; 2016) – Hong Kong;
 - *Kungfu Panda 3* (功夫熊猫 3; 2016) – America (Hollywood).
2. Financial Investment:
 - *Bait 3D* (大海啸之鲨口逃生; 2012) – Australia and Singapore;
 - *Seventh Son* (第七子：降魔之战; 2014) – America (Hollywood);
 - *Warcraft* (魔兽; 2016) – America (Hollywood).

3. Post-production Collaboration:

- *Mr. Go* (大明猩; 2013) – Korea;
- *Hero* (英雄; 2002) – Australia;
- *Monster Hunt* (捉妖记; 2015) – America.

I am aware that the selected case studies do not fully represent Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations. However, it is hoped that this research offers new insights into the industrial factors that impact on a film's production, what producers believe the Chinese audiences' want and Chinese audiences' reception of these transnational productions.

In addition to examining government documents and news articles, I collected box office statistics to identify the financial performance of the selected case studies (Bryman 2012; Lee 2006). Although fabricated box office revenues were recently exposed in China, examining box office figures provided me with a basic understanding of the popularity of the selected films with Chinese audiences. I collected box office statistics from *entgroup* – a research centre dedicated to the Chinese entertainment industry, and *China Box Office* (CBO 中国票房) – a site dedicated to reporting box office revenues in China (CBO 中国票房, 2019; entgroup, 2019). I also conducted background research on each film to identify the countries involved in 中国票房 the production process in order to investigate the geopolitics affecting each film.

Film text analysis

Once the case studies were selected and before analysing the Chinese audience feedback, I conducted a close analysis of the selected films that included some content analysis that involved counting the occurrence of specific features in the film text. Using this method, I examined the Chinese elements present in the selected films by dividing them into three categories: (1) Chinese actors; (2) duration of dialogue in Mandarin; and (3) duration of scenes set in China. Within the Chinese actor category, I examined the duration of screen time and any dialogue that was used in the film to identify if the actors were part of the main or supporting cast, or simply making a cameo appearance. These results were analysed in relation to the news articles detailing the film's marketing strategy to identify the reliability of the marketing efforts in China. Next, I took note on the duration of the dialogue in Mandarin (if any) and related this to the context of the story. Lastly, I observed where the film was set and shot with reference to the film's narrative.

Similar methods have been used by scholars to understand how gender, and/or ethnic minorities are represented in film and television, through the identification of screen-time and dialogue given to them (see Eschholz, Bufkin & Long, 2002; Klocker, 2014; Naderi, Darzai & Eskandari, 2014; Tukachinsky, Mastro & Yarchi, 2015). This method of analysis allowed me to conduct a comparison between the publicity surrounding the film (through news articles) and what actually happened in the film, in order to identify the accuracy of the film's promotional material. In doing so, I was able to place the social media comments of the Chinese audience in context, and to identify what elements of the films were significant to them. This was then correlated with a consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of the implemented strategies during the film's production process.

Industry forums

To complement the analysis of government documents, news articles, and the film text, I attended several industry forums in 2015 to 2016 to collect new information on Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations that were not published or made known in the analysis listed above. The industry forums I attended involved key producers and creative personnel with experience collaborating with the Chinese. Unlike academic conferences, the participants in these forums are from media companies seeking to forge new commercial partnerships or to build on existing ones. Many participants (both panel and audience members) were open to informal private conversations about their experiences. These provided invaluable information about how they perceived the current context of Chinese co-productions and collaborations. This assisted me in creating the key questions to ask during the interviews and the issues to which I should attend to when undertaking the audience research.

During the panel discussions, participant observation, or more precisely participant listening, was undertaken in order to understand the relationship between panel members and the topic under discussion. Participant listening places a focus on what is heard, allowing me to link the comments provided by the participants (speakers) to the broader context of the research (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Forsey, 2010). Permission was sought from organisers of each forum to record the panel discussions. Data was collected without disturbing the nature of the environment of the forums which included presentations and panel discussions, panel members' interaction with each other including the moderator, along with their responses during the question and answer (Q&A) session (Greifinger et al., 2014). After collecting the data, I conducted a discourse analysis based on the voice recordings of the panel discussion (which were transcribed) and notes I took based on the observations I made through my attendance.

I analysed a total of four industry forums, two of which I attended, while viewing the other two online as they were publicly available on iQiyi, a Chinese video streaming website. A list of the forums and panel discussions I analysed is presented in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: List of forums and panels analysed for research

| 2015 Asia Television Forum (ATF) and Screen Singapore | | | | | |
|--|--|--|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| <i>In Conversation with:</i> | | | | | |
| Name | Title | Company/Film | JP⁴ | PP | FI |
| Dave Winnan | Executive Producer of International Formats | ITV Studios (UK) | | | |
| Qiu Yuan Yuan | President | JSBC International Co. Ltd (China) | | | |
| PJ Ronerts (Moderator) | Senior Vice President | Repucom Asia | | | |
| <i>What do Buyers Want</i> | | | | | |
| Charlene Lai | Senior Director of Content Acquisition and Licensing in APAC | Le Corporation Limited, LeTV (Hong Kong) | | | |
| Hwang Jin-woo | General Manager/Head of Formats in Media Content Business | CJ E&M (Korea) | | | |
| Fera Rosihan | Director | GroupM Entertainment (Indonesia) | | | |
| Maggie Xiong | Senior Director of International Acquisitions | Youku Tudou (China) | | | |
| Vinita Jakhanwal (Moderator) | Senior Director for Displays and APAC Research | IHS Technology (Malaysia) | | | |
| <i>On the Prowl for Asia's Original</i> | | | | | |
| Xue Han | Project Manager, Strategic Development Centre | China Zhejiang Satellite TV (China) | | | |
| Hendy Liem | Vice President of Contents | MNC Group (Indonesia) | | | |
| Kevin Balhetchet | Managing Director | Hun Media Group Pte Ltd (Singapore) | | | |
| Zhang Yuxin | General Manager, Copyright Management Centre | iQIYI | | | |
| Tim Crescenti | President | Small Word IFT (USA) | | | |

⁴ Note on abbreviations: JP – Joint Productions; PP – Post-Production Collaborations; FI – Film Investments

| 2016 Australia-Chinese Co-Production Forum | | | | | |
|---|--|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <i>Effective Australia-China Collaborations</i> | | | | | |
| <u>Name</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Company/Film</u> | <u>JP</u> | <u>PP</u> | <u>FI</u> |
| Mark Lazarus | Producer | <i>Guardian of the Tomb</i> | | | |
| Tim Philips | Head of Producer Offset and Co-production | Screen Australia | | | |
| Ellen Eliasoph | President and CEO | Village Roadshow Pictures Asia | | | |
| Damian Kerin | Regional Manager of Entertainment | Allianz Global Corporate and Speciality | | | |
| William Feng | Vice President and Head of Greater China | MPAA | | | |
| Jiang Yanming | CEO | China Lion Entertainment | | | |
| Wu Yue | Vice President | CFCC | | | |
| Pauline Chan | Writer and Director | <i>33 Postcards</i> | | | |
| Patrick Frater (Moderator) | Asian Editor | Variety | | | |
| <i>How to Maximise the 30% PDV Offset Working with Australian VFX and Post</i> | | | | | |
| Tony Clark | Managing Director | Rising Sun Pictures | | | |
| Adam Scott | General Manager | Spectrum Film | | | |
| Debra Richards (Moderator) | CEO | Ausfilm | | | |
| 2016 Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum | | | | | |
| Raman Hui | Director | <i>Monster Hunt</i> | | | |
| Natalie Portman | Actress (America) | | | | |
| Giuseppe Torantore | Director (Italian) | | | | |
| Ian Smith | Producer (UK) | | | | |
| James Schamus | Producer (American) | | | | |
| Huang Jianxin (Moderator) | Director (China) | | | | |
| 2018 Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum⁵ | | | | | |
| Steven O'Dell | President of International Theatrical Distribution | Sony Pictures Entertainment | | | |
| Johannes Rexin | Vice President | European Producer Club | | | |
| James Wang | CEO | Huayi Brothers | | | |

⁵ The 2017 Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum was not available for streaming during the research of this thesis.

One of the major limitations of this form of industry research was finding participants who were willing to discuss the questions I wanted to ask. Many participants (both panel and audience) were representing their company, and therefore, may not have been able to answer the questions because of commercial in-confidence issues. In most cases, although contacts were exchanged, organising interviews were not always successful as respondents would eventually direct the enquiry to different departments, which failed to give a positive response.

2015 ATF and Screen Singapore

The 2015 ATF and Screen Singapore forum was held from 1 December to 4 December 2015. The forum focused on Southeast Asia's television and film industry as well as the facilitation of networking opportunities among film and television producers, investors and creative personnel across the globe. Discussions on the first three days were around the television industry (ATF), while the final day focused on the Southeast Asian film industry (Screen Singapore).

Although this research is not specifically concerned with television production, the first and third day of the forum were useful as panel members based their discussion around their experiences of working in, and with, China and potential opportunities based on the then current industrial and political climate. Most of the audience was from Southeast Asia with a select few from Korea and China. As listed in Table 2.1, the first three panels⁶ I selected for analysis had at least one panel member in the Chinese television and/or film industry and their conversations focused on China's ambition to build international partnerships.

2016 Australia-China Co-production Forum

Recordings were not permitted for the *2016 Australia-China Co-Production Forum*. Nonetheless, I was able to take detailed notes during the panel discussions with permission from the event organisers to publish my findings, as long as the films in discussion had been released to the public. The entire conference was simultaneously interpreted in English and Mandarin for conference participants; however, I did not use the service as I am bilingual in English and Mandarin. This allowed me to pay close attention to the nuance in the language used. I specifically examined the first two sessions of this forum as the last session was a pitch session for filmmakers who were seeking Chinese and

⁶ The three panels include: *In Conversation* with Dave Winnan and Qiu Yuan Yuan, *What do Buyers Want* and *On the Prowl for Asia's Original*.

Australian film financiers and was marked confidential. The forum had a much lower number of audience participants than that of the 2015 *ATF and Screen Singapore* forum, which allowed for more networking and conversations during breaks. The majority of participants here were Australians with a few from Chinese mid-size production studios.

The first session *Effective Australia-China Collaborations* consisted of two panels. The first panel focuses on Australia's experience of co-producing with China through the films *Bleeding Steel* (Zhang, 2017) and *Guardians of the Tomb*. The second panel focused on Chinese experiences of co-producing with Australia, with an emphasis on China's enthusiasm in searching for original content from outside of China and the digital platforms available for feature films. The second session, *More Bang for your Buck – How to Maximise the 30% PDV Offset Working with Australian VFX and Post Studios* discussed Australia's post-production resources and was the most well-received panel for the day, showcasing Australia's reputation in this sector. The panel outlined the history of post-production in Australia and provided essential information on the various offsets available for international film producers. More importantly, it was the only panel that presented their visual aids in both English and Mandarin, with the presentation spoken in English.

2016 and 2018 Beijing International Film Festival Sino-Foreign Co-production Forum

The 2016 and 2018 *Beijing International Film Festival Sino-Foreign Co-Production Forums* were both streamed on the Chinese online video platform iQIYI for public viewing. At the time of research, the 2017 *Beijing International Film Festival Sino-Foreign Co-Production Forum* was not available online. However, the biggest limitation of watching the forum online was not having the ability to fully observe the panel participants given that what is viewed on screen is dictated by the camera angles and the editing of the session. Another limitation was not having the ability to network or hold conversations with participants to gain more specific information regarding my research.

Both the 2016 and 2018 forums were conducted in both English and Mandarin, with Mandarin being the dominant language. Conference participants were able to listen to simultaneous translations in English and Mandarin. Russian was also available for the 2018 panel, as one of the invited guests was Russian director Fedor Bondarchuk. I myself translated the Mandarin dialogue into English for analysis as an English translation was not available online. The major limitation of translation, which I personally experienced and is widely acknowledged in translation studies, was that some words seemed to be 'untranslatable'. Untranslatable words pose two problems: (1) not having a direct

equivalent word in the translated language; and (2) although the word may seem translatable, cultural connotations might become lost in the translation process (Blenkinsopp & Pajouh, 2010; Overing, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2011).

In order to overcome this barrier, I have taken particular care in explaining the untranslatable word or phrase in the analysis that follows and have provided the cultural context. This is also the case in my account of the interviews I conducted in Mandarin and the translation of Chinese audiences' social media posts. One advantage of being able to understand both languages means that I did not have to consider the influence of another translator. In this way, my interpretations are 'part of the context of data production' (Temple, 1997, p. 608). This leads to a degree of consistency in the analysis of the research data even if my interpretation is somewhat subjective.

Placing the importance of language, translation and cultural nuance in mind, one of the issues raised by Chinese producers (specifically Raman Hui and Yu Dong) during the 2016 panel session was the importance of differentiating between English language and Mandarin films. From an industry perspective, both Hui and Yu believe that there are cultural nuances involved depending on the target audience for the film. English language films primarily cater to English speaking countries, while Mandarin films are specifically intended for Chinese audiences. This implies that audiences may have different understandings of the cultural nuances that may be present in a film's narrative. Chinese audiences may have different perceptions of the text based on the language used in the film. As a result of the observation, I decided to divide the selected case studies into the primary language used in each film, listed in Table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2: Segmentation of English-language and Mandarin films

| English-language Films | Mandarin Films |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Children of the Silk Road</i> | <i>The Mermaid</i> |
| <i>Bait</i> | <i>Mr Go</i> (in Korean and Chinese) |
| <i>Seventh Son</i> | <i>Hero</i> |
| <i>Warcraft</i> | <i>Monster Hunt</i> |
| <i>Kungfu Panda 3</i> | <i>Kungfu Panda 3</i> ⁷ |

Taken as a whole, both the 2016 and 2018 *Beijing International Film Festival Sino-Foreign Co-Production Forums* provided valuable insights into the context of co-productions with Hollywood and Europe, as they involve major players in the international film industry with experience in Chinese-foreign co-productions. The attitudes towards co-production

⁷ Two versions of the film were released, one in English for English language audiences, and another in Mandarin targeted primarily at Chinese audiences.

and collaboration also differed in each panel discussion which ignited my curiosity. Was it possible that the public setting for the majority of the panel discussions led to self-censorship among some of the panel members? I later sought to explore this question through interviews with filmmakers experienced in co-producing or collaborating with China.

Interviews with industry players

Before conducting the interviews, an Application for Approval to Undertake Research Involving Human Participants was submitted to the University of Wollongong (UOW) Human Research Ethics Committee. This was approved on 21 September 2016 (HE15/457). The interviews were useful in providing insight into the perceptions of the producers and creative personnel and their intentions when implementing certain strategies. Interviews with key producers and creative personnel with experiences of working on international co-productions and collaborations provided further insights into the questions raised from the analysis of government documents and news articles along with the conference panels.

Applying a snowball sampling strategy, I recruited 12 interviewees who had experience of co-producing and/or collaborating with China, with their last released film being in 2010 and/or after⁸. Snowball sampling refers to accessing interviewees through personal contacts and from other interviewees (Noy, 2008). This was executed through contacting networks I had established prior to starting this research and met at the industry forums. Although not all interviewees had a role in the selected case studies for this research, the interviews provided me with invaluable understanding of the people working behind the scenes, the organisations, and the social dynamics of producing with China. This enabled me to better understand the networking practices of the creative labour involved and the role of cultural globalisation in the Chinese film industry (Caldwell, 2008; Rosten, 1941; Sullivan, 2009).

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured and organised around pre-planned open questions, while other questions emerged during the dialogue (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The questions were developed from the information I had previously collected from government documents and news analysis, the film texts and forum discussions. I presented all interviewees with a participant information sheet which they had to sign, and a consent form that stated the purpose of the research. I also requested permission to voice record, explaining how the recording would be stored and used (see Appendix 1). A list of interview questions can be found in Appendix 2. A list of interviewees that participated in

⁸ Taking note that producing and creating a film could take several years to complete.

the research is listed in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: List of interviewees

| Name | Title | Company/Film | JP ⁹ | PP | FI |
|-------------------|--|---|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Stephen Cremin | Journalist and Deputy Director | New York Asian Film Festival (America) | | | |
| Anonymous | N/A | N/A (America/Hollywood) | | | |
| Mike Gabrawy | Chief Creative Officer | Arclight Films (Australia) | | | |
| Elliot Tong | Head of Asian Sales and Acquisition/Producer | Arclight Films (China) | | | |
| Kevin Chang | Korea | Independent Producer | | | |
| Matt Cho | Korea | Max Digital Studio | | | |
| Lee Hong-dae | Manager of New Film Business | CJ E&M (Korea and China) | | | |
| Andy Yoon | Producer | Moonwatcher | | | |
| Lee Joo-ick | Producer | <i>Late Autumn</i> (Korea) | | | |
| Edward Yi Chi-yun | Producer | | | | |
| Chuck Chae | Producer/Director | Dexter Studios/ Independent (Korea and China) | | | |
| Chris Bremble | Visual Effects Supervisor | Base FX (China and America) | | | |

As a Southeast Asian woman in my late 20s, ethnically Chinese, and able to speak the language, I had to be aware of the gender and class differences that could impact on the interviewee's conduct (Seiter, 1990). Interviewees are likely to assume that I have knowledge of the 'rules' regarding gender and age that are ingrained into East Asian culture. Because of this, I knew that interviewees might offer a response based on their personal bias due to my age and gender. For example, during some of the interviews in Korea, interviewees conducted an informal interrogation during our conversations that seemed to be 'testing' my knowledge of the East Asian film industry, the Chinese market and my Mandarin ability. However, once they ascertained that I did have the acceptable level of knowledge as a researcher, they started to open up and participate in meaningful conversations, which provided rich data for this study.

Prior to the interviews, I conducted background research on each interviewee to obtain basic knowledge of their experiences and to search for related interviews they may have already conducted within the context of this research. I did this so as to not ask my interviewees the same questions, but to further explore their responses. I was also mindful of not having any preconceived notion of my interviewees that would affect the equity of the interviews, even though background research was conducted. After conducting research on my interviewees, I made the decision not to contact Chris Bremble for an

⁹ Note on abbreviations: JP – Joint Productions; PP – Post-Production Collaborations; FI – Film Investments

interview as he had previously provided interviews to various industry news outlets that already provided the level of insight I needed for my research.

I first conducted face-to-face interviews in Korea on October 2016 during the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) and in Seoul on a research trip funded by the UOW's Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts' Research Activity Support (RAS) Funding. Initially, all the interviews were planned to be held at Busan. However, this was prevented by a boycott of BIFF on behalf of the Korean film producers who were protesting against the political interference of the Busan metropolitan government. I therefore had to reschedule the majority of my interviews and instead met several of my interviewees in Seoul and Ilsan.

These interviews were conducted in English or Mandarin, based on the language ability of the interviewees. Interviews conducted in Mandarin were personally translated and transcribed into English for analysis. As noted above, I was mindful of the problems in translating the text from Mandarin to English. All the interviews were voice recorded, unless specific comments were made off the record.

While at Busan, I managed to conduct several face-to-face interviews, including one with the American journalist and Deputy Director of the New York Asian Film Festival, Stephen Cremin; Korean Producer Edward Yi; and Lee Hong-dae, Manager of New Film Business from CJ E&M. Yi was the special effects coordinator for the Chinese, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan co-production *Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008-2009) and now works as a producer bridging Chinese and Korean filmmakers, while Lee was part of the team that developed the Chinese-Korean co-production *20 Once Again*. Interviews with Yi and Lee were conducted in Mandarin.

At Ilsan I interviewed Andy Yoon a Korean Producer from Moonwatcher, who is the producer of the Korean film *Blind* (블라인드)(Ahn, 2011) and the Chinese remake *The Witness* (我是证人)(Ahn, 2015). The interview with Yoon was conducted in Korean, with an English and Mandarin interpreter present at the interview. The two interpreters worked for Yoon's company and were present in the interview as Yoon wanted to ensure that his comments were translated accurately. This did however, present a limitation as I had to be mindful that the translation was based on the interpreters' experiences – who are also Yoon's employees –, as they reconstructed the answers to the interview questions (Temple, 1997). However, having two interpreters (one in English and another in Mandarin) meant that I was able to compare two different versions of the same text, providing a more complex account.

Face-to-face interviews conducted in Seoul were with Kevin Chang, an independent producer, who has been actively supporting co-productions with China; Matt Cho, a producer at Max Digital Studio who works closely with the Chinese company, Huayi Brothers; Lee Joo-ick, a Korean producer who produced the Korean-American-Chinese-Hong Kong co-production *Late Autumn* (Kim, 2010); and Chuck Chae, an independent director who directed a Chinese-Korean co-production *Laspe* (forthcoming) and also conducted post-production work on the Chinese-Korean co-production *Mr Go* and several Chinese films directed by Tsui Hark through Dexter Studios. Online interviews were conducted via e-mail with Arclight's Creative Chief Office Mike Gabrawy (*Bait* and *Bleeding Steel*) and through WeChat¹⁰ voice messaging with Elliot Tong, the Head of Asian Sales and Acquisition at Arclight Films (China). Lastly, a phone interview was conducted with an interviewee who wished to remain anonymous but worked at a directorial level in a Hollywood media company specialising in producing Hollywood blockbusters, during the research phase of this study.

The interviews gave me insights into the opinions of filmmakers, including directors, producers and creative personnel, and helped me understand more about the framework of these transnational collaborations (Caldwell 2008). Through the rich data collected up to this point, I managed to gather valuable knowledge about how content is created and what filmmakers believe Chinese audiences would like to see at the cinema. The data from the interviews was also used to identify any connection (or lack thereof) between the filmmakers' intentions and what audiences took away from their encounter with the text (Hall 1980). In addition to the approaches described above, I undertook an analysis of audience feedback on the Chinese SNS, Douban. Conducting an analysis of audience comments provided some insight into ways that Chinese audiences view Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations.

Analysing audiences' feedback through social networking sites

In Stuart Hall's (1991 [1973]) encoding/decoding model, the encoder (in this case, filmmaker) may construct a given text based on their framework of cultural knowledge and factors in the external environment such as, within the context of this thesis, the agenda from financial investors and political involvement of participating nations. The audience then actively decodes the text based on their cultural understanding and social experiences that may differ from that of the encoder. When audiences share the same cultural knowledge as the encoder, this suggests a degree of what Joseph Straubhaar describes as

¹⁰ WeChat is a Chinese instant messaging application and social media platform

cultural proximity (Straubhaar 1991; 2003). The concept of cultural proximity highlights the importance of paying attention to the demographics and the cultural knowledge of the audience being studied (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

In today's media environment, the internet along with SNSs has facilitated the exploration of participatory culture, creating new pathways for researchers and businesses to gain insights into their target audiences through an analysis of their social networking activities (K Soh & Yecies, 2017). The launch of various SNSs has empowered audiences who have established 'a space at the intersection between old and new media, [and] are demanding the right to participate within the culture' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 24). SNS also allow for the creation of specific communities, encouraging like-minded individuals to share and communicate their opinions on various topics, fuelling a participative, interactive, agentic audience base (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; N. Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). For example, the users on Douban could be classified as a highly active audience in their engagement with the text (film). The participation and content created by these users could reveal the specific cultural groups to which they belong and can yield a better understanding of how these audiences engage with a particular text. Therefore, having knowledge of the audiences demographic profile and motivations is important to facilitate understanding of the meanings behind the comments they posted on Douban.

Within the context of watching a film, traditionally, the audience at a public film screening involves a group of people who view the same performance. In the early days of the cinema, viewers had limited interactions with the onscreen 'object' (McQuail, 1997). However, SNSs have changed the nature of this interaction, allowing audiences to share their opinions about what they have viewed both widely and anonymously. These opinions may provide valuable insights, as unlike more traditional datasets collected from surveys, conversations on SNSs are seen to have less response bias as the researchers are not directly involved in facilitating the discussion (Orne, 1962). Furthermore, the fact that people believe that they are recommending and giving advice to their peers without the involvement of the organisation responsible for marketing the product or service in question, is also of significance (Keller, 2007).

At the time of writing (July 2019), much of the scholarship relating to cinema audience feedback on SNSs has focused on the technology behind the collection of data, the economics of the film industries and the influence of marketing through the reception of films rather than on a vigorous analysis of what people say about the content that they are viewing (see Chen & Xie, 2008; Duan, Gu & Whinston, 2008; Kim, Park & Park, 2013; Henning-Thurau, Wiertz & Fledhaus, 2015; Liu, 2006). It is precisely this kind of analysis

that this thesis seeks to explore and to contribute to a broader understanding of the films reception.

The role of Douban in China

I selected Douban as the data source for my research as it offers a rich source of information on both foreign and domestic cultural products available in China through official and unofficial channels. Beyond China, Douban has become a well-known source of critical cultural reviews with Western media outlets using the site as a barometer of a film's success with Chinese audiences (Yecies et al., 2016). Douban has also seen a steady rise in users over the years. In 2017, 13.6% of all internet users in China were active on Douban, an increase from 11.15% in 2015, showing the significance and rising popularity of the platform (CNNIC 2017).

Douban was launched in 2005 as a platform allowing users to interact, review and post recommendations on books, music and film, together with the affordance for users to create their own communities based on their personal interest. Non-registered users are able to access up to 80% of the site's content, while registered users have the additional capacity to rate and review books, music and films, as well as replying to reviews left by other users. Douban is also known as a 'follower' network, allowing users to follow other users without knowing them personally and to discover other users based on the platform's characteristics and functions.

The site's primary audience consists of white-collar workers as well as Chinese university students who are interested in a wide range of cultural products also known as 文艺青年 (*wenyi qingnian*). In English this translates as *young people* who are interested in literature and the arts. People within this group are considered opinion leaders who frequently use interest group websites such as Douban, and are more likely to live in urban areas such as Beijing and Shanghai, as well as being active participants in the creative industries as creators or consumers (Ren, 2016; Tan, 2012). This cultural group of Douban users are more likely to have been exposed and influenced by popular cultural products from outside the borders of the Mainland.

Douban is segmented into nine categories:

1. Douban Books (豆瓣读书 *douban dushu*) – allows users to upload their reviews on books;
2. Douban Read (豆瓣阅读 *douban yuedu*)– for users to purchase and download e-books;

3. Douban Film (豆瓣电影 *douban dianying*) – allows users to upload their reviews on films and book movie tickets online;
4. Douban Music (豆瓣音乐 *douban yinyue*) – allows users to upload their reviews on music;
5. Douban FM (豆瓣 FM *Douban F.M.*) – a music streaming platform that allows users to create their own playlist;
6. Douban Stuff (豆瓣东西 *douban dongxi*) – users are able to recommend, share comments and view products. It also directly links to other Chinese e-commerce platforms;
7. Douban Market (豆瓣市集 *douban shiji*) – an e-commerce platform, allowing shops and brands to create an online store on the site. However, brands are curated by Douban before being listed
8. Douban City Events (豆瓣同城 *douban tongcheng*) – allows users to view events close to their city.
9. Douban Groups (豆瓣小组 *douban xiaozu*) – an online forum that is segmented into several interest groups including: culture, travel and photography, entertainment, fashion, lifestyle and technology.

This thesis specifically examines the category *Douban Film* that employs a recommendation system created to encourage sharing among its users (Zhang & Wang, 2010). As of writing (July 2019), the site's interface allows users to categorise films on their personal profile using two categories: (1) already watched (看过 *kanguo*) and (2) would like to watch (想看 *xiangkan*). The site allows users to interact based on their personal taste as displayed on their profile. Individual film pages also allow users to interact with each other through three sections: (1) 'short commentary' (短评 *duanping*), (2) 'questions' (问题 *wenti*) and (3) 'film review' (影评 *yingpin*). Within each film page, Douban filters all the comments into four categories based on the rating each user selected for the film with a specific percentage breakdown available for the public to view: (1) 完全 (all; *wanquan*) 好评 (positive, rating of 5 and 4; *haoping*) 一般 average (rating of 3; *yiban*); 差评 negative (rating of 1 to 2; *chaping*),

The 'short commentary' section allows users to post a maximum of 140 Chinese characters. In this section users can rate a film on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where one star denotes 'least satisfied' and five stars 'most satisfied', with other users having the ability to rate the 'usefulness' of the comments. The 'question' section allows users to post their questions about the film, while any other user can provide an answer. Users are also able to click on 'same question' (同问 *tongwen*) if they have a similar question. The section 'film review' is

mainly geared towards critical reviews, with no limitation on the number of Chinese characters a user can post. Users are able to interact with the post through the reply function and by rating how useful the content might be, allowing for an interaction between audiences who have watched the film and potential audiences through the accumulation of reviews. For this research, I analysed the comments posted by users in the 'short commentary' section which I classified as 'high audience activity', as people rely on these comments to satisfy their need for information (Galloway & Meek, 1981; Lichtenstein & Rosenfeld, 1983) .

Collection and Analysis

I chose to focus on the short commentary section in the belief that users are more likely to comment on what they consider to be the most important aspect of the film as this section only allows a maximum of 140 characters. These comments allowed me to locate instances when the audience perceived there was a problem in terms of a cultural representation, misunderstanding or faux pas and/or when this was well done. The comments also pointed to an awareness of the processes involved in co-productions, providing an insight into how Chinese filmgoers perceived transnationality within the limited boundaries of Douban.

All the comments analysed for this thesis are available for public viewing and were collected from 2016 to 2017. Six of the nine data sets were collected with the assistance of the SMART Infrastructure Facility¹¹ at UOW, using a method that involves 'scraping' the comments. Scraping imitates the action of a person surfing the Internet, acquiring data from web pages and putting it into a usable format (Skelton, 2012). The comments analysed were scraped from Douban's publicly available application programming interface (API), enabling the data to also be extracted and saved.

Three of the datasets (*The Mermaid*, *Monster Hunt* and *Warcraft*) were collected manually because of technical difficulties during the period of collection. For *The Mermaid* 1,841 comments were collected manually, while 2,000 comments were collected for *Monster Hunt*. Unfortunately, during the collection of data for *Warcraft*, Douban limited the number of viewable comments related to the categories listed above ('view all', 'positive', 'average', and 'negative'). Each category only showed a total of 880 comments, with several comments overlapping in the 'view all' category. This resulted in only 719 comments being collected for *Warcraft*. However, I collected every comment that was publicly available and deleted duplicates collected from the 'view all' category.

¹¹ UOW SMART (University of Wollongong Simulation, Modelling, Analysis, Research and Teaching) is focused on applied infrastructure research.

To ensure that the comments collected were representative of the breakdown of 'positive', 'average' and 'negative' comments as shown on the film's Douban page, the category awarded with the largest percentage was used as the basis of calculation. I then proceeded to collect the rest based on the percentage breakdown of the three categories (positive, neutral and negative). For example, with *The Mermaid* (Chapter Three), 920 comments under the 'positive' category were collected. As 50% of all the comments posted on *The Mermaid* Douban's page were positive, I identified that 50% of the collected data should be at 920 comments, while the 'average' filter's percentage at 30% will be at 552 comments, and 20% comments that were labelled as 'negative' indicate that I could only analyse 368 comments:

- 920 (50%) comments with a positive rating;
- $920/50 \times 30 = 552$ (30%) comments with an average rating;
- $920/50 \times 20 = 368$ (20%) comments with a negative rating.

Random sampling was conducted to identify which comment should be deleted to provide a representative number of comments as indicated by the percentage breakdown of 'positive', 'neutral' and 'negative' comments by Douban. All comments with a minimum of one 'like' were collected, while for comments with zero 'likes', every fifth comment was deleted till the dataset reached the required number of comments. This ensured that there was an unbiased representation of the total population as each dataset had an equal opportunity to be chosen as part of the sampling process (Thompson, 2012). Comments with 'likes' were selected as the assumption was that users that clicked 'like' are likely to agree with the comment posted.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were used during analysis. The quantitative data consisted of information that could be analysed statistically and included four factors: (1) the date stamp given for the posted comment; (2) the film rating provided by users; (3) the number of 'likes' the comment received; (4) and the frequency of words/phrases. Qualitative data included the analysis of the short commentary section of a maximum of 140 characters. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative data allowed me to identify trends within the comments, and to make some general observation (Barker & Mathijs, 2008). For example, the combination of a film rating and related comments provides some possible explanation as to why a specific rating is given.

The films selected for analysis and the number of comments are displayed in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Details of Dataset from Douban Film as of Time of Collection

| Film | Theme | Partnering Country | Number of Comments Scraped and Analysed | Average Rating |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---|----------------|
| Children of the Silk Road | Joint Production | Australia | 1,274 | 6.7 |
| The Mermaid | | Hong Kong | 1,841 | 6.8 |
| Kungfu Panda 3 | | Hollywood | 48,590 | 7.8 |
| Mr Go | Post-production Collaboration | Korea | 5,273 | 5.4 |
| Hero | | Australia | 18,959 | 6.8 |
| Monster Hunt | | America | 2,000 | 6.8 |
| Bait | Financial Investment | Australia and Singapore | 4,200 | 5.4 |
| Seventh Son | | Hollywood | 9,467 | 5.0 |
| Warcraft | | Hollywood | 719 | 7.7 |

After collection, the qualitative dataset was placed in NVivo, a software tool that assists with the analysis of non-numerical data. This was useful in the identification of the most frequently used key word and phrases in the dataset through the word frequency query function, reducing the time spent on manually sorting the data. NVivo allows for the recognition of the frequency of Chinese word/phrases used when discussing specific topics and also reduces the margin of human error. The frequently used words were then collected and displayed in a table for easy analysis as shown in Table 2.5. Detailed tables of the frequently used words and phrases relating to each study are found in the relevant chapters.

Table 2.5: Example of Table for Frequently Used Words/Phrases

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Rank | Text translated to English | Original Chinese text | Overall percentage of appearance |

Once I identified the frequently used words, the top 10 were selected for analysis. Comments with the identified frequently used word/phrases were then manually analysed, categorised and translated for presentation. As in the case of the translation of panel discussions and interviews, I was again very aware of terms that are ‘untranslatable’, especially Chinese internet slangs. In order to reduce the limitations of the study, I am careful to provide an explanation of the word/phrases that are not readily translated by including notes and providing the cultural context of the translated comments.

Using big data does have its limitation as the source is not always clear. The results presented here should therefore be taken as indicative of perceived general trends. In some cases, Douban could also have censored and removed comments that they deem to be inappropriate for their platform (boyd & Crawford, 2012). However, in the context of an integrated cultural-industrial approach to analysis, the findings gleaned from Douban, as well as the government documents, news articles, the film text, panel discussions at forums and semi-structured interviews, constituted a rich combination of data for interpretation and analysis (Black, 2006; Bondeberg et al., 2017; Caldwell, 2008). As will be evident in the following chapters, this approach afforded some interesting insights into the history, role and impact of international Chinese co-productions and foreign collaborations in the Chinese context, from the perspective of both the producers and the creative personnel involved as well as the audience.

Chapter 3:

Entering the Chinese market through joint productions

To begin interrogating the emergent trend of international co-productions and foreign collaborations in the Chinese film industry, it is important to consider, the role of foreign partnerships in transnational collaborations from a political and commercial perspective through examining international co-productions between China and their foreign partners. As outlined in Chapter Two, I used a mixed methods approach consisting of: the analysis of government and policy documents along with news articles; participant observation at industry forums; semi-structured interviews with film practitioners with experiences working with or in the Chinese film industry; a film text analysis and an analysis of Chinese audiences' feedback posted on Douban on the thesis' relating to the selected case studies.

According to existing research, international co-productions are generally designed to enhance economic and creative capital, underlining the development of the national cinemas of the participating nations to create a local presence alongside dominant imports within local and international markets (Hoskins, McFadyen & Finn, 1999; Khoo, 2014). Typically, international co-productions are used to promote cultural exchanges, facilitate joint financing and to create new distribution channels (Morawetz et al., 2007). As revealed by previous academic studies (see Hoskins, McFadyen & Finn, 1998; 1999; Morawetz et al., 2007; Miller et al, 2001; Wei, 2011), practitioners, including one of my interviewees, Elliot Tong, the Head of Asian Sales and Acquisition from Arclight Films (China), believe that Chinese-foreign co-productions result in three main benefits for producers. These include (1) financial advantages; (2) the integration of creative elements; and (3) being granted the status of a domestic film production for all nations participating in the co-production. In our interview, he further elaborated:

Chinese-foreign co-production to me is when two countries get together to co-finance a film. So, money comes from each side to finance the budget of the film. That is the first and foremost, it's about money. The next thing is about creative elements such as talents involved, in terms of where the script comes from, where the actor comes from, where the director comes from. And as you know, the reason to co-produce is so that the movie satisfies the requirements to become a national film for both sides. That is the reason why you want to co-produce.

Hypothetically, this sounds beneficial for all parties involved; however, in reality many producers face a variety of issues and challenges. One of the challenges identified during my research were the cultural differences present in the co-production process and how

these could, at times, hinder the production. Nonetheless, a good relationship between co-producers may not result in a positive reception of the film from the audience's perspective. Chinese film practitioners are becoming aware of this, and gradually shifting their focus away from building relationships through co-production to concentrating on how audiences will receive this. At the *Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum* James Wang, the CEO of Huayi Brothers pointed this out during his panel discussion:

Although the film might do well at the box office or the producers and people involved in the production may think it is a good co-production, we [as producers], more importantly, should focus our efforts to ensure that film reviews and the film's reputation are positive amongst our target audience. (Translated from Mandarin)

This comment highlights the shifting stance of Chinese film practitioners as they view the importance of looking beyond box office revenues in order to create a sustainable approach for Chinese-foreign co-productions.

Globally, international co-production treaties tend to follow a similar structure. However, domestically, there may be additional guidelines for local and foreign producers to follow. For example, in China, for a production to be approved as an official co-production, producers have to agree to additional local guidelines on top of guidelines listed in the signed co-production treaties. Unofficially, the approval process can therefore differ based on the stakeholders involved, the nature of the production, and possible political relationship between China and the country or countries involved. In an attempt to provide a pathway for foreign filmmakers from nations without official treaties to apply for domestic status in China, the government has established their own 'joint production' category. Approved international co-productions are automatically designated joint productions, but the category also grants countries without a signed treaty similar benefits to official co-productions, such as gaining domestic film status.

Films awarded joint production status can bypass the restrictions placed on foreign films as the government grants them the same status as domestic productions. As well as bypassing the Chinese foreign film quota of 34 foreign films per year, co-producers also receive a higher percentage of the box office revenue, an average of 40%, as compared with imported films, which can only receive approximately 25% of the total box office revenue (Lang & Frater, 2018; Papish, 2017a). Additionally, joint production can also benefit from similar financial support as of domestic films. This includes funds from CFG, the National Film Development Funds and China Film Special Funds (Cain, 2012). Many of my interviewees

revealed during our interviews the ways in which a whole range of factors might help or hinder their efforts to obtain joint production status. This might attribute to the level of *guanxi* (关系) achieved by the foreign stakeholders and the political relationship between the participating nations of the co-production.

To provide an overview of *guanxi*, which will be further discussed throughout the thesis, the concept derives from the philosophy of Confucius more than 2,500 years ago. *Guanxi* implies that individual and societal ties determine the role and position of an individual within their environment (Luo, 1997). Although Confucius may not have explicitly used the terms *guanxi*, the relational ethics of were part of elite society during that period of time. Scholars in English academia have debated the definition of *guanxi*, but the term is mainly used in reference to relationships that create continuous obligations to exchange favours as a result of a blood relationship or some form of social interconnection (Campbell, 1987; Park & Luo, 2001; Shenkar, 1990). *Guanxi* can also be used by individuals and organisations as a strategic tool when seeking to enter the Chinese market without formal government support, especially through the connections of well-established individuals within a specific industry. This plays a crucial role for both local and foreign businesses in gaining a competitive advantage and growth in market expansion (Park & Luo, 2001; Vanhonacker, 1997; Xin & Pearce, 1996). When *guanxi* is well cultivated, businesses can use their *guanxi* networks to cultivate ties for business opportunities and recruitment (Bian 2019). From a social and economic point of view, *guanxi* is perceived as a significant tool and failure to honour one's commitment to *guanxi* may result in damage to a person's social reputation, and the *loss of face* (面子 *mianzi*) (Luo, 1997). To build strong *guanxi* relations and to keep *mianzi*, individuals have to demonstrate trust and credibility through their interactions with others and the exchange of favours as they establish and cultivate the relationship (Dunfee & Warren, 2001).

Within the Chinese film industry, *guanxi* plays a crucial role in the approval process of a joint production. The most widely reported *guanxi* relationship in the Chinese film industry is between Dan Mintz, an American based in China and founder of DMG Entertainment, and Han Sanping, the Chairman of the China Film Group (CFG). According to media speculation, the strong *guanxi* ties between DMG Entertainment and CFG resulted in the Chinese theatrical release of both *Looper* and *Iron Man 3*, creating pathways for Hollywood productions to enter the Chinese film market. DMG Entertainment appears to understand the Chinese market, including the policies and censorship restrictions that have been established by the Chinese government, giving them the ability to provide advice and strategies to other companies on how foreign productions should proceed. According to speculation, the result of the DMG/CFG partnership enabled *Looper* to

achieve ‘assisted production’ status. *Iron Man 3*, on the other hand, was only labelled ‘jointly produced’, and not a ‘joint production’, therefore, domestic status was not awarded to *Iron Man 3*. *Looper* was also released in China on the same day it was released globally during China’s domestic film protection month. This is a rare occurrence even for Hollywood films today. The domestic market is protected by a ‘film protection month’ (国产电影保护月 *guochan dianying baohu yue*; also known as a blackout period) that is implemented by the Chinese government to provide more screen time to domestic production by imposing a ban on foreign imported film for a specific duration (Cain, 2015).

Both *Looper* and *Iron Man 3* released a ‘special’ version for Chinese audiences, featuring scenes located and shot in China and the inclusion of Chinese actors, possibly to appease local censors. As mentioned in the Introduction, many of the creative decisions behind *Looper* and *Iron Man 3* were a result of the influence of the Chinese stakeholders. The powerful incentive and the desire for the film to be released in China led to the decision by the Hollywood producers to include the suggestions by the Chinese investors, although this resulted in a different version for the Chinese market (Goldstein, 2012; Pidd, 2012; Zeitchik, 2012). This enabled the original film to retain its creative integrity. Nonetheless, at the time of writing, the strategy of releasing a separate Chinese version to appease Chinese stakeholders is now obsolete as China has implemented a new policy, allowing only one ending per film worldwide (Sala, 2016). Chinese regulators now have the ability to hinder a film’s distribution process by blocking films seeking to enter the Chinese market if they do not fit within the local guidelines. This could, hypothetically, provide Chinese authorities with power over the content of foreign films that are hoping for a release in China. This new regulation has thus increased the importance of building cultural knowledge of the market and *guanxi* between foreign producers and Chinese personnel. Foreign producers need to either create connections to assist them with understanding regulatory guidelines; or to seek influential stakeholders that are willing to collaborate in order to ensure a higher probability of having their film released in China.

This chapter aims to shed light on the issues mentioned above through an exploration of how policies and *guanxi* relations can impact the production of films that are awarded a joint production status. In order to do this, I will be presenting three case studies: *Children of the Silk Road* (an official co-production with Australia); *The Mermaid* (an official co-production with Hong Kong); and the animation feature *Kungfu Panda 3* (an unofficial collaboration) All three films were awarded joint production status by the Chinese authority, SAPPFRFT¹². In each case I will investigate the effects of policies and cultural

¹² As of 2018, SAPPFRFT was segregated into several categories, with film censorship being under the National Film Administration (NFA) under the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China

practices on the co-production process and the ensuing reception of the film.

Australians working with China to understand the ‘method to the madness’

Australia is no stranger to international collaborations, although the first official co-production treaty was only signed with France in 1986 and is currently still in force (Hammett-Jamart, 2004). As of the time of writing in July 2019, Australia has subsequently signed 12 co-production treaties with: Canada, China, France, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, and the United Kingdom (UK). In 2006, Australia signed a co-production treaty during the Howard government era which established Screen Australia as the competent authority for Australia.

According to a survey conducted by Screen Australia in 2013, the Chinese film market has held a considerable allure for Australian filmmakers (Screen Australia, 2013). 69% of Australian producers surveyed showed confidence in the opportunities available in China due to the size and rapid growth of the market. When placed in comparison with other Asian countries including India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, and Japan, China topped the list in terms of producers’ expectation for revenue growth (Screen Australia, 2013).

Since Australia and China signed the international co-production treaty, the Australian government – particularly The Department of Communications, IT and the Arts, Screen Australia¹³ and Ausfilm¹⁴ – have been actively encouraging Australian filmmakers to work together and broaden their Asian cultural knowledge through ‘build[ing] their Asian capability and cultural adaptability’ (Screen Australia, 2013, p. 11). Screen Australia and Ausfilm have continuously endeavoured to promote the strength of the Australian film industry and what Australia could offer through the Australia-China Co-Production Forum held annually since the 2015 *International Chinese Film Festival* in Sydney, as well as the showcasing of Australia’s studio spaces to Chinese producers through the Industry Familiarisation Tour (Johnson, 2016). Australia has also made efforts to build a relationship between the Chinese and Australian film industries through the analysis and consolidation of reports to highlight and record partnership opportunities. This includes the White Paper ‘*Beyond the Great Wall – Pathways to Australia-China Co-productions*’ by Mario Andreacchio (2013), director of the Australia-China co-production *The Dragon Pearl*. However, despite the efforts of the Australian government, Australia is still considered a ‘junior partner’ within this relationship where the dominant partner is still China (Goldsmith, Ward, & O’Regan, 2010; Yue, 2014). In other words, Australia is more

¹³ Screen Australia is a government funding body for the Australian screen production industry.

¹⁴ Ausfilm promotes Australia as a film and television production destination and assists with networking opportunities with producers outside of Australia.

dependent on China and needs China's partnership more than China needs Australia, as China's film industry is more successful in terms of monetary value than that of Australia.

This could explain the advice given by the Chinese panel members during the 2016 *Australia-China Co-Production Forum* to aspiring Australian producers. During these discussions, Chinese panel members encouraged Australian producers to pitch their ideas to digital platforms rather than to aim for a theatrical release. Producers from Chinese media conglomerates such as the Huayi Brothers, Alibaba Pictures and Dalian Wanda are keen to give their attention and resources to co-producing and collaborating with larger film industries that are more well-known to Chinese audiences such as Hollywood, India and Korea. At the same time, Chinese producers consider Australia a good option for mid-range Chinese productions to internationalise their films to English-language audiences, as Australia is viewed as a cheaper alternative to both Hollywood and the UK (Peng, 2016; Walsh, 2012). Nonetheless, Australian filmmakers are aware of their strengths and have focused on promoting behind-the-scenes services, including access to Australia's physical landscape, which provides a wide range of enticing locations available tax free as well as access to Australia's internationally renowned post-production services as will be explored in more detail in Chapter Four.

Generally, Australian filmmakers face several challenges when co-producing with the Chinese. These consist of the policy agreements, the censorship requirements, along with other culturally related complications including interpersonal communication that affects the workflow processes, echoing the findings addressing the disadvantages of co-producing with international partners (Hoskins, McFadyen & Finn, 1995). However, although Australian-Chinese co-productions may be viewed as a challenge to produce, it would appear that both nations are striving towards developing a healthy co-production relationship (Andreacchio, 2013; Walsh, 2012).

For a co-production to achieve official status in Australia, Screen Australia has imposed two main criteria. The first criterion is in relation to the percentage of financial investment from all participating nations where a restriction on the maximum and minimum percentage is in place. Examining Australia and China's co-production treaty, the minimum financial contribution from an individual participating nation of two co-producers is at 20%, while the maximum is at 80%. The second criterion requires co-productions to make a similar creative contribution to their financial contribution. For example, if Australia provides 80% of the film's budget, Australia would be required to contribute to 80% of the film's creative contribution.

To measure the creative contribution of each participating nation, Screen Australia uses the 'Points Test' system. This test follows a numerical system allowing Australian producers to clearly identify their eligibility for co-production status. A set number of roles are segmented into two categories (Section A and B) based on the level and type of creative input. Section A includes major roles in the creative contribution of the film, while Section B includes other key significant roles. The total points required to fulfil co-production requirements is therefore dependent on the financial contribution of each participating nation with a 5% leeway. Thus, if Australia contributes to 80% of the film's budget, Australia needs to fulfil a minimum of 75% and a maximum of 85% of the creative contribution. Each role consists of a maximum number of points that each production is allowed to claim as listed in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: Australian's Point Test for co-production eligibility (Screen Australia, 2018)

| Roles in the Feature Film | Point (Maximum Point/s Available) |
|---|--|
| Section A | |
| Writer | 2 |
| Director | 2 |
| Director of Photography | 1 |
| Editor/Picture Editor | 1 |
| Cast (maximum four principal roles) – If majority financial contribution is from Australia, a minimum of one role must be filled by an Australian | 4 |
| Section B (Select a Maximum of Five) | |
| Composer | 1 |
| Costume Designer | 1 |
| Production Designer | 1 |
| Sound Designer | 1 |
| Underlying Work | 1 |
| VFX Supervisor | 1 |
| Other key senior roles including: Choreographer, Special Make-Up Design etc. Producers are required to justify the role | 1 |

Despite the available resources to prepare Australian filmmakers to co-produce with the Chinese, there are challenges. According to Paul Currie, producer of the Chinese science-fiction (sci-fi) blockbuster *Bleeding Steel*¹⁵, working with the Chinese can be challenging due to the cultural differences between producers which may have a major impact on the film's workflow process. According to Currie, however, there may well be a 'method to the madness'. Speaking of his co-producing experience on *Bleeding Steel* at the *2016 Australia-China Co-Production Forum*, Currie described how there was 'chaos' on set as the Chinese were implementing ideas and decisions that were not previously discussed in the film's pre-production stages. This in his experience was very different from typical production

¹⁵ *Bleeding Steel* is a collaboration between Village Roadshow Pictures Asia and Heyi Pictures (China) and was shot on location in Sydney, Taipei and Beijing.

practices in Australia. However, in spite of several ‘surprises’, he eventually developed an understanding of the ‘Chinese way of filmmaking’ at the same time as he questioned his own understanding of what and how filmmaking should or could be. Ellen Eliasoph, President and CEO of Village Roadshow Asia described a similar experience to Currie, as she described her experiences on *Bleeding Steel* as a ‘pressure cooker of intensive ideas’. The comments made may be viewed as a recount of a negative experience, while others could view it as a learning experience, implying that Australians are willing to learn and to co-operate with potential Chinese partners.

Australia’s eagerness to make an impact on Chinese stakeholders through the various events could be seen in the case of *Bleeding Steel*, which highlighted Australia’s status as the ‘junior partner’ in this transnational relationship. To date, *Bleeding Steel* is one of the largest *dapian* (大片 *dapian* – big film – in Chinese; also known as Chinese blockbusters) to be shot in Australia. Jackie Chan, the lead actor, was the first person to be given permission to fight on the roof of the Sydney Opera House. This stunt was highly publicised in 32 news articles, with stories focusing on the stunt featuring in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Daily Mail* and *Hollywood Reporter*¹⁶. The efforts made to approve the filming at Sydney Opera House could be seen as Australia’s attempt to establish their reputation of being an ideal location for Chinese filmmakers, as well as a strategy to showcase what Australia can offer, thereby creating more opportunities for future shot-on-location collaborations with major Chinese productions.

No official Chinese-Australian co-productions were released from 2012 to 2016. However, in 2017, a surge of co-productions was announced including *Guardians of the Tomb; Dog Fight* (TBC); *At Last* (TBC); *My Extraordinary Wedding* (TBC); and *Tying the Knot* (TBC), amounting to a total of eight co-productions. As of the time of writing, of all the Australia-China co-production announced in 2017, only *Guardians of the Tomb* has been given a theatrical release, and the majority of the films listed above are rumoured to have been scrapped¹⁷.

Unfortunately, none of the co-productions that have been released thus far have done particularly well either at the Australian or the Chinese box office. To date, *Guardians of the Tomb* is the top earner with RMB 45.56 million (USD 7.1 million), with *Dragon Pearl* coming in second with RMB 32.1 million (USD 5 million), while *Children of the Silk Road*

¹⁶ Articles include: Thomas, S 2016 ‘Jackie Chan to scale the Sydney Opera House for Sci-fi thriller *Bleeding Steel*’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 July, Factiva; Bulbeck, P 2016, ‘Jacki Chan talks sci-fi, love interests and jumping off the Sydney opera house’, 28 July, Factiva; Nsenduluka, B & Lyall, A 2016, ‘Jackie Chan films daring stunts atop the Sydney Opera House for latest blockbuster action movie *Bleeding Steel*’, *Daily Mail Online*, 11 August, Factiva.

¹⁷ *Bleeding Steel* was released in China on 19 January 2018 and in Australia on 1 February 2018.

earned a total of RMB 12.3 million (USD 1.9 million) and 33 *Postcards* at RMB 1.7 million (USD 256,000). Although these films may not have fared well at the box office, they still provide useful evidence that help explain why Chinese-Australian co-productions are not resonating with Chinese audiences and where the reputation of the Australian film industry stands with them. I selected *Children of the Silk Road* as this section's case study as this film is also the first co-production between both nations.

A good story badly executed in *Children of the Silk Road*

Children of the Silk Road was the first official co-production between Australia and China, and involved a third co-producer, Germany. The film was directed by British-Canadian director Roger Spottiswoode with a budget of AUD 17.7 million (USD 14 million). Globally, *Children of the Silk Road* earned a total of USD 7.8 million but was not able to cover its production costs. The film was released in China on 3 April 2008 and 3 July 2008 in Australia.

The film stars Irish actor Jonathon Rhys-Meyers, Australian actress Radha Mitchell, Hong Kong actor Chow Yun-fat and Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh. Both Chow and Yeoh are well-established in Chinese-language cinema, with additional careers in Hollywood. Chow previously had a role in the Hollywood production *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* (Verbinski, 2007), while Yeoh starred in *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Spottiswoode, 1997), also directed by Roger Spottiswoode, and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (R. Marshall, 2005). Both Chow and Yeoh also starred in the internationally acclaimed Chinese co-production *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* directed by Ang Lee (李安 *Li An*). It is useful to note that *Children of the Silk Road* was released before Chow was reported to have supported the Hong Kong Umbrella Movement in 2014, which led to a campaign to boycott his appearance in Chinese films (Qin & Wong, 2014).

Children of the Silk Road is based on the semi-fictionalised story of British journalist George Hogg's (Rhys-Meyer) time in China during the second Sino-Japanese war. The story begins with Hogg being arrested for taking photographs of Japanese soldiers massacring Chinese men, women and children. Hogg manages to escape from the Japanese with the assistance of Chen Hansheng (Chow). Chen introduces Hogg to American nurse Lee Pearson (Mitchell) who encourages him to stay and assist her in managing an orphanage she runs. As Hogg settles down at the orphanage, he receives news that the Japanese are approaching. Soon after, the Chinese Nationalist Party (中國國民黨 *zhuongguo guoming dang*; also known as Kuomintang [KMT]) sends an order that the orphans are to be conscripted into the army as more soldiers are needed to defend against the Japanese. To

avoid the orphans' conscription Hogg plans an escape with Chen, Pearson and Chinese businesswoman Madame Wang (Yeoh). This entails walking across the Lipan Mountain to the edge of the Mongolian desert.

Initially, the title of the film was a toss-up between 'Children of Huangshi' and 'Escape from Huangshi'. The producers, however, decided to settle on the less specific *Children of the Silk Road* in order to better appeal to Western audiences and improve the film's international marketing. This is based on the perception that Western audiences are presumably more aware of the Silk Road rather than Huangshi (黄石)(Yue, 2014). In contrast with co-productions released after *Children of the Silk Road*, the majority of the primary cast and crew were not from Australia. However, the Australians involved in the film included scriptwriter Jane Hawksley, editor Geoffery Lamb, producer Jonathan Shteinman, composer David Hirschfelder, production designer Steven Hones-Evan, actress Radha Mitchell and three supporting actors: Guang Li, Matt Walker and David Wenham. The Director of Photography (Zhao Xiaoding) was of Chinese nationality.

The film ran for a total of 2 hours and 24 seconds, with Chow only appearing in 17.5% of the film while Yeoh appeared in 5.8%. Chow made his first appearance in the film at 12 minutes and 55 seconds and made his last appearance at the end of the film. Yeoh, on the other hand, only appeared at 40 minutes and 15 seconds, and made her last appearance at an hour, 14 minutes and 10 seconds into the film. Although the film is an English-language film, 5% of Chow's dialogue was spoken in Mandarin, while Yeoh spoke Mandarin for less than 1% of her screen time. Occasionally, Rhys-Meyer and Mitchell's characters spoke Mandarin in an attempt to add authenticity.

During the time of the collection of data, the film scored an average rating of 6.7 on Douban, the lowest rated film in this chapter. A total of 1,274 comments were collected and analysed from the film's Douban page. As mentioned in Chapter Two, the selection of comments for analysis involves two main steps: (1) identifying the most frequently used word/phrases by users; and (2) the selection of frequently used word/phrases to identify the comments for analysis as displayed in Table 3.2 below:

Table 3.2: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Children of the Silk Road*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|----------------------|------------|---------------------|
| 1 | People | 人 | 2.85% |
| 2 | Story | 故事 | 1% |
| 3 | Jonathon Rhys Meyers | 乔纳森·莱斯·梅耶斯 | 0.96% |
| 4 | China | 中国 | 0.86% |
| 5 | Chow Yun Fat | 周润发 | 0.80% |
| 6 | Children | 孩子 | 0.71% |
| 7 | Film | 片子 | 0.68% |
| 8 | Not bad | 不错 | 0.67% |
| 9 | Touching/Moving | 感动 | 0.61% |
| 10 | War | 战争 | 0.53% |

From an audience perspective, it seems that the film did not have much Australian presence as the story was located in China. Mitchell, the only Australian in the film's main cast, spoke with an American accent for her role as the American nurse Lee Pearson, eliminating the representation of Australia through her character. Audrey Yue (2014) argues that these strategies removed the Australian identity from the film by homogenising 'Australia' into the 'West'. This was done perhaps in an attempt to appeal to Chinese audiences by showing content and displaying accents that they are more likely to have been exposed to through Hollywood films. This assumes that Chinese audiences are more likely to be exposed to American accents rather than Australian. Throughout the film, the only representation of Australia was through David Wenham's character Barnes, an Australian correspondent who appears for a brief moment at the beginning of the film. A simple search within the comments posted by users for 'Australia' (澳洲 *aozhou*) yielded zero results, while only 0.7% of the comments (9 comments), mentioned the term 'co-production' (合拍 *hepai*). This led to many Douban users assuming that the film was a Hollywood production, based on the English accents adopted by the Western actors. The underrepresentation of Australian elements was not an accident, as the Australian producers shot several scenes in Australia to satisfy the co-production requirements in the Australian financial and creative contribution guidelines (Walsh, 2012).

As revealed by the comments, 9% of users were aware that the film was directed by a non-Chinese person, which raised some criticism as users considered that there was no authenticity to the story. A user commented in 2008:

This could probably be because of my familiarity [with the story], but I feel that when Westerners direct (or produce) Chinese stories there are many flaws and shortcomings.

大概是因为熟悉的缘故，总觉得西方人拍的中国题材在制作上都有很多硬伤。

Another user commented in 2016:

A foreign director directing a Chinese story that took place during an important time in history. The feelings emoted from this film are sincere, however, it was insubstantial.

外国导演拍中国故事，而且背景设定在那么特殊的年代，感情很真挚，但影片却略显单薄

Children of the Silk Road attempted to tell a Chinese story in an English-language narrative; however, many members of the Chinese audiences on Douban felt that this was resulted in misrepresentation and believed that a foreign director should not have been given the responsibility of telling this particular Chinese story. Overall, 92% of the comments gave the film a negative review, with 53% pointing out that the adaptation was done poorly. These comments seemed to imply that the scriptwriter did not have sufficient understanding of Chinese history, cultural knowledge or the ability to adapt this historical event to film. A user in 2008 sarcastically implied how badly the script was written by posting this comment:

Was there a writer's strike during the production of this film?

是不是正好碰上编剧罢工

Several comments also pointed to Australia's attempts to please the Chinese censors. This was perhaps done by producers in a bid to build *guanxi* and provide *mianzi* to the Chinese authorities, in order for the film to gain joint production status. In several scenes, users noticed the negative portrayal of the KMT, although in reality, both the KMT and the CCP formed the Second United Front to fight against the Japanese invasion (Kataoka, 1974)¹⁸. A user commented in 2012:

The story line itself is really touching; however, the filming was ordinary. Simply put, the film seems artificial. One word to describe this film, fake. Instinctively I questioned is this a 'propaganda film'?

故事本身很好很感人 只是拍得很一般 假就一个字.直觉问“政治宣传片”?

Another user in 2013 made reference to how the film attempts to show a Westerner's point

¹⁸ This research does not focus on the historical narrative of the Second United Front; therefore, detailed analysis of this historical event was not conducted.

of view of Chinese history, but did not manage to achieve this:

I feel that the film is very eager to express Westerners' understanding of China's history. Unfortunately, the film did not manage to express what they thought about [of this historical situation]...

感觉片子很想表达出西方人对中国这段历史的理解，可惜到后来还是没有表达出他们到底在想些什么……

Douban's primary audiences the *wenyi qingnian* (文艺青年) group are especially sensitive to films that may appear to contain propaganda due to the nature of Chinese cinema before China opened its film industry. Audiences belonging to the *wenyi qingnian* group view themselves as 'cultural critics' because of their greater access to education and information on social and political issues inside and outside of the Mainland, as compared to the majority of the population (Tan 2012; Ren, 2016). The characteristics of this specific group can also be seen in the comments discussing the film's historical accuracy. In reality, two New Zealanders, Kathleen Hall and Rewi Alley, who played a huge role in the orphans' escape, were not included in the film (Bynes, 2008). A user commented in 2011:

Looking back into history, this is not the truth

回头翻翻历史是不是真事儿

Nonetheless, having access to information and knowledge about China's less well-publicised history, 76% of the comments discussing the historical aspect of *Children of the Silk Road* argue that it is important to record historical events through creative productions, such as film, to encourage people to remember what happened. A user commented in 2008:

That particular historical era requires this particular type of story in order for us to remember what happened

那段历史就需要这样的故事才能被记住

Although the film's narrative was panned by audiences, there were users who believe that the film did tug heartstrings. This is reflected in Table 3.2 as the word 感动 (*gandong*) meaning touching or moving was the ninth most frequently used word. A user commented in 2011:

Very thankful to the foreigners that helped us during this warring period; after watching the film I was very touched. It is worth recommending this film.

感谢在战争中帮助过我们的外国人 看到最后挺感动 值得推荐一下

Chinese audiences seemed to be more forgiving when it was apparent that the foreigner actors were making an effort to understand Chinese culture and language. Users also made note of the efforts of Rhys-Myers' character who spoke Mandarin briefly to suggest the authenticity of being in China. The film showed Hogg's communication difficulties with the Chinese which led him to learn the language, while Mitchell's character is seen conversing in Mandarin with several of the Chinese film characters. Although Mitchell's character did speak Mandarin, audiences mainly praised Rhys-Meyers' Mandarin attempts. This could be in relation to a scene in which Hogg spoke in Mandarin as he confronted KMT for pursuing to conscript the orphans. A user commented in 2013:

Three stars for this film, and one star is for Jonathan's Chinese

片子三星，一星给小乔的中文

However, audiences were critical of the Mandarin accents and level of authenticity of the ethnic Chinese actors in the film. Unbeknownst to the Chinese audiences, many of the Chinese orphans were played by Chinese-Australians, including actor Guang Li who spoke Mandarin with a heavy Australian accent. The awkward accent of the character did not suit the scenario, which raised the issue of linguistic authenticity among the audience (Yue, 2014), suggesting there was little attempt to understand the cultural implications of authenticating the Chinese accent. A user complained in 2013:

The Chinese people in the film cannot even speak Mandarin well.

片里中国人连中文都说不好

The importance of linguistic authenticity in film was extensively discussed at the 2018 *Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum*. Over the years as co-producing has become more popular, producers are gaining more knowledge through their experience, and have noticed how important language is to the audiences' appreciation of content, as shown in previous academic research (Fu, 2013; Ksiazek & Webster, 2008; Mast, De Ruiter, & Kuppens, 2017). Highlighting the importance of linguistic authenticity, Steven O'Dell, the President of International Theatrical Distribution for Sony Pictures Entertainment suggested in the forum:

What I notice when we are releasing films is that one thing that holds people back right now is that they want a piece of familiarity and want something fresh, and that familiarity comes with language.

The production choices including the film's casting seemed to create a muddle of contradicting elements which Elliot Tong describes as 'a pudding of everything'. In our interview he described the elements present in failed co-productions and suggested:

If you try to make a movie that sort of does not look like it is a pudding of everything, probably the chance of it being a success is higher than a movie that looks like a pudding where you put everything together and does not really look like anything in the end.

Arguably, in *Children of the Silk Road*, there was an attempt to homogenise the film for an international audience by removing the Australian aspects in order to reflect the more dominant British and American culture (Yue, 2014). Ignoring the importance of various Mandarin accents was also an issue, as it is the language spoken by one of film's intended primary audiences, the Chinese. Reflecting on the authenticity of Mandarin accents is an important factor for films with Mandarin dialogue as accents (and dialects) could be used to represent the class of a character, the socio-economic development in the era in which the film is set, as well as the differentiation of Chinese people from the Mainland and those from the Chinese diaspora (Lu, 2007). The reception of the film was diverse because while audience members were grateful that this historical Chinese moment had been preserved on film, others were unhappy about how the scenarios during this period were presented. While transnational films encourage new practices and content, *Children of the Silk Road* revealed that this can lead to a negative outcome. This suggests that there was clearly a need for the Australian producers to show more cultural awareness when working with the Chinese.

Looking at the reality of this international partnership, based on observations at the 2016 *Australia-China Co-production Forum* and this case study, the issues arising from *Children of the Silk Road* were not a surprise. During the presentations at the 2016 *Australia-China Co-Production Forum*, Australian speakers might have attempted to build *guanxi* and to shed a positive light on the way that Australians are trying to understand the concept of *mianzi*. However, these efforts arguably failed to hit the mark. Instead the presentations seemed to be more concerned with commenting on the 'chaos' of working together, rather than providing positive suggestions and recommendations on how to further enhance this relationship, moving away from the concept of giving *mianzi*.

It is important to note in this context that Australia is perceived as the junior partner in this co-production relationship. As a result, the Chinese assume that Australia should compromise since they view themselves as the dominant partner. Arguably, Australia has

yet to fully realise their position in this relationship. Australia's low level of cultural knowledge may thus be viewed as showing a lack of respect and trust; in other words the Australians are not showing the Chinese *mianzi* by failing to recognise China's social standing and position within this particular relationship (Buckley, Clegg, & Tan, 2010; Lockett, 1988).

For instance, at the 2016 Australia-China co-production forum, a presentation by Mark Lazarus, the Australian producer of *Guardians of the Tomb* from Arclight Films, revealed how little Lazarus understood about China before he started working on the film. Lazarus described how he was unaware what Chinese New Year meant to the Chinese and could not understand why Li Bingbing (the lead actress of *Guardians of the Tomb*) refused to work during this period. Considering that Arclight Films has an office in China, it seemed unfortunate that Lazarus was ignorant of this major Chinese cultural event. Many participants I spoke to at the forum also felt the same way. The reaction to Lazarus's comment demonstrates the importance for Australian filmmakers to pay attention to the power dynamics in this partnership, which could, perhaps, improve the success rate for the approval of co-productions.

In the next case study, I examine *The Mermaid*, a co-production between Hong Kong and China, which demonstrates a contrast in the processes and outcomes of the relationship with Australia and China. In addition, the two industries arguably share a significant degree of geographical and cultural proximity. Hypothetically, co-productions involving Hong Kong and Mainland China are less likely to experience cultural misunderstandings because of their close proximity and shared cultural knowledge. Examining the co-production relationship from this perspective in the next section, I attempt to investigate whether this statement stands true and to highlight the effects of the role of language, geopolitics and the power of *guanxi* in this relationship.

Strengthening the Chinese film industry through attempts to revive Hong Kong cinema

Filmmakers from Hong Kong have been involved in the Chinese film industry since the 1980s when Hong Kong was still a British colony (Ma, 2006). In the early 1990s, Hong Kong's film industry was at its peak with the production of more than 200 feature films per year, representing up to 79% of the gross local film market (J. M. Chan, Fung, & Ng, 2010; HKMPIA, 2010). During this period of time, Hong Kong was known as the 'Hollywood of the Far East', but the reputation of the industry began to diminish around the mid-1990s. According to some academic commentators (see: Chan, Fung & Ng, 2010; Curtin, 2007; Ge,

2017; Keane, 2007; Szeto & Chen, 2012) the decline in Hong Kong's film industry was based on three factors including:

1. The reduction of budgets due to financial constraints faced by the industry as the result of the 1997 financial crisis;
2. Speculation about the industrial and economic climate after the transfer to Chinese sovereignty (also known as The Handover);
3. Hyper-production which led to a loss of engagement with their key audience who were previously attracted to Hong Kong's distinct cinematic style.

After The Handover, when Hong Kong was 'returned' to China, Hong Kong's film industry continued to suffer for several years as the Mainland treated Hong Kong films as foreign content. This meant that to enter the Mainland market, Hong Kong films had to compete with other international productions (including Hollywood) through the foreign film quota implemented by the government. Thus, many local filmmakers found themselves receiving lower pay or becoming jobless as The Handover and 1997 financial crisis greatly affected film content as well as job opportunities (Curtin, 2007). In attempts to revive Hong Kong's film industry (and economy) Hong Kong signed the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2003. The CEPA includes the goods and services industries and is regularly updated to assist the growth of Hong Kong's trade, investment and tourism. It was not until November 27, 2015, that films were included through an agreement on trade in services. Under this agreement, co-productions involving the two regions were to be viewed as local productions, allowing films made in Hong Kong to expand their reach into the Mainland (CEPA, 2019; Szeto & Chen, 2012; Yeh & Chao, 2018).

Under this agreement, the CEPA allows Hong Kong films to screen in their original Cantonese version in the Guangdong province, although the government mandates the use of Mandarin in all its media products (CEPA, 2019; May & Ma, 2014). Currently, the Mainland's government also allows approved Cantonese dialogue with Chinese subtitles to be distributed in China (CEPA, 2019). Since signing the agreement, Mainland-Hong Kong co-productions have invigorated Hong Kong's cinema with films such as *The Grandmaster* (Wong, 2013) and the case study that has been selected for this research, *The Mermaid*. *The Grandmaster* won several film awards, while *The Mermaid* is currently the second highest grossing Mainland-Hong Kong co-production, receiving a total of RMB 3.4 billion (USD 524 million) (CBO 中国票房, 2019).

Before The Handover and CEPA agreement, the Hong Kong film industry followed a

different set of censorship regulations than the Mainland. Film content included satirical and racy comedies along with fantasy, horror and crime films (Curtin, 2013). Prior to 2012, Hong Kong films were permitted to modify their original endings to secure a release in the Mainland (see *Looper* and *Iron Man 3* above; May & Ma, 2014). *Infernal Affairs* (A. Lau & Mak, 2002) is an example of such a film, where the Mainland version had to be re-edited to show the film's villain facing legal consequences for breaking the law (Fung, 2008; Szeto & Chen, 2012). The need for this kind of revision is still evident today in China's censorship regulations, as one of my interviewees, Chuck Chae, had his film rejected in 2017 because there was no legal punishment for one of his characters that broke the law. The official rejection letter from Chinese authorities suggested that the film include a form of legal punishment. The rejection letter stated:

The character that robbed the bank and set the factory ablaze did not face any legal penalties for his criminal act. Innocent people are constantly getting hurt and there is no social constraint or outrage. Effective legal explanations as well as criticism and reflection of his actions must be made. (Translated from Mandarin)

As mentioned in the previous section, if producers are keen to distribute their films on the Mainland, only one version can exist and there is no 'special' (second) version allowed for Chinese audiences. This has led Hong Kong filmmakers to follow the Chinese censorship regulations that have decreased the freedom of expression they were used to and to move away from the kinds of film for which they were once known involving Hong Kong's triads and corruption in the government sector with ambiguous endings (Szeto & Chen, 2012). Nonetheless, many are still eager to break into the Chinese market as it has been proven to be more profitable than that of Hong Kong (Chu, 2015).

To some extent, the increasing level of bureaucracy could explain the shift from Hong Kong's previous style of popular crime films. This strategy also reveals how Hong Kong filmmakers are keen to build *guanxi* and show *mianzi* to the Chinese government in order to have their films released on the Mainland. Since films seeking a release on the Mainland are required to go through Chinese censorship regulations, Hong Kong filmmakers are now moving towards producing comedies and fantasy blockbusters to avoid moral and legal 'consequences' for the characters. Co-productions involving Hong Kong and the Mainland have also started fusing comedy and Kung Fu with familiar Chinese fantasy novels. Popular co-productions using these themes include *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demon* (西游伏妖篇)(Chow & Kwok, 2013); *The Money King* (西游记之大闹天宫)(Cheang, 2014), and

The Taking of Tiger Mountain (智取威虎山)(Hark, 2014)¹⁹.

Unlike the typical co-production treaty, the Hong Kong and Mainland agreement has specific requirements. This includes (and is not restricted to): having a third of the leading actors from the Mainland, the number of Hong Kong people working on each film. The film's story and leading character must, however, somehow relate to China (CEPA, 2019), although at times, these regulations were not strictly implemented. However, on 16 April 2019 Chinese authorities officially announced that these requirements would no longer be in place (Leung, Chiu, & Cheung, 2019). Commentators have argued that the co-production relationship between Hong Kong and the Mainland is beneficial for both parties as it alleviates Hong Kong's financial pressures and assists with the revival of Hong Kong films through the distribution of films on the Mainland, at the same time as Hong Kong films have introduced creativity and vitality into the Chinese market (Chua, 2012; Szeto & Chen, 2012). Box office revenues for Hong Kong-Mainland co-productions show the implications of these benefits as 10 of the top 50 highest-grossing films in China are by Hong Kong directors or are co-produced between the two regions.

In observing the Mainland's regulations, the identity of Hong Kong films has shifted as producers appear to be leaning towards creative content that falls within the guidelines. Michael Curtin (2013) argues that while Hong Kong films were once renowned for their reflective, instinctive and boisterous content, they have now transformed into formulaic blockbusters in order to satisfy Chinese financiers and government officials, as revealed in the following case study.

Fitting *The Mermaid* into the mould through hybridisation

The Mermaid directed by Hong Kong actor/director Stephen Chow, is a significant case study as it confirms Chow's ambition to direct and produce films for Chinese audiences. As was the case with his previous film *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons*, the dialogue of *The Mermaid* is in Mandarin, whereas previous co-productions by Chow (and other Hong Kong directors) involved a mix of Cantonese and Mandarin depending on the actors' language ability. In previous productions, dialogue in Cantonese was dubbed in Mandarin for release in China and other countries with a large Chinese diaspora such as Singapore and Taiwan. Additionally, *The Mermaid* did not feature any Hong Kong actors in its main cast, moving away from Chow's regular Hong Kong cast, showing a clear shift from a dependence on the star power of Hong Kong celebrities' in co-productions prior to 2013.

¹⁹ Total all-time box office ranking in China as of 1 June 2017: *Journey to the West Conquering the Demon* is ranked 13; *The Man from Macau 3* is at ranked 17; *The Monkey King* is ranked 19; *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* is ranked at 22.

The film stars Chinese actors Deng Chao, Lin Yun and Zhang Yuqi along with Taiwanese singer/actor Show Lu.

One reason behind Chow's eagerness to adapt his films for the Chinese market could be his participation as a member of the Guangdong Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Committee (CPPCCC), an advisory board aimed at bringing non-party officials into the Chinese establishment (Tsui, 2013). Chow's participation demonstrates the use of soft power as an approach, as he uses his celebrity status and creative productions to impart the values and ideologies of the CCP to citizens. Soft power as a strategy became significant after Joseph Nye (1990) discussed the concept in his book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Nye argues that soft power can help determine political agendas and shape preferences based on cultural, ideological and institutional influences rather than military and economic strength (hard power). The use of soft power in China as part of the country's political agenda is not new, as Ding Sheng (2008) argues that characteristics of this concept were already present in Confucianism. As an ideology, Confucianism encourages those who play a prominent role in society to set an example of how one should behave, imparting certain values through their actions rather than imposing them. It is assumed that recruiting popular celebrities, such as Chow, to participate in government initiatives could help portray the Chinese government in a positive light, especially in Hong Kong, where there is a high level of animosity towards the Mainland (Kammerer, 2018). China's soft power ambition, however, is not only focused on building their international reputation by accomplishing foreign goals, but also on building their reputation domestically (Barr, 2011; Li, 2008).

In 2016, when I was selecting the case studies for this research, *The Mermaid* was the highest earning film at the Chinese box office, which was one of the major rationales for selecting it for this case study. However, in August 2017, Wu Jing's film *Wolf Warrior 2* (Wu Jing, 2017) overtook *The Mermaid's* top spot. *The Mermaid* subsequently fell to fourth place on February 2018, as the Chinese-Hong Kong co-production *Operation Red Sea* (Lam, 2018) and Chinese film *Detective Chinatown 2* (Chen, 2018) gained the lead (CBO 中国票房, 2019).

The Mermaid begins with playboy business tycoon Liu Xuan's (Deng) decision to purchase the Green Gulf, a fictional wildlife reserve, for a reclamation project. His company is using sonar technology to remove the sea life in the Green Gulf before the reclamation can commence. Unknown to Liu, the area he plans to destroy is home to a group of merfolk who are falling critically ill because of the sonar technology implemented to destroy marine life within the area. Angry at Liu's action the merfolk survivors come up with a plan

to assassinate him and send mermaid Shan (Lin) to seduce and murder Liu. The plan eventually fails as Shan and Liu fall in love. The film follows their turbulent romance until Liu ultimately decides to save the merfolk, to protect them from his evil business partner Ruolan (Zhang), and to save the environment.

During the period when data was being collected for this study, the film maintained an average rating of 6.8 on Douban with 174,341 comments available for analysis. Out of the total comments, 1,841 were manually collected. As the percentage of comments within the film's rating may be skewed, I ensured that the percentage of comments within each rating were weighted the same as the manually collected comments. On Douban, *The Mermaid* received 50% positive comments (好评 *haoping*), 30% average comments (一般 *yiban*) and 20% negative comments (差评 *chaping*). To demonstrate a correlation between these figures, 920 (50%) comments were randomly collected with a positive rating, 552 (30%) comments were collected with an average rating and 368 (20%) negative rating, leading to the total of 1,841. This method of analysis ensures that the results were weighted equally among the other case studies. Table 3.3 displays the ten most frequently used words/phrases in *The Mermaid's* Douban short commentary section.

Table 3.3: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *The Mermaid*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|----------------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | Stephen Chow | 周星驰/星爷 | 2.67% |
| 2 | Laugh | 笑 | 1.58% |
| 3 | Zhang Yuqi | 张雨绮 | 1.03% |
| 4 | Deng Chao | 邓超 | 0.66% |
| 5 | Protecting the environment | 环保 | 0.59% |
| 6 | Story | 故事 | 0.43% |
| 7 | Awkward | 尴尬 | 0.43% |
| 8 | Mermaid | 美人鱼 | 0.37% |
| 9 | Comedy | 喜剧 | 0.36% |
| 10 | Show Luo | 罗志祥 | 0.31% |

Overall, Chinese audiences were willing to spend money to watch Chow's film at the cinema because of his positive track record as an actor and as a director of films such as *Shaolin Soccer* (Chow, 2001) and *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow, 2004). The majority of the commenters found the film funny, as reflected in Table 3.3 with the word 笑 (*xiao*; laugh). 56% of the comments posted expressed a positive sentiment about the film's humour including Chow's signature style; however, there were specific criticisms of the film. In 2016 a comment that received 3,067 likes mentioned:

It was really awkward to watch

真的看得好尴尬啊。

Although there was no elaboration as to why the film was ‘awkward to watch’, the number of useful votes shows that a large number of users shared the same sentiment. A further investigation into why audiences found *The Mermaid* awkward to watch suggested two main reasons: (1) the humour which many found to be nonsensical; and (2) the chemistry between Deng and Zhang. Users posted in 2016:

After watching the film, I felt so embarrassed. There are a few laughing points, but what in the world is going on with the film’s narrative and the actors?

看得我尴尬症都犯了，有几个笑点不错的，但是整个剧情跟演员都是什么鬼嘛。

Deng Chao and Zhang Yuqi were not able to communicate with each other through their acting. However, in other films, they showed good chemistry with their co-stars. Well, it is overall an awkward film.

邓超和张雨绮的演戏是完全无法沟通的两个人，而他俩又各自和电影里的其他人存在结界。嗯，就是这样一部尴尬的电影。

Chow is known for his nonsensical comedy also known in Cantonese as *mo lei tau* (无厘头), both as a director and actor in the Hong Kong film industry. *Mo lei tau* translates as not having the ability to differentiate the head from the tail, used to describe something that makes no sense. This genre of comedy is known to be an integral part of Hong Kong’s popular culture as popularised by Chow in the 1990s (Wang, 2011). Chow’s foray into Mainland-Hong Kong China co-productions demonstrates his attempt to introduce the *mo lei tau* genre of comedy to Mainland audiences. His critics however have argued that the genre only works in Cantonese and not in Mandarin because of the linguistic conventions and the historical conditions that are unique to Hong Kong (Pig China, 2016).

It could be argued that Hong Kong and China have a distinct and separate culture because of Hong Kong’s colonial past. Hong Kong was a British colony for 156 years and has therefore arguably espoused more Western capitalist values than the Mainland (Chan & Cheng, 2002). However, China’s requirements that socialist values be included in co-productions are already an established feature in Mainland-Hong Kong co-production. This can be seen in Chow’s attempts to hybridise Hong Kong’s distinctive *mo lei tao* genre with socialist messages to create a Mainland version of the genre in line with China’s soft power ambitions in the domestic market. Interestingly, the film highlights sensitive topics in China, including the nation’s pollution issue, along with the behaviour and attitude of

the 'rich and powerful' Chinese businessmen also known as 富豪 (*fuhao*) as compared to the merfolk who might be seen as the common people. The issue with the environment certainly resonated with Douban users as illustrated in the fifth most frequently used word 环保 (*huanbao*; protecting the environment; see Table 3.3 above). Although the film may have focused on economic inequality in China, the ending of *The Mermaid* presented socialist values by showing how Liu gives up his wealth and material possessions (capitalistic values) to serve a greater cause and to save the planet for the well-being of the nation (socialist values). This highlights a significant difference with Chow's previous productions as he incorporates Chinese socialist values into *The Mermaid*, thereby showing *mianzi* towards the Chinese authorities by recognising the values of the Chinese government.

In the final scene of the film, Liu is shown to have been reformed as audiences are made aware of his donations to environmental causes. Towards the end Liu says:

If there is not a drop of clean water or breath of fresh air on this planet, then life means nothing even with wealth (Translated from Mandarin).

It was also not surprising that many users compared Deng's acting skills to Chow's signature *mo lei tau* style. 41% of the comments expressed negative sentiments about Deng's embodiment of *mo lei tau*, while 35% believed that his skills were comparable to Chow's. A user praised Deng in 2016:

It is a pretty good film; do not be put off by the vulgar trailer. The story is quite intact, and is filmed in Stephen Chow's style. Deng Chao uses his own method to impersonate Chow's film, which did not work at all.

挺好看的，不要被恶俗的预告片骗了。故事挺完整，风格很周星驰，邓超用自己的方式演出周星星的片子一点都不违和。

Audiences were also quick to point out the costume choices and sexual innuendos peppered throughout the film, demonstrate the ambiguity of government regulations. Currently, the Chinese regulatory body has not implemented a content rating system and requires all films to be suitable for all ages. Government officials determine what content is appropriate for audiences and implement the level of censorship needed before a film is released into theatres. This represents a challenge for filmmakers since within this framework, they are unable to produce a film designed for a specific demographic. Some Chinese filmmakers have argued that the requirement that a film be suitable for 'all' audiences restricts their creative freedom as a film needs to be deemed suitable from the

perspective of Chinese regulators. Chinese cinemagoers surveyed by Entgroup were in agreement with the filmmakers, with 90% supporting a content rating system (T. Cunningham & Lang, 2013).

In an attempt to produce a film for a mass audience, many Chinese films embrace more than one main genre to accommodate to all demographics. In my interview with Chuck Chae, he mentioned that in his first Chinese-Korean co-production²⁰, his Chinese producers highly recommended that he re-write the script and to re-imagine his original sci-fi project as a multi-genre film with a significant romantic element in order to target a larger audience.

As well as questions of genre, Chinese censors are also careful about the type of content that is being released, especially films with sexual content regardless of whether this conspicuous or implied. *The Mermaid* managed to bypass several of these restrictions and included sexual innuendo and the display of Zhang's cleavage. Prior to *The Mermaid's* release, Chinese actress Fan Bingbing's television drama *The Empress of China* (Go, 2014) was criticised for similar issues and had to be taken off air for a re-edit. According to Chinese censors, the costumes worn by the female characters showed too much cleavage even though the costumes created reflected the style of the Tang dynasty (Frater, 2015). This suggests that there may be contradictions in the governing bodies' decisions on what is deemed appropriate. Another scene in *The Mermaid* featuring Luo's character Bage, an octopus, was also controversial. Here, Luo wears a pair of trousers using three of his tentacles resulting in one of his tentacles protruding from his groin region. This scene was given the green light by the censors, although a similar scene in Chae's co-production was rejected. The rejection letter stated that 'the character that placed a wine bottle in his groin region while attempting to open the bottle must be deleted' (translated from Mandarin).

These discrepancies in the approval of content by SAPPRFT demonstrates the sometimes arbitrary nature of China's media regulations as Chinese authorities attempt to produce their own 'created-in-China' productions to aid in their soft power ambitions. Chow's popularity amongst the Chinese and Chinese diaspora around the world arguably ensured that he was granted a degree of leeway that is not given to all filmmakers. Chow's participation as a member of the Guangdong CPPCCC may have assisted him in building *guanxi*. *Guanxi* is known to provide leniency from the Chinese government through connections with well-established individuals (Vanhonacker, 1997; Xin & Pearce, 1996). His reputation clearly gave him an advantage as the Chinese government considers him an

²⁰ Chae is one of my interviewees who directed the Korea-China co-production *Laspe* (forthcoming). The film has not yet been released (see Soh & Chae, forthcoming).

asset to their soft power ambitions. Being part of the CPPCCC also reveals how Chow's social standing with Chinese officials has increased his reputation which could assist his professional career as he is viewed as a creator with the potential to enhance China's soft power agenda (Tsui, 2013).

While the Chinese audience may not have observed the contradictions in the decisions made by Chinese regulators, they did take issue with specific scenes they felt were inappropriate. *The Mermaid* was released on the first day of Chinese New Year (8 February 2016), which is also known in China as *hesui pian* (贺岁片). *Hesui pian* has been marketed for decades as a day for entertainment for the whole family which usually means the release of comedies aimed to produce laughter to reflect the celebration and joyfulness of Chinese New Year (Law, 2010; Yin, 2018). Chinese audiences were therefore more critical of certain scenes because the film should be enjoyed by the *entire* family due to the *hesui pian* label that it had been given. Users commented in 2016 about the portrayal of Zhang and Luo's characters:

The 3D effects are probably used to showcase Zhang Yuqi's cleavage and Show Luo's tentacles. Ang Lee says Stephen Chow's films are made for children, but doesn't this seem like a spoof for *Lust, Caution*?

3D 也许真是用在张雨绮的胸和罗志祥的触须上面了。李安说周星驰的电影是拍给孩子的，这部是恶搞《色戒》吗？

A Stephen Chow fantasy film, with mystical creatures and an environmental message. In the first half of the film there were several scenes that were pretty funny, however, every time Zhang Yuqi's cleavage pops up on screen it reminded me that this is a lousy film. The second half of the film is really bad (from the point of view that the audience is being deceived by the hype/ reviews/ ratings). The concept [of the film] is good there were a few funny moments, but in essence the film is 'empty' [does not provide much quality].

星爷的内核还是奇幻生物+环保母题，前半段有些梗还是挺搞笑的。但一看到张雨绮那对胸吧…就在不断提醒我这是个烂片。后半段的收尾太坑爹了…愿景是好的，过程是搞笑的，实质是空洞的。

It was not surprising that these issues were discussed by the primary users on Douban (the *wenyi qingnian* group), since they are likely to pay close attention to the relationship between cultural products and what they reveal about the politics of the day. A comment posted in 2016 with the highest number of likes at 11,766 discussed Chow's role and influence:

Is Stephen Chow God? So, for his whole life should we be worshipping him? He is never coming back from *From Beijing with Love*²¹! The film could make money even though no efforts were placed in producing it? Commercial films are not cult organisations. Because the education system is backwards, it has wrecked people's brains and made them buy tickets to see the film. The big players in the industry can depend on celebrities to make money from the people because the government will not stop them.

周星驰是神?就应一辈子当神供奉?《国产 007》时代一去不返!动不动就欠星爷电影票钱?商业片不是邪教组织,脑残瞎嚷嚷并买票因为国民教育落后,伪大神与奸商们能靠迷信口号圈钱,只因为政府不能枪毙他们

As the comment above shows, members of the *wenyi qingnian* are performing as cultural critics within the Douban space. These users believe that they have greater access to cultural knowledge, in comparison to the mass public, placing them within a specific hierarchy that enables them to judge what is 'low culture' (cheap) or 'high culture'. Although the film was for the most part negatively judged, Chinese audiences on Douban did appear to enjoy the humour of the film and appreciated Chow's hybridisation of the *mo lei tao* genre within the Mainland context. A comment with 2,412 likes said in 2016:

No one else can shoot a film like Stephen Chow. It is difficult for him to release a film so we have to cherish it. In addition, within this genre, who else but Chow would have the courage to produce such a film?

周星驰的电影是其他人一辈子都拍不出来的,好不容易等他拍出了一部就应该好好珍惜,环保题材的电影除,

It has been argued that Hong Kong and China have different cultural values based on Hong Kong's colonial past that is reflected in their different cinematic styles (Chan & Cheng 2002). Hong Kong filmmakers such as Chow are therefore attempting to bridge this gap by hybridising Hong Kong's cinematic signature style in co-productions with the Mainland in an attempt to build both a creative and a political relationship with the Mainland. As in the case of *mo lei tau*, Chow is seen to demonstrate the reality of transnational collaborations (transborder projects) by introducing this uniquely Hong Kong genre to the Mainland audiences. Regardless of the reception of this new hybridised genre by the Chinese audience, this highlights Chow's level of cultural knowledge as he demonstrates the importance of showing *mianzi* to the respective Chinese authorities. *The Mermaid* thus also demonstrates the value of building the *guanxi* that has ensured Chow's relevance and

²¹ *From Beijing with Love* is directed by Lee Lik-chi and Chow, which Chow also stars in. The film is said to be the film that brought forth the popularity of the *mo lei tao* genre.

popularity as a filmmaker that is also seen to support the One China Principle²² (Yeh & Davis, 2008).

Unlike Australian-Chinese co-production relationships, Hong Kong filmmakers like Chow do have more say on what films they would like to produce based on their popularity status domestically and amongst the Chinese diasporic community. In retrospect assist in the creation of strong *guanxi* networks with important stakeholders within the industry by participating in government-initiated activities, and/or integrating socialist ideologies into their public work building trust and more importantly positive expectations with the relevant government stakeholders (Barbalet, 2015). In the next case study, through *Kungfu Panda 3*, I will demonstrate how the political relationship between American and China is less important in the Hollywood and Chinese film industries, as both industries focus more on using their cultural knowledge learnt from past collaborations and resources, along with building their *guanxi* networks to create an enticing film production for the Chinese and global film market.

Gaining experiences from Hollywood

In the Introduction, it was revealed that the American government has been actively lobbying against the UNESCO convention on the *Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression* convention in order to reduce restrictions on American exports, including Hollywood films, to countries globally through their FTA (International Trade Administration, 2019). America's global economic power and the diversity of trade products and services included in the FTA have provided Hollywood films with the opportunity to dominate a large number of national box office revenues overseas. Countries depending on their trade relationship with America have been put under pressure to reduce the restrictions placed on foreign films to fulfil trade negotiations. Countries that have had their foreign film quota affected by the FTA include Australia and Korea (Dalton, 2004; Jin, 2011; "U.S. makes proposal on FTA screen quota issue: sources," 2006). These trade practices may well have assisted the global dominance of Hollywood productions, with the industry currently being one of the largest film industries to date, with 19 films in the 2017 top 20 list of films, with the highest box office revenue worldwide (MPAA, 2017; The Numbers, 2017).

However, unlike the two previous case studies, Hollywood did not sign a co-production agreement with China. Nonetheless Hollywood films producers are able to collaborate with

²² This includes viewing Taiwan (the Republic of China) as part of the PRC, as well as the integration of Hong Kong and Macau as part of 'One China'.

the Chinese to have their films released in the Mainland through three options. They can (Papish, 2017b):

1. be part of the import quota of 34 foreign films and receive approximately 25% of the box office revenue;
2. participate in a flat fee buyout also known as 买断片 (*maiduan pian*) or 批片 (*pi pian*), in this situation producers can negotiate a fixed price with the Chinese distributor;
3. engage in a hybrid buyout also known as revenue sharing, where the producers (the original rights holders) are only allowed to take a cut of the revenue once the Chinese box office revenue exceeds a specific amount.

As of July 2019, China has not signed an FTA with America, leading the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) to negotiate with the Chinese film industry. An attempt to negotiate a new agreement that would increase the foreign film quota and revenue sharing percentage for Hollywood films took place in 2017. Unfortunately, the negotiation was hampered by the American and Chinese trade standoff over other commodities such as steel and soybeans, among other issues (Frater, 2018b; Li & Martina, 2018). Nonetheless, the absence of official treaties and negotiations did not hinder collaborations between Hollywood and China, with several films gaining joint production status. From 2010, some of these joint productions include: *Karate Kid* (Zwart, 2010), *Man of Tai Chi* (Reeves, 2013), *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny* (Yuen, 2016), *Kung Fu Panda 3* and *The Great Wall*. This serves once again to illustrate the arbitrary nature of Chinese regulations, where guidelines can be 'adjusted' by Chinese officials based on the perceived benefits to the Chinese film industry.

Prior to 2016, Chinese producers believed it was important to look towards the biggest global film industries, in particular Hollywood, for their model on how to create content that will appeal to global audiences. This was clearly reflected in the panel discussions during the 2016 *Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum*. During these discussions, James Schamus, a Hollywood producer and frequent collaborator with Ang Lee, voiced his opinion on the co-production relationship between China and Hollywood. He believed that Chinese producers were using their economic capital to infiltrate the studio system in Hollywood, in order to 'learn' more about the appeal of American films, which he refers to as the 'old version' of co-producing. This possibility was reiterated by Yu Dong, the CEO of Bona Films, who responded by saying: 'Chinese producers do not have enough knowledge of Hollywood, but by working together, both China and Hollywood films and productions are changing' (translated from Mandarin).

British producer Ian Smith then responded to Yu's comment on the changing climate by discussing his concept of 'China Hollywood'. When Smith was asked to elaborate on what he meant, especially on using the term 'Hollywood' in this context, he explained:

Hollywood is not real; Hollywood is an idea. Films are an idea of something, a perception of it... The idea of Hollywood is the brand of Hollywood, it's the power.

Smith seems to be implying that although Hollywood was founded in America, it has become a global brand. In other words, Hollywood began by producing films for a national audience that travelled internationally, and now produces films with the global audience in mind. This, however, highlights the dominant reputation of Hollywood in the global film industry, with China at that time believing that they were only able to achieve the same level of success if they imitate Hollywood practices.

Fast forward to the 2018 *Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum*, and the tone of James Wang's²³ subsequent responses to the topic of joint productions with Hollywood that illustrates China's latest stance on the shifting power dynamics. Wang said:

I believe that American companies should be analysing China and the Chinese market and how to collaborate with us. It is not for the Chinese to figure out what they need to change in order to have a successful collaboration with America [in reference to Hollywood] and for our films to do well in China. I believe this idea should be flipped. Americans should try to figure out how they can make a good film for Chinese audiences. If we [Hollywood-Chinese collaborators] want to maintain a good reputation, we need to start working together right from the beginning and not only be invited to be involved during the film financing and/or filming stage. We should not be involved only in those components. For example, with Sony [in reference to Steven O'Dell from Sony who was also on the panel], they produce films for the global audience. Based on their experiences, they should be able to work with China to discuss what would work for the Chinese audience through using everyone's experiences. By doing so, we might have a chance to produce a collaborative film for the global market. (Translated from Mandarin)

Returning to the collaborations I listed in the thesis' introduction, Hollywood films, such as *Looper*, *Iron Man 3* and *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, were panned by Chinese

²³ James Wang is the CEO of Huayi Brothers

audiences as a result of misleading marketing campaigns and a critique of the poorly represented Chinese elements. However, the decisions to include these elements were made after the producers decided to distribute the films in China as a result of suggestions from their Chinese collaborators and investors. Chinese audiences were well able to see through this strategy and criticised the films for hiring Chinese actors with minimal or no speaking roles in an attempt to create a sense of ‘Chinese-ness’. For the most part, the inclusion of Chinese elements had little impact on the film’s overall narrative. This led to Wang Jianlin, the Chairman of Dalian Wanda, to criticise Hollywood for treating China as a pot of gold and for not showing any respect towards the Chinese market and their consumers (Barnes, 2016; Berry, 2014; Brzeski, 2016b).

***Kungfu Panda 3* and significance of cultural nuance**

Kung Fu Panda 3 is significant because it moves away from the ‘old version’ of collaboration to a new initiative that invites Chinese stakeholders’ involvement during the film’s development stage. Schamus describes this as a ‘new version’ of collaboration, revealing China’s ambition to be, in Schamus terms, the ‘new Hollywood’. This is apparent in the fact that China had started to become involved in the creation of productions, rather than at the later investment stages, to produce more ‘created-in-China’ films.

Kungfu Panda 3 was co-produced with DreamWorks Animation, Oriental DreamWorks (DreamWorks Animation’s then Chinese unit), China Media Capital (CMC), the Shanghai Media Group and Shanghai Alliance (McNary, 2017). On February 2018 it was announced that CMC had taken full ownership of Oriental Dreamworks which was re-branded as Pearl Studios. The financial terms of the acquisition were not publicised (Brzeski, 2018b). The film was subsequently officially declared a joint production on 15 January 2015 and animated for the most part at Oriental Dreamworks’ Shanghai studios.

The film received mainly positive reviews from Chinese audiences and has the highest rating among all the case studies selected for this thesis. While most English-language animations are dubbed in Mandarin for release in China, *Kung Fu Panda 3* was animated twice, once for the English-language version and a second time to fit the characters’ mouth movements when speaking Mandarin. The reanimation highlights Yu’s discussion on the importance of paying attention to the correlation between language and the target audience (see Chapter Two). During the 2016 *Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum*, Raman Hui confirmed that the English script was re-written in Mandarin to create culturally specific jokes and puns along with catchphrases from the Chinese celebrities involved in the voiceovers to create authenticity in the representation

of Chinese culture for Chinese audiences. Clearly this was intended to reduce the gap in cultural proximity for Mandarin-speaking audiences as the producers used their cultural knowledge of the language and Chinese social norms to appeal to the taste of Chinese audiences. The Mandarin version was released in China as well as in several theatres in California as well as Australia's Hoyts chain in which China's Dalian Wanda held majority shares (Brzeski, 2016a).

The English version was co-directed by American-Korean Jennifer Yuh Nelson, who also directed *Kung Fu Panda 2*, along with Alessandro Carloni, and was written by Jonathan Aibel and Glenn Berger. Chinese director Teng Huatao was hired as the consulting director for the Mandarin version. *Kung Fu Panda 3* also released an official theme song, *Try*, sung together in English and Mandarin by Jay Chou and Chou's music apprentice Patrick Brasca. Brasca is a Canadian-Taiwanese singer with mixed European and Chinese ethnicity. Both the English and Mandarin versions featured voices from prominent actors in their respective industry as illustrated in Table 3.4. Jackie Chan was featured in both the English-language and Mandarin version, albeit playing different characters, due to his level of popularity internationally.

Table 3.4: Case for English-language and Mandarin version of *Kungfu Panda 3*

| English Cast | Chinese Cast | Character |
|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Jack Black | Huang Lei | Po |
| Bryan Cranston | Jackie Chan | Li Shan |
| Dustin Hoffman | Wang Zhiwen | Master Shifu |
| David Cross | Wang Taili | Master Crane |
| Seth Rogen | Xiao Yang | Master Mantis |
| Jackie Chan | Jay Chou | Master Monkey |
| Lucy Liu | Zhu Zhu | Master Viper |
| Angelina Jolie | Bai Baihe | Master Tigress |
| Kate Hudson | Yang Mi | Meimei |
| Randall Duk Kim | Zhang Jizhong | Grand Master Oogway |
| James Hong | Zhang Guoli | Mr Ping |

Kung Fu Panda 3 follows the adventures of Po the Dragon Warrior as he takes over Master Shifu's teaching responsibilities. Po feels uncomfortable in his new role as a teacher and becomes demoralised as the Furious Five members (Tigress, Crane, Mantis, Viper and Monkey) are injured as a result of his teachings. Feeling upset Po heads home to his adoptive father Mr Ping. There he meets a panda named Li Shan who catches his attention by breaking Po's dumpling eating record. Po eventually discovers that Li Shan is his biological father. Meanwhile in the Spirit Realm, Grandmaster Oogway fights against Kai, who previously defeated all the other Kung Fu masters, taking away their *chi* (roughly translated and referring to the concept of soul in the film) and turning them into small jade

charms, fights Kai. During the fight, Grandmaster Oogway voluntarily surrenders to Kai but warns him that the Dragon Warrior Po will defeat him. Kai takes this as a challenge and heads to the mortal realm where he plans to defeat Po and steal his *chi*. The film continues to develop as Po attempts to defeat Kai and send him back to the Spirit Realm.

At the time of data collection, the film held an average rating of 7.8. A total number of 48,590 comments were collected and analysed from Douban. The most frequent used words and phrases are listed in Table 3.5 below:

Table 3.5: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Kungfu Panda*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|--------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | China | 中国 | 1.30% |
| 2 | Panda | 熊猫 | 1.16% |
| 3 | Laugh | 笑 | 1.04% |
| 4 | Cute | 萌 | 0.90% |
| 5 | Plot/Drama | 剧情 | 0.90% |
| 6 | Dubbing | 配音 | 0.77% |
| 7 | Scenes/Frame | 画面 | 0.66% |
| 8 | Not bad | 不错 | 0.65% |
| 9 | Good | 好看 | 0.49% |
| 10 | Story | 故事 | 0.48% |

Unlike the previous case studies, there were no mentions of any celebrities in the top 10 most frequently used words and phrase. This could imply that Chinese audiences considered the re-writing and re-dubbing of the animation more significant than the animation's all-star cast ('plot/drama' 5th place 剧情 *juqing*; 'dubbing' 配音 *peiyin* 6th place; and 'story' 故事 *gushi* 10th place). Star power took a backseat in this production with Huang Lei only mentioned 473 times; Wang Zhiwen 80 times; Bai Baihe 28 times; and Jackie Chan 14 times out of the 48,590 comments scrapped for analysis.

In Teng's interview with *China Daily* (2016) he mentioned several challenges faced by the American and Chinese team during the film's development stages. Teng considered that many of the American team had inaccurate ideas about China although there was some eagerness to portray 'authentic' Chinese culture on film. For example, the Chinese team recommended that Meimei should perform a ribbon dance. However, the American team did not think the dance was 'Chinese' enough because they considered it to be a sport (as seen at the Olympics). The Chinese team had to convince the Americans that the ribbon dance originated from China and is seen as part of Chinese culture, especially to the Chinese. The negotiations between the American and Chinese team on creative aspects of

the film eventually proved to be fruitful. A user posted a comment with 329 votes in 2016 (top seventh comment):

Each *Kung Fu Panda* film gradually reflects the Chinese style more skilfully through the addition of Chinese elements with the combination of beautiful colours. If you are creating a film with influence from Chinese art, you would need to spend time observing the details.

夫熊猫做的一部比一部更有中国风，更娴熟，融入了更多中国元素，色彩搭配更美。做中国艺术题材电影，就得多花心思好好研究。

Another user posted a comment in 2016:

This film is different from the other two [*Kung Fu Panda* films]. This film is both funny and heart-warming at the same time. The best thing was the large number of Chinese elements that were seamlessly included in this Hollywood production.

和以前的两部一样，这部依然是笑点横飞，泪点点缀。最让人欣慰的是大量的中国元素在一部好莱坞制作里显得那么的自然不做作

Nonetheless, Teng was aware that the *Kung Fu Panda 3* was a Hollywood production intended for an international audience and not a 'pure' Chinese film. He emphasised that his team's main role was to contribute suggestions that would ensure that no major cultural errors featured in the film, rather than directing and making final decisions. An example of initial cultural errors included leaving chopsticks sitting in a bowl, which in Chinese culture is considered to be an offering to the spirit of the dead. Chinese audience on Douban appeared to be aware of Teng's intention but not aware of his contribution as seen in the comment below posted in 2016:

The scenery is beautiful and embraces a Chinese aesthetic. We can see the root of the panda's furs, showing that America's 3D technology is more advanced than China's. We are still far behind. You should not pay too much attention to the plot, but the Panda follows Chinese traditions and includes many funny moments. This is a film for the whole family.

昨天冒着严寒去看点映，画面很美，中国风的意境；熊猫身体表面的细毛根根可见，老美的 3D 技术还是没得说，我们比梦工厂还差一大截。情节不能细推敲，但继承熊猫系列传统，笑料不少。适合节日全家观看，合家欢。

The critical issue here is that if Chinese audiences consider this film to be a Hollywood production rather than a local production, this could potentially put China back a step in

the establishment of their soft power ambitions. Rather than viewing *Kungfu Panda 3* as a 'created-in-China' production, Chinese audiences labelled the film a 'Hollywood' film, apparently unaware of the Chinese technical skillsets used to create this production.

Nonetheless, the Chinese team's efforts to ensure authenticity paid off. 96% of the users on Douban that mentioned 'China' or 'Chinese version' expressed positive sentiments. This could in turn signal a shift in Chinese attitudes towards Hollywood and the appropriation or stereotyping of Chinese cultural elements in these joint productions (Chan, 2009). The appearance of Chinese elements was not the only way in which the effort of authenticity was achieved. Re-writing the script to include cultural nuances to increase the level of authenticity for Chinese audiences also proved to be successful. Changes to the film's dialogue include one scene where Po admires the body armour of Li Shan, his biological father. In the English version Po says: 'Wow, I think I just pee-d a little', a quip very much in line with Jack Black's crude style of humour. However, in the Mandarin version the dialogue changes but the meaning behind the dialogue remains the same, as Po is seen to be in awe of Li Shan in the armour. Po says: 'You are way too handsome' (你正是帅得太过份了). Another example is seen in a scene where Po, Monkey and Tigress are ordering noodles from a stall. In the English version, Po asks, 'Tigress do you want any sauce with that?' And Monkey responds on behalf of Tigress: 'On the side', which Tigress then echoes. In the Mandarin version again the dialogue changes, but the action does not vary. In the Mandarin version of the scene, Po asks Tigress: 'How spicy do you want your noodles? (你的面要多辣的?)'. Monkey again responds on behalf of Tigress with a different answer to the English version. He says: '变态辣 (*biantai la*)', which is slang in Mandarin for the highest degree of spiciness possible or extremely spicy. Once again, as in the English version, this is echoed by Tigress.

Re-writing the script to embrace Mandarin and Chinese cultural nuances highlights the importance of understanding the relationship between language and culture. Although these can be viewed as two separate symbolic systems, they are interlinked because the meanings of specific words can depend on the cultural and syntagmatic context (Nida, 1998). The efforts of the producers thus demonstrated *mianzi* to the Chinese investors and authorities as they showed eagerness to portray authentic Chinese cultural elements and language authenticity (Buckley, Clegg & Tan, 2010; Lockett 1988). This could in turn help to build *guanxi* relations between Hollywood and China as Chinese stakeholders could view this effort and strategy in a positive light.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Fu's (2012) study demonstrates how audiences are more likely to appreciate films that share a similar language and cultural profile. *Kungfu Panda 3*

seems to take the concept of cultural proximity into consideration as Raman Hui, who helped establish Oriental Dreamworks, suggested during his panel discussion at the 2016 *Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum*:

... for *Kung Fu Panda 3* we made an English version and a Chinese version. When you know both languages and watch both movies, you will know that a lot of the lines and dialogue are different...the Chinese version we made for the Chinese audiences, so there are a lot of jokes that Americans won't understand. At the same time, the English version was for international audiences, so English-speaking audiences will understand it very clearly.

As this partnership develops, there is a growing emphasis on understanding the correlation between language and culture and this was well discussed at the 2018 *Beijing International Film Festival Co-Production Forum*. Steven O'Dell²⁴ described how when dealing with international co-productions, voice and language can become a barrier. O'Dell suggested that animation can help reduce this cultural barrier as it allows producers to re-write and re-animate the film, without greatly affecting the production period as seen with *Kung Fu Panda 3*. The Chinese audience for *Kung Fu Panda 3* on Douban appeared to validate the strategies implemented by Dreamworks, as seen in the third most liked comment by users posted in 2016:

...Gungun [general nickname for pandas in China] is originally from China, so they should be using Mandarin.

...滚滚本来就是中国的嘛，说国语才对啊。

Kung Fu Panda 3 demonstrates the significant role of cultural proximity, highlighting the importance for filmmakers to understand the cultural profile of the target audience.

A user who posted a comment that attracted 231 likes stated:

I actually think the story is very generic; however, the effects [animation] were great. The dubbing does make you feel empathetic for the character. The most important thing is that the panda is very cute, especially the toy panda that one of the pandas plays with.

其实我觉得剧情一般，但是特效很棒，配音也很有代入感，重点是熊猫村的熊猫好可爱，尤其是那个拿着玩偶的小熊猫，太可爱啦。

Two comments posted in 2016 mentioned:

²⁴ Steven O'Dell is the President of International Theatrical Distribution of Sony Pictures Entertainment.

The dialogue, Mandarin voiceovers and effects [animation] deserves 100 points. We should be proud!

台词、配音、特效，给你 100 分满分，不怕你骄傲！

They did a Mandarin and English version for the animation's mouth movement, DreamWorks is really working hard. The Mandarin dubbing is good, but Jackie Chan's Mandarin is still awkward.

口型动画做中英两版，梦工厂也真是拼。国语配音好棒，成龙大哥普通话还是有点尴尬

Having a film with a plot that is easy to understand allows the film to be understood universally, although audiences may find it predictable, as was seen in some of the comments on Douban. To understand the film's plot, audiences are not required to have a high level of cultural knowledge; therefore, audiences are more inclined to pay attention to other details such as the film's dialogue, behaviour, props and images. A user commented in 2016:

The plot is actually quite general and predictable. The villain is not as interesting as the villain in the second film. However, the pandas are extremely cute! And why is this film not created by a Chinese filmmaker?

故事情节其实挺一般，看开头就猜得到结尾，反派没有第二部精彩，但是熊猫们真是太太太太太可爱了!还有，这为什么不是中国人拍的电影!

This case study shows the importance of paying attention to specific cultural nuances in order for a film not made-in-China to leave a positive impression on Chinese audiences, drawing attention to the importance of balancing content for a diverse audience yet keeping the target market satisfied. While Chinese audiences on Douban are aware that the film is a Hollywood production, they appear keen for the Chinese film industry to move in the direction that *Kung Fu Panda 3* seems to be heading. Since this is a film that seeks inspiration from Chinese stories and cultures. The comment which received the highest number of likes simply said:

This is better than any of the local high-budget blockbusters produced.

嗯哼 就是比国产的什么大圣归来好看

Conclusion

Theoretically, transnational collaborations such as the case studies listed in this chapter allow producers to disconnect from existing practices enabling them to create new practices and content. In an ideal world, the policies behind co-productions are beneficial to all parties involved. However, in reality, ticking all the boxes may not result in a successful film based on the target audience's opinions. While international co-productions, or rather joint productions as the Chinese term these, include a facility for joint financing and the creation of new distribution channels, the promotion of cultural exchange may not always take place and is dependent on the co-producers' intentions. Additionally, the findings in this chapter also illustrate three key elements that could potentially determine a positive reception amongst producers and Chinese audiences. These elements are: (1) the level of cultural knowledge obtained by producers to negotiate the ideologies of the participating countries and their target audience; (2) the power dynamics operational between the participating nations; and (3) the importance of showing *mianzi* to relevant Chinese stakeholders in order to build *guanxi*. It is critical to note these three characteristics are not independent of each other but are intertwined throughout the collaborative process.

All three case studies demonstrated a varying degree of effort on improving the cultural knowledge of the producers. Reviewing the Australian case study, Australian producers seemed to be more focused on the cultural differences present rather than working on gaining cultural knowledge to improve the working relationship in future productions. This was consistently highlighted in the *2016 Australia-China Co-production Forum*, where the focus was on describing the 'chaos' behind the co-productions and collaborations rather than providing advice on how to proceed in the future. Specifically with *Children of the Silk Road*, the film attempted to hybridise the production through fusing Chinese elements into this English-language film based on a Chinese historical moment. However, this was met with criticism, specifically the authenticity of the language spoken by its ethnic Chinese casts.

Arguably, the low levels of Chinese cultural knowledge demonstrated by the Australian producers in relation to the recent co-production *Guardians of the Tomb*, as well as the failure to obtain joint production status with *Mao's Last Dancer* and the criticism of *Children of the Silk Road*, demonstrate a failure on the part of the Australian producers to demonstrate the *mianzi* that is necessary to the growth of *guanxi* between the Australian and Chinese film industry. Additionally, being perceived as a junior partner by China does not help Australia's situation. Australia is seen to be more dependent on China but has yet

to show any understanding of this 'junior' status. According to Park Seung Ho and Luo Ya Dong (2001, p. 457), Chinese society places great significance on the importance of *mianzi* and it is seen as 'an intangible form of social currency and personal status'. Australia's lack of attention on building this relationship could potentially hinder future outcomes, which is seen in the unconfirmed status of several Chinese-Australian co-productions.

On the other hand, the producers of *The Mermaid* (Hong Kong) employed their cultural knowledge of both the Mainland and the Hong Kong film genres by hybridising the ideologies of both and creating something unique to Chinese cinema. Using *mo lei tau* as an example, Chow managed to incorporate China's socialist ideology into his specific style and the film's narration. Unfortunately, this did not resonate too well with Chinese audiences as they were able to see through Chow's strategy and perceived the film to be a departure from his past signature style. Nonetheless, Chow's efforts did demonstrate a degree of *mianzi* to the Chinese authorities in recognising the Chinese government's social importance. Furthermore, his efforts to feature Mainland actors rather than his usual pool of Hong Kong actors demonstrated his eagerness to help push the Mainland's soft power ambitions. Chow's participation in government events and committees also assisted in creating a strong level of *guanxi* that allowed him to bypass several general censorship regulations, including scenes that exhibited sexual innuendos that are usually frowned upon.

Although America and China have not signed a co-production treaty due to the current tensions with trade negotiations, Chinese authorities have allowed filmmakers to bypass several policy guidelines to create joint productions in order to benefit from Hollywood's global success, once again highlighting the fluidity of China's regulations. *Kungfu Panda 3* demonstrated an awareness of the cultural differences between American and Chinese audiences by engaging a Chinese team to help create the Mandarin version of *Kungfu Panda 3*. Hollywood producers were clearly aware of *Kungfu Panda's* heavy reliance on Chinese cultural elements in the film's narrative, and therefore allocated additional resources to modify the film to please the Chinese audience by creating a brand new script in Mandarin as well as casting Mandarin-speaking actors and actresses to create authenticity.

When compared to *Looper*, *Kungfu Panda 3* highlights an important shift in the power dynamics between the Hollywood and the Chinese film industries. Chinese media conglomerates are no longer actively knocking on the doors of Hollywood to seek advice and experience but would now like to be seen as equal collaborators. This level of confidence is further supported by the considerable success of 'created-in-China'

productions that have pushed the nation's soft power ambitions domestically with films such as *Wolf Warrior 2* and *The Wandering Earth* (流浪地球)(Gwo, 2019), the two highest grossing films of all-time in China thus far (July 2019). Nonetheless, joint productions are still viewed as an important strategy since China is seeking to utilise the resources provided by their foreign partners to help build their soft power ambitions internationally.

As this chapter has demonstrated, transnational flows in cultural products may be uneven and effort is required to build the kinds of relationships that allow such flows to travel in both directions. The transnational relationships that result in joint or co-productions are based on the significance and level of engagement of all the parties involved. In the next chapter, I further interrogate the concept of the 'transnational' by conducting an analysis of foreign films that were financed by the Chinese. I investigate the purpose and value of this strategy and if the elements presented in this chapter could be applied to understand the transnationality of Chinese-foreign collaborations. Additionally, I will investigate the consequences of Chinese investments in foreign films and explore the potential outcomes of this strategy.

Chapter 4:

Chinese financial investment in foreign film productions

In the previous chapter, I examined transnational collaborations from a political and (at times) a commercial perspective involving joint productions with China and highlighted the importance of co-producers acquiring cultural knowledge in order for a joint production to gain favourable reviews from Chinese audiences. Joint productions are usually conducted and approved on the basis of a treaty that is signed by the participating country and China. However, if political tensions occur between China and the participating country, this may affect the film's ability to gain joint production status.

The Korean film industry (along with other creative industries including television and music) experienced such consequences when China halted the approval of joint productions between Korea and China. This was due to tensions resulting from Korea's installation of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) anti-missile system. THAAD was installed in partnership with the American military as a response to increased missile testing and the ongoing perceived threats issuing from North Korea during that period. China protested this decision by restricting Korean entertainment content from being distributed in China. This posed a challenge for Korean cultural producers as China is the largest foreign market for Korean entertainment productions (see Chapter 5 for further elaboration). Since September 2016 to the time of writing this thesis in July 2019, no official Korea-China co-productions have been released, raising concerns over the future of the partnership (K Soh & Yecies, 2017). Korean producers interviewed for this thesis believe that the ban was imposed in order to pressure then Korean President Park Geun-hye to rethink Korea's position on THAAD.

Similarly, the unstable relationship between America and China has caused many Hollywood studios to seek alternative strategies to lower such threats and restrictions by offering creative collaborations and financial investment opportunities to Chinese companies. However, in China, films made in America with Chinese financial investment may be officially designated as foreign films, with the result that the release of the film is restricted according to the foreign film quota system. Nonetheless, financial investments overseas are beneficial for Chinese companies as they seek to build networks and create awareness of their organisation in the international film market. Furthermore, financial investment from Chinese companies seems to benefit foreign films (from Hollywood and beyond) as this provides them with the opportunity to not only fund their budget, but to build a pathway into the Chinese market.

As highlighted in Chapter Three, China has implemented a set of regulations for foreign producers to follow in order for their films to be released in China. At times, this process can be viewed as arbitrary, and largely dependent on the level of *guanxi* the foreign film producer had achieved with Chinese stakeholders. This unpredictable approval process could be seen as a challenge as productions may be completed but fail to achieve a release date, resulting in huge financial losses. However, seeking Chinese financial investments in Hollywood productions may be a useful preliminary step for Hollywood producers seeking to build *guanxi* relations, while attempting to secure a release date for their ‘foreign film’ in China.

Unfortunately, in 2017, this particular strategy was slowed down, especially for state-run companies such as CFG, following an announcement from Chinese President Xi Jinping that the government would be more stringent on financial investments in foreign companies (Frater, 2017). However, privately run media companies such as Alibaba (阿里巴巴) are still investing in Hollywood films although on a reduced scale. *Green Book*, which was partly funded by Alibaba, became the first film with Chinese financial investment to have won Best Picture at the Academy Awards (Li & Ruwitch, 2019)²⁵. Although China is keen to produce films in the future, rather than investing in foreign film productions, the Oscar nod to *Green Book* could perhaps revive the latter strategy.

Continuing Chinese investment in foreign films begs a number of questions: Why should the Chinese continue to invest in foreign films and studios? How might this assist them in developing their own films for the Chinese market? How does this particular transnational relationship assist in creating new practices and content? And, as discussed in the previous chapters, how are policy agreements and the development of social and cultural relationships important in the specific strategy? In order to answer these questions, the following chapter is organised into two sections as I explore the impact of Chinese financial investments in foreign films and how this could inform future strategies.

The first section examines the official Australian-Singaporean co-production, *Bait 3D*, by investigating the producers’ motivations in seeking Chinese financial investment and the strategies that were put in place in order to satisfy the Chinese stakeholder’s stipulated agreement. I also examine Chinese audiences’ response to these strategies to understand the implications of re-developing a film in its post-production stage to satisfy the requirements of the Chinese stakeholders. In the second section, I focus on Legendary Entertainment’s (Hollywood) relationship with the state-run CFG through an analysis of

²⁵ *Green Book* won Best Picture at the 2019 Academy Awards.

the two films *Seventh Son* (2014) and *Warcraft* (2016). Unlike the case of *Bait 3D* and the case studies discussed in Chapter Three, these two films did not include any conspicuous Chinese elements in a situation where the investors played the role of a silent financial partner.

An Australian-Singaporean co-production with financial assistance from China

As revealed in Chapter Three, China tops the list in terms of Australian film producers' expectations for revenue growth, while Singapore was listed as second (Screen Australia, 2013). Australia and Singapore also have a co-production agreement which was signed on 7 September 2007 and put into force on 16 October 2008. Prior to this, Australia and Singapore had reached various agreements including *A New Partnership*, a joint declaration signed in 1996 promoting cooperation in cultural, economic, political and security matters. In the treaty signed in 2007, it was agreed that the competent authority for Singapore was the then Media Development Authority (MDA)²⁶, while Screen Australia acted for Australia.

MDA issued a number of guidelines for productions seeking co-production status in Singapore, including the requirement that co-producers are Singaporeans and/or nationals of the partner country. For feature films, any production must include Singapore-based companies with a minimum of 30% local ownership (by Singaporean citizens or permanent residents). The Singaporean co-producer must also contribute a minimum of 20% of the production budget, which can be supplied by investors from any country. As in the case of the Australian co-production requirements (see Chapter Three), the proportion of the budget spend on local elements and creative contributions should be a minimum of 20% and be proportionate to Singapore's financial contribution. The input of the key creative participations should also be equivalent to the budget share contributed by the Singaporean producers. If no Singaporean actors are cast in any of the four major roles in a given production, the production of local technical input or supporting cast participation should be increased to adjust the balance (MDA, 2009).

In 2012, Australia managed to move a step closer to their goal of penetrating the Chinese film market through their co-production with Singapore of the film *Bait 3D*. Although the film did not fare well in Singapore (USD 116,000) or Australia (USD 624,000), it earned USD 19.5 million in China alone, an amount exceeding the film's budget of AUD 20 million

²⁶ As of October 2016, MDA is now known as the Info-communications Media Development Authority of Singapore (IMDA)

(USD 14 million). This was an achievement in itself, as no Australian co-production to date has recouped such large box office revenues in China (see Chapter Three).

Since Australia is still perceived as a junior partner in the Chinese film market, Australia could benefit greatly from this relationship with Singapore because of Singapore's economic links with China, as well as its cultural connections. Since Singapore has already made inroads into the Chinese film market, Australian filmmakers stand to benefit from this arrangement by tapping into Singaporean knowledge, resources and connections (Chan, 2014). Strategies from the Singaporean film industry include collaborating with Chinese studios in an official and unofficial capacity and promoting Chinese films in Singapore. Films produced under this co-production treaty include *Meeting the Giant* (Tay, 2014) directed by Singaporean actor/director Tay Ping Hui and *Ten Hours of Divorce* (forthcoming) directed by Hong Kong-born Singaporean Filmmaker Au Yuk Sing. All Singapore-China co-productions are originally shot in Mandarin.

From a cultural standpoint, Singapore is also well positioned as a partner for Australia since it is a globalised city with a strategic geographical and economic position. The country embraces the concept of cultural hybridity through the integration and the diffusion of different cultures (Mitchell, 2005). As a multi-racial country that is also influenced by its colonial past, English is the nations' lingua franca²⁷ to allow its various ethnic groups to communicate in both a professional and personal settings (Ooi & Tan, 2013). However, the Singapore government also encourages the on-going existence of the different contributing cultures through an emphasis on language maintenance. The three main ethnic groups and their mother tongues (which the government designates as second languages) are Chinese (Mandarin), Malay (Bahasa Melayu) and Indian (Tamil). This strategy is supported by Singapore's education system, where children start learning two languages, English and their nominated mother tongue, as soon as they begin school. This policy means that the majority of Singaporeans are bilingual, with English as their primary language. As the Chinese constitute the majority ethnic group at 74.3%, many Singaporeans can speak, read and write Mandarin fluently (*Population Trends 2018, 2019*). This is a crucial consideration for entering the Chinese film market, as it reduces the communication barrier.

Although Australia has signed a separate film treaty with China (as discussed in Chapter Three), the business relationship is not well established because of Australia's junior partner status. While Singapore's relationship with China is not on the same level as that

²⁷ Lingua franca or 'bridge language' is used to facilitate communication between people who do not share a native tongue.

with Korea or Hollywood, it does have an advantage of overcoming communication barriers and forming better relationship with the Chinese through surmounting cultural hurdles. Singapore has also positioned itself as a global hub within the Asian region, allowing Australian producers to potentially access not only the Singaporean market, but the entire region. Thus, by drawing on the unique cultural capabilities presented by Singapore, Australian filmmakers are well placed to learn the nuances of Chinese culture, while not having to worry about offending Singaporeans through the importation of Western practices. Australian companies are also able to utilise bilingual Singaporean Chinese actors for film projects and marketing promotions.

***Bait 3D's* deceptive marketing and Chinese audiences' response**

Bait 3D is the first feature film collaboration to come out of the official co-production treaty between Australia and Singapore. The film is a horror-thriller revolving around a group of people trapped in a supermarket after a tsunami hits a coastal town in Queensland, Australia. A hungry Great White Shark is also trapped with them, attacking the group at every opportunity. Filming took place in Australia, both on the Gold Coast and at Warner Roadshow Studios. Both the director, Kimble Rendall, and the film's main writer, Russell Mulachy, are Australians. The cast consists mainly of Australians including, Xavier Samuel and Sharni Vinson as the male and female leads.

Two Singaporean actors Adrian Pang and Qi Yuwu (a Chinese born permanent resident of Singapore) joined the cast as supporting actors. There were also some efforts made to develop the Singaporean connection in the screenplay. 'Singapore' crops up in the dialogue when Samuel's character (Josh) and Vinson's character (Tina), express their interest in moving to the state. 'Singapore' is mentioned again when Tina encounters Josh at the supermarket and explains how she met Qi's character Steven. Singaporean company Widescreen Media was involved in the 3D technology used in the film which also employed VFX and post-production from the Singapore company Blackmagic Design. The score was also written by two prominent Singaporean film composers, Alex Oh and Joe Ng.

Bait 3D premiered in Australia on 20 September 2012 and in Singapore on 25 October 2012. The film was released in a total of 28 countries including China, in a version edited specifically for the Chinese market. Though the film's main financial backing came from Australia and Singapore, 20% of the 25 million AUD (USD 18 million) budget came from Chinese investors. According to producer Gary Hamilton, these investments resulted from his wife Ying Ye's established *guanxi* relations derived from previous business relationships. However, the Chinese investors pushed for Chinese elements to be

incorporated in the film and requested additional scenes, leading to the creation of a separate version specifically for Chinese audiences (Quinn, 2012). Chinese elements for *Bait 3D* include, filming in China, having Chinese actors and using Mandarin as part of the film's dialogue. As mentioned in Chapter Three, prior to 2013 there were no restrictions on releasing a separate version for the Chinese market.

For the film's Chinese version, the entire dialogue was dubbed in Mandarin. Each time 'Singapore' appears in the original dialogue, it was replaced through dubbing with 'China'. The Chinese version also included an additional two minutes and 35 seconds featuring Tina in Beijing. This added scene opens with Tina at a ballet school trying to compose an e-mail to Josh. When deciding if she should hit 'send', her friends enter and invite her along to a club. In the next scene, Tina is seen dancing with a famous Chinese actor Ashton Chen also known by his stage name Shi Xiaolong (释小龙), who is well-known in China for his roles as a child actor. The name of Chen's character is never revealed, nor the reason behind his appearance in the scene. Steven is then seen telling another male friend that he has yet to tell Tina of his feelings for her, creating a love story for Steven and Tina which was absent in the film's original version. Finally, at the end of the additional Chinese scene, Tina is seen thanking her Chinese friends for helping her overcome a difficult moment in her life.

Further additional scenes were filmed but were rejected as the producers and director Rendall felt that they would make the movie too long. The deleted scenes were meant to provide Chen with more screen time. These scenes show Chen saving a mother and child from a burning building, identifying him as a member of the China International Search and Rescue Team. Next, Chen is seen riding a motorcycle to meet his girlfriend and to give her a necklace. This anticipates the deleted end of the film when the China International Search and Rescue Team rescues the people trapped in the shark-infested supermarket and saves two Chinese girls, neither of whom made it into the film.

During *Bait 3D*'s opening weekend in China, the film grossed USD 5 million. Besides being the highest grossing Australian and Singaporean film in China, the film was also reported to have been shown over 180,000 times on 2,000 screens, bringing in a total audience of 3.5 million (C. Delaney, 2012; Yang, 2012). As these figures suggest, *Bait 3D* achieved a number of firsts for Australian films, especially from a financial viewpoint. One factor that was no doubt partly responsible for *Bait 3D*'s financial success was its strategic release. The film was released on 12 October 2012, coinciding with China's blackout Period, this meant it did not have to compete with Hollywood films (see Chapter Three)(Screen Staff, 2012). In 2012, China was recorded as having 12,225 cinemas, meaning that *Bait 3D* was only released in 16% of the nation's theatres (Statistia, 2014a). Considering that in 2012 China's population

stood at 1.35 billion, only 0.25% of Chinese saw *Bait 3D* at the cinema (Statista, 2014b). The ability to make 27 million AUD, three times the revenue made by the film in the rest of the world²⁸, with less than 1% of the population contributing to box office returns, is one way of illustrating the enormous potential of the Chinese film market. *Bait 3D* also streamed on the Chinese multimedia provider Baidu (百度), where the film was played over five million times on its site ("Bait," 2019).

The journey of *Bait 3D* from Australia and Singapore to China is an interesting one. *Bait 3D* was first screened in the Venice Film Festival's Out of Competition category, which was covered by the Australian media. According to Simonot (2012), this section is reserved for important works by directors that already have established reputations at the festival. However, a programmer from the Venice Film Festival that I had a chat with at the ATF in Singapore (see Chapter Two), mentioned that it was sometimes a struggle to find a film to screen at Venice Film Festival. The festival requires that the film should not have been previously screened to the public, which at times can be challenging, especially in this digital era. Before *Bait 3D*'s release in Australia, it garnered high expectations due to the film's budget and the invitation to the Venice Film Festival. However, prior to its Australian release (after it was screened at Venice Film Festival), the film was labelled a B-grade movie; a low-budget film featuring stilted acting and dialogue (Martin, 2005).

Following its Australian release, the film failed to meet the expectations of media critics, even as a B-grade production (Fitzpatrick, 2012). The Australian media, including the *Sunday Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, mentioned how the storyline, acting and technology were very poor (Hall, 2012; Mathieson, 2012). *STM Entertainment Magazine* (2012) wrote that the acting was poor, and the characters' accents were 'all over the place', switching freely from Australian to American. In an interview with the *Sunday Herald Sun*, Vinson was quoted as saying that although the film was originally shot using Australian accents, during post-production some dialogue was re-recorded with American accents to make the film more accessible to international audiences (Wigney, 2012). As noted in Chapter Three, *Children of the Silk Road* was subject to a similar strategy whereby the Australian elements were removed from the film through the homogenisation of 'Australia' to the West (Yue, 2014). Producers clearly believe that the global audience are more inclined to accept American accents due to the audiences' high level of exposure to the readily accessible Hollywood films. However, the film was dubbed into Mandarin in the Chinese version; therefore Australian/American accents were of little significance, unless Chinese audiences watched the original English-language version through illegal streaming

²⁸ According to Box Office Mojo, *Bait 3D* earned an approximately USD 5 million internationally excluding China.

or download. The article also commented that the technology used was ‘cheesy’, making the whole production looking cheap, despite its massive budget. In Singapore, the film was barely given any publicity. Of the five news items related to *Bait 3D*, three were film reviews, one included an interview with Singaporean actor Pang and the fifth was a summary of Singaporean films released in 2012.

The marketing strategy in China, however, mainly focused on the cameo appearance by Chen suggesting that he had a substantial role in the film. Chen was also in attendance during the film’s Beijing press conference, replacing lead actor Samuel. The end credits were also modified to emphasise the Chinese actors, with supporting actor Qi appearing first, followed by Chen. However, Qi is killed off barely halfway through the film, while in the Chinese version of the film, Chen appears for less than 10 seconds. China’s biggest infotainment web portal, Sina (新浪), picked up on this misinformation and published two articles emphasising Chen’s disappointment at his lack of screen time (Echo 应声虫, 2012; Landscape 山水, 2012). Chen is also quoted as regretting that the burning building scene did not make the final cut, noting that he worked very hard preparing and performing his own stunts, which were never shown²⁹. The article also cited a response from Rendall, who is quoted as saying that he felt bad about cutting Chen’s scene and promised him more screen time in the film’s sequel. The article also noted the disappointment felt by audiences who were expecting that Chen would have a starring role in the film (Echo 应声虫, 2012). Another article by Landscape 山水 (2012) included links to the deleted scenes for the benefit of Chen’s many fans.

Most of the articles appearing in the Chinese media noted that *Bait 3D* was directed by an unknown director and featured unknown actors, and thus, the film’s popularity had come as a surprise. Articles that appeared on Sina, Da (2012)(2012) and Gracetot (2012) argued that *Bait 3D*’s success had been mostly due to good timing and luck because restrictions on what was to be considered a domestic film were more ambiguous at the time. *Bait 3D* was also released in China at a fortuitous time when 3D foreign films were a hot topic with Chinese audiences, since *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) was released in 3D in China (Global Times, 2018; Gracetot, 2012). Most importantly, because of private Chinese financial investment and the additional Chinese elements, *Bait 3D* was considered a domestic production and was spared the restrictions that are usually imposed on foreign films.

²⁹ In one of the deleted scenes, Chen was shown saving a child from a burning building, which according to Chen he performed without a stunt double.

The analysis of *Bait 3D*

At the time of the collection of the data in 2016, the film had an average rating of 5.4 out of 10 on Douban. A total of 4,200 comments were collected from *Bait 3D*'s Douban page. The most frequently used keywords are listed in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Bait 3D*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|-------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | Ashton Chen | 释小龙 | 1.62% |
| 2 | Shark | 鲨鱼 | 1.52% |
| 3 | 3D | 3D | 1% |
| 4 | Plot | 剧情 | 0.74% |
| 5 | Effect or quality | 效果 | 0.67% |
| 6 | Death | 死 | 0.66% |
| 7 | Bad | 烂 | 0.61% |
| 8 | Bloody | 血腥 | 0.50% |
| 9 | Disaster | 灾难 | 0.40% |
| 10 | China | 中国 | 0.39% |

41% of the comments were negative, 45% were average (or borderline negative as discovered through further analysis), and 14% of the comments were rated positive. The words 'Singapore' (新加坡 *xinjiapo*) and 'Australia' (澳洲 *aozhou*) were barely mentioned, (15 and 6 times respectively), while 'China' was mentioned 176 times by users. This emphasises the lack of awareness of Singapore and Australia's involvement in *Bait 3D*, perhaps due to the unknown actors and actresses in China and the generic nature of the 'West' as portrayed in the film. The word '3D' was also present in the top 10 most frequently used words/phrase, which is hardly surprising as one of the film's main publicity angles in China was the use of 3D technology.

Following *Bait 3D*'s release in Singapore and Australia, the Australian print news media panned the 3D effects as 'cheap', suggesting that the much-hyped technology had failed to meet expectations (Benjamin, 2012; Mathieson, 2012; Hall, 2012; STM Entertainment, 2012). On the *Bait 3D* Douban page, 35% of the comments mentioning '3D' gave the film a negative rating, while 43% gave the film a neutral rating and 22% gave the film a positive rating. Within the neutral rating, 62% of the comments showed positive sentiments towards the 3D effects of the film, 16% were neutral, while 22% were negative. Thus, the majority of the comments rated the 3D technology in the film as positive. The other neutral comments either implied that the user watched a pirated version of the film and did not watch the film in 3D or that the 3D effects were of average quality.

The negative comments, where users commented that the technology gave the impression that the film had been shot on a tight budget, were mostly in line with the Australian film reviews. A comment posted in 2012 gave the film a rating of two stars with reference to the backstory of how the group came to be trapped in the supermarket:

Low budget film, there was no scene showing any tsunami, the film's 3D effects were not good at all

小成本，根本没有海啸场面。3D 效果也不出色。

Another user in 2012 felt that 3D effects were a gimmick to attract audiences to the cinema:

Now, as long as a film is labelled 3D, you can start to deceive people; a bad film.

现在只要有“3D”电影的噱头，就能开始坑蒙拐骗了，烂片一部。

This may reflect the new policy implemented by the Chinese government in relation to foreign 3D films to promote 3D cinemas in China. *Bait 3D* was screened in the same year as the Chinese government announced the change in policy to allow additional foreign films to enter the market if they were released in 3D, and this became a popular topic with Chinese audiences. The use of 3D technology in *Bait 3D* was no doubt seen as a powerful drawcard as until then foreign films, especially 3D films, had limited release in China (Hennock, 2012). With very little exposure to foreign 3D films, Chinese audiences may have had lower expectations than their Singaporean and Australian counterparts.

The positive comments asserted that the 3D elements were the best part of the film, rather than the plot or acting. A user commented in 2012:

Although the 3D aspect of the film is not bad, the story is shit, it is not worth going to the cinema for

3D 效果虽然不错，但是故事太 shit，不值得一看。

Another use commented in 2012:

This film is good for dates. There were not many impressive aspects about this film, but the 3D effects are scary enough that your girlfriend would be shocked and grab onto you, without you having to take the initiative

这部电影堪称约会神片，虽然没有什么闪光点，但是 3D 的效果下的恐怖，让女朋友惊悚到你不用主动

As suggested, this positive response could be attributed to the minimum exposure of audiences to foreign 3D films in China prior to 2012.

While Singapore was responsible for the technological effects in the film, which theoretically (from the Singapore government perspective), was intended to demonstrate Singapore's technological capabilities to the Chinese audience, this unfortunately did not work. Audiences on Douban did not comment on Singapore's involvement. Chinese audiences may not have been aware of Singapore's involvement because Singapore is not clearly represented in the film. The involvement of Chinese investors also led to the last-minute inclusion of Chinese elements in the film during post-production, including the addition of Chen. However, many Chinese viewers failed to appreciate the strategically added scenes.

The most blatant example of the addition of Chinese elements was the sudden scene change from Australia to Beijing following the opening credits and Chen's appearance in the film. A user commented in 2012:

The film stated that Xiao Long [Chen] would be starring in the film, but the only appearance he made was in the Beijing scene. Netizens [Douban users] have been asking, where are you [Chen]? Are you acting as the shark?

号称是本片主演的释小龙，只在北京场景中出现了不到十秒钟，以至于许多网友一直在追问，小龙你到底在哪里，难道你演的是那条鲨鱼吗？

The top comment voted for its usefulness at 185 said:

Can someone please tell me if Shi Xiaolong [Chen] is that shark?!!!!!!!!!!!!

请问释小龙演的是那条鲨鱼吗!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Before the film's release in China, Chen was reported to have a substantial role in *Bait 3D* and in the film's Chinese poster, Chen's name was printed alongside the main actors, although he only made a cameo appearance. Chen thus seemed to be a major drawcard for the film as his name was the most common term used and was mentioned 541 times. However, 93% of the comments mentioning Chen were negative with most of the commentators lamenting his absence, while only 7% were positive. *Bait 3D* was marketed as Chen's first international film since he took a break from the industry to concentrate on his education, thus creating a buzz among his fans. Exploiting a star's popularity to create a sense of expectation is a common promotional strategy used by producers to provide a

discursive framing for the reading of a film. Star power assists in creating awareness for a film and is drawn on to make well-known actor/s the main focus of a film, rather than the plot, production process or technical aspects (Luthar, 2008; Roschk & Große, 2013). This strategy works to create a specific representation of the film in the media based on what the audience is assumed to want (Marshall, 2005). However, it clearly backfired here.

The word 'death' (死 *si*) was often mentioned in the comments with reference to the deaths of the ethnically Chinese characters and the survival of the Western characters. This highlights a lack of cultural sensitivity as the film did not take into consideration the varied different audiences across cultures (Cunningham, Jacka & Sinclair, 1998; Katz & Lazardsfeld, 1955; Ksiazek & Webster, 2009; Straubhaar, 1991; 2003; Peng, 2016). Chinese audiences are unlikely to appreciate how the ethnically Chinese characters were all killed by the film's midway mark. This was also unfavourably received in Singapore with a film reviewer mentioning that the death of Pang's character was premature (Yip, 2012). A user posted in 2012:

Bloody sharks, did not bite any Western 'pigs' to death, but killed all the Chinese
臭鲨鱼, 没咬死外国猪, 害死了中国人

Another user commented in 2012:

The best thing about this film is that many people survived, but all the characters
who looked Chinese died
最大的亮点就是活下来的人很多 中国脸儿的都死了

Bait 3D thus demonstrates once again that a positive and coherent representation of Chinese characters (and to an extent Chinese culture) is key to a film's acceptance by Douban's film audiences. The appropriateness of Chinese elements, if they are skilfully introduced, has a major impact on the audiences' response. Thus, the elements added to *Bait 3D* purely for marketing and financial reasons were not well received by Chinese audiences. The Douban audience was clearly critical of the Chinese elements that were tacked on to provide the film with a sense of 'Chinese-ness' and to make money.

The 3D technology used in *Bait 3D* was also the subject of extensive comments and seems to have impressed Chinese audiences much more than the Australians and Singaporeans, even though Singapore was mainly responsible for *Bait 3D*'s technology. Investment from private Chinese investors enabled China to share in the positive reception of the film's 3D technology in China given that China's soft power ambitions include the notion that any

Chinese success, regardless of the industry involved, contributes to the success of China (Li, 2008).

More importantly, regardless of the reception of *Bait 3D* in China, this collaboration facilitated the building of *guanxi* between Arclight and *Bait 3D*'s private Chinese investors. This relationship opened the door for Arclight to enter the Chinese market through their Hong Kong branch Easternlight and their now defunct Chinese branch Chinalight. Initially, Chinalight was created to focus on Australia-China co-productions, rather than the previous approach that depended on Chinese financial investors. However, this initiative may have been abandoned as Chinalight has been removed from Arclight's official website, with no information available since January 2018. In addition, Chinalight's Creative Executive, Jenevieve Chang who led the initiative, left the company in March 2018.

Australia's 'junior partner' status (see Chapter Three) has also perhaps hindered the collaborative process as major Chinese investors and producers do not view Australia's much smaller market to be as valuable as that of Hollywood or Korea. Hollywood has, however, had more success with regards to this strategy, as major Chinese investors have focused their resources on this industry. This then begs the question, what are the perceived benefits of this strategy and how can this help China build their soft power ambitions?

Hollywood made with a little help from China

Since 2013, Chinese companies have been actively investing in Hollywood studios and film production, as a strategy to establish their stake in building the Chinese film industry to meet the demands of a global market. Although some might argue that this is shifting as China is becoming less dependent on Hollywood after the flop of the Hollywood-China co-production *The Great Wall* and the success of the domestically produced *Wolf Warrior 2* and *The Wandering Earth* (Koprowski, 2017). Over the years, Chinese companies have been heading across the Pacific to invest or acquire American companies, especially within Hollywood. In the Chinese film industry alone, the biggest acquisitions and investments include:

- The Dalian Wanda Group's acquisition of AMC Theatres and Legendary Entertainment in America, along with the Australian chain cinema Hoyts;
- Tang Media Partners, China Media Capital (CMC)
- The Huayi Brothers' acquisition of IM Global;
- CMC's joint venture with Warner Bros. Entertainment

- Hunan TV's USD 375 million investment in Lionsgate (Chow 2018; Garrahan & Sender 2016; Reuters 2015).

Initially, Chinese investors including Wang Jianlin, the CEO of the Dalian Wanda Group, aimed to make their mark in the global film industry by offering financial investment to Hollywood studios. Wang was quoted in an interview as saying

I wanted to acquire one of the big six, but whether we can is a different story – it's uncertain [...] we will continue to work on a potential acquisition. But it won't hurt to start by doing what we can. Participating via investment seems like a wise choice for the time being (Brzeski, 2016b).

In 2016, Thomas Tull, the founder of Legendary Entertainment sold his studio to Wanda for USD 3.5 billion. It could be argued that this acquisition was a result of Wanda's aims to become an independent global producer as they are intent on creating 'tentpole'³⁰ films. The inspiration behind this strategic move could also be due to the potential of franchising film characters through films previously produced by Legendary including *Pacific Rim* (Toro, 2013), *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft*. Wanda is not the only Chinese company adopting this strategy with Alibaba investing in *Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation* and the 2019 Academy award winner for Best Picture *Green Book*, and CFG's financial investment in *Furious 7* (Wan, 2015), *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft* (Kokas, 2017).

In 2013, prior to Wanda's acquisition of Legendary Entertainment, CFG signed an agreement with the latter as a result of a deal made with Legendary East, the company's Chinese arm, to fund the development and production of Legendary films over an initial three year period (Coonan, 2014; McNary, 2014). CFG is a state-run organisation that was incorporated in 1999 after the merger of China Film Corporation (CFC), Beijing Film Studio and other Chinese film institution and organisations. CFG's main aim was to develop and distribute film in the Chinese film industry by participating in joint productions, local film production, distribution, exhibition, along with many other film services. The agreement signed by CFG was the organisation's first venture into Hollywood and was implemented after Legendary Entertainment concluded their partnership with Chinese media company Huayi Brothers (Meng, 2014). On April 2014, it was officially announced that CFG was co-financing two Legendary Entertainment blockbusters *Warcraft* and *Seventh Son* (Coonan, 2014; McNary, 2014; Meng, 2014). This announcement was made close to the time that CFG was preparing to sell their shares on the Shanghai Stock Exchange (Fritz & Burkitt, 2015).

³⁰ 'Tentpole' refers to a film that is able to support the financial performance of a movie studio, and create related merchandise or fund sequels.

As well as co-financing films, Legendary East also signed a deal with CFG to co-produce a number of films, which eventually led to the joint production *The Great Wall*³, directed by Zhang Yimou and starring Matt Damon and Jing Tian (Meng, 2014). The CFG and Legendary Entertainment agreement allow CFG to be credited in the films in which they participated and provides the organisation with an opportunity to recoup their equity internationally. During this period of time, CFG was the sole distributor of Legendary Entertainment films in China (McNary, 2014). It is important to note that films made under the co-financial agreement were not given joint production status, therefore these films were not considered to be domestic productions even though CFG is a state-run organisation.

The partnership between Legendary Entertainment and CFG is seen as a good investment for three reasons. First, as CFG is a state-owned organisation, the level of *guanxi* between the organisation and the Chinese government is significantly higher than those of private media companies. Therefore, films released and co-financed with CFG were more likely to be screened in China and placed on a priority list in the foreign film quota system. It has been reported that Legendary Entertainment received incentives including 'preferred dating' for films co-financed by CFG due to their affiliation, though there was no confirmation from CFG themselves (Fritz & Burkitt, 2015). This speculation highlights once again the arbitrary nature of the Chinese regulatory process and the significance of *guanxi* for the foreign film producer and their Chinese counterparts (Kokas, 2018). Secondly, the agreement required Legendary Entertainment to credit CFG in all films they co-financed. This places CFG in the international spotlight, creating more awareness for the company and simultaneously enhancing China's soft power ambition internationally. Lastly, CFG may have viewed Legendary Entertainment as a good investment due to their prior participation in previous tentpole film franchises including *Batman* and *Superman*.

Unfortunately, from 2016 onwards there was increased scrutiny of Chinese investments and the acquisitions of American companies by both the American and Chinese authorities. In 2016, the American House of Representatives requested that the American Government Accountability Office investigate the speed of Chinese acquisitions of American entertainment companies. The request from the House of Representative was ostensibly based on the anxieties about national security (Brzeski, 2016b). And in 2017, Chinese president, Xi Jinping, announced a halt to Chinese acquisitions of international companies, especially in America (Frater, 2017). This decision could have played a significant role in elevating Chinese involvement in Hollywood from that of a passive equity investor to that

³ Which was also co-produced with Le Vision Pictures (China).

of an active participant in the production process (See Chapter Three). Acquisitions that were decelerated as a consequence of the new regulations imposed by the Chinese government included: a halt on Beijing-based Huahua Media financial investment in Paramount Pictures, and the Dalian Wanda Group's acquisition of Dick Clark Productions as well as their plans to integrate Legendary Entertainment into their publicly traded film company Wanda Media (Faughnder & Koren, 2017). It was announced that deals signed before 2017 would be allowed to continue as there was still an interest in fostering Chinese-Hollywood business relationships in order to nurture and develop collaborations (Frater, 2017).

In the following case studies, I will be analysing two Legendary Entertainment films that were produced with Chinese financial investment from CFG, *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft*. Both films were the first Hollywood films for which CFG provided financial investment. Although the deal between Legendary and CFG has now been terminated, it is nonetheless important to understand what audiences were saying about this collaboration and the content of the film to understand the strengths and weaknesses of this strategy. Furthermore, both films differ from *Bait 3D*'s strategy, along with other previous Hollywood films with Chinese financial investments (such as *Looper*, *Iron Man 3* and *Transformers Age of Extinction*), as the films' plot did not involve the addition of Chinese elements or the release of a separate version for Chinese audiences. *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft* were released in China prior to the films' release in America, although these were not considered to be joint productions. It is rare for a foreign film to be released in China before its release into the American market³², which illustrates the motives underlying the promotion of the film in the Mainland as outlined below.

A film for Chinese audiences? - The analysis of *Seventh Son*

Seventh Son was first released in France on 17 December 2014. This was followed by the film's Chinese release on 16 January 2015 and the American release on 6 February 2015. The film is loosely based on the book *The Spook's Apprentice* (2004) written by Joseph Delaney and follows the story of the witch Mother Malkin (Julianne Moore) and John Gregory (Jeff Bridges) also known as the Spook, a roving witch hunter, and that of Tom Ward (Ben Barnes). The film begins during the rise of the centennial blood moon when Malkin breaks out of the prison in which Gregory had imprisoned her. In the process Malkin kills Gregory's apprentice and restores her mountain fortress and brought her sister Bony Lizzie (Antje Traue) back to life. Gregory vows to take revenge and seeks for the seventh son of a

³² Though this is a rare occurrence, in 2018, *Aquaman* (2018) was first released on 7 December 2018 ahead of its second release date on 12 December 2018 in various parts of the world.

seventh son, Ward, to assist him with his mission. This is when the adventure begins. The film faced several obstacles during the post-production stages and distribution, leading to a delay in the film's release. The first delay occurred when post-production studio Rhythm & Hues faced bankruptcy (more details in Chapter Five). This delayed the film's release as Rhythm & Hues filed a motion in court to receive loans from Universal and Fox to keep the company afloat to work on their films, but not on *Seventh Son* as the film was a special project based on an agreement signed with Legendary Entertainment in 2010 (Gardner, 2013). This film was then slated to be released on 18 October 2013. However, the film was pushed back again when Legendary Entertainment ended their partnership with Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (WB). In 2013, Legendary Entertainment signed a new distribution deal with Universal, albeit with different conditions, leading to the film's release (Graser, 2015).

Unlike the previous case studies (*Children of the Silk Road*; *The Mermaid*; and *Kungfu Panda 3* and *Bait 3D*), there were no Chinese or ethnically Chinese actors in the film's main or supporting cast. On the film's Douban page, 'China' is listed as a production partner as well as companies in America, England and Canada. According to the film's co-producer, Erica Lee, the producers wanted a film that was 'as internationally friendly as possible' in order to attract and be relevant to the Chinese market (Lee, 2015). Unfortunately, this goal was not met; the film received an average rating of only 5 out of 10 stars. Among the 9,467 comments collected for analysis, 12% of the comments gave the film a positive rating, 35% average rating and 53% negative rating. This begs the question, why did the film fail in the Chinese market (rating wise), and did the Chinese audience miss the producers' intentions?

Examining the Douban users' most frequently used words/phrases (see table 4.2 below), 'lousy' or 'very bad' (烂) was the second most frequently mentioned word reflecting *Seventh Son's* negative rating.

Table 4.2: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Seventh Son*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|--------------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | Special effects | 特效 | 0.93% |
| 2 | Lousy | 烂 | 0.86% |
| 3 | Magic | 魔 | 0.80% |
| 4 | Death | 死 | 0.57% |
| 5 | Witch | 女巫 | 0.47% |
| 6 | Boss | boss | 0.45% |
| 7 | Protagonist/Leading role | 主角 | 0.39% |
| 8 | Julianne Moore | 朱丽安·摩尔 | 0.35% |
| 9 | 3D | 3D | 0.31% |
| 10 | Bored/Silly | 无聊 | 0.28% |

As a fantasy film, there was an emphasis on the special effects and VFX, on which the Douban users commented. As in the case of *Bait 3D* the aesthetics of the film was for the most part praised, however, the film's plot received negative reviews. Users commented in 2015:

The film's special effects are really good, but the story is too weak!

特效很好，故事太弱了！

There is quality in the film's frames, special effects and music; but the plot is ridiculous [吐槽 *tucào* is a slang term used to ridicule].

有水准的画面、特效和音乐，剧情无力吐槽。

Even the special effects cannot save this lousy film. The battle scene is too ridiculous

特效也救不了烂片，决战太可笑了

The plot was negatively panned by users, who considered that this was over the top, which left them unconvinced by the storyline. This could be one of the main reasons why the film received such a low rating as illustrated through the comment that received the highest number of likes at 203. This comment posted in 2015 noted:

The Queen suffered too much. She was betrayed by the other witches; she was betrayed by the man she loves; she was betrayed by her niece and then she was betrayed by her sisters. Finally, she was killed by her beloved. It's already 2015, and they are still producing something like this. [This was written in a negative tone through questioning the story].

女王太可怜了，被别的女巫背叛，被心爱的男人背叛，被自家侄女背叛，再被亲妹妹背叛，最后被心爱的人追杀至死。。。都 2015 年啦，还拍这些东西。

Nonetheless, many users thought the film would attract gamers because of the role of the characters and the special effects used in the film. Gaming is the top entertainment industry in China and the world's largest in terms of users and revenue, providing potential opportunities for films seeking to create tentpole products in the gaming industry (Huang, 2018; Kshetri, 2009). In 2017 56.1% of all Internet users in China (422 million users), participate in some form of online gaming, while 53.3% at 385 million users are active mobile gamers (CCNIC, 2017). Research has shown that 70% of China's gamers are below the age of 30, a percentage that mirrors Douban users' demographics (Bhattacharya & Michael, 2008). This could explain the large number of comments that compared the narrative and characters of *Seventh Son* to a game, especially role-playing games (RPG). Users comparing *Seventh Son* to a game were likely to give the film a higher score of 3 stars and above. Although 49% of users that mentioned the word 'game' or 'RPG' in their comment only gave the film a rating of 0 to 2 stars, 51% of this group gave the film 3 stars and above. Though these ratings were different from the overall film ratings, users who compared the film to gaming were still quite negative about the film's plot.

The story and plot are very average. It's a typical magic action movie, but the film's special effects, and the acting etc... are good, it's still quite enjoyable to watch, especially for gamers!

故事、情节都很一般，就是个常规魔幻动作片，不过特效、场面、设定等方面水准不错，看得还挺过瘾，尤其适合游戏玩家！

I should be giving the film 3 stars (instead of 4). The mobile phone does not allow me to give it half a star. The film is a little like RPG. The special effects are not bad. Auntie Moore [Julianne More] is very pretty. If a film can have a good complete narrative it deserves 3 and a half stars.

其实应该给 3 星半的，手机端好像不能给半星。有点像 RPG 游戏的剧情，特效还不错，摩尔阿姨很美，完整的讲述了一个故事，能讲好故事的值得给 3 星半。

Referring to Table 4.2, the term 'boss' (at number 6) was also frequently mentioned. 'Boss' is a gaming term used to describe an important and challenging computer-controlled enemy that gamers need to defeat. It is interesting that the term was used by Douban users in their reviews as the film was not based on a previously known game. Employing the term 'boss', an English-language word, thus provides further evidence of Douban users' exposure to popular culture beyond the borders of the Mainland (see Chapter Two). 'Boss'

was used by users to describe Malkin and her minions with many complaining that the big 'boss' (Malkin) died too soon. Users commented:

The female 'boss' died too quickly.

女 boss 死的太快。

It turns out that all you need is a jewel to kill all the demons, the big 'boss' [Malkin] is also too weak!

原来只要戴着一个宝石就能杀死所有的魔，大 boss 也太弱了吧

These comments by the Douban users demonstrate the potential for the film to be franchised into other form of entertainment products with the most obvious being gaming, and Legendary Entertainment did indeed develop a game version with Chinese mobile gaming company Locojoy. This was released on 16 January 2015 to capitalise on the promotion of the film. According to media reports, this partnership was the first major deal between a Hollywood film company and a Chinese gaming company (Coonan, 2015). The strategy of promoting a mobile game as part of the marketing campaign for *Seventh Son* thus highlights Legendary Entertainment and CFG's intention to create tentpole films by tapping into China's most profitable creative industry.

The casting of Moore also provided the film with star power, as she is one of the most recognisable Hollywood actresses in China. This clearly appealed to the Chinese audiences on Douban, as Moore was the only actress mentioned in the top ten most frequently used words and phrases, appearing at number eight (see Table 4.2). In the comments, Moore was largely referred to as 'auntie' as a sign of respect that is commonly used in Chinese culture. This is most likely due to her age and her reputation in the film industry, rather than her role as an 'auntie' in the film, since the word 'auntie' is placed before Moore's name rather than her character's name. A user commented in 2015:

I only wanted to watch the film because of Auntie Moore [Julianne Moore]...

为了摩尔姨才滚进来...

However, the character that Moore played, Mother Malkin, was largely criticised for her storyline, with some Douban users 'pitying' the life she faced, as seen in the third comment above. Users who did not use the gaming term 'boss' shared similar sentiments as the gamers about this character (refer to comments above). Users commented in 2015:

The witch is too weak! One stab and she is dead!

女巫也太弱了吧！一刀就砍死！

The witch is too pitiful; it is all because of her damned love

女巫好可怜，都是因为该死的爱情

These comments were made in reference to Malkin and Gregory's relationship. Although they were former lovers, Gregory chooses to kill her for the greater good. Towards the end of the film, Malkin's niece Alice Deane (Alicia Vikander) also assists Gregory and Ward in defeating her Aunt.

Most of the negative reviews of the film focused on the plot, with many users finding the whole film silly. Clearly, this adaptation of a book did not translate well to the Chinese audience, although the film was intentionally produced with the Chinese audience in mind. A user commented in 2015:

A very silly film and old-fashioned; I felt exhausted after watching it.

好无聊、老套的电影，看得我好累。

By way of contrast, as in the case of *Bait 3D*, the film's VFX and special effects were largely praised by Chinese audiences, highlighting the skills and expertise of Rhythm & Hues, though the company was not mentioned by any users. Douban audiences were appreciative of the film's special effects and would perhaps, therefore, be more likely to watch the film at the cinema rather than downloading an illegal copy. This may well have been a strategy to complement China's anti-piracy stance, which is well supported by Chinese cinema chains through the constant upgrading of the latest sound and image technology to compete with illegal video streaming (Harashima, 2018). Besides appealing to audiences, the film's special effects and VFX also establishes a link between the film and the gaming industry which was also part of the film's marketing strategies. In the next section, I will examine an alternative marketing and production strategy, one in which Legendary Entertainment and CFG marketed a film on the novelty of an already existing game.

Adapting China's most popular 'Western' game: The analysis of *Warcraft*

Based on the multiplayer online role-play game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft* (WOW)(Pardo, Kaplan, & Chilton, 2004), one of the most popular 'Western' games in China (Schiesel, 2006), *Warcraft* the film was produced by Legendary Entertainment and CFG who had had high hopes for its success given the popularity of the game in China. In general, Western games in China do not fare well because the social and cultural expectations of the Chinese gamers are different (Chung, 2007). However, with its fantasy

scenario, WOW has broken down cultural barriers in China which is now the biggest market for the game. In 2012, a Chinese influenced expansion pack was created named the *Mists of Pandaria* which features panda warriors, monks, and architecture heavily influenced by Chinese culture and Buddhism. Though the game has been heavily censored in China because of the extensive gore, half of the WOW gaming population is now located in China, proving the popularity of the game despite the censorship barriers (BBC, 2016; Fung & Liao, 2015; Wen, 2016). The popularity of the game in China thus provided CFG with a major motivation to co-finance the film *Warcraft* as the potential audience of gamers is large. This was clearly justified, since the film managed to reap USD 221 million in the Chinese market alone, contributing to 55% of the film's global box office revenue. Unfortunately, content wise, the film did not perform as anticipated internationally (Fritz, 2018).

The film follows WOW's game characters and narratives through an origin story involving the formation of the main WOW clans, the Alliance and Horde, and the pending war that precedes WOW's gameplay. The film begins in Draenor, home to the orcs who are being threatened by 'fel magic'³³. In order to save themselves, Gul'dan (Daniel Wu), an orc warlock, unites the orc clans and forms the Horde. As Draenor is slowly being destroyed, Gul'dan creates a portal to relocate the orcs into Azeroth, a land habited by humans, where fel magic has not yet hit. Durotan (Toby Kebbel), the orc chieftain of the Frostwolf Clan, discovers the evil intentions of Gul'dan and seeks to unite with the humans to defeat him. Durotan challenges Gul'dan to Mak'gora, in a fight to death for leadership of his clan. However, Durotan dies as Gul'dan breaks the rules and uses magic to drain him of his life. Eventually, the humans decide to form the Alliance to fight against the Horde. Thus begins one of the major plotlines in the game WOW.

The two clans, Alliance and Horde, and the different races present in WOW, would be well-known to WOW gamers, as they would have encountered this back story during the initial stages of game play. While the game introduces thirteen different races³⁴ to its players, the film only focused on the conflict between the orcs and humans. These two races were first introduced to gamers during the first Warcraft gaming series, *Warcraft Orcs & Humans* (Roper & Wyatt, 1994). As in the case of *Seventh Son*, the film was heavily reliant on VFX and special effects using motion capture performers for the non-human characters alongside those playing humans (Giardina, 2016).

³³ In the film, 'fel magic' corrupts and poisons those that come upon it.

³⁴ In the alliance team the races are: human, dwarf, night elf, gnome, dranei and worgen; while in the Horde the races are: orc, undead, tauren, troll, blood elf and goblin. The race Pandaren (the character with influences from Chinese culture) is a neutral race, where users are able to pick a side once they reach a certain level.

Again, like *Seventh Son*, the film was first released in France on 24 May 2016 and was released in China on 8 June 2016 and in America on 10 June 2016. During the film release in China, fans participated in creating a spectacular premiere by dressing up in their favourite character costumes and queuing up to watch the film on the big screen. Chinese cinemas were also decked out in Horde and Alliance clan colours to further enhance the atmosphere (West, 2016). Employing their cultural knowledge of the Chinese audiences, additional marketing in China by Legendary included the release of the mandarin song *We Will Rule* (背水一戰 *beishuiyizhan*; 2016) by Taiwanese hip-hop super group G.U.T.S (兄弟本色 *xiongdi bense*), a group involving several of the most popular hip-hop artists in the Chinese-language music scene. The music video was shot with the film backdrop and the artists dressed in *Warcraft* inspired costumes. The music also expresses the ‘aggressive’ tone of the impending Horde and Alliance war. Sadly, the song and the music video were largely panned by fans of both the game and the film.

Despite receiving negative reviews internationally, *Warcraft* received a rating of 7.7 out of 10 on Douban where China was listed as the producing country, alongside America, Canada and Japan. This rating score was higher than the those received on IMDb at 7.1 out of 10 and on Rotten Tomatoes at 4.3 out of 10 (27%). Examining the 716 comments collected for analysis, the film was given a 68% positive rating, 22% average rating and a 10% negative rating, making it the highest rated film in this chapter. As in the case of *Seventh Son*, the Chinese word for ‘special effects’ was present in the top 10 most frequently used words/phrases in the comments, highlighting the significance of VFX and special effects to Chinese cinema audiences on Douban (see Table 4.3 below).

Table 4.3: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Warcraft*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|--------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | <i>Warcraft</i> | 魔兽 | 1.58% |
| 2 | Game | 游戏 | 1.16% |
| 3 | Play | 玩 | 1.13% |
| 4 | Feelings | 情怀 | 0.60% |
| 5 | Special effects | 特效 | 0.46% |
| 6 | World | 世界 | 0.36% |
| 7 | Character | 人物 | 0.32% |
| 8 | Sequel | 续集 | 0.27% |
| 9 | Looking forward to | 期待 | 0.27% |
| 10 | Fan | 粉丝 | 0.26% |

Overall, the comments showed the conflict between fans of the game and non-players, as users are actively comparing the film to the game. This is highlighted in Table 4.3 with

'game' ranked second and 'Warcraft' placing first. Users who are WOW gamers are highly defensive of negative reviews. The comment with the second highest number of usefulness votes at 3,935 stated in 2015:

I am boiling with anger, those that gave the film one or two stars; I do not want talk to you... This level of IP [intellectual property] is very rare. Being able to balance this level of storytelling between the average audience [non-players] and experienced players is very rare. A film going through this situation and released with such quality is very hard to come by.

看得热血沸腾，打一两星的我不想跟你们说话...这量级 IP 算凤毛麟角，能在普通观众和资深玩家之间平衡到这个程度，并保证各方面水准，真的挺难得了。

Previous WOW players who have not played the game for a significant period of time also expressed positive sentiments towards the film. A user commented in 2015 wrote:

Although I was AFK [away from keyboard] from this game for a long time and I am completely unfamiliar with the history of Warcraft [the game], it did not affect my viewing experience at all.

作为一个 AFK 很久的玩家，虽然入坑晚完全不熟悉《魔兽》前史，但完全不影响观影体验啊

Non-players largely gave negative reviews, as seen in this comment posted by a user in 2015:

I was dragged by my friends to watch this movie and I fell asleep. Maybe only the fans of the game would like it.

被朋友硬拉着去看，看得都快睡着了，或许只有游戏迷才会喜欢吧

Unlike *Seventh Son*, *Warcraft* cast Daniel Wu, an American actor of Chinese ethnicity based in China, as the character Gul'dan. However, users may not have been aware of this as he plays an orc warlord and was heavily disguised through computer-generated imagery (CGI).

As was the case with *Seventh Son*, CFG was a passive equity investor in *Warcraft* and did not play a major role in the film's marketing. This could explain the absence of Wu's name in the top 10 most frequently used word/phrases although he was cast in one of the main roles (see Table 4.3). Legendary did not need to actively promote Wu's film presence in the film's Chinese marketing as they were keen to capitalise on the game's popularity.

However, some users took the liberty to conduct an internet search to find out more about the film after they had seen it. This highlights the ‘active’ nature of these cinema audiences belonging to the *wenyi qingnian* group. A user wrote in 2015:

Not very interesting, but not too bad either. If you are a non-gamer you would be able to understand the movie. I knew that Wu Yanzu [Daniel Wu] appeared in the film, but I did not see him at all. After I did a search I found out he played Gul'dan. The only thing I did not like about the movie is the ending, it seems like they will be making a sequel to make money...

不是很有趣，但是也不糟糕。非游戏粉也是可以看懂的。之前知道有吴彦祖但是没有查卡斯，看完电影没看着，回来一查 Gul'dan。。。只是很不喜欢后面一副摆明要圈钱拍续集的样子。。。

Another comment with the eighth highest number of likes at 1,367 again demonstrates the characteristics of the participation of the *wenyi qingnian* group on Douban, as users correlate *The Angry Birds Movie* (Kaytis & Reilly, 2016) and its allegorical depiction of the European migrant crisis to *Warcraft*. The comment posted in 2015 stated:

In fact, to people who can link the European refugee crisis to angry bird, you should watch *Warcraft*. =)

说真的，能从《愤怒的小鸟》读出欧洲难民危机的朋友们，你们去看《魔兽》吧。
=)

The comment appears to be a critical analysis of the film, as the user compares the orcs’ ‘migration’ from Draneor to Azeroth to the rising number of refugees arriving in the European Union (EU). Here the user is implying that the orcs’ reason for migration reflects that of the refugees, as they seek for a better life outside of their homeland which is heading towards the brink of destruction. The reflexivity of the Douban user that posted the comment and users that ‘liked’ the comment suggests, that the *wenyi qingnian* group of Chinese cinema audiences are well-versed and critical of news and current affairs happening outside of the Mainland.

Douban users also made comparisons between *Warcraft* and previous domestic productions that were heavily reliant on VFX and CGI. A user posted a comment in 2015 which received 109 votes:

Overall it is not a bad movie. I have never played the game, but it did not prevent me from understanding what was happening in the movie. There must be a sequel

coming up. It's better than *The Mermaid* and one million times better than *Monster Hunt*.

整体来说还是不错的。我没玩过游戏，但不妨碍我懂这部电影，一定会有续集的。比《美人鱼》好看 100 万个《捉妖记》。

Since 2015, the Chinese film industry has attempted to improve the country's post-production industry, specifically within the VFX and 3D sector, as is further elaborated in Chapter Five. However, it is interesting to note that users identified the two films that marketed themselves as being the forerunners of China's domestic VFX and 3D capabilities, though Chinese audiences tend to be more 'lenient' to local productions by being less critical (see Chapter Three for *The Mermaid* and Chapter Five for *Monster Hunt*).

The potential of a sequel was frequently discussed by users although director Duncan Jones replied to a Tweet regarding a *Warcraft* sequel on 15 July 2018: 'I know. I'm sorry. That's not looking likely, I'm afraid. Too many companies involved to thread that needle' (Jones, 2018). Nevertheless, Chinese audiences on Douban were, looking forward to a sequel with 58% mentioning the term 'sequel' and anticipating the release of the next *Warcraft* film.

I can't help but give the film a perfect score. I really want to see the sequel tomorrow. Is this film a contender for best VFX?

忍不住的满分，好想明天就出续集，奥斯卡最佳视觉有戏吗

What these comments suggest is that if a sequel were to be made the focus should be on Chinese audiences, given the success of the film in the Chinese market.

The VFX and 3D capabilities of the film were also frequently discussed as reflected in Table 4.3. *Warcraft* was considered 'ground-breaking' through its use of motion capture to create VFX for the orcs and other non-human characters. These effects were created by Industry Light & Magic (ILM), a VFX company founded by George Lucas (Frei, 2016). The top comment mentioning 'special effects' with 1,912 useful votes noted:

The visual aspects of the film are amazing! A large number of close shots allows us to immerse ourselves into the film. The scene showcasing magic was sensational and was a lot better than many fantasy movies that showcase this. The scenes showcasing action [fighting scenes] and special effects did not seem superficial, it feels real. This is by far the best game adaptation. Duncan is off to a good start!

视觉方面非常出色！大量近景造成强烈的代入感和沉浸感。魔法场景特别带感，比很多奇幻大片更强调施法过程。动作及特效场景都不虚浮，有实在感。已经是最棒的游戏改编电影了，邓肯开了个好头！

Overall, based on the Douban comments, *Warcraft* shows great potential for becoming a tentpole film, especially within the Chinese market. Though international audiences were not as receptive, Chinese audiences, especially those on Douban believe that *Warcraft* is a quality film and are keen to see what happens next. Additionally, users also commented on WOW's expansion packs by speculating on the plot of the sequel, wondering if it would be released.

As the film was largely based on non-human characters, star power did not play as much of a role as in the two previous case studies, *Bait 3D* and *Seventh Son*, since audiences were more focused on the film's narrative and special effects. As in the case of the *Seventh Son*, the film's special effects created conversations among Chinese audiences, and the correlation to the game was one of the major factors of the film's success and positive reception.

Conclusion

The three case studies in this chapter demonstrate a different form of transnational collaboration between China and their foreign partners, one that uses financial investments to enhance the development of the Chinese film industry on an international scale. Although Hollywood is arguably transnational in and of itself because of its global reach, financial investment from China provides further evidence of the transnational nature of cinema production and distribution. As discussed in Chapter Three, seeking financial investment or creative input from China could result in power struggles on issues such as representation, casting and storylines because foreign producers are eager to release their films in the Mainland. As in the case of *Bait 3D*, Chinese stakeholders may have the final say about what they would like to see in a film as was evident in the case studies described in Chapter Three. However, in the case of *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft*, there was arguably a shift in this strategy as the Chinese stakeholder, in the case of CFG, took a backseat as a silent investor.

The production history of the films discussed in this chapter thus demonstrates similar transnational elements to those that were highlighted in Chapter Three. This includes the importance of acquiring cultural knowledge of China and their target audience (the Chinese) and the influence of power dynamics operational between the participating

partners on production decisions, with the outcomes of these factors playing a potential role in building *guanxi*.

The strategy of seeking Chinese financial investment in a film could be viewed as an attempt to secure a film's release in China. As highlighted in Chapter Three, America and China are currently facing a trade standoff due to disagreements on trade tariffs for specific commodities. Investing in films, however, enables Chinese companies to build their reputation in the global media sphere, especially within the international film market, whether or not the film is able to obtain a release on the Mainland. The publicity surrounding the film serves to raise awareness of the financial potential of Chinese media companies and their financial resources. Within China itself, publicity about China's involvement in foreign productions appears to have taken a backseat without affecting the film's success at the box office. China was only mentioned 67 times out of the 9,467 comments selected for analysis (at 0.69%) in relation to *Seventh Son* and 7 times out of 719 (0.97%) in relation to *Warcraft*. Interestingly, in those cases where Chinese elements and involvement were not noticeable to the Chinese audiences, the Douban reviews demonstrated a more critical analysis of the film's narrative and characters.

Nonetheless, power struggles (and control issues) were present in the production history of all three films, albeit at different levels, as producers carefully build their *guanxi* relationship with China to ensure the film's release. This was evident in the case of *Bait 3D* with Chinese stakeholders casting Australia as a junior partner (see Chapter Three). Nonetheless, *Bait 3D* enabled Arclight to build *guanxi* and establish themselves in China as *Easternlight* based on the success of the film through box office revenues. The film has also provided Australia with the opportunity to create new practices allowing the push for the Chinese-Australian co-production initiative, Chinalight, though the program was unfortunately unsuccessful. The level of *guanxi* established during the production of *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft* was due to the participation of the state-run company CFG, enabling the films to be released on the same day or even before the American release date, which is rare, though not impossible. This suggests that it is important to pick the right partner and know how to go about building *guanxi* relations in order to bypass local censorship requirements and other restrictions placed on foreign films. Legendary Entertainment's partnership with CFG also proved to be useful as the state-owned organisation does have a level of power that private companies would have been less likely to achieve.

The level of cultural knowledge obtained and applied by producers was also a feature of the case studies discussed in this chapter, noting that the focus shifted from producers' working relationships to the film's content. *Bait 3D*'s decision to kill off all their ethnic Chinese characters was a bad move not only in China but also in Singapore, as the film's plot garnered negative responses from Chinese audiences and the Singaporean media. Nonetheless, fantasy films such as *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft* appear to reduce the problem of cultural proximity between Chinese audiences and the film. Minimal efforts are required to ensure a 'politically correct' film in the context of these fantasy films and China's current political context. Legendary Entertainment's strategy of targeting the booming Chinese gaming market also proved to be a step in the right direction as reflected in the comments on Douban. Here, users were able to correlate *Seventh Son*, and particularly *Warcraft*, into their gaming experiences as revealed by the use of specific gaming jargon in their reviews. It would seem that a fantasy film located 'out of this world' offers more opportunity for Chinese audiences to form a connection with the film as compared to Legendary Entertainment and CFG's joint production, *The Great Wall*, which met with negative reviews internationally.

This chapter thus demonstrates that films targeting Chinese audiences can attract positive reviews without including Chinese elements or showcasing 'Chinese-ness' as long as the film meets the interest of the intended audience. All three films discussed here devoted special care to their special effects and VFX capabilities. While this may have been intended to counter video piracy, it also ensured their success at the box office with Chinese audiences who appreciated these effects. This suggests that there may well be opportunities for high-end post-production collaborations with China as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Enhancing Chinese cinema with movie magic

The previous findings discussed in Chapter Three and Four demonstrate a number of factors that are important in the negotiation of transnational film collaborations. This includes acquiring the cultural knowledge necessary to negotiate the different ideologies of the participating countries and their identified target audience, along with the operational power dynamics present in the relationship. Each or all of these factors could play a positive or negative role in building *guanxi* networks that could enable or hinder these transnational collaborations. Rather than being isolated challenges, these three elements are for the most part interrelated and could result in complication in the production process. The complexity of these elements becomes more apparent when the foreign partners' aim is to primarily target the Chinese market or when the partners' market and audience reach is substantially smaller than that of the Mainland. Chinese stakeholders therefore believe that they have the authority to make final decisions on what they believe should be included in a production. The complexity of the production process, as highlighted in the audiences' Douban comments in the previous chapters, could have a negative impact on the film's final outcome.

With this chapter, I go further behind the scenes to investigate the relationship between foreign post-production practitioners and Chinese producers in creating 'Chinese' movie magic. As production values directly impact on what audiences view on screen, it is important to interrogate the work flow and conditions of post-production practitioners and to identify the correlation (if any) with Chinese film audiences' reception of the respective films. As highlighted in Chapter Four, post-production, especially within VFX, has now become essential to Chinese stakeholders as they move towards creating blockbusters within the genre of fantasy, and more recently in 2019, sci-fi. The VFX industry is becoming more essential to Chinese producers as China seeks to build their soft power ambitions by producing more films created in China in order to compete with Hollywood domestically (Fredriksson, 2019; Keane, 2010). However, the aim of this strategy is to not only impart socialist values within the domestic market (see Chapter Three), but to also strategically compete with their neighbours Japan (Cool Japan) and Korea (*hallyu* or Korean Wave) – in producing cultural products domestically for the global audiences (Keane, 2010). Cultivating the quality of VFX in a 'created in China' film production, especially films with a strong representation of Chinese directors, producers and actors, along with an emphasis on Mandarin, could perhaps help build China's reputation for producing quality films.

In order to investigate the impact and role of post-production transnational partnerships in the Chinese film industry, I began with a question about Chinese audiences and the extent to which they are aware of the involvement of foreign professional practitioners. So, are Chinese producers following in the footsteps of Hollywood productions by keeping mum about the transnational collaborations that occur in the post-production process? Does this help to build the reputation of the commercial Chinese cinema? And if so, what negotiations are taking place to encourage the development of VFX in Chinese cinema. More importantly, do the elements highlighted in the previous chapters also have a role to play in this type of transnational collaboration?

Before delving into China's VFX story, this chapter will begin with a discussion of the common functions of the post-production companies and the typical transnational workflow practices within the film industry. I will then consider the development of China's post-production industry and the production environment faced by both local and foreign practitioners based in China through the analysis of three films that employ three different forms of premium VFX services in China.

The creation of Movie Magic

In practice, a film production (excluding the development and distribution stage) consists of three main stages before it is distributed for public viewing. The three stages include: (1) pre-production; (2) production; and (3) post-production. A film's pre-production stage largely refers to the planning of the film and consists of the gathering of financial investment, stakeholders, finalising the script, determining the cast and crew, along with planning the production schedule. Once this stage has been completed, the film moves into the production stage during which the film is shot. The final stage is known as the post-production stage, and involves piecing the film together and creating the master copy that audiences can view on different media platforms. This stage comprises various processes including (but not restricted to) video editing, colour grading, VFX, special effects – including CGI –, and sound design. In this chapter, I will focus on the post-production stage, with a particular focus on the post-production studios specialising in providing premium VFX services.

VFX services are now seen by audiences to be an essential part of a film because of the technology that now drives the globalisation of the film industry in both production and distribution. This is especially evident in the case of commercial blockbusters, especially those produced by Hollywood. Although the demand for VFX services is increasing, many VFX companies are, surprisingly, struggling to stay in operation. Globally, Hollywood's big

six studios are the biggest customers for premium VFX services; however, competition is fierce, as these companies have considerable leverage on price control, due to the considerable power imbalance of the market (Hollywood Ending Movie, 2014). Hollywood's big six studios are: WB, 20th Century Fox, Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, Sony Pictures Entertainment and Walt Disney Studios. In figures published in 2009, the competition amongst premium VFX studios was heightened as annually, an estimation of only around 20 to 30 Hollywood films have a budget large enough to afford premium VFX services, though these numbers may have increased since (Thompson, Parker & Cox, 2016).

The State of the VFX Industry in 2015 published by Steve Parish (2015) demonstrates the increasing number of inappropriate hiring and payment practices within the industry. This study illustrates how VFX companies are negatively impacted as the industry (especially Hollywood) does not pay VFX companies an hourly rate for their service, nor do they receive a cut from the box office revenues. Instead, VFX companies are expected to anticipate the cost of their services, with an estimation of hours spent, during the bidding process. The winning bid, which happens before any work is done, is final with (typically) no negotiation. Risks related to delays and unforeseen complications are largely ignored by the studios (clients). If it becomes apparent that more time and money is needed to complete the work after the bid, VFX companies would typically be required to absorb all additional expenses to keep their clients happy. This may have a negative impact on the company as it leads to low profit margins, leading to what critics called the 'race to the bottom' (Kaufman, 2019; Parish, 2015).

In addition, the rising costs of producing premium (and quality) VFX in America, has led many VFX companies to move their studios abroad to tap into tax incentives provided by the host country's government and/or countries offering cheaper labour costs (Curtin & Vanderhoef, 2014). America does not currently offer tax incentives or other benefits for films (both foreign and local) to engage American post-production services. The solution devised by VFX companies has thus resulted in negative impacts that have unintentionally forced VFX companies into participating in transnational collaborations through relocation. Another disadvantage to VFX studios is that VFX itself is seen as a tangible product. Hypothetically, the final output of VFX is considered to be a digital product that can be conducted anywhere in the world as long as a good internet connection is available to send and receive files (Parish, 2015). The accessibility of the technology used to facilitate VFX services internationally this provides a clearer picture of how technology may influence cultural flows in transnational collaborations. The relocation of VFX companies and the outsourcing of work to companies located in countries where labour costs are lower is not new in the film industry.

Generally, to create better profit margins, producers look beyond their national borders to search for good economic deals (government tax incentives, cheaper labour cost etc.), leading to the creation of a 'new international division of cultural labour' (Miller et al., 2001, pp. 44-82). Toby Miller (2016, p. 115) argues that 'NICL [new international division of cultural labour] has become a model for exploitation across territories, industries and occupations', highlighting the importance for us to remain critical when examining these processes. Countries that have attracted well-established premium VFX studios include Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK. All the governments in the countries listed have assisted these moves by providing production studios with tax incentives if they hire VFX companies located within their national border. This allows production studios to reduce their costs for premium VFX services through claiming tax returns.

Tax incentives are beneficial to both the host country and production studios involved, but, they have had negative repercussions on the VFX industry, especially with companies based in America. In order to stay competitive, one of the biggest disadvantages is that American VFX companies would have to bid at a lower price compared to companies located in countries that offer tax incentives. Examining the competition between an Australian versus an American company, the Australian government currently offers a tax rebate of 30% for production studios hiring Australian VFX companies³⁵. This means, if an Australian VFX company wins a bid for USD 10 million, the production studio will be able to claim USD 3 million in tax. An American VFX company would then have to bid for USD 7 million to stay competitive with their Australian counterparts, because that is essentially what the production studio is paying. This reduces the American VFX company's profit margin as they lose USD 3 million in the bidding process. This raises the question of whether the negative impacts of tax incentives outweigh the benefits since these may distort cross-border investment decisions. Furthermore, looking into the future, will the VFX industry eventually become economically unsustainable as a result of such intensive competition?

While this thesis is not primarily concerned with economic analysis, the cause and effects of tax incentives is important when identifying the effects of the political and economic dimensions of globalisation through these transnational collaborations. As specified in Chapter One, the increasing forces of globalisation have now increased the accessibility of (popular) culture products. VFX companies re-locating to countries that offer tax incentives and/or lower labour costs, encourages the flow of cross-border investments, as these movements can entice international investment and promote competition in the

³⁵ This is further elaborated in the following section Imitating Hollywood's Quality through VFX: The Post-Production Relationship between Australia and China.

industry (though this is not always positively viewed). Tax incentives may benefit certain parties, but at the same time could directly harm VFX companies, fuelling and encouraging the industry's 'race to the bottom' (Curtin & Vanderhoef, 2014; Hollywood Ending Movie, 2014).

One such example is the shocking case of Rhythm & Hues, which was briefly mentioned in Chapter Four. Rhythm & Hues was forced to file for bankruptcy on 11 February 2013, after completing post-production work on *Life of Pi* (Lee, 2012) which won them an Academy Award for Best Visual Effects in 2013. This led to several public protests from American VFX practitioners and Rhythm & Hues themselves during their Academy Award speech, as they felt that their VFX services (and Hollywood productions) are one of America's most valuable export commodities, yet the government is not protecting or assisting the industry. Additionally, many American industry practitioners have reported to be living like nomads due to the introduction of tax incentive programs outside of America. Often, they have to set up temporary residence in different locations as they complete a project before moving on to the next, which may be located in a different part of the world (Barkan, 2014). Thus, the growing reputation of the Chinese film industry and the ambition to imitate Hollywood's production values is encouraging premium VFX companies and prominent VFX practitioners to establish themselves in China.

The growth of VFX in the Chinese film industry

Since China began pursuing its goal to become Hollywood's largest competitor, opportunities for premium VFX companies are starting to increase. As highlighted in Chapter Four, we can see the need for Chinese films to keep up with Hollywood's VFX capabilities, as Chinese audiences (especially those on Douban) are paying close attention to what is presented to them on screen. Chinese filmmakers, including the distinguished directors Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, are engaging with VFX companies outside of China to create production values similar to Hollywood films. Prominent Hollywood VFX practitioners such as John Hughes (founder of Rhythm & Hues) are entering the Chinese market through various initiatives after his company faced bankruptcy in America. The latest of Hughes' attempts to enter the Chinese market includes signing an agreement with the administrative committee of the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area in 2016 to launch a VFX company and visual arts centre in China (Amidi, 2016).

The opportunities available within the Chinese film market may seem to be a positive development for VFX practitioners, however, as identified in Chapter Three and Four, the Chinese film industry still has its own procedures and workflow processes, which at times, can differ from typical practices elsewhere and the work flow norms in Hollywood. Prior to 2010, when the Chinese film industry was still at its early stage of development (in regards to foreign collaborations), one of the most noticeable variations between China and Hollywood was the absence of big private commercial studios monopolising and setting the benchmark for bidding standards for VFX companies (other than state-run companies), though, this is gradually shifting as Chinese conglomerates and film production companies are now slowly monopolising the industry (e.g.: the state-run China Film Group, and the privately-run Huayi Brothers and Bona Films). The rising power of production studios makes it even more imperative for VFX practitioners to build their relationship (*guanxi*) with individuals in order to gain a competitive advantage in the Chinese film market (Park & Luo, 2001; Ryan, 2016; Vanhonacker, 1997; Xin & Pearce, 1996).

Foreign post-production studios are also encouraged by Chinese stakeholders to enter the Chinese film market by providing financial investments or acquiring international VFX companies. As a result, an increasing number of foreign VFX companies are establishing Chinese franchises, which has also encouraged established foreign VFX practitioners to start their own businesses in China. For instance, a significant acquisition was made by Cultural Investment Holdings Co. Ltd (CIH), a Chinese investment company, who acquired 75% shares (valued at USD 187 million) of the British VFX company, Framestore (Barraclough, 2016). According to William Sargent, founder of Framestore, the acquisition was part of the plan to move Framestore into the Chinese and Indian film markets which he believes could be a challenge if the company does not have support from the Chinese (Kollewe, 2016). However, as is evident from the preceding discussion about the new international division of cultural labour, foreign practitioners and companies are also likely to be heading to China due to lower labour costs in comparison to countries such as America, Australia, Canada and the UK. While this may open up opportunities for Chinese practitioners, it may also be seen as the West exploiting their services.

Having a base in China may also provide great networking opportunities and promote the development of *guanxi*, as the business culture in China prefers face-to-face meetings to establish and maintain relationships (Luo, 1997; see Chapter Three). Being physically in China also increases the opportunity for practitioners to gain first-hand experience of the Chinese business culture, easing the facilitation of building *guanxi* with local organisations and government agencies. According to one of my interviewees, Korean VFX producer Edward Yi Chi-yun, China is now welcoming foreign collaborations to help add value to the

Chinese film industry. However, he strongly insists on the importance of obtaining Chinese cultural knowledge as he maintains that it is the foreigners' responsibility to understand the Chinese culture and business environment. Echoing Smith's comment in Chapter Three, Yi believes that although Hollywood's brand is typically well-known for its American flavour, this brand's identity is largely constructed by companies *outside* the geographical borders of America. He believes that post-production practitioners with experience of working on Hollywood productions now have sufficient experience in different working environments to be able to operate effectively in different cultural contexts.

Although foreign practitioners have argued that the current practice in China seems to reflect and to follow in America's (Hollywood's) footsteps and in the 'race to the bottom', the VFX industry in China is still relatively new and unpredictable. Limited academic research has been conducted within this specific context, although industry practitioners have publically voiced and revealed some issues regarding the current practices of the Chinese film industry. According to Wil Manning, the VFX supervisor of Pixomondo's Beijing branch, the budgets and timelines for VFX services in Chinese films are relatively lower and shorter in comparison to Hollywood productions. This has led to a high turnover rate among early career practitioners, resulting in an insufficient local talent pool (Edwards, 2011; Landreth, 2016). Manning uses his experiences on *The Monkey King: Hero is Back* (西游记之大圣归来)(Tian, 2015) as an example of how demands from Chinese production studios have lowered the quality of production. According to Manning, Pixomondo was given three months to complete the VFX work on *The Monkey King: Hero is Back*, which consisted of 1,800 VFX shots, while *Leagues of Gods* (2016) was slated to be completed within four and a half months with over 2,000 VFX shots and conversions (Colman, 2016b; Edwards, 2011). Comparing the timeline given to Hollywood blockbusters, *Guardian of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (Gunn, 2017) consisted of 2,300 VFX shots that were completed over seven months by four VFX companies including Framestore (UK), Weta Digital (New Zealand), Method Studios (America) and Trixter (Germany)(Frei, 2017; McMillan, 2016). A reason for the short timelines provided by Chinese filmmakers could be due to the lack of locally trained practitioners and the inadequate experience of local producers as they are unaware of the expense and time needed for VFX services (Lee, 2015).

Foreign practitioners experiencing the negative impact that has resulted from Hollywood productions have tried to combat these problems in China by establishing the China Post-Production Alliance (CPAA). The CPAA was established by Chris Bremble, from the Beijing based company Base FX, to promote and enhance the development of the VFX industry in China (Colman, 2016a). CPAA is not affiliated with the Chinese government, but was

created by a group of VFX companies to discuss the changing climate of the Chinese film industry and to provide guidelines on the best practices for hiring, with the long-term goal being to retain Chinese VFX practitioners in the industry (Landreth 2016). Despite developing problems in the Chinese landscape, I argue that it is important to look beyond the economic benefits and issues in order to consider how Chinese audiences' perceive China's VFX services.

The globalisation and distribution of international film productions have allowed Chinese audiences to consume high quality films from Hollywood and beyond. As a result, audiences have the knowledge and ability to conduct a comparison on the perceived differences in VFX quality. In order to do this, I will consider three films that employ three different forms of VFX services in China. In this chapter, I will be analysing three case studies: *Mr Go*; *Hero*; and *Monster Hunt*. Each case study will have a different focus involving three of the more common type of VFX collaborations in China. The first case study, *Mr. Go*, is an official Korean-Chinese co-production (joint production), that was mainly post-produced in Korea by Dexter Studios. The film was also the first 'local' 3D film to be released in Chinese cinemas. This case study highlights the practice of foreigners conducting post-production work outside China's national borders through an (official) joint production. This experience subsequently led to the establishment of important *guanxi* networks which opened doors for Dexter Studios (a Korean company) who set up their Chinese branch in Beijing. The next case study *Hero* is the first major Australian-Chinese VFX collaboration. The VFX work was conducted by the Australian company Animal Logic, which boasts an impressive portfolio of Hollywood blockbusters. This case study showcases the practice of hiring a foreign post-production company with the goal of imitating the Hollywood 'look'. The final case study will be the analysis of *Monster Hunt*, as I investigate what happens when foreign practitioners 'set-up-shop' in China in order to break into the Chinese market.

Building post-production relationships through a joint production: The Korean case study

Since the early 2000s, Korea and China have worked together on several film productions, both in production and post-production, with *Anarchists* (아나키스트; 2000)³⁶ being the earliest recorded Chinese-Korean collaboration (Jin, 2015). However, it was not until 2009 when these collaborative efforts captured public attention with *Sophie's Revenge* (非常完美)(Jin, 2009), starring So Ji-sub (Korea) and Zhang Ziyi (China). The film earned an approximate USD 15 million, doubling its production budget in China. In 2012, the Korean

³⁶ The film was collaboration between Cine World (Korea) and Shanghai Film Studio (China).

Film Council (KOFIC) strengthened the bilateral relationship through the opening of a Korean film business centre in Beijing to provide resources for producers to cultivate co-production arrangements with the Chinese (Soh & Yecies, 2017). To further encourage collaboration, China and Korea signed a co-production treaty in July 2014, leading to a string of co-productions managed by KOFIC. Interestingly, the majority of the co-produced films have been Korean remakes catering to the taste of Chinese audiences, including *Once Again* (重返 20 岁; 2015), a remake of *Miss Granny*, and *The Witness* (我是证人; 2015), and a remake of the thriller *Blind* (블라인드; 2011). In 2015, it was announced that both nations would create a joint fund of approximately USD 200 million to support film production, broadcasting and music-based projects, with financial contributions from both government and private organisations (Lee, 2015b).

Korea also has a close involvement in Mainland-Hong Kong co-productions (joint productions) and Chinese arthouse and blockbuster films, such as *Double Exposure* (诡替身)(Li, 2014), *The Mermaid*, *Operation Red Sea* to name but a few (K Soh & Yecies, 2017; Yecies & Shim, 2016). Compared with other renowned international VFX companies, Koreans share a closer proximity to China both geographically and culturally. Koreans have also observed the potential of working with China based on the rapid growth of the industry, both financially and creatively, creating opportunities for Koreans that may not have been previously feasible in Korea. According to several of my interviewees, the main attraction for them (as Koreans) to enter the Chinese market is the enticing economic resources available from Chinese production companies. Many films produced in China are likely to have a higher budget for VFX than those produced in Korea. This would allow companies to conduct more Research and Development (R&D), improving the ability to use and advance certain technologies and methods that may otherwise not have been readily possible due to financial constraints.

Returning to the benefits of the tax incentives mentioned above, the Korean government also provides financial incentives to Korean companies working on overseas projects as a strategy to support the continuous flow of Korean Wave products (also known as 한류 [*hallyu*] in Korean and 韩流 [*hanliu*] in Mandarin) beyond the borders of Korea (Lee, 2015). This enables Korean VFX companies to charge a lower rate during the bidding process, placing them in the forefront of the competition with global VFX companies within the Chinese market. These incentives have proven successful as according to Yi, approximately 50% of the current Chinese films (since the interview in 2016) released in China contained some form of Korean contribution. Several films in the top 10 highest grossing 'created in

China' *dapian*³⁷ of all times contain Korean VFX contributions. Films with Korean VFX input include: *The Wandering Earth*, *Operation Red Sea*, *The Mermaid*, *Kungfu Yoga*, and *Journey to the West: The Demon Strikes Back*.

Another interviewee, Korean director/producer Chuck Chae, who was also the 3D producer for *Mr. Go*, suggested a reason why Chinese producers are increasingly hiring Korean VFX services. Chae believes that this is because of Korea's ability to produce work of a quality similar to that of Hollywood, but at approximately a third of the price. Through his own experiences, Chae concludes that Chinese and Koreans share a similar work ethic and environment, especially the practice of working inconsistent hours with no additional reimbursements for overtime. As Chae explained during our interview:

Usually according to our [Korean] work ethic, we pretty much have no weekends; sometimes we have our own Sundays. If we were to hire an artist from LA (Los Angeles) it would be very expensive (...) In Korea, your team leader or your boss is your teacher, you are like a disciple and we really follow that. China is pretty much the same.

As reflected in Chae's comments, work ethics are a product of the social and cultural environment of an organisation operationalised in their rules and regulations, code of conduct and policies, as well as the dominant cultural values of the country (Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Since the culture of both Korea and China are influenced by Confucian ideology, there is a shared understanding of the expected work practices in these two cultures as compared to that of VFX companies located in countries that follow Western working practices such as America, Australia, New Zealand and UK. There are three main strategies used by Korean VFX practitioners when working on Chinese films: (1) conducting the work in Korea; (2) establishing a Chinese branch of an existing Korean VFX studio (e.g. Dexter Studio); (3) or Korean practitioners migrating to China to establish their own companies after developing a level of *guanxi* with essential Chinese stakeholders through their previous employment (e.g. lololmedia and Forestt Studios).

The case of Dexter Studios and *Mr. Go* is intriguing as the company established their prominence in the Chinese film industry not only through the development of their *guanxi* relations, but also through the Chinese-Korean co-production (joint production) of *Mr. Go*. This case is significant as the film arguably opened the doors to further opportunities for Dexter Studios, allowing them to contribute to several top Chinese *dapian*. These include *The Wandering Earth*, *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*, *Kung Fu Yoga* and *Journey to the*

³⁷大片 *dapian* – big film – in Chinese, also known as Chinese blockbusters

West: The Demon Strike Back to name a few.

Mr Go: The official co-production with a VFX focus

Mr. Go is the first feature film to be shot entirely in 3D and the first 3D co-produced film to be counted as a domestic mainstream production in China. The film was produced by Dexter Studios, a Korean-based multi-service production studio with a focus on VFX and Digital Intermediate (DI). The film is written and directed by the founder of Dexter Studios, Kim Yong-hwa, best known for his films *200 Pounds Beauty* (미녀는 괴로워)(Kim, 2006) and *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds* (신과함께-죄와)(Kim, 2017), which as of 2018, had earned the third highest global box office revenue for a Korean film of all time (Noh 2018). *Mr. Go* stars Korean actor Song Dong-il and Chinese actress Xu Jiao. Xu Jiao is known for roles with heavy VFX such as *CJ7* (Chow, 2008), *Future X-Cops* (未來警察)(Jing, 2010) and *Starry Starry Night* (星空)(Lin, 2011). *Mr. Go* was inspired by Heo Young-man's 1984 comic *The 7th Team* (체 7 구단)(Huh, 1984) and follows the adventures of Weiwei (Xu) a young circus ringmaster and her bat-swinging gorilla, Lingling. Sport agent Seong Chung-su (Song) learns of Lingling's talent and convinces Weiwei to allow Lingling to play in the Korean Baseball League. Weiwei believes she has no other option as she has a huge debt due to her grandfather's gambling habit. Chung-su successfully signs Lingling to Doosan Bears, leading them to a winning streak in that season.

The involvement of Dexter Studios is significant because of the way in which the company was formed and their focus on quality post-production services. Kim Yong-hwa apparently established Dexter Studios because he considered that there were no Korean companies with the technology to handle the production, especially the technology behind the development of the gorillas. Kim Yong-hwa approached Kim Tae-yong, who had previously worked at Rhythm & Hues, to consult on the development on the baseball playing gorillas. Both Kim Yong-hwa and Kim Tae-yong invited their personal network of experienced Korean VFX supervisors to join the team and to build Dexter Studios. The conglomerate of the different pre-production, production and post-production departments at Dexter Studios was mainly influenced by Kim Yong-hwa's experiences as a scriptwriter and director, along with his interest in post-production work. In Korea, Dexter Studios has been lauded as one of the leading post-production studios because of their extensive portfolio in both Korea and China (KoBiz, 2018). Being the first of its kind in Korea, Dexter Studios provides a full set of services including assistance in the development of the film's script and visual capabilities. This allows the studio to identify what is possible during the development of the script rather than outsourcing the work to post-production studios. This has enabled Dexter Studios to not only have access to a production's IP rights, but

also to receive a larger cut of box office revenues as post-production work is conducted in-house.

Mr. Go took 18 months to develop and USD 1.4 million was raised from the Korean government and private investment for the development of the gorillas (Yecies 2016). According to Chae, creating the gorillas was creatively challenging and the team took approximately three years to perfect this for the film. Midway through the film's development, Kim Yong-hwa realised that more financial support was needed as more than half of the film's budget had been spent on this aspect of the project. At that time, it was rare for Korean films to spend such a large portion of the budget on post-production technology. According to my interviews in Korea, to recoup the film's VFX expenses, director Kim Yong-hwa decided to seek investment from the Chinese market and approached several of his *guanxi* network, employing his '*guanxi* capital' to secure financial investment from Huayi Brothers. *Guanxi* capital is another aspect of building *guanxi* and is described by Bian Yanjie (2002) as using social resources (social capital) from an individual's *guanxi* network to conduct business. No doubt, Kim's positive directorial reputation and recognition in China from his *hallyu* film *200 Pounds Beauty* also played a role in securing financial support for the movie.

The involvement of Huayi Brothers allowed the film to qualify for joint production status involving Korea and China, thereby achieving domestic status in China. The joint production status obtained by *Mr. Go* was also based on the international co-production MOU signed by Korea and China in 2013, which was followed up by a treaty signed in 2014 (Yecies & Shim, 2016). Films awarded joint production status in China are able to avoid the restrictions placed on foreign films as these films are viewed by officials as a domestic production and have been reportedly able to receive a higher portion of the box office revenues in comparison to imported films (see Chapter Three)(Lang & Frater, 2018; Papish, 2017a).

During the time of the release of *Mr. Go*, films that had acquired joint production status were required to contain Chinese elements. These might include, but were not restricted to: Chinese product placements, the casting of Chinese celebrities, and the use of the Chinese language, primarily Mandarin, in the film's production (see Introduction). In order to fit within these regulations, Kim took several creative liberties with the original text of *Mr. Go*, which is based on a Korean comic book. The inclusion of Chinese elements that were not featured in the original comic involved a Chinese protagonist (Weiwei) and a reference to the Sichuan earthquake.

While the film ended up being a box office failure in both Korea and China, it did position Dexter Studios on the radar of Chinese producers as Chinese producers and audiences alike started taking notice of Korea's technological capabilities. Though it is important to understand the impact of the narrative and casting choices that were made, the focus here is on the post-production aspects. This was also a focus for the film's director Kim Yong-hwa as the film's marketing efforts in China emphasised on the film's VFX efforts, along with the 3D technology used during filming.

A total of 4,360 comments were collected on Douban, with the film obtaining an average rating of 5.4 out of 10. Overall, 20% of the comments about *Mr Go* were positive, 36% identified the film as average, while 44% of the comments gave the film a negative rating.

Table 5.1: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Mr Go*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|---------------------------------|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | Xujiao (Actress playing Weiwei) | 徐娇 | 1.65% |
| 2 | Gorilla | 猩猩 | 1.36% |
| 3 | Film | 电影 | 1.11% |
| 4 | Lingling (Gorilla's name) | 灵灵 | 0.94% |
| 5 | Special effects/VFX | 特效 | 0.86% |
| 6 | Plot | 剧情 | 0.70% |
| 7 | Korea | 韩国 | 0.70% |
| 8 | Animal | 动物 | 0.63% |
| 9 | Baseball | 棒球 | 0.56% |
| 10 | 3D | 3D | 0.49% |

The frequently used words and phrases as highlighted in Table 5.1 highlights Dexter Studios' initial foray into post-producing as audiences focused on the film's VFX elements along with its' 3D capabilities.

The VFX aspect of the film is the focus of this chapter; however, issues identified by the Korean producers³⁸ were interlinked with the audiences VFX discussions. The issues were: (1) the use of a baseball theme for the film and (2) the casting of Xujiao as Weiwei. In relation to the first issue, Kim Yong-hwa was insistent on keeping the original baseball theme for the film. Many critics and practitioners working on the film believed that Kim may have made a wrong decision as baseball is not a popular sport in China (Frater 2013). This was however, not strongly reflected as 40% of the Douban users linked baseball to the film's gorillas and narrative, rather than commenting on the Chinese response to baseball as a sport. A comment was posted in 2013:

³⁸ I obtained information on these issues during my semi-structured interviews.

Look! King Kong is here to play baseball.

看！金刚来打棒球了。

According to the dataset, out of 4,360 comments only 6 mentioned the fact that baseball is not a popular sport in China, and that it might have been a problem to base a film on baseball. 24% of the comments referred to 'baseball' as a sport that it is authentically Korean. This could be seen as a reflection of the influence of Korean cultural products in China as the sport and their athletes are a frequent feature in Korean variety shows and television drama such as the *Reply* series (*Reply 1997* and *Reply 1995* 8). A user commented in 2013:

The idea of gorillas playing baseball is only something that the baseball loving Koreans could think of.

打棒球，这得是有多热爱棒球运动的韩国人才能想出来的创意啊~

As predicted by the Korean producers' (see second issue), the casting of Xujiao was indeed an issue as 87% of the comments criticised her acting in the film. The comment below posted in 2013 received the second highest likes at 167 by Douban users:

The two gorillas act better than Xujiao; the gorillas win.

徐娇演的还不如那两只猩猩，猩猩完胜

Another user commented in the same year:

The one rating I gave was for the VFX. Xujiao was terrible and reduced the quality of the film.

一分给的是特效很棒。徐娇很烂，拉低影片质感。

Like the comment above, many were critical of Xujiao's appearance in the film, but highly praised the film's VFX. Another user posted in 2013:

The highlight of the film is its special VFX. The graphics imitating the gorilla is of high quality. So to enjoy this film, just focus on the gorillas. Xujiao seems to be suffering from some form of hysteria; she just screams throughout the film. Because of this [her acting], there is a lack of emotional connection for me to the film.

Without her, I believe the film would have been more successful.

特效是这部电影的亮点，猩猩的仿真程度相当高，所以整部戏看猩猩就好。徐娇像患上了歇斯底里症，整部片都在吼，这样很难想象会有感情交流啊.....所以没有徐娇整部片可能会更成功。

Users were also critical of the film's narrative, as they felt that the plot was uninteresting. Nonetheless, many were impressed by the film's VFX with the users also being aware that the VFX was produced in Korea by Koreans. A user commented in 2013:

The film's VFX are amazing! If the film *The Host* [2006 Korea movie] surprised me, then this film undoubtedly confirms and refreshes my opinion of Korean film technology. The rating of two stars that I gave the film is only for the VFX and nothing else. As for the plot I can summarise the plot in one sentence: the events that unfold during the mistreatment of a poor old gorilla.

特效非常棒，如果说《汉江怪物》给我带来了一次震撼，那么这部影片无疑让我对韩国电影技术的认识又一次被刷新了，两颗星全是给特效的。至于剧情逻辑，一句话可以概括：本片就是大家一起虐待一只可怜的老猩猩的过程。

Another user commented in 2016

The film has the right attitude toward VFX where the focus is on the details and not solely on creating spectacular scenes. This allows us as audiences to believe the fight between the gorillas, as it seems realistic. However, there was low emotional connectivity [for me] towards the film as the story is very predictable. For the most part, the gorillas are the main characters of the film, making audiences feel sorry for the way Lingling was being treated.

对待特效的态度倒是的，着重细节而不是单纯壮观的场面，结尾让两只猩猩 PK 也是众望所归，可惜故事意图传递的情感效果是苍白的，故事也是生硬的，大部分时候猩猩主角就是处在被压榨的状态，让人心疼。

The efforts given to R&D were clearly recognised as 90% of the comments that mentions 'gorilla' or 'Lingling' (the name of the main gorilla) and praised the film for the realistic visuals of the gorilla and its movements. A user stated simply in 2014:

The gorilla looks very realistic.

大猩猩特效很逼真。

With regards to the 3D technology, the comments were encouraging as this was a highlight for many Douban users who watched the film. In 2013 a comment praised the 3D effects of the film, although like the others, criticised the film's plot:

One star for the VFX and the 3D effects were amazing. The film is too long, you could guess the outcome. It would better if it was only for one and a half hours.
一星给特效，3d 很棒。影片太长了，猜得到的结局，一个半就够了。

This case study highlights the potential benefits of co-production treaties in developing a nation's film industry, as it allows the participating nations to showcase their abilities. The technological capabilities showcased in the film not only opened the doors for Dexter Studios, but also other Korean VFX companies to enter the Chinese film market. The film provided Dexter Studios with a platform to build their reputation through this joint production, fuelling the development of *guanxi* between Dexter Studios and the key players in the Chinese market (in this case, the Huayi Brothers). Eventually, this led to the establishment of Dexter Studios' Beijing branch in 2013, once again complicating the transnational flows of Chinese film productions. Dexter Studios' VFX unit in Beijing was established through *guanxi* relations through the assistance of the studios' frequent collaborator, Chinese director Tsui Hark. More importantly, Kim Yong-hwa's growing reputation as a *hallyu* Korean film director was reinforced with his smash hit *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds*, which created more opportunities for Dexter Studios in China and perhaps beyond the East Asian region.

With an increasing number of Korean VFX studios and practitioners in China hiring Chinese practitioners, it is possible that the Koreans might be worried about the Chinese eventually developing their own technological capabilities that could perhaps one day surpass theirs. At the end of each of my interviews with the Korean VFX practitioners³⁹, I asked:

The Chinese are open about seeking Korean creative practitioners for their expert knowledge. However, is there a worry that current work opportunities will disappear once the Chinese industry catches up to Korea and Hollywood standards?

I received a simple reply of 'no' from all my interviewees who appeared to believe that Korea has had a head start. Chinese companies are only now (since the interviews were conducted in 2016) beginning to establish their own VFX studios. Nevertheless, as in the case of American VFX companies, many studios are sadly suffering from high turnover

³⁹ This includes, Matt Cho, Edward Yi Chi-yun and Chuck Chae (see Chapter Two).

rates due to the culture of the VFX work environment. My interviewees also believed that in their experience, their companies were still attempting to catch up to premium Western VFX companies who, in comparison with Korea, had a head start with their R&D. No matter how far the Koreans may have progressed, these premium VFX studios are perceived to be always a step ahead. Many also believed that the reputation and fan base of *hallyu* has enhanced the reputation of Korea's creative industries as China attempts to learn from Korea's experience in order to fulfil their soft power ambitions, both domestically and internationally.

More importantly, because VFX services are considered to be produced by the 'faceless' technicians behind the scenes, it might be assumed that VFX services could be carried out regardless of the political situation between Korea and China. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the installation of THAAD caused China to publicly express a negative response due to the close proximity and relationship they have with North Korea. To further emphasise their unhappiness, China also placed a ban on Korean celebrities appearing in advertisements and Chinese television shows, halting co-productions between both nations (Soh & Yecies, 2017). However, VFX work by Korean companies is still undertaken on Chinese films, regardless of the geopolitical situation between both nations. As it is, VFX services can be conducted regardless of immigration issues, such as obtaining a work visa, or the banning of specific cultural products, as the silent VFX heroes of these film productions are able to work in any part of the globe unbeknownst to the audience.

Although Korean VFX seems to be the more popular choice for Chinese producers, there are several Chinese films with sizable budgets that have hired other foreign VFX practitioners with Hollywood experience. In the following case study, I examine whether there is a noticeable difference in Chinese audiences' reception of a film that contains a more 'premium' VFX experience, or are audiences unaware of the difference?

Imitating Hollywood's quality through VFX: Australia and China's post-production relationship

As discussed in Chapter Three, China considers Australia to be a 'junior partner' in their co-production relationship. However, Australia is well-known in China for their post-production services due to their extensive portfolio of Hollywood films. Looking at post-production work conducted by Australian-owned post-production companies since 2010, VFX work includes a number of Hollywood blockbusters, such as: *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Screen Australia and Ausfilm are aware of Australia's strengths in post-production, especially within VFX, and have organised various forums

and studio familiarisation tours, aiming to attract Chinese filmmakers in engaging Australian post-production services. During my attendance at the 2016 *Australia-China Co-production Forum*, an entire session was reserved for showcasing VFX services in Australia. The session, *More Bang for your Buck – How to Maximise the 30% PDV Offset Working with Australian VFX and Post Studios* was the only presentation that included both English and Chinese text in their presentation slides. Speakers at the presentation included Debra Richards, the CEO of Ausfilm, Tony Clark, the Managing Director of Rising Sun Pictures and Adam Scott, the General Manager of Spectrum Film. The presentation focused on Rising Sun Pictures and Spectrum Film's extensive Hollywood portfolio as well as information regarding the exchange rate between RMB (Chinese Yuan) and the AUD (Australian Dollar). The companies also highlighted their efforts in building their Chinese-language skills and cultural knowledge.

According to a paper by Paul Thompson, Rachael Parker and Stephen Cox (2009), Australian VFX studios need to expand internationally since the Australian domestic feature film market is 'small and relatively stagnant' (p. 10). The Australian government has assisted this move by supporting and encouraging foreign filmmakers to work with local companies through the introduction of the Post, Digital and VFX (PDV) offset. The PDV offset, administered by Screen Australia, is an Australian Federal incentive that offers a 30% tax rebate for qualifying PDV expenditure according to the Qualifying Australian Expenditure on Film (QAPE)⁴⁰ (Screen Australia, 2017). Within the post-production sector, items on QAPE include (Ausfilm, 2016):

- the conception of audio or VFX;
- editing and mixing of audio and VFX;
- any related activities including salaries, per diems, along with travel costs for PDV staff and crew (regardless of nationality, as long as the work is conducted in Australia), rental of applicable facilities and equipment.

Productions also have the option to work with various PDV facilities around Australia, but QAPE can only be claimed by one company in-charge of all post-production activities with a minimum claim of AUD 500,000. Productions may receive a 30% return on the total spent on PDV services in Australia and combine this offset with other state grants or incentives. Films are not required to attain official co-production status or fulfil any cultural or content tests, as long as the collaboration takes place with an Australian post-production company and receives a PDV final certification from the Australian Tax Office

⁴⁰ QAPE calculates goods and services provided in Australia, among other criteria.

(ATO). However, films that have received official co-production status, will receive more tax incentives as they are able to apply for the PDV and Production offset (see Chapter Three).

Australian post-production services are thus able to provide Chinese productions with a range of benefits through their transnational experiences. Major Australian post-production companies have been established for over two decades, allowing practitioners to sustain and develop their technology through research and development innovation. Examples of several well-established Australian companies include Rising Sun (25 years), Animal Logic (29 years), Soundfirm (35 years) and Spectrum (56 years)⁴¹.

Being aware of Chinese filmmakers' intention to emulate Hollywood production quality, Australian post-production companies have placed great emphasis on their growth and the knowledge gained through working in Hollywood. For example, Tony Clarke from Rising Sun Pictures, described how Rising Sun established their portfolio as a result of their work on various film productions. An example he cited was their experience on *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1* and *Part 2* (Yates 2010; 2011). Through this experience on the *Harry Potter* franchise, they were able to build their technological capability. This served them well for *Gravity* (Cuarón, 2013); and they subsequently applied their expertise on *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. Although Australia's premium VFX service could assist in achieving their ambition to create *dapian* with Hollywood-like quality, their services are presently seen as costly because of the strength of the AUD against the RMB, as well as the high employee wages, and the ability of the Australian companies to charge a higher premium due to their working relationship with Hollywood (Kai Soh, 2017). Australian post-production companies are also competing with the Koreans, whose popular cultural products using Korean services have had considerable success in China. As in the case of Dexter Studios, local Chinese production companies may offer a much lower rate, albeit with a slight decrease in quality. This highlights the issues supported by the Toby Miller's (2016) concept of the new international division of cultural labour, as Korean companies can charge a reduced rate due to lower expenses including labour costs.

Australia's involvement in the Chinese film industry is not new, with *Sun Valley* (Ping, 1996) being the first recorded Chinese film to incorporate Australian post-production work. Within the Chinese market, *Sun Valley* showcased Australia's post-production capabilities, especially in the VFX and sound effects sectors (Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, 2005; Walsh, 2012). More importantly, Australia's contribution has demonstrated

⁴¹ As of 2019.

their ability to provide Chinese films with the Hollywood-like special effects that are expected by global audiences (Farquhar, 2009). Australian companies with experience working with the Chinese, or currently working on Chinese productions include: Animal Logic, Cutting Edge, DPP Studios (formerly Digital Pictures), Spectrum Films and Rising Sun. To date, Soundfirm and Animal Logic are the two most active Australian post-production companies in the Chinese film industry. Additionally, both companies are also known globally for their post-production service and facilities through their portfolio and countless international awards.

In 2003, China Film Assist, a Chinese production services company, invested in Soundfirm enabling the establishment of an office in Beijing. This facilitated several *dapian* collaborations including: *The Monkey King*, *Red Cliff*, *Curse of the Golden Flower* (满城尽带黄金甲)(Zhang, 2006), *House of Flying Daggers* (十面埋伏)(Zhang, 2004), *Kungfu Hustle*, and the next case study, *Hero*. Animal Logic, on the other hand, does not have a physical presence in China, but has been working closely with several prominent Chinese directors including Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou. Animal Logic's CEO and co-founder Zareh Nalbandian suggested in an interview that the company is known in China for their high-end work and has a great reputation within the Chinese film industry based on the work they have produced (ACCI, 2013). The company's portfolio of *dapian* include: Chen's *Monk Comes down the Mountain* (道士下山)(Chen, 2015), Zhang's *House of Flying Daggers* and *Hero*. *Hero* was the inaugural *dapian* for both companies, winning Best Sound Design for Soundfirm and Best Visual Effects for Animal Logic at the 2003 Hong Kong Film Awards.

***Hero*: 'China's first guide to creating an international commercial film'**

Hero was directed by Chinese filmmaker Zhang Yimou and is set during the Warring State Period when China was divided into seven kingdoms: Yan, Zhao, Chu, Han, Wei, Qi and Qin. The King of Qin (Chen Daoming) considers himself the most powerful King and intends to unify the country, which makes him a great target for assassination. When one of his prefects known as Nameless (Jet Li) arrives at the Qin capital city, he proves to the King that he has defeated three of his enemies: Broken Sword (Tony Leung), Flying Snow (Maggie Cheung) and Long Sky (Donnie Yen). Curious, the King requests Nameless to tell his story, and the film follows Nameless' account. However, while listening to the story, the King sees through Nameless' deceit and his desire to assassinate him. The King then tells Nameless what he believes took place and orders his execution.

The film is a prime example of Chinese transnational cinema, as *Hero* is produced in collaboration with technical and artistic personnel across national borders including

Australians among many others (Higbee & Lim, 2010). According to the film's director, Zhang's intention was to create *Hero* as a global blockbuster, and he created the film with the global audience in mind (Farquhar, 2009; J. Lau, 2007; Stringer & Yu, 2007). Zhang therefore hired filmmakers and companies who had previously worked on Hollywood productions, as he aspired to emulate Hollywood's post-production success. Although the film did well worldwide, earning a total of USD 177.4 million globally, how the film was perceived by the Chinese audience has not been explored in any detail thus far ("Hero," 2018).

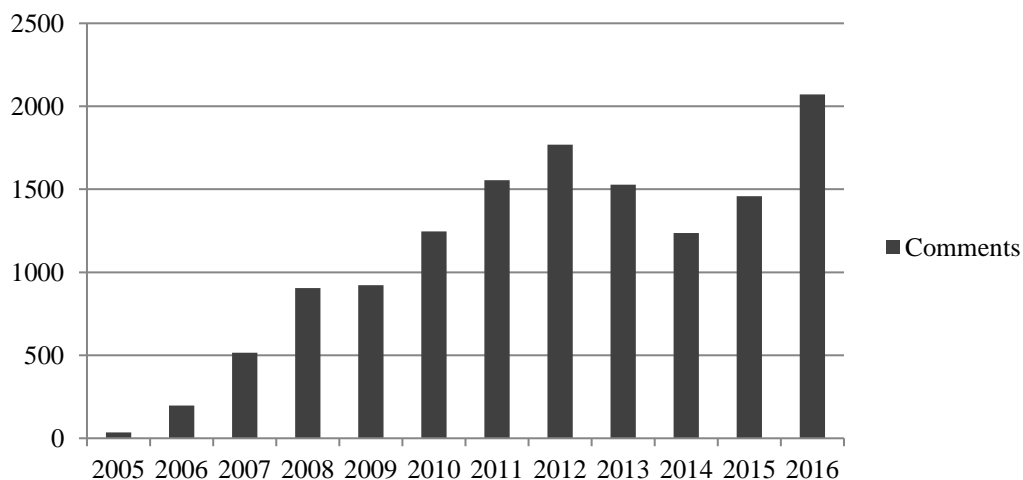
To understand the success and reception of *Hero* in China, I collected 13,400 comments on Douban. Here, the film received an average rating of 6.7 out of ten. Overall 62% of the comments gave the film a positive rating, 28% considered the film to be average, while 10% gave the film a negative rating.

In considering these ratings, it is important to note that Douban was only founded in 2005, while *Hero* was released in 2002. This may explain the relatively low number of comments in comparison to more recent *dapian* hits, which attract an average of 140,000⁴². As highlighted in Figure 5.1, there was a steady increase in the number of comments on Douban from 2005 as the platform began to develop and gain popularity, albeit with a slight dip in 2013 and 2014. However, the comments picked up again in 2015. The dip in comments could perhaps be explained by the nation's boycott of the film in China when Zhang was fined for breaching China's one-child policy (Ng, 2014). The majority of comments about the film were posted in 2016, right before the release of Zhang's blockbuster *The Great Wall* which attracted more attention to *Hero*.

Figure 5.1: Number of comments by Chinese Douban users on *Hero* from 2005 to 2016

⁴² This was calculated by taking the average of *The Mermaid* at 173,481 comments, *Monster Hunt* at 100,772 comments and *Mojin: The Lost Legend* (2015) at 141,041 comments as of 25 April 2017.

**Audiences Comments on Douban for *Hero*
from 2005 to 2016**



Overall, there were fewer comments focused on the actors, but rather more on the film’s aesthetics and the narrative as a whole. The keywords are reflected in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Hero*

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|--|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | Film | 电影 | 1.56% |
| 2 | Beautiful | 美 | 1.24% |
| 3 | Scene/Images | 画面 | 1.20% |
| 4 | Zhang Yimou (film’s director) | 张艺谋 | 1.03% |
| 5 | Colour | 色彩 | 0.68% |
| 6 | Hero | 英雄 | 0.64% |
| 7 | Story | 故事 | 0.63% |
| 8 | China | 中国 | 0.62% |
| 9 | Whole world/ All under heaven (concept of the film discussing the unification of China) | 天下 | 0.44% |
| 10 | Plot | 剧情 | 0.40% |

The top six keywords were selected for further analysis with the aim of coming to an understanding of the significance of the film’s post-production elements from the audience’s perspective. The keywords are: film (电影 *dianying*), beautiful (美 *mei*), scene (画面 *huamian*), Zhang Yimou (张艺谋), colour (色彩 *secai*) and hero (英雄 *yingxiong*) – which could also be a reference to the film’s title. Two additional words related to the study were also included to identify whether Chinese audiences were aware of Australia’s contribution. The two words were: Australia (澳洲 *aozhou*), which resulted in zero comments, and Hollywood (好莱坞 *haolaiwu*), with 27 comments. Most of the comments in the dataset focused on the aesthetics of the scenes, along with the achievement and growth of Chinese cinema since the release of *Hero*. A user commented in 2012:

This film is China's first guide to creating a commercial film, showing the ability to retain a respective amount of art and not entirely selling out. The mixture of the solid colours of black, red, blue, green and yellow with the special effects was visually pleasing.

中国大导们初试商业片的首部作品，保留了不少艺术气息，尚未商业到庸俗的地步。黑、红、蓝、绿、黄，纯色的大量应用加上特技，视觉效果很好。

Another user commented in 2015:

This is the product of achievement in Chinese cinema. Since the release of this film, domestic commercial blockbusters in China started to develop.

中国电影史上里程碑似的作品。从此，国产商业大片在中国的电影土地上得到了长足的发展~

94% of the total comments discussed post-production elements of the film including VFX, colour and the visual appeal of the scenes, rather than the narrative or actors as seen in Chapter Three. A user commented in 2013:

After re-watching *Hero*, [I came to the conclusion that] Zhang Yimou had created the most beautiful scenarios that I could imagine. It is really magnificent.

重温了一遍英雄，张艺谋把我心目中最美的场景都拍出来了呀，真是美轮美奂。

In 2015:

Watching the scenes [visually], the action, special effects and colours of the film will allow one to be overwhelmed with enjoyment in this accessible martial arts film...

就画面，动作，特技，色彩来看是一部让人沉醉的写意武侠...

There were also negative comments, but they were in the minority. A user commented in 2015:

... There was however too much use of colour and special effects in order to develop the film to become more aesthetically pleasing. This makes the film seem artificial!

... 不过过多的使用色彩和特技想把电影往唯美那发展就显的有些做作了！

Although the focus of this chapter is on post-production it was interesting to note that almost two thirds of the comments (at 64%) expressed dislike for the film's narrative. A

user commented in 2010:

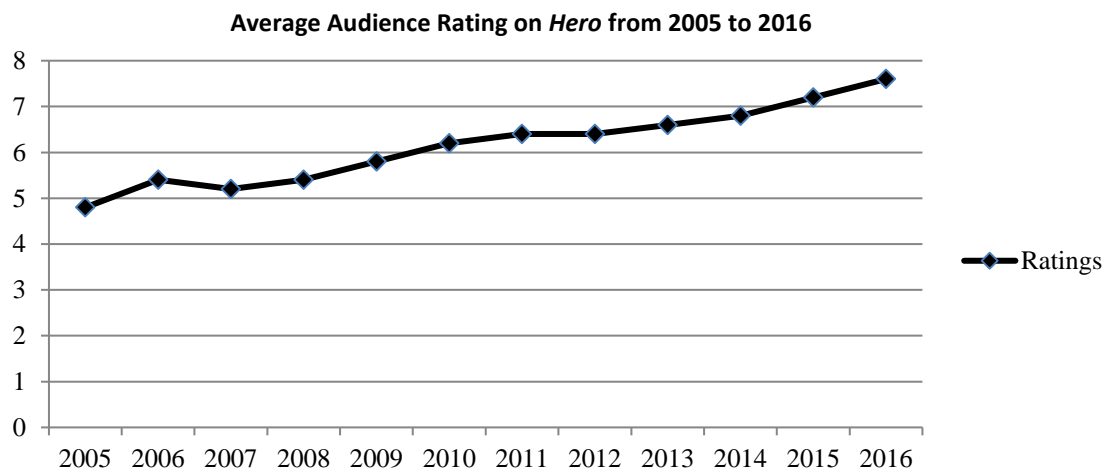
The beautiful scenes are not able to cover up the empty plotline.
华丽的画面掩盖不了空洞的剧情。

And in 2011:

Ignoring the plot, the scenes were beautiful.
故事情节放一边 画面还是挺漂亮的

The annual film ratings were also analysed (see Figure 5.2 below), which shows a yearly increase from 2007.

Figure 5.2: Average rating of *Hero* per year on Douban from 2005 to 2016



The ratings correspond with the comments and previous research conducted by Sabrina Qiong Yu (2010) on the reception of *Hero*. Yu's research focuses on the correlation between box office revenues in China and the negative comments *Hero* received online. Yu's study concludes by suggesting that Chinese young adults were motivated to watch the film both legal and illegally in order to join in on the online discussion, as at that time watching *Hero* and providing film reviews was perceived as a trend amongst young adults wanting to be critical of *dapian* hits. According to Yu's research, from 2003 to 2004, ratings and comments on the film were mainly negative. However, this dataset (from 2005 to 2016), shows a different set of results, where audiences were less negative and harsh towards the film in both ratings and comments. Looking at the results, it seems that the fad of criticising *Hero* continued during 2005, before dying down in 2006. In 2016, the trend of bashing films with a large budget appears to have died down, as this was when *Hero* was the most highly rated. This could be because by 2016 Chinese audiences were starting to

view *Hero* as a 'classic' Chinese film in comparison to more recently released films. One user stated in 2016:

Years later [on reflection], do Chinese audiences that have 'suffered' greatly from badly produced domestic films feel that they have been too harsh with their comments [about *Hero*]?

多年以后，被国产烂片虐的死去活来的中国人，是否会觉得当初太过苛责？

Another assumption is that audiences posting on Douban have watched *Hero* more than once as comments were posted a minimum of three years after the film was released. Many of these audiences watched the film when they were younger and are likely to have viewed it a second time (or more often) when older. 14.5% of the total explicitly mentioned watching the film more than once. A user commented in 2011:

When I was young, the school took us on an excursion to the cinema to watch this film. At that time, I could not understand anything. When I think back, the memory (of the film) is very vague. After re-watching the film, [I realised] this film is really beautiful. Haha. Anyway, I was fascinated.

小时候学校组织去金钟影院去看，结果必然是看不懂，现在想起来也记忆模糊了，重温了一下，真漂亮，哈哈。反正我是看入迷了。

In 2016:

Watching it back on 9 October 2016, this film has been underestimated. In comparison to films today, this film is not particularly bad.

2016.10.9 翻回来看这部电影还是被低估了，至少放到现在来看也不算特别差

Based on the dataset, after watching *Hero* more than once, audiences tend to be more appreciative. Audiences were also aware that *Hero* was intentionally created to be a global blockbuster imitating 'Western', or more specifically Hollywood's narrative characteristics, from their perspective this would have likely weakened the film's narrative. In 2006, users commented:

Although I do not think that the meaning behind this film is deep enough, it is a good film to show Westerners what is 'martial arts', and also in a way a reflection of Chinese culture. In addition, the scenes are exquisite, which suits foreigner's tastes. It can be said that Zhang Yimou's film are not made for Chinese audiences.

虽然我并不认为这部电影的道理够深邃，但它很好地向西方人反映了“武侠”，也可以说反映了中国传统文化，另外画面精美，这一点也很合老外口味。可以这么说，张艺谋的电影，不都是为了中国人拍的。。

When it comes to colour, there is no other film as beautiful as *Hero*. However, the visually stunning film does not cover up the fact that the narrative is lacking. This style suits a foreigner's taste.

论色彩，没有再比英雄更漂亮的电影了。可是漂亮的外表下掩盖不了故事的空洞，这倒是很合老外的胃口。

Another comment from 2013:

[In *Hero*], Zhang Yimou perfectly demonstrated the film's aesthetics and also achieved great commercial success with this production. However, it attempts to excessively appeal to Western audiences' taste, but does not reflect social reality. This makes it deliberately mystifying and lacklustre in the narrative
张艺谋将镜头美学和形式主义发挥到极致而又在商业推广上极尽成功的一部作品，过于迎合西方人趣味使其不接地气故弄玄虚，故事性上乏善可陈

In 2016, a user simply commented:

Not bad, visually it looks like a Hollywood film.

不错，画面都是好莱坞大片水准

Considering the comments above, users are not only aware of Zhang's intention, but also keen to compare the film with Hollywood productions, a fact that illustrates the ways in which Australian VFX companies are able to emulate Hollywood-like qualities. While people in the film industry may be aware of Australia's contribution through the awards and praise for *Hero*, this was largely overlooked by Chinese audiences on Douban. While Chinese audiences on Douban applaud the visual artistry of *Hero* this is mainly attributed to the role of Zhang as the director rather than the post-production companies. Though mention of Australia is clearly missing in the dataset, the success of Australia's Animal Logic is clearly indicated by the comments that praise the film's colour and artistry. Chinese audiences are also well-aware of Zhang's ambition for *Hero* to be a global success through the film's attempt to emulate a Hollywood blockbuster (hence the engagement of Australian post-production services), but this move was not entirely welcomed.

Australian VFX companies have had an advantage, not only due to their portfolios, but also

the tax incentives implemented by the Australian government as they seek to build stronger relations with the Chinese film industry. In this sense, similar to the case of *Children of the Silk Road* discussed in Chapter Three, Australia is more dependent on this relationship, with China being the dominant partner. However, building this relationship could not only help Australia's VFX industry to continue to prosper, but act as a great selling point for the Chinese to engage Australian services.

Based on my observations at the 2016 *Australia-Chinese Co-production Forum*, pitches from both Australian and Chinese filmmakers were mostly presented by independent filmmakers or mid-size production companies with a modest budget. Australian post-production companies are not able to support current Australian-Chinese co-productions due to budget constraints, as many prominent Australian VFX companies provide premium services. In the eyes of Chinese filmmakers, Australia's film industry and post-production industry has a significant reputation with the post-production sector being perceived to be a global leader. In comparison with China, Australia's post-production industry is far ahead in its technological capabilities and experiences, and therefore could charge a premium price to their Chinese clients. The biggest predicament faced by Australia's post-production industry lies in the tension between supporting the Australian national film industry and remaining globally competitive through transnational partnerships, with the latter as the direction in which the industry is currently heading.

Establishing opportunities through partnerships between Hollywood and China

In this section, I examine the third strategy VFX companies have used to enter the Chinese market. Here, I explore a foreign practitioner's experience of setting up a brand-new company in China as foreign practitioners develop their *guanxi* relations with China through their previous experiences working with Hollywood and personal networks. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, many of these foreign practitioners are Americans who have left their companies due to the uncertainty of their careers as the industry appears to be engaged in a 'race to the bottom'. With their previous Hollywood experience, these foreign practitioners have a head start in China as they have already established themselves in the Chinese film industry through previous projects. These newly established companies have built their portfolio and *guanxi* relations through working on several *dapian* films, while simultaneously placing Chinese post-production workers on the VFX map with their contribution to Hollywood blockbusters.

One key example here is John Dietz, former creative producer, VFX Supervisor and Head of

Production at Pixomondo, and currently the founder of the Chinese VFX company, BangBang Pictures. Pixomondo is an American-based company, with an established branch in China and has worked on several Hollywood blockbusters including *Hugo* (2011), winner of the Best Visual Effects at the 24th Academy Awards. The bulk of the film's work was conducted in Pixomondo's Beijing and Shanghai offices, highlighting the potential of Chinese VFX practitioners (Wei, 2012). With the reputation and connections that Dietz had formerly created, he was able to build a new company and establish himself in China.

Another example is that of Base FX, a prominent Chinese-based VFX company established in 2006 by American Chris Bremble. He entered China in order to obtain Chinese-made VFX for his directorial work *Deep Rescue* (Bremble, 2005). According to Liu Wei (2012), one of the primary reasons for Bremble's entry into the Chinese market was due to the low labour costs (as compared with America), which at times could be 20% below what other companies (especially those in America, Australia, New Zealand and the UK) are charging, highlighting the features of the new international division of cultural labour. When Base FX was established in 2006, Bremble only had eight employees and within a decade, the company had expanded to 500 employees (Scott, 2016). Currently the company has four offices, with three in China (Beijing, Wuxian and Xiamen) and one in LA. Base FX also has a partnership deal with the American company ILM, leading to Base FX's contribution to several Hollywood productions including *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Abrams, 2015). Other than film productions, the company has also worked on several American television series including *Boardwalk Empire*, which earned them an Emmy Award in 2010 (Scott, 2016). This provided Chinese VFX practitioners working at Base FX, with opportunities that may once have only been available to them if they were to relocate overseas. In 2016, Bremble further expanded Base FX by signing a partnership deal with CMC to launch Base Media. Like Dexter Studios, Base Media is a production company with a focus on DI and 3D development for both the Chinese and international film markets (Burkitt, 2016). The following case study involves Bremble's first *dapian*, *Monster Hunt*, examining how Chinese audiences responded to the film's VFX contributions.

Post-producing *Monster Hunt* with practitioners from Hollywood

Monster Hunt began as a collaboration involving Bremble's Base FX, Hui (director) and William (also known as Bill) Kong (producer) in 2010. The concept was to create a 3D film with CGI characters alongside live actors. Hui was slated to direct the film because of his previous experience as an animator at Dreamworks Animation, as well as his role as Character Designer and Supervising Director for *Shrek* (Adamson & Jenson, 2001) and *Shrek 2* (Adamson, Asbury, & Vernon, 2004). In 2011, Hui also assisted in the establishment of Oriental Dreams in China, which led to the development of *Kungfu Panda 3* (See

Chapter Three). With Base FX technological capabilities, and Hui's experience in animating characters, the team decided to work together to create *Monster Hunt*, a film that combines live action characters with animated CGI characters as the film's monsters. In 2012, Bremble, Hui and Kong started testing the possibility of creating the film to see if it was viable for production based on the technology they then had. After *Monster Hunt's* second round of testing in 2013 the film was greenlit, and Base FX spent the next two years developing the production (BaseFX, 2015). This film was almost entirely shot in Beijing with assistance from Jason Snell from the American company ILM as Chief Creative Officer for the production⁴³.

Though the partnership sounded ideal, with many of the film's contributors having had a long history of working in Hollywood, the film was mired in controversy in China as a consequence of the casting issues and distribution deals. Three months before the film was slated to be released, the original lead actor Kai Ko (contracted to play Tianyin), was arrested for smoking marijuana. He was ultimately banned from any form of work in China's entertainment industry, or any media production intended for release in China. As producers were unclear on the duration of the ban, they had to replace Ko with Jing and reshoot 70% of the film. The reshoots were conducted within the three months as Kong wanted the film to be released in the summer of 2015.

According to Hui, 90% of the original crew returned for six weeks to reshoot scenes with many of them working for free or at a reduced cost (Wong, 2016). This additional pressure and what were arguably unethical work conditions, in some respects contributes to not only the new international division of cultural labour, but also the VFX phenomenon of the 'race to the bottom', as implementing this specific solution would have been challenging in unionised industries. The additional stress and financial disadvantages imposed on the film's crew derived from the Chinese producers' expectations of a work culture that would get the job done regardless of circumstances. A year after the film was released; it was hit with another controversy, this time due to the actions of the film's Chinese production company and distributor, Edko Film Ltd. Edko was reported to have conducted what they call 'charity screenings', distributing 40 million tickets to the public in order to 'boost' their tickets sales, to compete against *Furious 7*; a charge to which they later admitted (Winfrey, 2017; Wong, 2016).

Regardless of the controversies, *Monster Hunt* is the first 3D Chinese film to combine live action and animation. The film is inspired by the Chinese text *Classic of Mountains and Sea*

⁴³ Snell is a VFX supervisor for ILM and was brought into the production because of the company's alliance with Base FX.

(山海經 *shanghai jing*) and is set in a mythical kingdom where monsters and mortals often fight each other. The Queen of monsters and her two attendants – Zhugao and Fat Ying (played by Eric Tsang and Sandra Ng in their human form) – take refuge in Yonging Village, a village for mortals, and disguise themselves as human. One day, the Queen becomes hungry and starts craving one of the villagers Tianyin (Jing Boran). As she is about to devour him, a low-ranking monster hunter, Xiaolan (Bi Baihei), interrupts her meal. In the chaos, Tianyin accidentally becomes the carrier of the monster Queen’s baby; leading to various gags in the film about the fact that the male Tianyin is pregnant. After Tianyin gives birth to the monster child, he names it Wuba because of the sound the monster child makes. Once news of the new-born spreads, mortals and monsters alike all set out to capture the new-born, which is when Wuba’s adventure begins.

As in the two previous case studies, the focus of this analysis will be around the VFX aspects of the film, rather than the film’s narrative and controversies surrounding the film. Because of technical difficulties (more information in Chapter Two), 2,656 comments were manually collected out of 101,267. The film received an average rating of 6.8 out of ten, with 48% of the comments giving the film a positive rating, 34% stating that the film was average, and 18% of the comments giving the film a negative rating.

However, after collecting the data, I discovered that 8% of the comments collected were posted before the film’s release date of 16 July 2015. Many of the comments were posted in late June and early July. This raised my suspicion that users were hired to comment on the film to boost its ratings. My suspicion was confirmed after reviewing one of the comments that received the fourth highest number of likes (1360) on the film’s Douban page. The comment, posted in 16 July 2017, stated:

Known for having a budget of 350 million [yuan]? All that is 3D is the subtitles. Was Douban over taken by people who were paid to comment? The common keywords that appear in the comments are “Wuba is cute, great special effects”. Other parts of the film were basically not mentioned.

号称 3.5 亿的投资就做出这玩意？看电影的时候整个只有字幕 3d 啊。。。。。。而且豆瓣被水军沦陷了？评论关键词：【胡巴萌 特效好】大量的评论集中在这两个地方，其他的基本没人提。。

My analysis confirmed the comment made above, as the original data showed frequent mention of the film’s special effects in the top ten most frequently used word and phrases for *Monster Hunt* (see Table 5.3). This was absent after I removed comments that were

posted prior to the film's released (cleaned version; see Table 5.4).

Table 5.3: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Monster Hunt* before the film release (original)

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|--|---------|---------------------|
| 1 | Cute (<i>meng</i> ; slang word in Mandarin) | 萌 | 1.81% |
| 2 | Wuba (Name of the baby monster) | 胡巴 | 1.24% |
| 3 | Film | 电影 | 1.23% |
| 4 | Laugh | 笑 | 1.15% |
| 5 | Demon | 妖 | 0.93% |
| 6 | Special effects (VFX and CGI) | 特效 | 0.79% |
| 7 | Jing Boran (Name of the film's male lead) | 井柏然 | 0.55% |
| 8 | Plot | 剧情 | 0.49% |
| 9 | Bai Baihe (Name of the film's female lead) | 白百合 | 0.49% |
| 10 | Cute (<i>keai</i> ; slang word in Mandarin) | 萌 | 1.81% |

Table 5.3: Top 10 frequently used word/phrases for *Monster Hunt* after the film release (cleaned)

| Rank | English | Chinese | Weighted Percentage |
|------|---|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Cute (<i>meng</i> ; slang word in Mandarin) | 萌 ⁴⁴ | 1.68% |
| 2 | Wuba | 胡巴 | 1.25% |
| 3 | Film | 电影 | 1.25% |
| 4 | Laugh | 笑 | 0.89% |
| 5 | Demon | 妖 | 0.86% |
| 6 | Not bad | 不错 | 0.67% |
| 7 | Plot | 剧情 | 0.61% |
| 8 | Domestic production | 国产 | 0.54% |
| 9 | Story | 故事 | 0.51% |
| 10 | Cute (<i>keai</i> ; traditionally used to describe cute) | 可爱 | 0.50% |

The percentage breakdown of each rating also differs from the comments posted before the film's release and after the cleaning of the data. In the original dataset, most of the comments rated the film at four to five stars out of five (see Figure 5.3), while the clean data showed that most users gave the film an average rating of three stars (see Figure 5.4).

⁴⁴ The term 萌 (pronounced as *meng*), is a Chinese slang for cute, which only has been recently utilised in the 21st century, whereas 可爱 (pronounced as *ke ai*), is traditionally used in the Chinese language.

Figure 5.3: Ratings of *Monster Hunt* before the official release date (original)

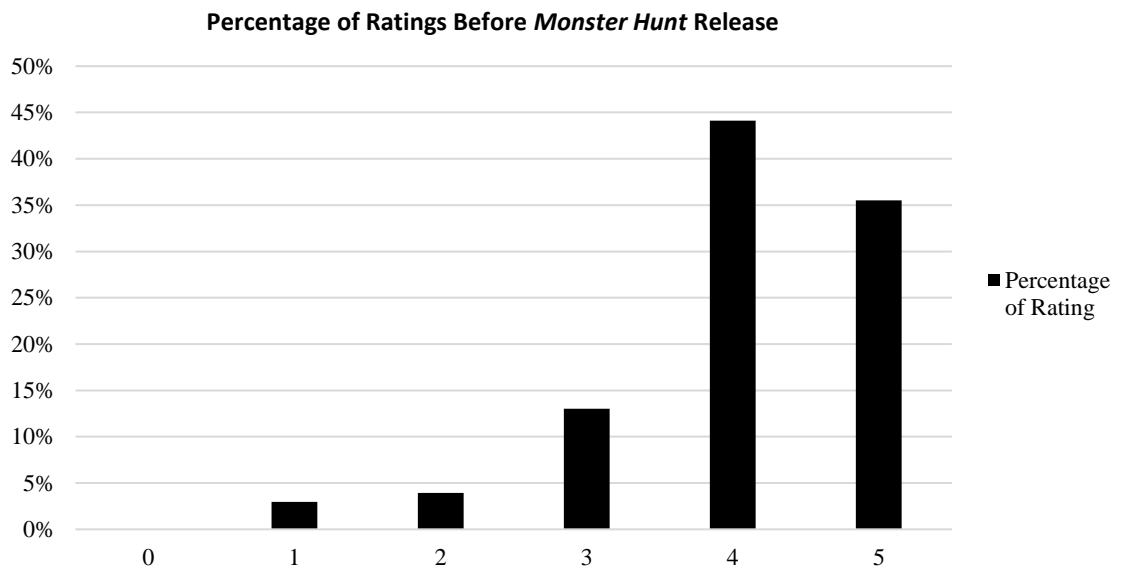
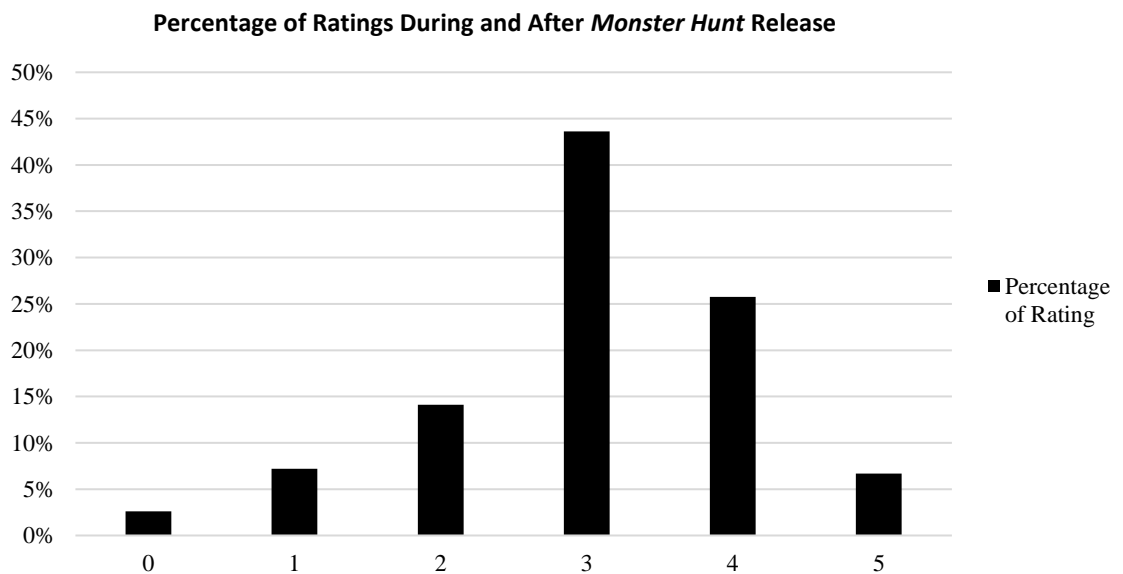


Figure 5.4: Ratings of *Monster Hunt* during and after release date (clean)



The act of hiring people to provide positive comments to the film is not surprising, as the film was already clouded with controversy, especially the 'charity screening'. Once the 'fake' comments were removed, it was clear that the genuine Douban users were less concerned about the VFX aspect of the film, and more critical of the film overall. Most of the comments were repetitive, commenting on the appearance of the monster baby character, Wuba, and the fact that this film was produced in China.

Wuba was the most frequently mentioned word, qualified by either ‘*meng*’ (萌) or ‘*ke ai*’ (可爱). The word *meng* is a loanword from the Japanese, used by young Chinese adults to describe affection for a cute character, specifically towards animated characters, comic and video games. *ke ai*, on the other hand, is traditionally used to describe cuteness. Interestingly, in the data set, the term *ke ai* suggested a more positive reaction to the ‘cuteness’ of Wuba than the comments containing the word ‘*meng*’ (see Table 5.4). Close to 100% of the comments that used the term *ke ai* suggested that the animation of Wuba is adorable, while users of the term *meng* suggested that Wuba looks cute but is ugly at the same time. The reason *meng* had a negative connotation could be due to the fact that users did not think Wuba was as cute as other animated characters with which they are familiar.

A user commented in 2015:

Do you think Wuba is ugly? I can't see how a radish could be cute (*meng*)!
又觉得胡巴很丑的吗？真看不出的一颗萝卜有什么萌的！

If you do not watch it at the cinema, you are not losing out. Wuba is very ugly. I'm watching this film all thanks to the Film Protection month⁴⁵.

没去电影院看也不会觉得遗憾，胡巴给我的感觉好丑。感谢国产保护月吧~

The publicity surrounding *Monster Hunt* focused on how the film was a created in China film with a largely Chinese cast and crew. This publicity strategy did not necessarily result in a positive reaction, as 60% of the comments revealed that the phrase domestic production (国产 *guochan*) had negative connotations, while only 25% of the comments were positive. In 2017, a user posted a positive comment:

For this year's domestic films, if they were not (super) lousy, they were in the news. The acting skills of the male and female leads were not good. The design of the ‘cute’ [*meng*] character is not cute [*meng*] at all, but ugly. It is another 3D film with non-existent 3D.

这年头国产电影不是（大）烂片就是新闻了。男女主角演技捉急⁴⁶。萌物设计得并不萌，而且丑。又是一部毫无 3D 效果的重影电影。

⁴⁵ The film was released during the Film Protection Month, also known as the Blackout Period. For more information, see Chapter Three.

⁴⁶ 捉急 (*zhou ji*) is a word commonly used by teenagers and young adults to describe something that is not good

Many Chinese audiences appear to rank Chinese productions (and Chinese VFX abilities) relatively low, and at times it is possible they were being condescending. A user commented in 2015:

I do not know why, but when a local production displays such 3D effects, they deserve praise.

不知为何，国产的 3D 居然做出这样的特效，给赞。

Another user commented in 2017:

A domestic original 3D animation which can be produced at this level makes me want to give this film five stars.

国产原创 3D 动画能做到这个程度讲真我都想给五星了

It would seem that there were hopes that the film would promote the VFX and CGI capabilities of Base FX, as was evident in the ‘fake’ comments posted before the film’s release. The majority of these fake comments commented positively on the film’s VFX and CGI aspects. However, it seems that the film’s VFX, CGI and 3D capabilities did not meet the standards of Chinese Douban users, as very few of the comments had good things to say. Those that mentioned Wuba, the film’s animated character, expressed mainly negative opinions, while some openly mentioned that technically the film was not too bad, but only because the film was a domestic production. Chinese audiences on Douban appear to be less critical as they lower their expectations for ‘created in China’ productions.

Considering *Monster Hunt*, it would appear that there were warning signs pointing to China’s ‘race to the bottom’, and that this is slowly becoming a reality because of the film’s production process. Having to reshoot and edit the film within a short time frame and at the personal expense of the people working behind the scenes does not help to establish a positive or conducive working environment for the film’s cast and crew. The stress of a short timeframe could explain the low quality of Base FX’s contribution to *Monster Hunt*, which resulted in the film’s negative reception, even though Chinese involvement in the VFX and CGI was marketed as the highlight of the film. Nonetheless, Hui and Base FX were given a second shot with *Monster Hunt 2* as Edko decided to try and establish *Monster Hunt* as China’s first fully-fledged tentpole franchise supported by merchandise and theme park attractions (Brzeski, 2017). As highlighted in Chapter Four, creating tentpole films is clearly an ambition for Chinese filmmakers, producers and production companies, as the Chinese film industry seeks to establish their own tentpoles to compete with those of Hollywood (see Chapter Four). As a response to the criticisms of the first film’s VFX

quality, *Monster Hunt 2* doubled the number of VFX shoots and cast significantly more prominent actors including international Chinese star, Tony Leung (Brzeski 2018).

Conclusion

The elements presented in Chapter Three and Four are still very much in play in the role of producing transnational collaborations involving premium VFX, though with some significant differences. This is because of the shift in focus from the producer, to the skilled technicians within the VFX industry. Nonetheless, it is important to examine this aspect of the film industry, as this sector is heavily dependent on transnational collaborations and is becoming increasingly essential in all film productions.

As in the previous chapters, the importance of obtaining cultural knowledge is perceived to be vital. This was mentioned by several Korean practitioners during our interviews. The Korean case study, *Mr. Go*, allowed Dexter Studios to establish a franchise in China and encouraged the growth of the Chinese VFX industry. This was not only accomplished through their *guanxi* connections, but also through the expertise of Korean practitioners, who experienced a degree of cultural proximity in terms of shared work practices with China. This was of use when overcoming the restrictive timelines offered by Chinese producers. In the case of *Monster Hunt*, although Base FX was established by an American, the company hired mostly Chinese technicians. Bremble therefore had to learn about the Chinese work culture, although he is trying to initiate a change through CPAA and fight for better working rights in China. Nevertheless, with *Monster Hunt*, Base FX followed the norms of working in the Chinese film industry, and followed the decisions set forth by the Chinese production company when they had to re-shoot certain scenes. With *Hero*, it is hard to identify the level of cultural knowledge obtained by technicians as work was mainly conducted in Australia.

Power dynamics still play a significant role in this kind of transnational collaboration, while geopolitical tensions tend to take a backseat. VFX practitioners are viewed as the 'faceless' people behind a film and are therefore not 'propelled' to be the face of the production. With reference to the political tensions between China and Korea, Dexter Studios and other Korean VFX companies are still able to work on Chinese productions, unlike other joint productions and other forms of popular cultural productions, which were placed on halt in China as they are dependent on the star power of Korean celebrities. Likewise, with Base FX, the trade tension between China and America (see Chapter Three) were not pertinent to this relationship. Additionally, the company has established itself in China, and is therefore viewed as a domestic operation.

Although geopolitics may not play a major role within this aspect of transnational collaboration, power dynamics are still very much in play. All three countries selected for this case study did have the expertise and experience that Chinese producers were looking for in their efforts to build the visual capabilities of Chinese *dapian* and in turn the country's soft power development. The power dynamics here are largely based on the reputation of the film and the popular culture industry of the participating nations. For instance, despite *Mr. Go* flopping in both China and Korea, the popularity and reputation of the film's director, Kim Yong-hwa, and his role in building *hallyu* through film, encouraged Chinese stakeholders to place their confidence in his ability to help develop the Chinese cinema industry. On the other hand, Base FX's Bremble did not have a similar reputation to Kim when he entered the Chinese market; however, being American from Hollywood gave him certain advantages. Base FX is thus providing various opportunities for their Chinese technicians to work on Hollywood film and television productions, giving them a platform to showcase their talent, and pushing the 'created-in-China' agenda.

In relation to the Australian-Chinese post-production relationship with *Hero*, Chinese audiences were aware of the great improvement in VFX in comparison to other local productions, and mainly praised the film's VFX and colours. Australian VFX companies are already well established as a result of their collaborations with Hollywood, which was especially the case with Animal Logic, although this fact was largely unknown to Chinese cinema audiences on Douban. Theoretically, the reputation of the Australian post-production industry could therefore assist in enticing prominent Chinese filmmakers to create official international co-productions with Australia. This is strongly encouraged by the Australian government based on the incentives on offer, improving the co-production relationship (refer to Chapter Three). But, as Australia is viewed as a junior partner in their co-production relationship, there seems to be less encouragement in engaging Australian post-production services.

The establishment of *guanxi* seems to be the most essential point of this chapter. All three studios mentioned in this chapter utilised their *guanxi* to establish their company in China. The Korean Dexter Studios used their support from Huayi Brothers to receive domestic status for *Mr. Go* and a significant level of Chinese publicity, demonstrating the advantages of co-producing partners. Despite throwing in last minute Chinese elements in order to recuperate production costs, the focus of the film production (VFX and 3D effects) proved to be successful as Dexter Studio devoted most of their financial resources to developing the film's production values, which were well-received by audiences. No doubt, this assisted Dexter Studios in demonstrating their potential and ability to develop the visual

artistry of Chinese cinema. The influence and support from the Huayi Brothers, along with popular Chinese director Tsui Hark (who heavily features VFX in his work), enabled Dexter Studios to establish themselves in the Chinese film industry. This allowed them to build an extensive portfolio of *dapian* (Chinese blockbusters), enabling them to boost their reputation on the Mainland.

Although Dexter Studios may be considered the exemplar case study when discussing the benefits of utilising *guanxi*, specifically through *guanxi* capital, Australia's Animal Logic and Bremble's Base FX also demonstrated a significant degree of success. Animal Logic established their network in China by building their *guanxi* with Zhang initially through their portfolio of productions, but eventually as a result of their work capabilities. This led to a number of VFX ventures on Zhang's productions after working on *Hero* including, *House of Flying Daggers* and *The Great Wall*. On the other hand, Base FX built their reputation through their American portfolio (through Hollywood and television dramas), along with their relationship with Hui and Kong as a result of producing *Monster Hunt*. This provided a positive push for in their involvement in major *dapian* including *The Wandering Earth*.

As is the case in any global film production, post-production companies and their employees are the silent heroes behind a successful film. They are the ones who effectively create the movie magic. As any visit to a cinema will reveal, audiences usually leave before the end credits finish rolling, unless incentives to stay are implemented. Therefore, the contribution of post-production companies is likely to be ignored by the mass audience. The hidden reality of such collaborations is not new. Nonetheless, post-production companies are essential in ensuring a film's success both visually and audibly. Examining all three case studies, audiences may not explicitly praise the post-production companies involved, but they do notice the difference when created in China productions engage in foreign VFX production. This highlights the significance of these transnational collaborations as audiences react positively to these collaborations, although they might not be aware of 'who' the people actually are behind these quality productions. Additionally, VFX could help China move forward in creating productions that are as visually appealing as those of their competing neighbours, Japan and Korea. The phenomenon of the new international division of cultural labour has encouraged a number of previously American-based studios to re-locate overseas due to tax incentives and/or cheap labour. Other foreign industries, including that of Korea, are following this trend as the Chinese film industry is currently capital rich and provides more opportunities for VFX practitioners that may have not been possible otherwise.

Though the case studies in this chapter demonstrate the potential growth in this kind of transnational collaboration, currently restrictions create difficulties for companies to achieve any improvements. Restrictions include the common practices in the Chinese film industry of working within tight timelines and reduced budgets. Companies with established networks and portfolios are able to charge a premium price because of their 'foreign' status in comparison to those established in China by locals. In spite of the lower labour costs in China, the biggest and most threatening disadvantage to the VFX industry in China is the high turnover rates as a result of issues in the work environment. Local Chinese VFX practitioners do not stay in the industry long enough to craft their skills and knowledge, leading to a small talent pool from which companies are able to choose. Power struggles between foreign VFX practitioners and producers are also still very much in play, as Chinese producers lack experience and/or are more concerned about short timelines, in order to meet profit margins. This has now become a norm in the Chinese film industry. Although the VFX industry sees China as a potential market beyond Hollywood, the examples of *Mr. Go* and *Hero* suggest that hiring foreign VFX companies is a more promising strategy, as it seems the Chinese producers are more respectful of their portfolio and workflow processes.

Concluding Chapter

This thesis has argued that the nature of international co-productions and foreign collaborations with China is not only dependent on the working relationships between producers, but also dependent on diplomatic agreements between China and the participating nations. As illustrated by the comments on *Douban*, these factors do have an impact on how Chinese audiences evaluate what they see on the big screen. Partnership with foreign producers and governments also suggests that international co-productions and collaborations are transnational because of their ability to forge connections across borders both culturally and economically through the transnational negotiation of cinema production, distribution and exhibition (Higbee & Lim, 2010; Higson, 2000). As I have identified, negotiating transnational film collaborations with China may involve acquiring the cultural knowledge necessary to negotiate the different ideologies of the participating countries and the target audience and the power dynamics that are operational between the participating nations. Each or all of these factors may play a positive or a negative role in the building of the *guanxi* networks that will enable or hinder such collaborations.

Within this context, cultural knowledge seemed to be one of the most significant issues identified in this research. The Australian case study of *Children of the Silk Road* (Chapter Three) demonstrated how having limited knowledge of Chinese culture and work practices may result in a challenging production process, which is then reflected in the film's content. During the *2016 Australia-China Co-production Forum*, the Australian producer of *Bleeding Steel*, Paul Currie, and the CEO of Village Roadshow, Ellen Eliasoph focussed on the 'chaos' that ensued when producing with the Chinese rather than presenting solutions or describing the strategies they implemented in order to adapt and move forward. Given Australia is perceived to be a junior partner by the Chinese (Yue, 2014), the Australian stakeholders could have used this opportunity to demonstrate their willingness to find common ground during the production process, rather than highlighting negative experiences. This could in turn have demonstrated Australia's willingness to develop a relationship with Chinese stakeholders and further develop *guanxi* relations.

The casting of Chinese-Australians with non-authentic Mandarin accents also demonstrated Australian producers' lack of cultural knowledge since they clearly believed that appearance alone could create a sense of authenticity amongst Chinese audiences. The 'non-authentic' Mandarin accents limits the concept of proximity, when political expectations clashes with other aspects of proximation and familiarity. In this instance, Chinese audiences were quick to pick up on the awkward Mandarin accents of specific actors and how these actors were unable to speak Mandarin well and therefore are not

'Chinese' as these particular accents are not represented in the pronunciation of Mandarin spoken by Mainland Chinese. Although *Children of the Silk Road* was categorised as an English-language film, this omission suggested a lack of willingness to incorporate authentic Chinese elements into what Chinese audiences consider a significant historical Chinese event. Arguably, these factors could work against Australia in building *guanxi* relations, as such creative decisions do not reflect a cultural sensitivity towards the power dynamics between Australia and China. However, as illustrated with *Bait 3D* (Chapter Four), Arclight managed to build their social relationships in China through the film's unexpected box office success. Through the *guanxi* relations built by Arclight, the company then attempted to provide further opportunities for Chinese-Australian co-productions through the initiative, Chinalight, though time has proven the program to be unsuccessful. Although no data is currently available on why the program ended without any output, my observations at the 2016 Australia-China Co-Production Forum was that the Australian producers demonstrated little cultural sensitivity when discussing their co-production experience with Chinese partners. Given this disregard and the audiences' reception of *Children of the Silk Road*, the outcome for Chinalight was not surprising. Australia's perception of the power dynamics that are operational in their transnational partnership with China seems to be in conflict with how China perceives this partnership given that China considers Australia to be junior partner, and not the other way around.

However, when examining the Australian VFX industry, it is clear that the power dynamics within this industry are different from Australia and China's co-production relationship. Australia's VFX industry is internationally well-known for their contribution to Hollywood blockbusters. The positive response from audiences to *Hero* (Chapter Five) established Australia as one of the key places for Chinese producers to go to for VFX service, but this relationship has been hindered by the cost of the Australian services. Although Australian VFX companies are perceived to be global leaders with their skills and expertise, the challenge faced by Australian VFX practitioners is whether they should be supporting the Australian national film industry through Chinese-foreign co-productions. Rather than assisting the Australian government in further establishing a good relationship between the Australian and Chinese film industry, the temptation for Australian VFX companies to remain globally competitive and to build their own relationship with the Chinese film industry is apparently much stronger, as this seems to be the direction in which the industry seems to be currently heading.

Reputation is also important in establishing *guanxi*, but this alone is not enough to establish a stable partnership. For example, *Mr. Go's* Dexter Studios (Chapter Five) illustrated how a positive reputation combined with a high level of cultural knowledge

about the Chinese industry, including work practices. Although the geopolitical relationship with Korea and China is on shaky ground, the networks built by Kim and his employees and their ensuing reputation, has placed them at the forefront of VFX in China. Additionally, Dexter Studios is considered to be a Korean company with experience in creating *hallyu* content, which could in turn assist Chinese filmmakers to achieve a similar aesthetic in their productions that is already familiar to Chinese audiences.

The examples of *The Mermaid* and *Kungfu Panda 3* as discussed in Chapter Three, demonstrate the importance of obtaining the cultural knowledge that may impact on the building of *guanxi* (with *The Mermaid*) in order to produce an authentic film for Chinese audiences (*Kungfu Panda 3*). Chow's decision to use a hybridised version of the *mo lei tau* genre, and to modify it to fit the Mainland's market of incorporating socialist ideologies in *The Mermaid*, played a significant role in building *guanxi* by demonstrating *mianzi* to both Chinese officials and the Chinese media landscape. *Kungfu Panda 3* followed a similar path in the display of *mianzi* by hiring a Chinese team to ensure that the film accurately portrayed Chinese culture, leading to positive reviews from the Douban audience. This was also clear in the case of *Monster Hunt's* Base FX as discussed in Chapter Five where *mianzi* was also shown to the Chinese film industry and government by providing work opportunities in Hollywood for Chinese practitioners and by promoting the 'created in China' agenda as pronounced by officials.

CFG's financial investment in Legendary Entertainment's production of *Seventh Son* and *Warcraft* (Chapter Four) could also be perceived as the company's attempt to build *guanxi* with the Chinese film industry. As Legendary Entertainment is not part of the Hollywood Big Six, partnering with a Chinese state-run company provided them with a stable foundation in the Chinese film market. This financial investment also allowed them to create films with a big budget and to demonstrate their potential for creating tentpole films. As the agreement was viewed as a 'silent' partnership, in order to help push China's soft power ambition, CFG was willing to learn from their 'seniors' in the industry. This resulted in a relationship in which CFG (China) was constructed as the student, and Legendary Entertainment (USA) as the teacher. An understanding of how to create blockbuster hits with the potential of creating a tentpole franchise could be perceived as valuable knowledge for the Chinese. At time of writing, the relationship between Legendary Entertainment and the Chinese film industry is unclear. Although Legendary Entertainment was acquired by the Wanda Group (China) in 2016, Jack Gao stepped down as CEO of Legendary Entertainment in 2017 as the Wanda Group announced that they would be refocusing their investment in China as they are 'actively respond[ing] to the call of the country' (He, 2017).

Hypothetically, transnational collaborations with Chinese filmmakers and production companies may be beneficial for both the Chinese and the foreign partners, but in reality, the power dynamics are starting to shift. China is slowly moving in the direction of producing their own blockbusters (*dapian*). This shift signals the importance of understanding the changing climate of the Chinese film industry and the impact that change could have on potential future Chinese-foreign co-productions and collaborations

Implications and Limitations of Study

Films usually require years of development before they are released to the public. The rapid growth and transformation of the Chinese film industry was much in evidence during the duration of this research, demonstrating the increasing growth and confidence of Chinese film practitioners. Indeed, the screen industry is changing, as China and their foreign partners, along with relevant government regulations, are constantly moving forward with new strategies and ideas. However, China's desire to develop their reputation, both domestically and internationally, can be related to their attempts to enhance their cultural influence, or rather their soft power appeal, through promoting the 'created in China' brand (Barr, 2011; Li, 2008; Keane, 2007). This could be considered as a direct response to the domestic and international competition of popular cultural products from their neighbours (Korea and Japan), along with Hollywood.

It seems reasonable to assume that China would prefer to use the potential of their resources (including economic and human capital) to their advantage. On the other hand, the eagerness of foreign filmmakers to enter the Chinese film market is based on the market's potential audience reach and the availability of resources - including capital - that may not have been available to them otherwise. This could assist foreign producers and practitioners to fulfil their ambitions in creating films that may not have been possible without Chinese investment or a Chinese platform for distribution. This growing trend for transnational collaborations with the Chinese calls for further research by both academics and practitioners to learn more about the ways in which foreign stakeholders could contribute to the Chinese film industry. Such insights may be vital to future successful collaborations.

Despite the relatively narrow focus of this thesis involving nine case studies addressing four different aspects of collaborations with China, the films selected for analysis are significant in that they illustrate many of the issues that have emerged involving international co-production and collaborations with China. This research is especially

relevant to the burgeoning Chinese film market, as Hollywood and other film industries including Australia, Korea and Hong Kong, are seeking new ways to attract Chinese audiences to their films. From the beginning of 2018 to mid-2019, China has focussed on releasing their own version of a Hollywood blockbuster to compete with Hollywood productions released into their domestic market (although it is important to also note that the Chinese government has a considerable amount of control over the foreign film quota). So far, the locally produced 'created in China' film *The Wandering Earth*, has been the highest grossing IMAX film to be released domestically, surpassing the previous number one film *Avengers: Infinity War* (Frater, 2019; Russo & Russo, 2018). This suggests that there may be more intriguing changes to come within the Chinese film industry in the near future. The producers of *Wolf Warrior 2* and *The Wandering Earth* have prided themselves on their Chinese-led productions that have become the top two highest grossing domestic films in China of all time (CBO 中國票房, 2019). This is a significant achievement, as previously most of the films in this category were co-produced with Hong Kong. Furthermore, although post-production has previously been conducted in collaboration with foreign companies, China is now gradually taking the initiative in producing their own films for their own audiences, on their own terms.

As this research has only considered collaborations with Australia, Hollywood, Hong Kong and Korea, it would be useful if future research investigated how other countries are seeking to collaborate with China, including India and Japan. This would illuminate the nature of their political relationships with China and how this influences the production's content as well as the collaborative process. For instance, examining the relationship between China and countries associated with the *One Belt, One Road* initiative could shed light on China's soft power ambitions and their desire to build a positive reputation with the countries along this planned route.

Additionally, exploring audiences' reviews concerning their cinema-going behaviour could result in a better understanding of how the selected films fare. This could include a bigger study, interviewing Chinese cinema audiences within the *wenyi qingnian* group to gain a broader understanding of what they know about international co-production and collaborations and whether they consider such films have achieved their goals based on the filmmakers' and other stakeholders' intentions. It could also be useful to break away from the *wenyi qingnian* group to examine the other sectors of the audience and their interpretation of these forms of collaborations through focus groups and surveys.

To conclude, the Chinese film industry is now moving towards the next chapter in its foreign collaborations as the Chinese become more focused on leading their own productions. Box office figures released at the end of September 2018 suggests that the ticket revenue for studio imports was down by 24% compared to figures from September 2017; however, local box office revenues increased by 13.7%, highlighting the success of recent Chinese films in the market (Brzeski, 2018c). China is presumably moving in the right direction with their 'created in China' productions that do not involve foreign investment or partnerships with other national film industries, although more effort may be needed if the industry is to compete with productions from Hollywood, Korea and Japan.

The elements of transnational collaboration highlighted in this research demonstrate the strategy that China has used thus far to achieve this. In the future, the evolution of the technologies that are fuelling the forces of globalisation will enable Chinese filmmakers to collaborate with film practitioners all over the world, while providing them with new distribution channels. Perhaps, soon, the Chinese film industry will be have a significant impact both domestically *and* internationally, and thus change the landscape of the international film industry in dramatic ways.

References

- Abrams, J. J. (Director). (2015). *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- ACCI. (2013). *Case Study: Animal Logic*. Retrieved from Canberra: https://www.exportawards.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/5434/Animal%20Logic%20Case%20study_AEA_approved.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y
- Adamson, A., Asbury, K., & Vernon, C. (Directors). (2004). *Shrek 2*. United States: DreamWorks Pictures.
- Adamson, A., & Jenson, V. (Directors). (2001). *Shrek*. United States: DreamWorks Pictures.
- Administration, I. T. (2019). Free Trade Agreements. Retrieved from <https://www.trade.gov/fta/>
- Ahn, S. (Director). (2011). *Blind*. South Korea: Next Entertainment World.
- Ahn, S. (Director). (2015). *The Witness*. China and South Korea: Beijing Enlight Pictures.
- Alasuutari, P. (1995). *Researching culture qualitative methods in cultural studies*. London: Sage Publication.
- Amidi, A. (2016, 21 April). Rhythm and Huges co-founder John Hughes to launch major Chinese VFX studio. *Cartoon Brew*. Retrieved from <https://www.cartoonbrew.com/business/rhythm-hues-studios-138984.html>
- Andreacchio, M. (Director). (2011). *The Dragon Pearl*. Australia and China: Umbrella Entertainment.
- Andreacchio, M. (2013). *Beyond the Great Wall – Pathways to Australia-China Co-Productions*. Retrieved from <https://www.aftrs.edu.au/media/books/ScreenBusiness/sb-whitepaper/index.html>
- Annaud, J.-J. (Director). (2015). *Wolf Totem*. China and France: Columbia Pictures Corporation
- Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7(2-3), 295-310.
- Ausfilm. (2016). The Production Offset. Retrieved from <https://www.ausfilm.com.au/incentives/the-producer-offset-and-co-production-treaties/>
- Screen Australia. (2013). *Common Ground: Opportunities for Australian screen partnerships in Asia*. Retrieved from <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/3374b628-c79d-4717-9ofa-71e0c836cd37/Common-ground-report.pdf?ext=.pdf>
- Screen Australia. (2017). Number of feature films produced and key cinema data, 2008-2017. Retrieved from <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/fact-finders/international-context/world-rankings/feature-films-and-cinemas>
- Bait. (2019). Retrieved from <http://v.baidu.com/kan/movie/?id=37375&url=http://www.letv.com/ptv/vplay/1826131.html#frp=v.baidu.com/v>
- Baltruschat, D. (2010). *Global Media Ecologies: Networked Production in Film and Television*. New York: Routledge.
- Barbalet, J. (2015). Guanxi, tie strength, and network attributes. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(8), 1038-1050.
- Barkan, K. (2014, 28 February). What's wrong with the visual effects industry? *ACM SIGGRAPH*. Retrieved from <https://www.siggraph.org/whats-wrong-with-the-visual-effects-industry/>
- Barker, M., & Mathijs, E. (2008). *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's World Audience*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Barnes, B. (2016, 17 October). Dalian Wanda of China Offers a Carrot to Hollywood. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/18/business/media/dalian-wanda-goes-on-an-entertainment-shopping-spreed.html>
- Barr, M. (2011). *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Barraclough, L. (2016, 4 November). 'Doctor Strange' VFX firm Framestore sold to China's CIH. *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2016/film/asia/framestore-china-cultural-investment-holdings-1201909720/>
- BaseFX. (2015, 10 September). Base FX's Christopher Bremble talks about *Monster Hunt* And his China adventure. *Base FX*. Retrieved from <http://www.base-fx.com/base-fxs-christopher-bremble-talks-about-monster-hunt-and-his-china-adventure/>

- Bay, M. (Director). (2014). *Transformers: Age of Extinction*. United States and China: Paramount Pictures.
- Bayona, J. (Director). (2018). *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*. United States: Universal Pictures International (UPI).
- BBC. (2016, 5 May). China's love affair with online game World of Warcraft. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-36209913>
- Beech, H. (2017, 26 January). How China is remaking the global film industry. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4649913/china-remaking-global-film-industry/>
- Benjamin, P. (2012, 24 October). "Bait 3D": Troubled waters. *inSing*. Retrieved from <http://movies.insing.com/feature/featurebait-3d-troubled-watersid-bo623foo/id-bo623foo/>
- Beresford, B. (Director). (2009). *Mao's Last Dancer*. In. Australia and United States: Samuel Goldwyn Films.
- Berry, C. (2003). "What's big about the big film?": "de-Westernizing" the blockbuster in Korea and China. In J. Stringer (Ed.), *Movie Blockbuster* (pp. 217-229). London: Routledge.
- Berry, C. (2010). What is transnational cinema? Thinking from the Chinese situation. *Transnational Cinemas*, 1(2), 111-127.
- Berry, C. (2014). Transnational Culture in East Asia and the Logic of Assemblage. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 41(5), 453-470.
- Berry, C., Iwabuchi, K., & Tsai, E. (2017). *Routledge handbook of East Asian popular culture*. London ;: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Berry, C., & Pang, L. (2008). Introduction, or, what's in an 's'? *Journal of Chinese Cinema*, 2(1), 3-8.
- Besson, L. (Director). (1997). *The Fifth Element*. France: Gaumont Buena Vista International and Sony Pictures Releasing.
- Bhattacharya, A., & Michael, D. (2008). How local companies keep multinationals by bay. *Harvard Business Review*, 86(3), 84-95.
- Bian, Y. (2002). Chinese social stratification and social mobility. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 91.
- Bian, Y. (2019). *Guanxi, How China Works*. Medford: Polity Press.
- Black, I. (2006). The presentation of interpretivist research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 9(4), 319-324.
- Black, S. (Director). (2013). *Iron Man 3*. United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Blenkinsopp, J., & Pajouh, M. S. (2010). Lost in translation? Culture, language and the role of the translator in international business. *Critical perspectives on international business*, 6(1), 38-52.
- Blum, J. (2014, 4 July). *Transformers: Age of Extinction* is a terrible film, but hilarious to watch as a Hongkonger. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/comment/blogs/article/1546529/transformers-age-extinction-terrible-movie-hilarious-watch-hongkonger>
- Bodrov, S. (Director). (2014). *Seventh Son*. United Kingdom, United States, Canada and China: Universal Pictures International (UPI).
- Bondebjerg, I., Redvall, E. N., Helles, R., Lai, S. S., Søndergaard, H., & Astrupgaard, C. (2017). *Transnational European Television Drama Production, Genres and Audiences*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood Press.
- boyd, d., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 662-679.
- Bremble, C. (Director). (2005). *Deep Rescue*. In: Tranquility Base Productions.
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brzeski, P. (2016a, 28 February). 'Kung Fu Panda 3' becomes China's biggest animated film ever. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/kung-fu-panda-3-becomes-871149>
- Brzeski, P. (2016b, 2 November). Wanda Chairman reveals ambitious plan to invest billions in "all six" Hollywood studios. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/wanda-chairman-wang-jianlin-plans-invest-billions-hollywood-942854>
- Brzeski, P. (2017, 2 November). Inside China's 'Monster Hunt' franchise plans: tentpoles, theme

- lands and legal licensing deals. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/inside-chinas-monster-hunt-franchise-plans-tentpoles-theme-lands-legal-licensing-deals-1054012>
- Brzeski, P. (2018a, 20 March). China's Propaganda Department to Regulate Film Industry. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/chinas-propaganda-department-regulate-film-industry-1096127>
- Brzeski, P. (2018b, March 20). Filmart: China's Pearl Studio execs talk plans post-dreamworks, new Netflix partnership. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/filmart-chinas-pearl-studio-exec-s-talk-plans-post-dreamworks-new-netflix-partnership-1094593>
- Brzeski, P. (2018c, 10 March). Hollywood's box-office market share down sharply in China. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/hollywoods-box-office-market-share-down-sharply-china-1147593>
- Buckley, P. J., Clegg, J., & Tan, H. (2010). Cultural Awareness in Knowledge Transfer to China — The Role of Guanxi and Mianzi. In *Foreign Direct Investment, China and the World Economy* (pp. 165-191). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Burkitt, L. (2016, 9 March). Are China's box-office numbers fudged? Regulators investigate 'ghost screenings'. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2016/03/09/are-chinas-box-office-numbers-fudged-regulators-investigate-ghost-screenings/>
- Bynes, P. (2008, 3 July). Children of the Silk Road. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/children-of-the-silk-road-20080703-gdskmu.html>
- Cain, R. (2012, 12 July). How China's movie distribution system works, part 2. *Chinafilmbiz*. Retrieved from
- Cain, R. (2015, 1 August). China's national summer blackout is a roaring success. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robocain/2015/08/01/chinas-national-summer-blackout-is-a-roaring-success/#65127a897554>
- Cain, R. (2017, 3 October). Hollywood's MPAA uncovers significant box office under-reporting by Chinese theatres. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://chinafilmbiz.com/2012/11/03/more-on-how-to-deal-with-classic-chinese-negotiating-tactics/https://www.forbes.com/sites/robocain/2017/10/03/hollywoods-mpaa-uncovers-significant-box-office-under-reporting-by-chinese-theaters/#7177366a2da8>
- Caldwell, J. (2008). *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Cameron, J. (Director). (2009). *Avatar*. United States: 20th Century Fox.
- Campbell, N. (1987). Experiences of Western companies in China. *Euro-Asia Business Review*, July, 128-140.
- Carloni, A., & Nelson, J. Y. (Directors). (2016). *Kung Fu Panda 3*. United States and China: 20th Century Fox.
- CCNIC. (2017). *The 40th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*. Retrieved from Beijing: <https://cnnic.com.cn/IDR/ReportDownloads/201807/P020180711387563090220.pdf>
- CEPA. (2019). Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA). Retrieved from https://www.tid.gov.hk/english/cepa/tradeservices/av_cinema_picture_lib.html
- CFCC. (2001). 电影管理条例 dianying guanli tiaoli [Film management regulation]. Retrieved from <http://cfcc-film.com.cn/polic/content/id/21.html>
- CFCC. (2019). Guidelines. *China Film Co-production Corporation*. Reterieved from <http://www.cfcc-film.com.cn/introeg/busine.html>
- Chan, B. (2014, 12 February). Taking aim at China. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.straitstimes.com/the-big-story/case-you-missed-it/story/taking-aim-china-20140215>
- Chan, J. M., Fung, A. Y. H., & Ng, C. H. (2010). *Policies for the Sustainable Development of the Hong Kong Film Industry*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.
- Chan, K. (2009). *Remade in Hollywood: the global Chinese presence in Transnational Cinema*.

- Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Chan, K., & Cheng, H. (2002). One country, two systems: Cultural values reflected in Chinese and Hong Kong television commercials. *International Communication Gazette*, 64(4), 385-400.
- Cheang, P. (Director). (2014). *The Monkey King*. In. Hong Kong and China: Filmko Entertainment.
- Chen, K. (Director). (2015). *Monk Comes down the Mountain*. In. China: New Classics Media.
- Chen, L. (Director). (2015). *20 Once Again*. In. South Korea and China: Union Pictures.
- Chen, S. (Director). (2018). *Detective Chinatown 2*. In. China: CMC Pictures Holdings
- Chen, Y., & Xie, J. (2006). Online consumer review: Word-of-Mouth as a new element of marketing communication mix. *Management Science*, 54(3), 477- 491.
- China, P. (2016, 8 March 2016). Stephen Chow and Hong Kong Mo Lei Tau Comedy. Retrieved from <http://pigchina.com/stephen-chow-hong-kong-mo-lei-tau-comedy-2/>
- Chow, S. (Director). (2001). *Shaolin Soccer*. Hong Kong: Miramax Films.
- Chow, S. (Director). (2004). *Kung Fu Hustle*. Hong Kong and China: Columbia Pictures.
- Chow, S. (Director). (2008). *CJ7*. Hong Kong and China: Columbia Pictures.
- Chow, S. (Director). (2016). *The Mermaid*. China and Hong Kong: Sony Pictures Releasing.
- Chow, S., & Kwok, D. (Directors). (2013). *Journey to the West: Conquering the Demon*. China and Hong Kong: Edko Films.
- Chu, S. (2015). Towards a new Hong Kong cinema: Beyond Mainland – Hong Kong co-productions. *Journal of Chinese Cinema*, 9(2), 111-124.
- Chua, B. (2004). Conceptualizing an East Asian popular culture. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 5(2), 200-221.
- Chua, B. (2010). Engendering an East Asia pop culture research community *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 11(2), 202-206.
- Chua, B. H. (2012). *Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, HKU.
- Chung, O. (2007, 19 May 2007). China scores in online game battle. *Asia Times Online*. Retrieved from http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China_Business/1E19Cbo2.html
- Colman, C. (2016a, 8 January). Chris Bremble: leading the Base FX Juggernaut – Part 2. *Animation World Network*. Retrieved from <https://www.awn.com/vfxworld/chris-bremble-leading-base-fx-juggernaut-part-2>
- Colman, C. (2016b, 29 July). 'Feng Zhen Bang': blockbusting VFX in China. *Animation World Network*. Retrieved from <https://www.awn.com/vfxworld/feng-shen-bang-blockbusting-vfx-china>
- Coonan, C. (2014, 14 April). State-owned China Film Group Makes groundbreaking investment in 'Warcraft,' 'Seventh Son'. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/state-owned-china-film-group-696091>
- Coonan, C. (2015, 13 January). Legendary East, Chinese firm team on 'Seventh Son' mobile game. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/legendary-east-chinese-firm-team-763258>
- Crane, D. (2014). Cultural globalization and the dominance of the American film industry: cultural policies, national film industries, and transnational film. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 20(4), 365-382.
- Cuarón, A. (Director). (2013). *Gravity*. United Kingdom and United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Culton, J. (Director). (2019). *Abominable*. United States and China: Universal Studio and Pearl Studio.
- Cunningham, S. (2002). From Cultural to Creative Industries: Theory, Industry and Policy Implications. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, 102(1), 54-65.
- Cunningham, S., Jacka, E., & Sinclair, J. (1998). Global and regional dynamics of international television flows. In D. K. Thussu (Ed.), *Electronic Empires: Global Media and Local Resistance* (pp. 250-265). London: Arnold.
- Cunningham, T., & Lang, B. (2013, 27 August). Chinese anxious for movie-ratings system, complain local films 'too conservative'. *The Wrap*. Retrieved from <https://www.thewrap.com/chinese-anxious-have-movie-ratings-system-complain-movies-are-too-expensive-113391/>
- Curtin, M. (2007). *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Curtin, M. (2013). *Renationalizing Hong Kong cinema: The gathering force of the mainland market*. London: Routledge.
- Curtin, M., & Vanderhoef, J. (2014). A Vanishing Piece of the Pi: The Globalization of Visual Effects Labor. *Television & New Media*, 16(3), 219-239.
- Da, Y. T. (2012, 1 November). 大海啸》票房接近一亿五成黑马(图) – Bait: Black horse at the box office earning 1.5million Yuan. *Sina Entertainment*. Retrieved from <http://ent.huanqiu.com/yuleyaowen/2012-11/3232870.html?agt=15422>
- Dalton, K. (2004). *US Free Trade Agreement – the new opportunities and impacts*. Retrieved from https://afcarchive.screenaustralia.gov.au/downloads/policies/apec_kd_final_web.pdf
- Deboer, S. (2015). Working through China: Scaled convergence and the contingencies of East Asia film coproduction. *Screen*, 56(2), 214-233.
- Delaney, C. (2012, 15 October). Bait 3D takes \$7m on opening weekend in China. *Mumbrella*. Retrieved from <https://mumbrella.com.au/bait-3d-takes-7m-on-opening-weekend-in-china-121656>
- Delaney, J. (2004). *The Spook's Apprentice*. UK: The Bodley Head.
- DeWalt, K. M., & DeWalt, B. R. (2011). *Participant observation a guide for fieldworkers* (2nd ed. ed.). Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, 40(4), 314-321.
- Ding, S. (2008). To Build A "Harmonious World": China's Soft Power Wielding in the Global South. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 13(2), 193-213.
- Donald, S. H. (2011). Chinese Media Studies: A Belated Introduction? *Media International Australia*, 138(1), 57-65.
- Dreher, A. (2006). Does globalization affect growth? Evidence from a new index of globalization. *Applied Economics*, 38(10), 1091-1110.
- Duan, W., Gu, B., & Whinston, A. B. (2008). The dynamics of online word-of-mouth and product sales – An empirical investigation of the movie industry. *Journal of Retailing*, 84(2), 233 – 242.
- Dunfee, T. W., & Warren, D. E. (2001). Is Guanxi Ethical? A Normative Analysis of Doing Business in China. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 32(3), 191-204.
- Edwards, G. (2011, 15 August). Visual effects in China. *Cinefex*. Retrieved from <http://cinefex.com/blog/vfx-china/>
- Entertainment, S. (2012, 23 September). Bait 3D. *STM Entertainment Magazine*.
- Entgroup. (2015). *China Film Industry Report 2014-2015*. Retrieved from Beijing: <http://english.entgroup.cn/uploads/reports/China%20Film%20Industry%20Report%202014-2015%E4%BC%88in%20brief%E4%BC%89.pdf>
- entgroup. (2019). Retrieved from <http://english.entgroup.cn>
- Eschholz, S., Bufkin, J., & Long, J. (2002). Symbolic reality bites: women and racial/ethnic minorities in modern film. *Sociological Spectrum*, 22(3), 299-334.
- Farquhar, M. (2009). Digital imaginaries: Zhang Yimou's Hero and Sydney's Animal Logic. In M. Farquhar (Ed.), *21st century China: views from Australia* (pp. 204-222). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Farrelly, P. (Director). (2018). *Green Book*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Faughnder, R., & Koren, J. (2017, 12 November). As China cools on Hollywood, the movie business looks closer to home for money. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/business/hollywood/la-fi-ct-china-hollywood-foreign-investment-2017112-htmlstory.html>
- Feng, X. (Director). (2003). *Cell Phone*. China: Columbia Pictures.
- Finney, A., & Triana, E. (2015). *The International Film Business: A Market Guide Beyond Hollywood*. London: Routledge.
- Fitzpatrick, S. (2012, 5 September). Publicity-shy Malick a no show at Wonder's Venice debut. *The Australian*, p. 7.
- Forsey, M. G. (2010). Ethnography as participant listening. 11(4), 558-572.
- Frater, P. (2014, January 17). China adds 5,000 cinema screens in 2013. *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2014/biz/news/china-adds-5000-cinema-screens-in-2013-1201062132/>
- Frater, P. (2015, 22 January). China's censor explains why breasts were cut from period drama. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2015/tv/asia/chinas-censor-explains-why->

- [breasts-were-cut-from-period-drama-1201411719/](#)
- Frater, P. (2016, 9 March). China to introduce film law this year. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2016/film/asia/china-to-introduce-film-law-1201726912/>
- Frater, P. (2017, 21 August). Chinese companies turn to reset relationship With Hollywood. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2017/film/asia/second-china-hollywood-era-dawns-acquisitions-frenzy-halted-1202534125/>
- Frater, P. (2018a, 20 March). China movie industry oversight shifted to Communist Propaganda Department. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2018/film/asia/china-movie-regulation-communist-propaganda-department-1202732209/>
- Frater, P. (2018b, 20 May). U.S.-China Film Talks Now Hostage to Trade War (Report). *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2018/film/asia/us-china-film-talks-trade-war-1202817057/>
- Frater, P. (2019, 18 February). China box office: 'Wandering Earth' reaches \$557 million in second week. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2019/film/news/china-box-office-wandering-earth-557-million-second-week-1203142117/>
- Fredriksson, L. (2019, 6 February). On screen China: 2019 Chinese New Year films. *China Film Insider*. Retrieved from http://chinafilminsider.com/on-screen-china-2019-chinese-new-year-films/?utm_source=China+Film+Insider+Newsletter+Update&utm_campaign=ccf486dcaa-_-Daily+Newsletter+2017+January+9+COPY+01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_gao66bgdc2-ccf486dcaa-226857557
- Frei, V. (2016, 10 June). Warcraft: Hal Hickel - animation supervisor - Industrial Light & Magic. *Art of VFX*. Retrieved from <https://www.artofvfx.com/warcraft-hal-hickel-animation-supervisor-industrial-light-magic/>
- Frei, V. (2017, 19 May). Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2: Christopher Townsend - production VFX supervisor - Marvel Studios. *Art of VFX*. Retrieved from <http://www.artofvfx.com/guardians-of-the-galaxy-vol-2-christopher-townsend-production-vfx-supervisor-marvel-studios/>
- Fritz, B. (2018). *The Big Picture: The Fight for the Future of Movies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Fritz, B., & Burkitt, L. (2015, 19 April). China Film Group takes role in Hollywood. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-film-group-takes-role-in-hollywood-1429479876>
- Fu, W. W. (2013). National Audience Tastes in Hollywood Film Genres: Cultural Distance and Linguistic Affinity. *40*(6), 789-817.
- Fung, A. (2013). *Asian Popular Culture: the Global (Dis)continuity*. London: Routledge.
- Fung, A., & Liao, S. (2015). China. In M. Wolf (Ed.), *Video Games Around the World* (pp. 119 - 136). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Fung, A. Y. H. (2008). *Global capital, local culture : transnational media corporations in China*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Galloway, J. J., & Meek, F. L. (1981). Audience uses and gratifications: An expectancy model. *Communication Research*, *8*, 435-449.
- Gao, Z. (2009). Serving a stir-fry of market, culture and politics – on globalisation and film policy in Greater China'. *Policy Studies*, *30*(4), 423-438.
- Gardner, E. (2013, 20 February). Legendary Pictures is willing to pay to complete its Jeff Bridges film scheduled for release in October. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/seventh-son-rhythm-hues-seeks-422619>
- Ge, C. (2017, 28 July). It's fade out for Hong Kong's film industry as China moves into the spotlight. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/business/article/2104540/its-fade-out-hong-kongs-film-industry-china-moves-spotlight>
- Giardina, C. (2016, 10 June). How 'Warcraft's' visual effects wizards brought thousands of orcs to life. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/behind-screen/warcraft-how-visual-effects-turned-901243>
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black Atlantic : modernity and double consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Go, Y. C. (Director). (2014). *The Empress of China*. China: China Film Group Corporation.
- Goldsmith, B., & O'Regan, T. (2008). International film production: interest and motivation. In J. Wasko and M. Erickson (Ed.), *Cross-Border Cultural Production: Economic Runaway or Globalization?* (pp. 13-44). Amherst: Cambria Press.
- Goldsmith, B., Ward, S., & O'Regan, T. (2010). *Local Hollywood: Global Film Production and the Gold Coast*. St Lucia: University of Queensland.
- Goldstein, G. (2012, 6 October). China partner helps 'Looper' win big. *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2012/film/box-office/china-partner-helps-looper-win-big-1118060324/>
- Gonzalez, M. (2009, 15 September). Mao's Last Dancer: the dancer in red. *Mumbrella*. Retrieved from <https://mumbrella.com.au/801-801>
- Gracetot. (2012, 7 November). 《大海啸》吸金 1.5 亿 《2012》再映淘金 - Bait made 150 million Yuan "digging gold" from audience. *Sina Entertainment*. Retrieved from <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/f/2012-11-07/14443781979.shtml>
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.
- Graser, M. (2015, 4 February). Legendary stumbles with big Writedowns on 'Seventh Son,' 'Blackhat' (exclusive). *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2015/film/news/legendary-stumbles-with-writedowns-on-seventh-son-blackhat-exclusive-1201423728/>
- Greifinger, R., St. Louis, G., Lunstead, J., Malik, N., & Vibbert, M. (2014). Participant observation at a youth HIV conference. *13*(2), 237-254.
- Gunn, J. (Director). (2017). *Guardian of the Galaxy Vol. 2* United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Gwo, F. (Director). (2019). *The Wandering Earth*. China: Netflix.
- Hall, S. (1991 [1973]). Encoding/decoding. In S. During (Ed.), *The Cultural Studies Reader* (pp. 90-103). London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1995). New culture for old. In D. Massey & P. Jess (Eds.), *A place in the world? Places Cultur eand Globalisation* (pp. 175-214). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, S. (2012, 20 September). Blood, shrieks and jeers: stars take Bait in wet and wild ride. *Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 15.
- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hammitt-Jamart, J. (2004). Regulating diversity: cultural diversity, national film policy and the international Coproduction of films. *Media International Australia*, *111*, 46-62.
- Harashima, D. (2018, 1 February). Piracy crackdown boosts China's cinema sales. *Nikkei Asian Review*. Retrieved from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Piracy-crackdown-boosts-China-s-cinema-sales>
- Hark, T. (Director). (2014). *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*. China and Hong Kong: Huaxin Film Distribution.
- He, L. (2017, 17 October). Jack Gao exists Wanda, Legendary Entertainment as group's global push faces setback. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/business/companies/article/2115764/jack-gao-exits-wanda-legendary-entertainment-groups-global-push>
- Henning-Thurau, T., Wiertz, C., & Fledhaus, F. (2015). Does Twitter matter? The impact of microblogging word of mouth on consumers' adoption of new movies. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *43*(3), 375-394.
- Hennock, M. (2012, 21 February). Boost for Hollywood studios as China agrees to ease quota on US films. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/20/china-eases-import-quota-hollywood-films>
- Hero. (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=hero02.htm>
- Higbee, W., & Lim, S. H. (2010). Concepts of transnational cinema: towards a critical transnationalism in film studies. *Transnational Cinemas*, *1*(1), 7 - 21.
- Higson, A. (2000). The limiting imagination of national cinema. In M. Hjort & S. MacKenzie (Eds.), *Cinema and Nation* (pp. 63-74). London: Routledge.
- HKMPIA. (2010). *Statistical Digest of the Services Sector*. Retrieved from Hong Kong:

- Ho, P., & Tsou, T. (1986). *China in Crisis* (Vol. 1, bk. 1). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Culture and organisations: software of the mind*. London: McGraw Hill.
- Hofstede, G., & Bond, M. H. (1988). The Confucius connection: from cultural roots to economic growth. *Organizational dynamics*, 16(4), 5-21.
- Hoskins, C., McFadyen, S., & Finn, A. (1998). The effects of cultural differences on the international co-production of television programs and feature films. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 23(4), 523-538.
- Hoskins, C., McFadyen, S., & Finn, A. (1999). International joint ventures in the production of Australian feature films and television programs. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 24(1), 127-139.
- Hoskins, C., McFadyen, S., Finn, A., & Jäckel, A. (1995). Film and television co-production: Evidence from Canadian-European experience. *European of Communication*, 10(2), 221-243.
- Huang, Z. (2018, 8 August). China's gaming industry suffers revenue slowdown as new government body kills approval of upcoming titles. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/tech/article/2158743/chinas-gaming-industry-suffers-revenue-slowdown-new-government-body-kills>
- Huh, Y. (1984). *The 7th Team* (제7공작단). South Korea.
- Hui, R. (Director). (2015). *Monster Hunt*. In China and Hong Kong: Edko Films.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2002). *Recentering globalization : popular culture and Japanese transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2014). De-westernisation, inter-Asian referencing and beyond. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17(1), 44-57.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Jin, D. Y. (2011). A critical analysis of US cultural policy in the global film market: Nation-states and FTAs. *International Communication Gazette*, 73(8), 651-669.
- Jin, E. (Director). (2009). *Sophie's Revenge*. China and South Korea: China Film Group.
- Jin, E. (2015, 26 November). Korea-Chinese films pose new opportunities. *Korea Joongang Daily*. Retrieved from <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3012040>
- Jing, W. (Director). (2010). *Future X-Cops*. China, Hong Kong, Taiwan: Mega-Vision Pictures Ltd.
- Jing, W. (Director). (2017). *Wolf Warrior 2*. China: China Film Group
- Johnson, R. (Director). (2012). *Looper*. United States and China: Roadshow Films.
- Johnson, T. (2016, 24 June). China looks to Australia for film production opportunities. *Film Ink*. Retrieved from <https://filmink.com.au/2016/china-looks-to-australia-for-film-production-opportunities/>
- Jones, D. (Director). (2016). *Warcraft*. United States, China, Canada and Japan: Universal Pictures International (UPI).
- Jones, D. M. (2018, 18 July 2018, 10.49am). I know. I'm sorry. That's not looking likely, I'm afraid. Too many companies involved to thread that needle. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/ManMadeMoon/status/1018553145889189889>
- Joo, J. (2011). Transnationalisation of Korean popular culture and the rise of "pop nationalism" in Korea. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44(3), 489 - 504.
- Kammerer, P. (2018, 29 January). In Hong Kong, animosity towards mainland Chinese can't be overcome without an open mind. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2130985/hong-kong-animosity-towards-mainland-chinese-cant-be>
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- Kataoka, T. (1974). *Resistance and Revolution in China: The Communists and the Second United Front*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1955). *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. New York: Free Press.
- Kaufman, D. (2019, 20 March). Global VFX: state of the industry 2019. *VFXV: The Magazine of the Visual Effects Society*. Retrieved from <http://vfxvoice.com/global-vfx-state-of-the-industry-2019/>

- Kaytis, C., & Reilly, F. (Directors). (2016). *The Angry Birds Movie*. Finland and United States: Sony Pictures Releasing.
- Keane, M. (2007). *Created in China: The Great Leap Forward*. New York: Routledge.
- Keane, M. (2010). Keeping Up with the Neighbors: China's Soft Power Ambitions. *Cinema Journal*, 49(3), 130-135.
- Keane, M. (2016). *Handbook of Cultural and Creative Industries in China: Handbooks of Research on Contemporary China series*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Keane, M., Yecies, B. & Flew, T. (2018) *Willing Collaborators: Foreign Partners in China*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Kearney, M. (1995). The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalization and Transnationalism. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 547.
- Keller, E. (2007). Unleashing the Power of Word of Mouth: Creating Brand Advocacy to Drive Growth. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 47(4), 448-452.
- Khoo, O. (2014). Bait 3D and the Singapore – Australia co-production agreement: from content to creativity through stereoscopic technology. *Transnational Cinemas*, 5(1), 1-13.
- Kim, S. H., Park, N., & Park, S. H. (2013). Exploring the effects of online word of mouth and expert review on theatrical movies' box office success. *Journal of Media Economics*, 26(2), 98-114.
- Kim, T. (Director). (2010). *Late Autumn*. South Korea, United States, China and Hong Kong: Boram Entertainment.
- Kim, Y. (Director). (2013). *Mr. Go*. China and South Korea: Showbox/Mediaplex.
- Kim, Y. (Director). (2006). *200 Pounds Beauty*. South Korea: Showbox.
- Kim, Y. (Director). (2017). *Along with the Gods: The Two Worlds*. South Korea: Lotte Entertainment.
- Klapisch, C. (Director). (2002). *L'Auberge Espagnole*. France and Spain: Fox Searchlight Pictures.
- Klein, C. (2007). Kung Fu Hustle: Transnational production and the global Chinese-language film. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 1(3), 189-208.
- Klocker, N. (2014). Ethnic Diversity within Australian Homes: Has Television Caught up to Social Reality? *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 35(1), 34-52.
- KoBiz. (2018). Kim Yong Hwa. Retrieved from <http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr/eng/films/index/peopleView.jsp?peopleCd=10005151>
- Kokas, A. (2014). American Media and China's Blended Public Sphere. In J. Holt & S. Kevin (Eds.), *Connected viewing: Selling, Streaming and Sharing Media in the Digital Age* (pp. 144 - 157). New York: Routledge.
- Kokas, A. (2017). *Hollywood Made in China*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Kokas, A. (2018). Predicting volatility between China and Hollywood: Using network management to understand Sino-US film collaboration. *Global Media and Communication*, 14(3), 233-248.
- Kollewe, J. (2016, 4 November). Harry Potter special effects firm looks east with sale to China group. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/nov/03/framestore-sale-china-group-harry-potter-paddington-doctor-strange>
- Koprowski, G. (2017, 21 November). Why the curtain is falling on Chinese investment in Hollywood. *Sixth Tone*. Retrieved from <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1001212/why-the-curtain-is-falling-on-chinese-investment-in-hollywood>
- Kshetri, N. (2009). The evolution of the Chinese online gaming industry. *Journal of Technology Management in China*, 4(2), 158-179.
- Ksiazek, T. B., & Webster, J. G. (2008). Cultural Proximity and Audience Behavior: The Role of Language in Patterns of Polarization and Multicultural Fluency. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52(3), 485-503.
- Kung Fu Panda 3 is a film for the world: Director. (2016, 2 February). *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/culture/2016-02/02/content_23354654_4.htm
- Lam, D. (Director). (2018). *Operation Red Sea*. China and Hong Kong: Bona Film Group
- Landreth, J. (2016, 8 February). CFI Q&A with Christopher Bremble of Base FX - part one. *China Film Insider*. Retrieved from <http://chinafilminsider.com/cfi-qa-christopher-bremble-base-fx/>
- Lang, B. (2014, 22 June). Transformers': How 'Age of Extinction' Plans to Dominate China. *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2014/film/asia/transformers-age-of-extinction-china->

- [box-office-1201240294/](#)
- Lang, B., & Frater, P. (2018, 29 March). China film quota talks could be a casualty in Trump's trade war. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/china-film-quota-hollywood-trump-trade-war-1202739283/>
- Lau, A., & Mak, A. (Directors). (2002). *Infernal Affairs*. Hong Kong: Media Asia Distribution.
- Lau, J. (2007). *Hero*: China's response to Hollywood globalisation. *Jump Cut: A review of contemporary media*, 49. Retrieved from <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/Lau-Hero/>
- Law, F. Y.-W. (2010). Timely festivity: Chinese new year films (hesui pian) in the 1950s-1960s. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 4(2), 105-126.
- Lee, A. (Director). (2000). *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and United States: Sony Pictures Entertainment.
- Lee, A. (Director). (2012). *Life of Pi*. United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and Taiwan: 20th Century Fox.
- Lee, A. (2015, 2 March). Jeff Bridges, Julianne Moore highlight the international facets of 'Seventh Son'. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/seventh-son-jeff-bridges-julianne-769051>
- Lee, C. C. (2009). *Chinese Media, Global Contexts*. London: Routledge
- Lee, F. L. F. (2008). Hollywood movies in East Asia: examining cultural discount and performance predictability at the box office. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 18(2), 117-136.
- Lee, H. (2015a, 21 August). How Hollywood filmmakers can supply China's VFX demand. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/guardians-galaxy-2-everything-we-know-updated-regularly-941188>
- Lee, H. (2015b, 30 January). South Korea, China Ready \$200M joint entertainment fund. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/south-korea-china-ready-200m-768526>
- Leung, K., Chiu, P., & Cheung, T. (2019, 16 April). Hong Kong film industry gets major breakthrough with mainland China deal, but Chief Executive Carrie Lam says it comes with conditions. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/hong-kong-economy/article/3006339/new-deal-opens-mainland-china-hong-kong-film>
- Li, J. (Director). (2014). *Double Exposure*. China: Hangzhou Zhongwen Entertainment Co., Ltd.
- Li, M. (2008). China debates soft power. *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2, 287-308.
- Li, P., & Martina, M. (2018, 20 May). RPT- Hollywood's China Dreams Get Tangled in Trade Talks. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-trade-china-movies/rpt-hollywoods-china-dreams-get-tangled-in-trade-talks-idUSL3N1SR05M>
- Li, P., & Ruwitch, J. (2019, 28 February). Hit or miss: Oscar for Alibaba's 'Green Book' no guarantee for China success. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-awards-oscars-greenbook-alibaba-pictu/hit-or-miss-oscar-for-alibabas-green-book-no-guarantee-for-china-success-idUSKCN1QH0QT>
- Li, X. (2004). *Film Industry in China*. Retrieved from <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/film/84966.htm>
- Lichtenstein, A., & Rosenfeld, L. (1983). Uses and misuses of gratifications research: An explication of media functions. *Communication Research*, 10, 97-109.
- Lin, T. (Director). (2011). *Starry Starry Night*. Taiwan, China and Hong Kong: Huayi Brothers.
- Liu, Y. (2006). Word of Mouth for movies: Its dynamics and impact on box office revenue. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(3), 74-89.
- Lockett, M. (1988). Culture and the problems of Chinese management. *Organization studies*, 9(4), 475-496.
- Lu, S. (1997). Chinese cinemas (1896 – 1996) and transnational film studies. In S. Lu (Ed.), *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity Nationhood, Gender* (pp. 1-32). United States of America: University of Hawaii'i.
- Lu, S. (2007). Dialect and modernity in 21st century Sinophone Cinema. *Jump Cut: A review of contemporary media*, 49. Retrieved from <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/Lu/>
- Lucas, J., & Moore, S. (Directors). (2016). *Bad Moms*. United States: STX Entertainment.
- Luck, P. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0283900/>

- Luo, Y. (1997). Guanxi: principles, philosophies, and implications. *Human Systems Management*, 16(1), 43-51.
- Luthar, B. (2008). Promotional framemakers and the meaning of the text: the case of the Lord of the Rings. In M. Barker & E. Mathijs (Eds.), *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's World Audiences* (pp. 59-68). Peter Lang: New York.
- Ma, E. K.-W. (2006). Transborder visuality: The cultural transfer between Hong Kong and South China. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(3), 347-357.
- Marshall, P. D. (2005). Intimately intertwined the most public way: celebrity and journalism. In S. Allan (Ed.), *Journalism: Critical Issues* (pp. 19-29). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Marshall, R. (Director). (2005). *Memoirs of a Geisha* United States: Columbia Pictures.
- Martin, D. L. (2005, 27 February). What exactly is a B-Movie. Retrieved from <http://www.bmoviecentral.com/bmc/bmc-articles/145-what-exactly-is-a-b-movie.html>
- Mast, J., De Ruiter, K., & Kuppens, A. H. (2017). Linguistic proximity and global flows of television: A study with gatekeepers. *International journal of communication*, 11, 2562-2583
- Mathieson, C. (2012, 16 September). New releases. *Sunday Age*, p. 17.
- May, A., & Ma, X. (2014). Hong Kong and the CEPA: the changing fortunes of Hong Kong film production. *Continuum*, 28(1), 1-9.
- McGrew, A. (1992). A global society. In H. Stuart, H. David, & A. McGrew (Eds.), *Modernity and its Future* (pp. 61-116). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- McMillan, G. (2016, 26 October). 'Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2': all the essential in one place. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/guardians-galaxy-2-everything-we-know-updated-regularly-941188>
- McNary, D. (2014, 14 April). Legendary's 'Warcraft,' 'Seventh Son' secure Chinese investment. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2014/film/asia/legendarys-warcraft-seventh-son-secure-chinese-investment-1201157030/>
- McNary, D. (2017, 26 September). Oriental DreamWorks unveils five projects, promotes Peilin Chou. *Variety*. Retrieved from <https://variety.com/2017/film/news/oriental-dreamworks-five-projects-peilin-chou-1202573716/>
- McQuail, D. (1997). *Audience Analysis*. London: Sage Publication.
- MDA. (2009). *Guidelines for official co-production status application*. Singapore: Media Development Authority.
- Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (2005). *Inquiry into Australia's relationship with China*. Retrieved from Sydney:
- Meng, A. (2014, 16 April). State-owned China Film Group invest millions in Hollywood productions Seventh Son and Warcraft. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1483334/state-owned-china-film-group-invest-millions-hollywood-productions>
- Miller, G. (Director). (2015). *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Australia and United States: Warner Bros. Pictures and Roadshow Films
- Miller, T. (2001). Cinema studies doesn't matter; or I know what you did last semester. In M. Tinkcom & A. Villarejo (Eds.), *Keyframes: Popular cinema and cultural studies* (pp. 303-311). London: Routledge.
- Miller, T. (2016). The new international division of cultural labour revisited. *Icono*, 14(2), 97-121.
- Miller, T., Govil, N., McMurria, J., & R, M. (2001). *Global Hollywood*. London: British Film Institute.
- Mitchell, K. (2005). Hybridity. In A. David, J. Peter, S. David, & N. Washbourne (Eds.), *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Ideas* (pp. 188-193). London: I.B. Tauris.
- Miyokshi, M., & Haratoonian, H. D. (1989). *Postmodernism and Japan*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Morawetz, N., Hardy, J., Haslam, C., & Randle, K. (2007). Finance, Policy and Industrial Dynamics—The Rise of Co-productions in the Film Industry. *Industry and Innovation*, 14(4), 421-443.
- Mosco, V. (1990). Toward a transnational world information order: The Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 15(2), 46-63.
- Movie, H. E. (2014, 25 February 2014). Life After Pi. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glcBgu-gmVE>
- MPAA. (2014). *Theatrical Market Statistics 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.mpa.org/wp->

- [content/uploads/2015/03/MPAA-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-2014.pdf](#)
- MPAA. (2017). Theatrical Market Statistics 2016. Retrieved from http://www.mpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MPAA-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-2016_Final-1.pdf
- Naderi, A., Darzabi, R. C., & Eskandari, A. (2014). Representation of Iranian cultural identity in Hollywood: A study on Iranophobic movies. *Global Media Journal*, 9(1), 92-129.
- Newcomb, H., & Lotz, A. D. (2002). The production of media fiction. In K. B. Jensen (Ed.), *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research* (pp. 62-77). London: Routledge.
- Ng, N. (2014, 10 January). China: filmmaker Zhang Yimou fined \$1.2M for breach of one-child policy. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2014/01/09/world/asia/filmmaker-one-child-policy-fine/index.html>
- Nida, E. (1998). Language, culture, and translation. *Journal of Foreign Languages*, 3, 29-33.
- Noy, C. (2008). Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11(4), 327-344.
- Numbers, T. (2017). Top 2016 Movies at the Worldwide Box Office. Retrieved from <http://www.the-numbers.com/box-office-records/worldwide/all-movies/cumulative/released-in-2016>
- Nye, J. (1990). *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books.
- Oh, Y. (2009). Hallyu: The rise of transnational cultural consumers in China and Japan. *Korea Observer*, 40(3), 425-459.
- Ong, A. (1999). *Flexible citizenship : the cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ooi, V. B. Y., & Tan, P. K. W. (2013). Facebook, linguistic identity and hybridity in Singapore. In R. Rubdy & L. Alsagoff (Eds.), *The Global-Local Interface and Hybridity: Exploring Language and Identity* (pp. 225-244). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Orne, M. T. (1962). On the social psychology of the psychological experiment: With particular reference to demand characteristics and their implications. *The American Psychologist*, 17(11), 776-783.
- Overing, J. (1987). Translation as a creative process: The power of the name. In L. Holy (Ed.), *Comparative Anthropology* (pp. 70-87). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Papacharissi, Z., & Rubin, A. M. (2000). Predictors of Internet Use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44(2), 175-196.
- Papish, J. (2017a, 15 February). Box office revenue in China: how it works. *China Film Insider*. Retrieved from <http://chinafilm insider.com/box-office-revenue-china-works/>
- Papish, J. (2017b, 15 March). How many more import slots does each studio get? *China Film Insider*. Retrieved from <http://chinafilm insider.com/how-many-import-slots-does-each-studio-get/>
- Pardo, R., Kaplan, J., & Chilton, T. (Developers). (2004). *World of Warcraft*. United States: Blizzard Entertainment.
- Parish, S. (2015, 13 March). Practical Magic: The State of the VFX Industry in 2015, Part 1. *Animation World Network*. Retrieved from <https://www.awn.com/blog/practical-magic-state-vfx-industry-2015-part-1>
- Park, M.-J., & Curran, J. (2000). *De-Westernizing media studies*. London: Routledge.
- Park, N., Kee, K. F., & Valenzuela, S. (2009). Being Immersed in Social Networking Environment: Facebook Groups, Uses and Gratifications, and Social Outcomes. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(9), 729 - 733.
- Park, S. H., & Luo, Y. (2001). Guanxi and organizational dynamics: organizational networking in Chinese firms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 22(5), 455-477.
- Pells, R. (2004). From modernism to the movies: The globalisation of American culture in the twentieth century'. *European Journal of American Culture*, 23(2), 143-150.
- Peng, W. (2015). *China, film coproduction and soft power competition*. (PhD), Queensland University of Technology, Queensland.
- Peng, W. (2016). Sino-US film coproduction: A global media primer. *Global Media and China*, 1(4), 295-311.
- Pidd, H. (2012, 2 October). Sci-fi blockbuster *Looper* achieves Chinese box office first. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/oct/01/looper-sci-fi-blockbuster-china>
- Pieterse, J. (1994). Globalisation as Hybridisation. *International Sociology*, 9(2), 161-184.

- Ping, H. (Director). (1996). Sun Valley. China and Hong Kong: Media Asia Distribution.
- Pool, I. S. (1977). *The Social Impact of the Telephone*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- Population Trends 2018. (2019). *Department of Statistics Singapore*. Retrieved from Singapore: <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/-/media/files/publications/population/population2018.pdf>
- Posner, A. (2017, 10 February). Outsourcing Propaganda: China's control over Hollywood. *The Politic*. Retrieved from <https://thepolitic.org/outsourcing-propaganda-chinas-control-over-hollywood/>
- Qin, A., & Wong, A. (2014, 24 October). Stars backing Hong Kong protests pay price on Mainland. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/25/world/asia/hong-kong-stars-face-mainland-backlash-over-support-for-protests.html>
- Quinn, K. (2012, 25 October). Sinking our teeth into China. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/sinking-our-teeth-into-china-20121024-285n9.html>
- Rahman, A. (2016, 10 September). Steven Spielberg's Amblin Pacts with China's Alibaba Pictures Group. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/steven-spielbergs-amblin-pacts-chinas-936630>
- Reeves, K. (Director). (2013). Man of Tai Chi. China and United States: Man of Tai Chi
- Ren, Y. (2016, 14 June). China's cool, apolitical youth. *Financial Review*. Retrieved from <https://www.afr.com/lifestyle/arts-and-entertainment/books/chinas-cool-apolitical-youth-20160613-gphr5i>
- Rendall, K. (Director). (2012). Bait 3D. Australia and Singapore: Golden Village Pictures.
- Rendall, K. (Director). (2018). Guardians of the Tomb. Australia and China: Asia Releasing.
- Ritzer, G. (2012). Homogenization. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell
- Robertson, R. (1992). *Gloablization. Social theory and global culture*. London: Sage.
- Robertson, R. (1994). Globalisation or Glocalisation. *Journal of International Communication*, 1(1), 33-52
- Robertson, R., & Lechner, F. (1985). Modernization, Globalization and the Problem of Culture in World-Systems Theory. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2(3), 103-117.
- Roper, B., & Wyatt, P. (Developers). (1994). Warcraft: Orcs & Humans. In *Warcraft: Blizzard Entertainment*.
- Roschk, H., & Große, S. (2013). Talk about films: word-of-mouth behaviour and the network of success determinants of motion pictures. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 19(3), 229-316.
- Rosten, L. (1941). *Hollywood : the movie colony, the movie makers*. N.Y: Harcourt, Brace and Co.
- Russo, A., & Russo, J. (Directors). (2018). Avengers: Infinity War. United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Ryan, L. (2016). Looking for weak ties: Using a mixed methods approach to capture elusive connections. *The Sociological Review*, 64(4), 951-969.
- Sala, I. M. (2016, 22 September). 'No ghosts, No gay love stories. No nudity': tales of film-making in China. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/sep/22/tales-of-film-making-in-china-hollywood-hong-kong>
- Schiesel, S. (2006, 5 September). An online game, made in America, seizes the globe. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/05/technology/05wow.html>
- Schiller, H. (1969). *Mass communication and American empire*. Augustus: M.Kelley Publishers.
- Schiller, H. I. (1991). Not yet the post-imperialist era. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8(1), 13-28.
- Scott, M. (2016, 9 June). Base FX @ 10: a crazy dream became China's leading VFX Studio. *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2016/film/asia/base-fx-beijing-chinese-visual-effects-vfx-industrial-light-magic-ilm-1201789494/>
- Seiter, E. (1990). Making distinctions in TV audience research: case study of a troubling interview. *Cultural Studie*, 4(1), 61-84.
- Shaw, D. (2013). Deconstructing and reconstructing 'transnational cinema. In S. Dennison (Ed.),

- Contemporary Hispanic cinema : interrogating the transnational in Spanish and Latin American film*. Woodbridge: Tamesis.
- Shenkar, O. (1990). International joint ventures' problems in China: Risks and remedies. *Long Range Planning*, 23(3), 82-90.
- Shim, D. (2016). Hybridity, Korean Wave, and Asian Media. In K. Iwabuchi, E. Tsai, & C. Berry (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of East Asian Popular Culture*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Simonot, S. (2012, 1 August). 3D coolly shark flick attracts wave of attention at Venice Film Festival. *Gold Coast Bulletin*, p. 11.
- Singer, B. (Director). (2014). *X-Men: Days of Future Past*. United States and United Kingdom: 20th Century Fox.
- Skelton, C. (2012). Why you should learn web scraping and the e-book that can help. *Media*, 15(3), 37.
- Smith, M. P. (2001). *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalisation*. Malden: Blackwell Publisher.
- Soh, K.R. (2017). Examining the Chinese-Australian post-production relationship through Chinese audiences' cinema experience. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 11(3), 122-136.
- Soh, K.R., & Yecies, B. (2017). Korean Chinese Film Remakes in a New Age of Cultural Globalisation: Miss Granny and 20 Once Again along the Digital Road. *Global Media and China*, 2(1), 74-89.
- Spottiswoode, R. (Director). (1997). *Tomorrow Never Dies* United Kingdom and United States: United International Pictures
- Spottiswoode, R. (Director). (2008). *Children of the Silk Road*. Australia, China and Germany: Dendy Films.
- Staff, S. (2012, 12 November). China box office monthly round-up: Bait 3D makes surprise attack. *Screen Daily*. Retrieved from <http://www.screendaily.com/china-box-office-monthly-round-up-bait-3d-makes-surprise-attack/5048999.article>
- Statista. (2014a). Number of digital screens in China between 2007 to 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.statista.com/statistics/242450/number-of-digital-movie-screens-in-china/>
- Statista. (2014b). China: total population from 2009 to 2014 (in millions). Retrieved from <http://www.statista.com/statistics/263765/total-population-of-china/>
- Steger, M. B. (2009). Globalisation and social imaginaries: the changing ideological landscapes of the twenty-first century. *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies*, 1(1), 9-30.
- Stoke, J. (2003). *How to do Media and Cultural Studies*. California: Sage Publication.
- Straubhaar, J. D. (1991). Beyond media imperialism: Assymetrical interdependence and cultural proximity. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8(1), 39-59.
- Straubhaar, J. D. (2003). Choosing national TV: Cultural capital, language and cultural proximity in Brazil. In M. G. Elasmr (Ed.), *The Impact of International Television: A Paradigm Shift* (pp. 77-110). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Straubhaar, J. D. (2007). *World Television: From Global to Local*. London: Sage.
- Stringer, J., & Yu, Q. (2007). *Hero: How Chinese is it?* In P. Cooke (Ed.), *World Cinema's 'Dialogues' with Hollywood* (pp. 238-254). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Su, W. (2011). Resisting cultural imperialism, or welcoming cultural globalization? China's extensive debate on Hollywood cinema from 1994 to 2007. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 21(2), 186-201.
- Su, W. (2016). *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry 1994-2013*. Kentucky: University of Kentucky.
- Sullivan, J. (2009). Leo C. Rosten's Hollywood: power, status, and then primacy of economic and social networks in cultural production. In M. J. Banks, J. T. Caldwell, & V. Mayer (Eds.), *Production studies : cultural studies of media industries* (pp. 39-53). New York: Routledge.
- Szeto, M. M., & Chen, Y.C. (2012). Mainlandization or Sinophone translocality? Challenges for Hong Kong SAR New Wave cinema. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 6(2), 115-134.
- Tan, M. (2012, 1 November). China has hipsters, too. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/11/china-has-hipsters-too/264414/>
- Tay, P. H. (Director). (2014). *Meeting the Giant*. Singapore and China: Golden Village Pictures and Clover Films.
- Temple, B. (1997). *Watch Your Tongue: Issues in Translation and Cross-Cultural Research*.

- Sociology*, 31(3), 607-618.
- Thompson, P., Parker, R., & Cox, S. (2016). Interrogating Creative Theory and Creative Work: Inside the Games Studio. *Sociology*, 50(2), 316-332.
- Thompson, P., Parker, R. L., & Cox, S. D. (2009, 2-4 July). *Networks in the shadow of markets and hierarchies : calling the shots in the visual effects industry*. Paper presented at the EGOS 2009 : 25th European Group for Organizational Studies Conference, Barcelona, Spain.
- Thompson, S. (2012). Simple random sampling. In *Sampling* (Third edition ed., pp. 9-37). New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tian, X. (Director). (2015). *The Monkey King: Hero is Back*. China: SC Films International
- Times, G. (2018, 22 January). Chinese filmmakers choosing 2D over 3D for their films. *Global Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1085981.shtml>
- Tomlinson, J. (1996). Cultural Globalisation: Placing and Displacing the West. *European Journal of Development Research*, 8(2), 22.
- Tomlinson, J. (1997). International globalisation and cultural imperialism. In K. Thompson (Ed.), *Media and Cultural Regulation* (pp. 117-162). London: Sage.
- Tomlinson, J. (1999). *Globalization and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tomlinson, J. (2012). Cultural imperialism. *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization* (online).
- Tong, S. (Director). (2017). *Kungfu Yoga*. China and India: Clover Films.
- Toro, G. d. (Director). (2013). *Pacific Rim*. United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Tsing, A. (2000). The global situation. *Cultural Anthropology*, 15 (3), 327 - 360.
- Tsui, C. (2013, 14 January). 'Kung Fu Hustle' Star Stephen Chow Appointed to China's Top Political Advisory Body. *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved from <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/kung-fu-hustle-star-stephen-412580>
- Tukachinsky, R., Mastro, D., & Yarchi, M. (2015). Documenting portrayals of race/ethnicity on primetime television over a 20-year span and their association with national-level racial/ethnic attitudes. *Journal of Social Issues*, 71(7), 17-38.
- U.S. makes proposal on FTA screen quota issue: sources. (2006, 24 October). *Hankyoreh*. Retrieved from http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_business/166852.html
- UIS. (2013). *Emerging markets and the digitalization of the film industry: An analysis of the 2012 UIS international survey of feature film statistics*. Retrieved from Montreal: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/emerging-markets-and-the-digitalization-of-the-film-industry-en_o.pdf
- UIS. (2016). *Diversity and the film industry: An analysis of the 2014 UIS survey on feature film statistics*. Retrieved from Montreal: http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/diversity-and-the-film-industry-an-analysis-of-the-2014-uis-survey-on-feature-film-statistics-2016-en_o.pdf
- 18th CPC National Congress. (2012). Backgrounder: China's major events since CPC's 17th national congress. *Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the UN*. Retrieved from <http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/18dahuiyi/t985633.htm>
- Vanhonacker, W. (1997). Entering China: an unconventional approach. *Harvard Business Review*, 21(2), 159-171.
- Verbinski, G. (Director). (2007). *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*. United States: Buena Vista Pictures.
- Vertovec, S. (1999). Conceiving and researching transnationalism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(2), 447-462.
- Vlassis, A. (2015). Soft power, global governance of cultural industries and rising powers: the case of China. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 15(22), 1-16.
- Walsh, M. (2012). At the edge of Asia: The prospects for Australia-China co-production. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 6(3), 301-316.
- Wan, J. (Director). (2015). *Furious 7*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Wang, W.C. (2011). A critical interrogation of cultural globalisation and hybridity. *Journal of International Communication*, 14(1), 46 - 64.
- Waterman, P. (2005). Labour and new social movements in a globalising world system': the future of the past. *Labor History*, 46(2), 195-207.
- Wei, L. (2012, 24 May). Visualizing the future. *China Daily*. Retrieved from http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/2012-05/24/content_15376366.htm

- Wei, T. (2011). In the name of "Asia": Practices and consequences of recent international film co-productions in East Asia. In V. P. Y. Lee (Ed.), *East Asia Cinemas: Regional Flows and Global Transformations* (pp. 189-210). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wen, C. (2016, 9 June 2016). 'Warcraft' and its popularity in China. *What's on Weibo*. Retrieved from <https://www.whatsonweibo.com/warcraft-in-china/>
- West, K. (2016, 3 July). Success of Warcraft in China helps US open door to audience of 1.4 billion. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jul/02/warcraft-film-china-blockbuster-hollywood-investment>
- Wierzbicka, A. (2011). A culturally salient Polish emotion: Przykro ['Pshickro]. *International Journal of Group Tensions*, 30, 3-27.
- Wigney, J. (2012, 23 September). The Great Australian Bite. *Sunday Herald Sun*, p. 3.
- Wildau, G. (2015, 7 December). China's best-selling film accused of inflating box office. *Financial Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/a05coob4-9ca2-1e5-bfed-a24713ecdd4f>
- Winfrey, G. (2017, 27 June). China's box office fraud: how phony ticket sales hurt the film industry. *Indiewire*. Retrieved from <http://www.indiewire.com/2017/06/china-box-office-fraud-mpaa-phony-ticket-sales-film-industry-1201847763/>
- Wong, C. (2016, 21 April). Blockbuster Monster Hunt's box-office takings more reel than real. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/money-wealth/article/1937434/blockbuster-monster-hunts-box-office-takings-more-reel-real>
- Wong, K. (Director). (2013). *The Grandmaster*. Hong Kong and China: Bona Film Group.
- Woo, J. (Director). (2008-2009). *Red Cliff*. China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan: Chengtian Entertainment.
- Xin, K., & Pearce, J. (1996). Guanxi: connections as substitutes for formal institutional support. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 1641-1658.
- Xue, C. (2008). A review of Tomlinson's view on cultural globalization. *Asia Social Science*, 4(6), 112-114.
- Yang, L. (2012, 1 November). Bait 3D reaches 24 million USD in China. *Xinhua English News*. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/entertainment/2012-11/01/c_131945190.htm
- Yates, D. (Director). (2010). *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 1*. United Kingdom and United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Yates, D. (Director). (2011). *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2*. United Kingdom and United States: Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Yecies, B., & Shim, A. (2016). *The Changing Face of Korean Cinema*. New York: Routledge.
- Yecies, B., Yang, J., Shim, A., Soh, K.R., & Berryman, M. (2016). The Douban online social media barometer and the Chinese reception of Korean popular culture flows. *Audience & Reception Studies*, 13(1), 114-138.
- Yeh, E. Y.-Y., & Chao, S.-Y. (2018). Policy and creative strategies: Hong Kong CEPA films in the China market. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 1-18.
- Yeh, E. Y.-y., & Davis, D. W. (2008). Re-nationalizing China's film industry: case study on the China Film Group and film marketization. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 2(1), 37-51.
- Yin, Y. (2018, 24 February). Chinese New Year brings box office boom. *Sixth Tone*. Retrieved from <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1001783/chinese-new-year-brings-box-office-boom>
- Yip, W. (2012). Bait lacks bite. *The Straits Times*, p. 5.
- Yu, S. Q. (2010). Camp pleasure in an era of Chinese blockbusters. In R. G.G. & R. M.T. (Eds.), *Internet Reception of Hero in Mainland China* (pp. 135-151). London: Routledge.
- Yue, A. (2014). Contemporary sinophone cinema: Australia-China co-productions. In A. Yue & O. Khoo (Eds.), *Sinophone Cinemas* (pp. 185-202). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Yuen, W. (Director). (2016). *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny*. United Kingdom and China: Netflix.
- Zeitchik, S. (2012, 19 June). A more Sino-centric version of 'Looper' will be released in China. *LA Times*. Retrieved from <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/19/entertainment/la-et-mn-joseph-gordon-levitts-looper-will-be-released-differently-in-china-20120619>
- Zhang, L. (Director). (2017). *Bleeding Steel*. China and Hong Kong: Summit Entertainment.
- Zhang, W., & Wang, R. (2010). Interest-oriented versus relationship-oriented social network sites

- in China. *First Monday*, 15(8).
- Zhang, Y. (Director). (2002). *Hero*. China: Edko Films.
- Zhang, Y. (Director). (2004). *House of Flying Daggers*. China and Hong Kong: Sony Pictures Classics.
- Zhang, Y. (Director). (2006). *Curse of the Golden Flower*. China: Sony Pictures Classics.
- Zhang, Y. (2010). Transnationalism and translocality in Chinese cinema. *Cinema Journal*, 49(3), 135-139.
- Zhang, Y. (Director). (2016). *The Great Wall*. United States and China: Universal Pictures International (UPI).
- Zhu, Y. (2003). *Shadowplay: Early Chinese cinema in the shadow of Hollywood*. In *Chinese cinema during the era of reform: The ingenuity of the system* (pp. 175-200). Westport: Praeger Publishers.
- Zhu, Y. (2008). *Television in post-reform China : serial dramas, confucian leadership and the global television market* London: Routledge.
- Zwart, H. (Director). (2010). *The Karate Kid*. China, Hong Kong and United States: Sony Pictures.
- 中国票房, CBO. (2019). 内地总票房排名 (neidi zong piaofang paiming; Total box office ranking in Mainland China). Retrieved from <http://www.cbooo.cn/Alltimedomestic>
- 山水, Landsdcape. (2012, 27 October). 《大海啸》释小龙删减片段曝光 将演续集- Ashton Chen's deleted scenes in *Bait* exposed, he will act in sequel. *Sina Entertainment*. Retrieved from <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/f/2012-10-27/09143773652.shtml>
- 应声虫, Echo. (2012, 17 October). 《大海啸》释小龙戏份被剪 闯火海拒用替身 - *Bait*: Ashton Chen did not use any stuntman for the fire scenes that was cut from the film. *Sina Entertainment*. Retrieved from <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2012-10-17/13103765709.shtml>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Participation Information Sheet and Consent Form



Participant Information Sheet for Industry Partners (Interview)

Purpose of the Research

This is an invitation to participate in a research for a PhD thesis conducted at the University of Wollongong.

This project is being undertaken as part of Kai Ruo Soh's thesis research project.

The purpose of this project is to understand the nature and scale of media collaborations in Australia, Hollywood, Hong Kong and South Korea collaborative relationship with Mainland China. The research is interested in the ways that people and businesses find ways to collaborate, the different ways that creative work is conducted in collaborative environments and the skills and techniques learnt or shared in the process. The research is also interested in the challenges of collaboration from a market, policy and personnel management perspective. The results will be published in academic books and journals as well as industry reports and conference presentations.

You are invited to participate in this project because you have indicated that you have an interest in this area of research and/or are already engaging in media collaboration.

Investigator

Kai Ruo Soh

Faculty of Law Humanities and the Arts

krs354@uowmail.edu.au

Your participation will involve an audio recorded interview at your office or other agreed location that will take approximately 40 minutes of your time. Questions will include:

How did you come to be involved in media collaborations in China?

Has the experience been a challenging one, and if so, in what ways?

Have you had to change your management style working across cultures and across regions?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the project without comment or penalty. If you withdraw, on request any identifiable information already obtained from you will be destroyed. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with UOW.

Expected Benefits

It is not expected that this project will benefit you directly. However, it may benefit you indirectly by making you and your colleagues aware of the broader nature of media collaboration. The benefits may assist policy makers to provide better regulation for media collaboration.

Possible Risks

There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All comments and responses will be treated confidentially unless required by law. All comments and responses will be treated confidentially and are for academic purposes only. Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely and destroyed after the project is completed. If we use the information, we would prefer to be able to attribute that information directly to you in order to give you credit for your ideas and recognise your contribution to my research. However, if you choose, some or all comments and responses will be anonymous and be treated confidentially. Either way you will have the option to verify your comments prior to final inclusion in our research.

All records relating to your participation will be kept in a secure location and data will be digitally encrypted. Only the researchers will have access to this material. Non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects or stored on an open access database for secondary analysis.

Consent to Participate

Please sign a written consent form (enclosed) to confirm your agreement to participate.

Questions / Further Information about the Project

If have any questions or require further information please contact:

Kai Ruo Soh at krs354@uow.edu.au

Ethics Review and Complaints

This study has been reviewed by the University of Wollongong Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science). If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ay this research has been conducted, please contact the UOW Ethics officer on +61 2 4221 3386 or e-mail rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this sheet for your information.

Contact

Kai Ruo Soh (krs354@uowmail.edu.au)

Statement of Consent

- By signing below, you are indicating that you:
- Have read and understood the information document regarding this project.
- Have had any questions answered to your satisfaction.
- Understand that if you have any additional questions you can contact the research team.
- Understand that you are free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty.
- Understand that you can contact the Research Ethics Unit on +61 2 4221 3386 or e-mail rso-ethics@uow.edu.au if you have concerns about the ethical conduct of the project.
- Understand that the project will include an audio recording.
- Understand that non-identifiable data collected in this project may be used as comparative data in future projects.
- Agree to participate in the project.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Please tick the appropriate boxes:

I agree to use my name in the final publication

I wish to remain anonymous

Please return this sheet to the investigator.

卧龙岗大学研究项目参与信息

项目描述

项目旨在调研中国大陆合作片的本质与规模，主要研究，澳洲，好莱坞，香港，韩国和中国大陆与其它国家和地区的合作。研究员将关注业界人员以何种方式寻求合作；合作环境中不同的创意方式以及合作过程中技能技术的分享和交流。同时研究还将关注合作中面临的市场，政策和人力资源管理方面的挑战。研究成果将英文成书，同时作为产业报告和会议论文呈现。

因为您对本研究感兴趣亦或是因为您在媒体合作方面的经验，我们想邀请您参与这个项目。

研究员

Kai Ruo Soh 苏愷若

Faculty of Law Humanities and the Arts

krs354@uowmail.edu.au

采访将在您的办公室或其他约定地点进行。预计四十分钟。采访将被录音。如果您希望您在采访中的评论或者观点被匿名引用或希望不被引用，敬请告知。采访问题包括：

您如何定义合拍？

您是从什么时候开始对在中国制作电影产生兴趣的？

合拍的电影大部分都是与不同国家的工作人员一起合作完成的，在这个过程中，您有没有遇到了哪些挑战？

你在这个项目中的参与是完全自愿的。您可以在接受采访的两周内随时退出该项目，而不必承担任何责任和后果。您决定参与或者不参与该项目都不会影响您目前或者将来与卧龙岗大学的关系。如果你决定收回您采访中提供的信息，那么您提供的信息将被销毁。

应用价值

虽然本项目对您个人并没有直接利益，但项目的研究成果将为政策决策者提供参考，也有助于其他学者在该领域的研究。

潜在风险

您的参与不存在任何风险。采访之后，我会整理概括采访要点。

保密性

所有的评论和回答都是保密的，数据仅供学术研究使用。与本项目有关的数据将按照卧龙岗大学研究数据政策受到安全保管。您参与本项目的所有有关记录将受到妥善保管，数据将使用数字技术加密。只有相关研究者才能获取这些数据。除用于本项目，这些材料也可能用于会议报告和学术出版。

同意参与

我们想请您签署书面知情同意书（见附件），以确认您同意参加。

其他

如果您需要了解本课题更多信息，请随时联系上述的研究员

Kai Ruo Soh 苏愷若

krs354@uowmail.edu.au

投诉信息

卧龙岗大学一直致力于确保科研诚信和研究道德操守。如果您对该项目有任何诚信或道德上的担忧或不满，请与卧龙岗大学科研伦理负责人联系。科研伦理负责人与该研究课题没有关联，并且能够协助您公正公平地解决相关问题。

联系电话：+61 2 4221 3386

电子邮件：rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

东亚媒体制作中的合作趋势

研究员联系方式

Kai Ruo Soh 苏愷若

krs354@uowmail.edu.au

许可声明

您的签名代表如下事宜：

- 您已经参阅并理解有关该项目的文件
- 您的任何（有关）问题都得到了满意的答复
- 如果还有任何问题，您可以咨询（该项目的）研究团队
- 您知道您可在任何时候退出，并不承担任何责任或后果
- 您知道如果您对该项目（研究）的道德伦理行为有顾虑的话，可向该大学的科研伦理办公室联系，电话为：+ 61 2 4221 3386，或 rso-ethics@uow.edu.au
- 同意参与此项目
- 您知道该项目将涉及语音记录

姓名: _____

签字: _____

日期: _____

请在以下相关选项标记：

我同意在最后的出版物里使用我的名字

我希望匿名

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Below are the interview questions both in English and Mandarin:

1. How would you define co-production?

您如何定义合拍？

2. What are some successful projects that come to mind?

在您意见您觉得有什么成功的合拍案例

3. When did you first become interested in making films in China? Why?

您是从什么时候开始对在中国制作电影产生兴趣的？为什么？

4. In your own opinion, what are the reasons behind the interest with going to China?

在您看来, 您觉得为什么韩国的影视公司想要在中国发展？

(The Chinese question specifically asked about Koreans, as the Chinese interviews were conducted with Korean practitioners living in China).

5. In your opinion what are some of the main differences between American/Korea and Chinese film audiences?

您认为中国和韩国观众在哪些方面有所不同？

(The Chinese question specifically asked about Koreans)

6. The films you mainly produced are international c-productions, where you work with an international cast and crew. What are some of the challenges you face in terms of working practices and producing a film for audiences from different cultures?

您拍的电影大部分都是与不同国家的工作人员一起合作完成的，在这个过程中，您遇到了哪些挑战？对于制作一部针对不同文化背景的观众群，您又面对什么挑战呢？

7. What are the cultural differences between the relationships of filmmakers in Chinese productions? What are some effective strategies do you think can bridge the gap?

请问您在和中国方面的电影制作人合作时，有没有遇到什么文化上的差异？您又是用什么方法去弥补这些差异的？

8. For Korea Post-Production only:

According to recent KOFIC articles about Korean-Chinese co-productions, Chinese firms seem to depend on Koreans for their expert technical knowledge. However, there is a worry that current work opportunities will disappear once the Chinese industry catches up to Korea and Hollywood standards. What are your opinions?

KOFIC 在一篇有关中韩合拍的文章中提到，中国目前相当依赖韩国的电影制作技术。然而，这种合作机会，也许会在中国电影业将来达到与韩国或好莱坞水平时转弱或消失。对此顾虑，您有什么看法？