

Chinese Millennials Watching Hollywood Films:
A Generational Audience and Their Appropriation of American Pop Culture

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June 29, 2020

A doctoral dissertation submitted to
the Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies
Waseda University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Acknowledgements

For my parents,

whose unconditional support, emotionally and financially, has made possible my doctoral adventure.

For my supervisor and deputy supervisors,

whose guidance and encouragement have made the doctoral journey much more pleasant than I could have imagined.

For the respondents and interviewees in this study,

who have been extremely kind to share with me their cinema memories and film experiences.

For the Chinese 80hou and 90hou,

who may share such similar memories and experiences in relation to Hollywood as demonstrated in this thesis.

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Introduction

The world audience seems to be enjoying American blockbusters longer than anticipated, but in China, the obsession is quite phenomenal.¹ After being banned for several decades, Hollywood re-entered the mainland territory in 1994 during the period of the Chinese Economic Reform. Under the agreement of revenue-sharing, *The Fugitive* (Davis, 1993) debuted and managed to bring millions of Chinese movie-goers back to the theater. At the time when national cinema had been in a lifeless condition for years, *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) alone accounted for nearly one-fifth of the country's total box office receipts in 1998, marking one of the most striking moments in the history of cinema in contemporary China. While *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (Bay, 2014) suffered gloomy reviews and grossed only \$245 million in its home market, it feasted in China with an estimated box office record of RMB 1.9 billion (Chinese currency, about \$320 million). What seems even more surprising is that the top-ranked film in Douban Movie 250,² *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994), has in fact never been theatrically distributed in China. The film has been broadcasted on television many times and is now available online on a few subscription-based streaming services, including iQiyi, Sohu TV, Tencent Video, and Youku, with more than seventy-eight million views in total. It is

¹ Excluding Hong Kong and Macao SAR. Unless otherwise specified, China in this dissertation refers to the mainland area of the People's Republic of China.

² Douban.com (Douban for short) is a Chinese social networking website launched in 2005. It claims millions of monthly active users, the majority of which are white-collar workers and college students mostly living in the first and second level cities in China (Frater, 2017). Douban Movie is one of China's most popular online platforms where registered users can search, share, and create information about films. Douban Movie 250, similar to IMDb 250, is a list of 250 favorite movies rated by its users. *The Shawshank Redemption* (as interesting as it seems, it is also the No.1 movie on IMDb 250), is rated 9.6/10 by more than one million registered users on Douban. For more information of top-rated films on Douban Movie 250, please see Appendix II.

no exaggeration to say that China has indeed been fascinated with Hollywood entertainment since its re-entry.

The debate on Hollywood and its implications for China has been a subject receiving close attention in international culture and communication studies. China's encounter with the cinematic mogul during the development of its own filmed entertainment business at the turn of the century triggered a series of works investigating the interrelationship between the two in regard to industry transformation, government policy, cinematic collaboration, and more (see, for example, Wan & Kraus, 2002; Wang, 2006; Su, 2011; Peng, 2016; & Kokas, 2017). Once acknowledging that Hollywood cinema and its cultural specificity does matter, revealing how it has been received – welcomed as well as rejected – seems to be readily brought to the fore. Yet what I found disappointing in the debate so far is the tolerance of a certain degree of ignorance respecting the actual local audiences whose consumption and appreciation have made possible Hollywood's phenomenal popularity in the particular context. To further serious reflections on the popularity itself, I suggest that audience reception analysis (arising from media and cultural studies) is suitable for providing alternative theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence to account for the problematization of the cultural, social, and political role that Hollywood has played in China. Unraveling how the audiences make sense and make use of Hollywood cinema in order to fulfill their own agenda would help conceptualize global media and its consequences beyond the topic of cultural imperialism and cultural globalization (Su, 2009).

In addition, this research is concerned with a particular generation of movie-viewers – Chinese millennials, analyzing their engagement with and reaction to popular American feature films, and disclosing the meanings of their reception(s) of such popular foreign

culture which they engage with and relate to in everyday life. The concept of generation, although relatively new within the field of media studies (Siibak, Vittadini, & Nimrod, 2014), is useful to make a specific case for the investigations of Hollywood's popularity in mainland China. Formed through "independent social forces" (McQuail, 1987, p.125), generational audiences draw our attention to the importance of the shared social settings and cultural experiences during formative years which integrate the cohort through collective memory (Eyerman & Turner, 1998). Although social groups do not depend on media (channels or contents) for existence (Livingstone, 2005), generational practices are shaped by the specific pattern of media culture which they are part of. The millennial generation normally refers to people reaching young adulthood in the early 21st century (*OED*). In China, they are more like to be called 80-hou and 90-hou.³ Representing a major portion of the current young adult demographic, Chinese millennials were born under the one-child policy and grew up through the reform and opening-up program. The kind of cinema culture during that period features not only Hollywood's dominance of China's film market (both in and out of the movie theaters) but also China's ambition to reconfigure towards cinema modernization: imported American blockbusters were publicized all over the country; the potential influences of Hollywood's return were heatedly discussed; and the transformation of national cinema was plain to see. That being the case, investigating the micro-narratives of generational consumption of foreign pop culture within the macro-narratives of China's encounter with global Hollywood can explicate this popularity in its specific receiving context.

³ *80-hou* (in Simplified Chinese: 八零后) and *90-hou* (in Simplified Chinese: 九零后) are unofficial terms to describe people born in the 1980s and 1990s respectively. They may also be referred as post-80s and post-90s.

Hollywood: An Ingredient in Modern Chinese Cinema

Many dramatic cultural changes are rooted in the government-initiated reform and opening-up program of the 1980s (Moore, 2005). There is no exception with regard to the reconfiguration of Chinese cinema, whose interplay with Hollywood has been of great significance. It is no use to deny Hollywood's ambition of "implicating the entire globe" (Wark, 1994, p.15): the triumph of international marketing supported by its exceedingly institutionalized and industrialized production system, as well as the success of global distribution secured by (neo)liberalism and mercantilism in international trade. Nevertheless, that Hollywood becomes a particular ingredient in both the public and private discourses of modern cinema in China cannot be entirely attributed to the imperialist character of American cultural exports, nor to the inevitable progress towards cultural globalization. Global media accomplish the transmission across geographic divides, but their receptions are not disconnected from local realities. Meanings are filtered through discursive maps of locality, marked by their historical, social, cultural, and political specificities (Ang, 1996). In the case of Hollywood's return to mainland China, four reasons can be identified to explain its distinct cultural standing.

First, Hollywood returned to the mainland when the country was undergoing its own cinematic reform in the contemporary era, a reform that the Chinese film industry desperately needed in order to search for "an immediate stimuli and long-term investment" (Rosen, 2002, p.68) in the market. This return, with intent from both sides, has made Hollywood inseparable from the development of modern Chinese cinema since then. It is necessary to speak of "return" because Hollywood movies had once occupied China's film market in the 1930s, but they were rooted out after the founding of socialist China in 1949. The Communist Party of China (CPC), regarding the cultural industry, adopted

a Leninist model in which cinema served as a means of political propaganda and ideological education (Zhang, 2004; Rao, 2009). Hollywood was then considered highly toxic and abominable, and criticized for embodying western imperialism and promoting capitalist ideologies. By 1953, as most of the former private-owned film companies had become state enterprises, Hollywood films were nowhere to be found in China. In the following decades, the mainland experienced a series of severe cultural struggles and sociopolitical movements. National cinema, under such circumstances, was financially relaxing yet ideologically stressful in that it was functioning within the planned economy model and direct regulations of the state council and the central committee. The Mao-era China was thus filled with *hongse dianying*,⁴ a distinguished type of film that centered on the revolutionary and heroic spirit within socialist values.

China started to transform towards a market economy after 1978. The reform and opening-up program introduced commercialization and consumerism across the country. Three different types of films accounted for a disintegrated Chinese cinema which had been endeavoring to balance between market appreciation, artistic expression, and political education. The most popular genre, *yule pian*,⁵ resonated with the ordinary people better than the ideologically monotonous variety. Hit movies such as *Romance on*

⁴ *Hongse dianying* (in Simplified Chinese: 红色电影), literally meaning red film, is a term introduced by Mao Zedong in 1942. Red films usually depict stories about the Communist Army, or peasants following the lead of the Communist Party, fighting against the Imperial Japanese Army during the Sino-Japanese War or against the Nationalist Party during the Chinese Civil War. Red film can be seen as the first type of propaganda cinema that CPC had implemented with full consciousness. Classic red films are the ones made between the 1940s and 1970s, for example, *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* (Liu, 1960) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (Xie, 1961).

⁵ *Yule pian* (in Simplified Chinese: 娱乐片) literally means entertainment film. Opposing the conservative definition of cinema and its uses complying with the Leninist model, this term describes the kind of movies that are of low value in terms of education and propaganda but exist merely for the sake of entertaining or amusing. During the late 20th century, romance stories, comedies, and thrillers were broadly considered typical entertainment films in China.

Lushan Mountain (Huang, 1980) made film studios recognize the commercial value of cinema when they were exposed to the market regulation for the first time. Concurrently in the international film scenario, it was instead the Fifth Generation filmmakers⁶ that represented Chinese cinema's best. In the struggle against the old leadership and tracing the emotional trauma left by the Cultural Revolution, filmmaking of the Fifth Generation offered the West a Chinese spectacle that, in what was often seen as a "backward China", had been kept hidden for a long time (Dai, 1999; Rao, 2009). As China's film policy during the reform and opening-up era continued prioritizing "cinema as an ideological apparatus more than as a commercial enterprise" (Chu, 2002, p.47), *zhu xuanlv dianying*,⁷ as a top-down initiative, saw the administration making efforts to reassure socialist ideologies while making adjustment to the economic and cultural changes throughout society. To guarantee a successful performance, main-melody films were not only subsidized by both the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (MRFT) and the Ministry of Finance, but also heavily publicized throughout the press and broadcasting media.

Without the protection of a planned economy, the film industry, since the early 1980s, had been suffering serious decline in terms of both box office and movie attendance. Annual production of feature films was decreasing, while increasingly more

⁶ The Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers are in the main the first batch of graduates from Beijing Film Academy since the Cultural Revolution, including Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang. Many of them made their reputation with films awarded at the internationally acclaimed film festivals but also banned by Chinese authorities due to sensitive issues. For more information, please see Appendix III.

⁷ *Zhu xuanlv dianying* (in Simplified Chinese: 主旋律电影) literally means main melody film. It is also transcribed as "mainstream melody" or "major melody" in some studies. "Melody" in this term is an expression of the "tune" of China's cultural legacy. Teng Jingxian, director of the Film Bureau, proposed the initiation of main melody films in March 1987. The purpose was to reinvigorate national spirit and pride. Since then, main melody has become a unique film genre in China and considered an extremely political production. Originally, they were mostly produced by state-owned studios and highly subsidized by the government. As Chinese cinema continued to reform, there are now commercial main melody films produced by non-state-owned studios. However, the core intention to promote patriotism stays unchanged.

studios were in debt. Reforms were slow to arrive at the motion picture industry. In 1993, MRFT issued Document No.3 which marked the end of the China Film Corporation (CFC)'s absolute monopoly on distribution for all feature films in China. With a new distributing system came a more liberalized ticket-pricing policy. Moreover, the government actively encouraged private and foreign investment in the film sector. As Chinese cinema continued to be caught in a struggle to satisfy its stakeholders – the audiences, the filmmakers, and the state – contemporaneously comments on the future of national cinema polarized: while some advocated a complete profit-driven filmmaking so as to match with the market-economy model, others asserted that the highest value of a film's art was in its cultural contents. Hollywood returned to China at this precise moment of uncertainty whether marketization could help transform Chinese cinema towards modernity, when as yet its autonomy was not clear. During the annual national convention of film distribution and exhibition in 1994, it was announced that China Film Import & Export Corporation ("China Film" in short) was to import and distribute ten excellent foreign films that "basically reflect the finest global cultural achievements and represent the latest artistic and technological accomplishments in contemporary world cinema" (as cited in Rao, 2009, p.462), and revenues were to be shared between foreign studios and China Film. Eventually, most of the foreign imports turned out to be Hollywood blockbusters.

Second, Hollywood and its Chinese counterparts have offered each other both opportunities and threats. The direct consequence of Hollywood's return was very much in evidence. Between 1995 and 2001, each year there were no more than ten Hollywood imports, most of which were produced by the "Big Six" (20th Century Fox, Warner Bros.,

Paramount Pictures, Columbia Pictures, Universal Pictures and Walt Disney Pictures).⁸ These blockbusters contributed to about half of the country's annual box office revenue with less than one-third of the total screening time. In the meanwhile, Chinese cinema appeared weak and annual production of feature films kept decreasing so that by 2001 only seventy-one movies were made that year. After China joined the WTO, the importation quota was raised to twenty foreign films per year under the agreement of revenue-sharing. In 2012, it was increased again to thirty-four, including fourteen special imports released in enhanced (3D and/or IMAX) format. In a seemingly more stressful situation, China's filmed entertainment business had nonetheless been steadily growing during the early new millennium, then boomed in the second decade of the 21st century.⁹ Currently valued at least RMB 60.98 billion (\$8.9 billion), the country is the world's second largest film market with domestic production of almost one thousand films a year. Hollywood, more than ever before, will not give up further penetrating China's market. However, since the 2012 Sino-US Memorandum of Understanding regarding films for theatrical release lost effectiveness in 2017, no new agreement has been announced until the present day. It is reported that fifty-six American films, including those both under agreement of revenue-sharing and by flat-fee contract, were imported and released in China in 2018 (He, 2019).

US distributors used to earn quite a limited share of the money their films made in China, specifically, thirteen percent of the total box office profit (compared to the forty percent American studios typically acquire from other markets). The share was raised to

⁸ For a list of imported Hollywood films in China between 1994 and 2001, please see Appendix IV.

⁹ For more information on the development of China's film industry in terms of annual domestic production and box office receipts, please see Appendix V.

twenty-five percent in 2012. Local cinemas and China Film, the sole foreign film distributor in China and a subsidiary of the state-owned enterprise China Film Group Corporation (CFG), obtain most from the sales. Many expected that Hollywood imports would thus accelerate the marketization of Chinese cinema. After distribution was deregulated, the Government further pushed reform in the production sector. Since 1997, individuals and non-state-owned enterprises have been both able to invest and participate in filmmaking as long as they are issued a “Permit for Film Production” (No.538). A group of successful filmmaking companies, both private and public, including Huayi Brothers and Polybona Films, have emerged and become leading figures in China. In addition, the film exhibition business has been expanded in order to keep up with a rapidly growing market. As early as in 2001, the state administration pressed for the development of theater chains with modern multiplexes and IT ticketing systems (No.1519). Since 2003, non-state-owned and state-owned enterprises and individual investors have alike been allowed to invest in movie theaters (No.20). With government support, the film screening business has attracted large amounts of capital and experienced great progress (Lu, 2016). In 2003, there were 1,106 movie theaters with 2,197 screens in total (Rao, 2009). In 2017, China surpassed the US, becoming the country with the most movie screens, a total number of 59,009 (Brzeski, 2018).

The craze for Hollywood imports has confirmed the status of the motion picture as commodity. Recognizing the high-concept and production value in box office returns, Chinese filmmaking, in reaction, was seen to increase elements of commercialism (Wang, 2006). In 2002, Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* (2002) grossed more than RMB 250 million, considerably outselling the most popular Hollywood import of that year, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Columbus, 2001), which made merely RMB 59 million. The

success of *Hero* (2002) encouraged a fever of producing domestic commercial blockbusters. Within the following years, a number of “high-cost, high-tech, high-quality, and high-yield” (Lu, 2016, p.173) martial arts and costume dramas, for example, *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang, 2004), *The Promise* (Chen, 2005), *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang, 2006), *The Warlords* (Chan, 2007) and *Red Cliff* (Woo, 2008), reached the highest rank in China’s film market. Box offices of these domestic mega-productions mostly outnumbered their Hollywood counterparts. As main-melody films were in competition with both Hollywood and domestic blockbusters, the Party was under pressure to think through commercializing propaganda integrated with entertainment (Wan & Kraus, 2002; Davis, 2010). Feng Xiaoning enhanced the visual effects in *Grief Over the Yellow River* (1999), a romantic story between a U.S. pilot and a Chinese guerrilla during the Second Sino-Japanese War shot in Shanxi Province. Taking advantage of its natural glamor, the film was shot at Hukou Waterfall, the world’s largest yellow waterfall. *The Days Without Lei Feng* (1998) and *Zhang Side* (Li, 2004), on the other hand, structured ordinary party members, instead of primary leaders, into the new embodiment of the socialist spirit. The protagonists were still the Party heroes, but they also became a son and a friend. More recently, main-melody has been strategically incorporating a large number of well-known actors and actresses because of their box office appeal. Commissioned to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of China, *The Founding of a Republic* (Han & Huang, 2009)’s cast members include, but are not limited to, Tang Guoqiang, Xu Qing, Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Andy Lau, Vicki Zhao, Zhang Ziyi, and Jiang Wen. In a similar sense, *Beginning of the Great Survival* (Han & Huang, 2011), a chronicle of events that led to the founding of the CPC, features Daniel Wu, Chow Yun-fat, Chen Kun, Fan Bingbing, John Woo, and Zhou Xun. Substantially funded by the state

administration, “entertaining” main-melody films will continue to occupy their leading position in the cinematic field of China.



Fig. 1. Female guerrilla at Hukou Waterfall, *Grief Over the Yellow River* (1999)



Fig. 2. Poster of the leading cast members, *The Founding of a Republic* (2009)

For Chinese filmmakers, Hollywood was too alluring to resist thanks to the resources behind it and techniques it featured. Since returning to the mainland, American film studios had been collaborating with local artists on a variety of genres. Zhang’s ground-breaking film *Hero* (2002) was co-funded by Miramax. Besides, Columbia

Pictures co-produced Feng Xiaogang's black comedy *The Big Shot's Funeral* (2001), the best-selling Chinese film of 2001. Again in 2003, it invested in He Ping's martial arts epic *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* (2003). Last but not least, Universal partnered with Beijing Film Studio in the production of *Pavilion of Women* (Yim, 2001), a romance drama adapted from Pearl S. Buck's novel of the same title. A foreign studio would be granted a much bigger share of box office profits if they were qualified as a co-producer of an official Sino-foreign coproduction. As China's film market keeps thriving, Hollywood has been applying alternative methods to appeal to Chinese audiences. For instance, product placement of well-known local brands and employment of local actors and actresses for narrative-friendly characters have both proved positively related to the box office performance (Kwak & Zhang, 2011). However, the Chinese government's non-transparent censoring policies have caused a few co-productions to be disqualified when the final pictures were considered "inappropriate" by the authorities. Kokas named such works "faux-production" (2017, p.75), including the recent cases of *Looper* (Johnson, 2012) and *Iron Man 3* (Black, 2013). With increasing awareness of cinema as a form of soft power, China is now highly concerned about how it is depicted in Hollywood films since, compared to domestic productions, Hollywood is being consumed on a much wider scale globally. On the other hand, Hollywood's self-bowdlerization to satisfy the censoring authorities in order to approach the mass Chinese movie-viewers is seen to have an impact on the world's perception of the country (O'Connor & Armstrong, 2015).

In the 1990s, Hollywood had once allied with Chinese film artists declaring for freedom in cinematic creation (Wan & Kraus, 2002). Yet the more permissive environment that Chinese filmmakers had wished for as a result of the motion picture

industry reform, in which autonomy should be vital to the competition with American imports, seems even farther away than before. Within the national cinematic field, art-house and independent movies have always been struggling for a legitimate expression regarding sensitive social issues and historical events. *Lan Yu* (Guan, 2001) has been nominated best film at both the Hong Kong Film Award and Taiwan Golden Horse Award but could not reach the big screen in the mainland due to its portrayal of gay sexual relationships. *Summer Palace* (Lou, 2006) is still strictly banned by the Chinese authorities until the present day because the film features a strong political undertone considering the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protest as well as frontal nudity of both male and female characters. Both films had to rely on production capital from either Hong Kong or foreign countries. In the end, cinematic reform aligns Chinese commercial production with Hollywood's studio-system standards, but marketization refuses to embrace into its ideological agenda the kind of cultural creations that may challenge the authority of the CPC (Davis, 2010). As China steadily moves towards the center of the international economy, Hollywood will have to keep its strategies flexible to the demands of both Chinese audiences and the Chinese government in order to gain maximum payoffs from the mainland.

This leads to the third reason that Hollywood has been serving as a reference, contrasting as well as imitating, in cultural policymaking in China. American cultural hegemony has constrained many world cinemas. After all, even for those who were once systematically sustainable and culturally specific, such as French and Japanese cinema, the impact of global Hollywood on the local was plain to see. Debates on Hollywood's return and its implications in China appear to be an ongoing negotiation without settlements. Wang (2006) investigated the major cinematic practices of both sides during

the first ten years since Hollywood's return and concluded that the increasing sense of commercialism in the Chinese national cinema at that time is exactly what Hollywood's hegemonic threat had resulted in. It is also true that American media products have become "part of the popular imagination of the Chinese public" that needs to be carefully examined (Wang, 2006, p.290). Then, in discussing the cultural and ideological connotations of Hollywood in China, to what extent has the local decoded the "Americanness" in Hollywood films is one question that has been frequently asked. Su (2009) looked into coverage of Hollywood cinema in popular publications from 1994 to 2008 and revealed that discourses on the symbolic meanings of Hollywood had been wandering between the American spirit and universal value. Drawing on globalization theory regarding issues of cultural homogenization versus heterogenization, Su's critical discourse analysis underlined China's cultural dilemma in searching for "an alternative to Western/American modernity" (2009, p.94).

Cinema is profoundly implicated in China's cultural policy in which the CPC maintains the persistent stance that "art and literature are to be subordinate to politics" (Chin, 2015). In the international arena, the Chinese government's ambition is to lead the country towards a major role that can exercise its soft power to be competitive, if not dominant, in global cultural governance (Richeri, 2016). China's changing policy in relation to Hollywood in the past few decades was consistent with its objectives at different stages of its own cinematic reform. The state's central theory is exploiting Hollywood's capital and expertise to develop China's domestic motion picture industry, while being "eclectic" serves only to reinforce the control over that central idea (Su, 2014). Hollywood, introduced back to the mainland before the turn of the century, served solely for saving China's film market. It was when the economic reform made the country open

for foreign products, but the government was still active in direct administrative interference in film production, distribution and exhibition. Early main-melody films thus failed to compete against imported Hollywood blockbusters in terms of both cultural and economic aspects, since the state administration did not clearly address the definition and function of cinema in China, vacillating among art, commodity, and propaganda tool (Su, 2009). After China joined the WTO, entertainment blockbusters with transnational capital and techniques became the dominant mode of production, leaving little room, if any, for independent and art cinema (Wang, 2006). While these mega-productions demonstrated the quality as an effective countermeasure to win back audiences, Chinese blockbusters, with occasional exceptions such as *Hero* (2002), failed to achieve transnational commercial success, or acquire transnational recognition. China had not reached the center within the global governance of the cultural industry, and still had a long way to go before it could influence the distribution of resources and symbolic norms within the international arena (Vlassis, 2016). As China accomplished its economic reform and completed cinema marketization, there has been a shift in the capital flow of international entertainment, rather slight now but surely growing in the future (Garrahan & Sender, 2016). Increasingly more Chinese media entrepreneurs are investing in Hollywood, buying American film companies (e.g. Wanda Group purchased Legendary Entertainment, while state-controlled Hunan Television and Broadcast invested in Lions Gate Entertainment) or working with American studios on international blockbusters (e.g. Alibaba Pictures co-produced *Mission: Impossible – Rouge Nation* (McQuarrie, 2015), and Tencent Pictures joined with Warner Bros. for *Wonder Woman* (Jenkins, 2017)). There is also an increase in the presence of Chinese elements, be it brands (e.g. Shuhua Milk in *Transformers* franchises), talents (e.g. Li Bingbing in *Resident Evil* franchises),

or adapted local folktales (e.g. the upcoming Disney live-action *Mulan*), in today's Hollywood international blockbusters. If, as Rosen (2011) has claimed, Hollywood blockbusters are more persuasive in communicating Chinese soft power than its own productions, China, on top of learning from Hollywood's global structures and practices, will also want to take advantage of its international distribution to send out Chinese culture (Peng, 2016). Beijing, in sketching future plans for the Chinese cultural industry, will continue bearing in mind Hollywood's relationship with Washington D.C. as well as its functioning as "ambassador" of the United States since the Second World War till the present day (Swann, 1991; Moody, 2017).

All the discussions mentioned above regarding the implications of Hollywood in China are perceived from the reception of legally distributed Hollywood products and collaboration under explicitly written guidelines. The fourth and last reason, which I wish to highlight, draws attention to the kind of Hollywood that has been consumed and appropriated in China off the record. Even before Hollywood's official return to the mainland, it is estimated that a pirated American feature film could reach a sales volume of more than five million copies in China (Rao, 2009). According to IIPA Special 301 Reports, from 1995 to 2002, each year there were more than \$100 million estimated trade losses in the motion picture industry due to piracy in China (Wang 2003). In an anti-piracy drive in 2000, SARFT and the Ministry of Culture seized illegal copies of more than 540 different films, most of which were Hollywood and Hong Kong/Taiwanese productions. After the desktop became a household necessity and the World Wide Web led to a digital millennium, it is almost impossible to calculate the illegitimate circulation

of audiovisual products nowadays. With help from *zimuzu*,¹⁰ viewers in China are even able to download subtitled works within days after a film's original domestic release. In an open letter to the Office of the United States Trade Representatives (USTR) in 2014, MPAA named Chinese website *yyets.com* as the most popular dedicated download site for copyrighted content, which can attract millions of visitors in one month. *Yyets*, the subtitle group community behind the website is still active to produce translation of foreign films and series for the Chinese movie-viewers. They now share the subtitled works via social networking sites such as Weibo and the official applications of *yyets* on different platforms. Hollywood in China has always been on big screens in the movie theaters, as well as on small screens at home. It can cost either RMB 100, or nothing to watch. It includes *Titanic* (1997) and *Transformers* franchise (2007-present), as well as *12 Angry Men* (Lumet, 1957) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick, 1999).

Watching films through piracy has become a global entertainment complex, while as a mode of cultural consumption, it has long been an everyday-life activity in China. Moving away from condemning piracy as an ethical violation and stereotyping Chinese movie-viewers as barbarians disrespecting intellectual property, this specific cultural manifestation of conflicts deserves careful investigation (Pang, 2004). Within constant negotiations between the US and China, Chinese authorities' inaction in regulating copyright and protecting intellectual property, especially foreign rights (after all, it is not the Chinese government's priority to protect the rights of American film studios), can be interpreted as a resistance to Hollywood hegemony in global media consumption (Wang,

¹⁰ *Zimuzu* (in Simplified Chinese: 字幕组), literally meaning subtitle groups, are Chinese online communities that volunteer to translate foreign television series, cartoons and anime, and movies. Most subtitle groups consist of college students and young professionals. Some only upload subtitle text documents, which the majority also make subtitled versions of foreign works to share freely online. I will discuss more on subtitle groups in Chapter Two.

2003). Within China's foreign theatrical releasing quota system, piracy helps foreign cultural products bypass regulations that formal businesses cannot violate and thus reach previously untouched viewers (Miller, 2007). But it is still Hollywood films being watched at the end of the day, which, in return, reinforces Hollywood dominance of movie-image circulation, predictably on a larger scale and in a deeper degree (Wang & Zhu, 2003). Film scholar Dai Jinhua, as early as 2002, warned that lack of regulation on pirated foreign films was dangerous in that Hollywood might be homogenizing Chinese audience's viewing tastes generation by generation. Popular American films occupy not only the legitimate, but also the illegitimate space of film consumption in China. For those who enjoy Hollywood films through infringement, audiences take conscious decisions to engage in such activities. Although highly unlikely to be tracked down from official documents and published reports, film piracy is central to understanding to what extent and in what way the subordinate common people navigate their own cultural consumption beyond official offerings.

Generational Reception in Global/Local Interplay

I have highlighted the case of China encountering Hollywood during its own reform and opening-up era to suggest that Hollywood has become inseparable from the discussion of modern Chinese cinema culture. It is undoubtedly ingenuous to deny that Hollywood's reach is global: nowadays film-financing draws money from all over the world; shooting locations spread across the globe; crew team and cast members become ethnically diverse; and blockbusters premiere simultaneously on six continents (Miller, McMurria, Maxwell, & Wang, 2004). The increasing interactivity and exchange that breaks down national boundaries points to a sense of globalization where a global media apparatus is functioning within a globalized media market (Athique, 2016). One approach

to accounting for the increasingly transnational practices of such filmmaking and distributing is through theories in relation to cultural globalization. However, globalization is more descriptive than conclusive. To say that Hollywood is dominating the world's cultural consumption is merely to delineate the widespread dissemination of those popular filmic contents. Hollywood's interplay with China since the 1990s is premeditated on both sides. The modern Chinese cinema culture, especially as it is today, has as much to do with Hollywood as with the Chinese government and China's film industry. To place the global in the local, we thus must not accept an over-simplified notion of cultural imperialism that assumes no place for diversity or multiplicity as a result of one infiltrating, homogenizing force (Strelitz, 2003). On the other hand, although Su (2011) has made clear that China's public debates on Hollywood cinema have little to do with its practices in the US context but much with its connotations in China, meanings as the product of local realities come down to constant negotiation and exchange between the inside and the outside. To trace the global in the local, we need to stay skeptical as well about the over-optimistic notion of cultural hybridization that promises national culture's free will to assimilate from or repel against aspects from other cultures (Kraidy, 2005). As long as Hollywood keeps being hegemonic, trying to win as great an audience as possible, its power, through cinematic images and practices, will exert influence on the local. Regarding the consequences of the globally diffused media messages and technologies, the global-local paradigm is not necessarily a binary dichotomy. No culture, global or local, can be self-contained permanently. What we need to focus on is "the complicated relationship between global media and local meanings" (Ang, 1996, p.127).

In discussing the life cycle in which printed books come into being and spread through society, Darnton (1982) proposed a model of "the communications circuit" (p.67)

that runs from the author to the publisher, the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader, and then back to the author, surrounded by the economic, cultural, social, and political systems relevant to them. It is “communication” because it transmits meanings; it is a “circuit” because meanings are transformed from ideas to writing to publication features, and to ideas again in the reading (Darnton, 1982). Analogically, all forms of media can be understood in a similar circuit. As for the reception of global Hollywood in a given locale, there are at least three different kinds of key readers who are also in relationship with each other: the local authorities who come up with cultural policies in resistance to Hollywood hegemony, the so-called national cinema (however fragile the concept may be) which engages in competing against and/or cooperating with Hollywood filmmakers, and the local audiences who enjoy or do not enjoy Hollywood films. In China, Hollywood’s interrelation and interaction with the first two, i.e., the Chinese government and China’s entertainment business, have been systematically addressed elsewhere. But the audience’s receiving and perceiving of the foreign popular cinema remains mysterious. The communications circuit is left incomplete since we have little knowledge of what Hollywood signifies for its Chinese audiences and how the signification comes to work.

The cultural consumption, and moreover, appropriation, of Hollywood cinema as part of the practices of Chinese people’s daily lives is a research area underdeveloped. This thesis seeks to reveal how the local audiences make sense and make use of popular American films to fulfill their personal agenda. To address this problem, this thesis employs reception analysis that underlines the role of the actual audience in the process of meaning-making. In audience reception studies, personal readings are understood in relation to the social systems and experiences that people live in (Ott, & Mack, 2010). The relationship between audience and media is contextually situated and saturated.

Livingstone (1998), in discussing the problems and possibilities of media audience research, spoke about expanding the context of reception horizontally as well as vertically: “horizontally”, meaning, at a given moment of viewing, to enclose wider spatial surroundings; “vertically”, meaning to take into consideration the audience’s social and personal histories. In addition, reception studies in the era of globalization ask about not only people’s responses to foreign media texts but also the impact they have on negotiating national and cultural identities (Crane, 2002). Transnational media flow indicates that movies are produced in one system with its own social-political and ideological characters but consumed in another. The emphasis is not what global media “do” to local audiences, but rather how the audiences act, react, and/or interact in particular temporal-spatial circumstances, adds layers to our understanding of the global diffusion and influence of American culture embodied in Hollywood.

Yet who is the audience? “Audience is a shifty concept” according to Nightingale (1996, p.148). Within communication studies, it has been defined in relation to media texts, i.e., as readers and decoders, or to media technologies, i.e., as users and consumers. (Kitzinger, 2004). In more practical works, there are as many different constructs of audiences as there are many research aims and objectives. For this empirical audience research on the local reception of global Hollywood, I would like to introduce a generational perspective. The term generation is more a description than a definition of categorizing people into different age-groups. A group of individuals are integrated according to the same birth period, though being of similar age does not guarantee connections among group members. The significance of the generation concept is that a cohort of population, in their youth or other distinct period of time, experience similar events that have similar impact on their thoughts and feelings. In Mannheim’s

theorization, similar experiences in the “fresh contact”, the moment when a person encounters something novel, contribute to generational building (1928/1952). These similar experiences, similar events, and similar impacts come to form, for the cohort, a shared cultural field of emotions, attitudes, preferences and dispositions, as well as practices of activities (Eyerman & Turner, 1998). It is this cultural formation that engenders wider discussion on the concept of generation. In media studies, the problem of generational media usage in relation to media consumption culture has been paid much attention to for decades. As the media environment is in itself ever-changing as a result of continuous institutional transformation and technological innovation, different generations are thought to grow up with distinctive patterns of media culture. What can be assumed is that some common features of a generational audience are defined considerably by “fresh contact” with media and technologies in their formative years (Siibak, Vittadini, & Nimrod, 2014). That being the case, a generational perspective of audience echoes with the contextualism, especially the vertical one, in media reception studies (Ang, 1996; Livingstone, 1998).

Looking at the special case of China encountering global Hollywood while going through its own cinematic reform, together with findings from a preliminary online questionnaire survey about Hollywood in contemporary Chinese people’s film consumption, I chose the millennial generation in the urban area not only because they are conditioned by particular social histories, but also because these well-educated and well-paid urban youth account for a major percentage of cinema consumers in China. The prosperity of multiplex theaters, the piracy rampant in both physical and digital formats, along with the ever-evolving new media technologies have framed the cinematic and non-cinematic consuming conditions in China over the past decades. Chinese millennials, like

the millennial generation (or Generation Y) in many other countries, grew up watching films in both public and private spaces. While the state administration retained strict control over content creation and foreign importation, lack of regulation on copyright infringement granted these textual poachers alternative channels to satisfy their cultural demands. Under such circumstances, Hollywood (of course, together with numerous foreign media contents from other countries) penetrated to an extent that virtually no official records could explicate the cultural impact it had (and maybe still has) on China and Chinese audiences. It is therefore necessary to inquire into the micro-level narratives chronicled by the audiences themselves, through which undiscovered or previously neglected practices of media usage can offer informative insights into the interrelationship between text, audience, and context. We can expect that the generational characters in their shared film experiences during formative years would amplify discussions on the meaning of global Hollywood in the local mainland. Keeping in mind the extent to which consuming habits and media practices in the past may have an impact on the generational reception and interpretation of Hollywood cinema, this study aims to answer three particular research questions: How is the idea of Hollywood located and understood by Chinese millennials? What “viewing strategy” do Chinese millennials apply when watching different types of Hollywood films? How do Chinese millennials interpret Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood’s representations?

Structure of the Thesis

This dissertation sets out to explore the reception of Hollywood cinema by Chinese millennials: that is, it focuses on how Chinese post-80s and post-90s consume and interpret popular American feature films as an everyday life activity. This guides the research towards an empirical based ethnographic approach to the generational subjects,

which, by placing the actual movie-viewers at the center, intends to grant audience agency at least to some degree. The pressing dilemma lies here that, as movie-viewing has grown exponentially in domestic and private spheres, practice of watching films outside the movie theaters remains significantly under-theorized (Aveyard, 2016). **Chapter One: Approaching Millennial Movie-viewers** takes up the issue of the theoretical and methodological frameworks of studying the real movie-viewers. Chinese millennials' consumption and appropriation of Hollywood films are, without a doubt, beyond cinemas and beyond textual interpretations. To understand the people who watch films and how they watch them, we thus must be cautious and flexible in regard to keeping up with the theorizations of and experiments on such social subjects. Upon reviewing theorizations of the role of the film spectator in film studies and beyond, in this chapter, I will also make references to traditions and researches that concern cultural consumption of media in everyday life. With their influences and relevance combined, this chapter outlines the approach of this thesis which seeks to engage a broader spectrum of film consumption in understanding the generational reception of the filmic type of a foreign pop culture. In the second half, I will discuss methods and sampling, data collection, and analytical strategies regarding the empirical data. While addressing the significance and politics of doing empirical research on the film audience in today's rich media environment, I will explain the process of my fieldwork, defend my choices of using questionnaire surveys, focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews, and justify the targeted sampling and selected topics that are being analyzed in this reception study from the perspectives of cultural studies and media ethnography.

It is highlighted that audience reception cannot be studied isolated from the receiving context. Part of the receiving context, that is, Hollywood in the development of

Chinese cinema, has been revealed in this **Introduction** chapter. Based on information gathered from both preliminary questionnaire surveys and focus group discussions, **Chapter Two: Millennial Generation and Their Film Experiences** is mainly concerned with demonstrating the subject of this research, Chinese millennials, and their viewing activities both in and outside the movie theaters. Firstly, excluding responses from other generations, I will summarize findings from the questionnaire surveys to depict a general image of the ordinary millennial movie-goers in urban China. Their affections for watching films, their film consumption habits, the social needs associated with movie-viewing, and their genre preference have pushed me to go deeper into their movie-viewing histories. Tracing millennial's memories of early film experiences and reflections on the changing modes of film consumption in China, I will then focus on exploring how they grew up watching films, both domestic and foreign, both in theaters and beyond. Are there any distinctive viewing practices and, if so, what are they? What social and material conditions (in history and at present) may have made possible such practices? What are the likely implications of these practices? How does Hollywood fit into different practices under different circumstances? With these questions in mind, I will unveil how millennial audiences navigate their ways between the public and the private, between the disciplined and the rebellious. Although cinema-going as a primary function has not been on the wane, it cannot constrain all the pleasures that Chinese millennials seek from movie-viewing. Together with the alternatives, they shaped the unique local cinema culture of which they are a part. I argue that similar media habits and viewing practices contribute to a shared cultural field for the generational audiences, which provides insights into the reception context within which Chinese millennials consume and appropriate Hollywood cinema.

Chapter Three: How is the Idea of Hollywood Located and Understood by Chinese Millennials? tries to answer the first research question. This is, of course, not to investigate whether or not they can present a clear definition of what Hollywood is. Many researches on the reception of foreign pop culture in the local context have been focusing on the implications that the foreign has on the local, but ignored that the local influences the perception of the foreign. Hollywood remains a cultural other in China in that “its diegetic world cannot reasonably be claimed to be about here and about [the Chinese]” (Athique, 2016, p.11). But the reception took place in the Chinese mainland, framed by its local realities. What movies do Chinese millennials consider typical Hollywood and why? What are the characteristics that they value the most in terms of considering one film a Hollywood production? What kind of Americanness do they decode from Hollywood’s (re)presentation? What I look for is a conceptual framework that Chinese millennials use to make sense of this foreign popular cinema, in which the local history, as well as the local official ideology, plays a crucial role. Hall (1980), in the encoding/decoding model of communication, introduces three positions in reading a media message: the dominant/hegemonic, the negotiated, and the oppositional. Chinese millennial’s ambivalent reading of American cinema, praising and criticizing, suggests a decoding position in which individuals are in a position of resistance to two power blocs: global Hollywood which exerts hegemony through filmic texts, and the dominant ideology of official culture in the local. It is the latter that is likely to be neglected in comprehending the reception of foreign pop culture. When the standards of the ideology of mass culture become increasingly stricter, people will be feeling more oppressed and turning to a populist position (Ang, 1985).

As discussed in **Chapter Two**, movie-viewing, for Chinese millennials, is highly fragmented. **Chapter Four: What “Viewing Strategy” do Chinese Millennials Apply when Watching Hollywood Films?** concentrates on audience reception of three different types of Hollywood films: superhero movies, Oscar classics, and brain-burning films. Selected in accordance with results from the questionnaire surveys and focus group discussions, they are audience-led categories that are the most popular foreign pictures in China. I will look into the “viewing strategy” (Barker, 2006) Chinese millennials apply in consuming and appreciating these genres. I borrow the concept from Martin Barker who sees viewing as a motivated activity (2006). This concept revisits the Uses & Gratifications tradition of audience research in media studies, claiming the significance of pre-conditions from which viewers make sense of a film. (These conditions include, but are not limited to, expectations towards a film, prior knowledges related to the film, sense of importance attached to the viewing activity, real or imagined companions of the event, et cetera.). The purpose is to interrogate both the experience and judgement that a film audience realizes under certain conditions. I thus demonstrate that, upon enjoying different types of films, how millennial movie-viewers switch between different viewing strategies through which they seek different satisfactions, associate with different modes of consumption, and apply different critical theories of evaluation.

Hollywood has been criticized for its stereotypical representation and (mis)appropriation of other cultures for decades. However, recent years have seen Hollywood’s increasing efforts to flirt with mainland Chinese audiences by incorporating Chinese cultural elements in a less negative way in order to access the and take advantage of the growing market. **Chapter Five: How do Chinese Millennials Interpret Chinese Cultural Elements in Hollywood Films** takes into consideration such issue to

investigate the local reception of the representation of ‘themselves’ in foreign culture. I will answer the question by focusing on three tropes: product placement of Chinese brands in Hollywood blockbusters, Chinese actors participating in Hollywood productions, and Hollywood films inspired by Chinese histories or folktales. Millennial’s interpretations are analyzed with reference to a wide range of contexts including but not limited to the Sino-US cinema relationship from production to reception. In the process of cross-cultural reception, this chapter looks into the role that cultural identity (that is, being millennial Chinese, and Chinese, in terms of both ethnic and nationality) plays and the different priorities it invokes in the process of audience deciphering different cultural elements. It is to demonstrate to what extent does cultural identity constrain the audience's freedom of sense-making and to what extent does it facilitate their cosmopolitan positioning in the process of cross-cultural communication.

While Chinese cinema has been drawing research attention both in Chinese and Western scholarship for more than several decades, audience research is one of the most neglected and underdeveloped areas in China (Zhang, 2006). As the new millennium witnessed the dramatic transformation of China’s film industry, the transformation of the new generation moviegoers is also under way (Lu, 2016). In the **Conclusion** chapter, I will provide a summary of my research findings and their implications. With further discussion on the extent of audience agency in the contemporary media environment, I claim that the study can contribute to a better understanding of the generational audiences who are a significant part of cinema culture in China. Millennials’ movie-viewing practice disintegrates in response to the changes of media system and social realities in history. Hollywood becomes inseparable in the millennial’s discourse of cinema as it sets boundaries and benchmarks for what makes a (good) film. In addition, millennials are not

apolitical when Hollywood offers them resources and getaways to engage with sensitive issues that are otherwise impossible to represent within domestic cultural creations.

Definitions and Clarifications

Hollywood: In this thesis Hollywood refers in general to American cinema, which can be classified into: 1) feature films that are produced and/or co-produced by American filmmakers, including commercial blockbusters made by major studios and prestige indies acquiring worldwide recognition; and, 2) the broadly defined American filmmaking systems where those feature films are made. Since I am particularly interested in how millennials conceptualize and define this term, I do not put too much limitation regarding the meaning, denotative or connotative, of it. In addition, global Hollywood can refer either to the increasing dissemination of popular American cinema, or to the increasing transnational filmmaking and distributing practices initiated by American filmmakers.

Millennial Generation: As I have mentioned at the beginning of the thesis, there are no precise and unified dates limiting when the millennial generation starts or ends. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the millennial generation are those people reaching young adulthood around the year 2000, while according to the Cambridge Dictionary they were born in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. Pew Research Center defines the millennial generation as those born between 1981 and 1996. In this thesis, I term Chinese millennial as people born during the 1980s and 1990s, who are usually called post-80s and post-90s in China. Urban millennials were born under the CPC's single child policy and emerged during the country's reform and opening-up program, a period heralding rapid economic, political, and social change.

Chapter One: Approaching Millennial Movie-viewers

An unlikely urban legend as it seems, at the end of the nineteenth century a 50-second silent film of a train pulling into a station simply could astound an audience and set them running. Now? People get used to wearing glasses in order to experience the three-dimensional cinematic representation of the universe. Dreadful as Sontag (1995) claimed “the decay of cinema”, home entertainment and digital technologies have pinned down the experience of movie-viewing to our private and domestic territory over the years. Watching films in today’s media rich environment, in which alternatives in both time and space for viewing are offered, is considerably different from what it was a hundred years ago. At an event hosted by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Henry Jenkins (2015), as the opening speaker, described movie-going in a connected world: “...the future of cinema will involve diverse, not singular exhibition experiences, both in commercial movie theaters and beyond. We will have event movies that we all turn out to see, and we will have movies that we will watch when we have time, and we will watch by whatever device we have handy at the time that movie’s available.” As far as I’m concerned, that future has already come.

To understand the people who watch films and how they watch them, we thus must be cautious and flexible with regard to keeping up with the theorizations of and experiments on such social subjects. In this study, I am concerned with a specific group of young movie-viewers and their daily life engagement with foreign cinema, questioning how Chinese millennials make sense and make use of Hollywood in order to fulfill their own agenda. It is, in a general sense, a reception study of a particular media for a particular audience at a particular region in a particular historical age. It is worth noticing that, as the research purpose of this study has made explicit, this reception analysis does

not only concern the movie-viewers' interpretation, but also their appropriation – the sense-making and the meaning-making – of not a singular text but rather a group of texts, or, in other words, a mega-text called “Hollywood”. It is through this concept of cultural consumption that this study endeavors to reveal the significance of audience practice in the local reception of global media. Accordingly, three specific research questions are raised: how the idea of Hollywood is located and understood by Chinese millennials; what “viewing strategy” Chinese millennials apply when watching Hollywood films; how Chinese millennials interpret the Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films. To answer these questions, this chapter seeks to develop an appropriate research methodology that regards as important how viewers construct perceptions in the process of reception. I will firstly discuss studies that have tried to systematically theorize about the role of film spectators and spectatorship, focusing on the debating struggle of a passive or an active image of the film audience. In addition, I will consider a series of empirically based ethnographic works studying people’s cultural consumption of media in everyday life, including audiences watching television or films as well as readers reading magazines or popular fictions. These studies greatly inspired the research design of my examination on Chinese millennial’s reception of Hollywood. With their relevance and influence combined, I will then outline the approach of this research toward its subjects, dissecting research methods in which sampling, data collection, and analytical strategy are explained. In the end, I will address the rationale and limitations of such research design.

From the Passive to the Active to...

Film audiences, that is, those who watch films, were considered one of the earliest members of the mass audiences who were believed subjected to the mass production of

media and susceptible to those mediated messages (Christie, 2012; Gripsrud & Lavik, 2008; & Reinhard & Olson, 2016). At a time when there was only press, recorded music, motion picture, and radio broadcasting, the hypodermic needle model or, in another name, magic bullet theory seemed to be the first attempt to explain how audiences might react to mass media: individuals would all receive and accept an intended message in the same way. Grounded in traditions of social science from the Chicago School of media theory, the Payne Fund Studies, conducted in the 1920s and 1930s, were to examine the impact of motion pictures on young Americans. Herbert Blumer, in *Movies and Conduct* (1933), reported that race, class, or gender made almost no difference when cinema served as a major imitative influence on adolescents' conduct and worldview (Petersen, 2013). This disturbing result seemed to have justified cinema's impact on its audience in a way as if by a hypodermic needle.

At the same time, the Frankfurt School, addressing the transformation of capitalist societies in the early 1930s in relation to the emerging mass communication media, indirectly (since their ultimate purpose was not to address the mass audience in itself) depicted a similar image of the passive mass audience. Adorno and Horkheimer, referring to Hollywood in their critiques of the culture industry, were concerned that the masses were vulnerable to and would be deceived by the products organized according to commercial, rather than cultural, purpose (1944/1972). Cinema audience were thus subordinate to the mechanism of mass production in capitalist consumer societies. On the other hand, Benjamin, arguing from the same perspective of traditional Marxism, proposed a positive image of the masses in that the proliferation of mass art, including film, would encourage more political consciousness (1935/1969). In this sense, the film

audience was granted power and agency to a seemingly limited degree in which they were able to become self-aware of some political issues.

Early works under the classical film philosophy mostly conceived of the film spectator in either a formalist or a realist perspective, both of which constructed the spectator as a passive participant who entirely accepted the reality of unreality of the film; Sergei Eisenstein, on the other hand, admitted of variation among spectators as his theory emphasized the social and historical circumstances which might direct spectators towards misreading (Staiger, 1992; Reinhard & Olson, 2016). This sense of variation can be seen as an implicit account of how spectators could potentially be active.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the passive conceptualization in film studies developed into what is called screen theory, saturated with concepts from Althusserian structuralism, Barthesian semiotics, and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Mayne, 1993; Plantinga, 2009; Reinhard & Olson, 2016). Thereby, the film audience, indicated as the ideal spectator, is to read filmic text according to the textual features identically, and to engage with cinema according to the production and projection features universally (Marchetti, 2008; Reinhard & Olson, 2016). The film audience thus is not real people, but subject projected by the film. Within the same discipline from a feminist standpoint, film form in a patriarchal society constructed only a mode of pleasure for men, and women, in consequence, would have no choice but to surrender in front of the “male gaze” (Mulvey, 1975). The passive camp of theorizing film spectators was giving priority to the specialty of camera and film text: constructed as the ideal reader, film spectatorship was then universal and even ahistorical. At the same time, British cultural studies and Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model arose as a criticism to the text-activated reception theory (Hall, 1973/1980; Staiger, 1992; Reinhard & Olson 2016). According to the

encoding/decoding model, individuals could be argued to potentially stand in one of the three different reading positions – dominant, negotiated, and oppositional – when encountering a media text, which is considered the beginning of the active audience theory in reception studies.

Suggesting a cognitive approach to the study of watching films, David Bordwell claimed that the film audience must be active so that meanings can be constructed as a film text itself is not enough to initiate mean-making (1989). Applying cognitive science, such an approach demonstrated that movie-viewers, in order to make sense of the film, apply meaning-making strategies to construct the meaning of the text (Staiger, 1992). Even though the cognitivist film theorists were still more concerned with how the clues and signals in the film text could push the spectator to make sense, this theory indicated that film audience exert efforts in the process of interpretation. In addition, the pleasure of watching films was also taken into consideration in the cognitive approach to film spectators. Plantinga (2009) explained his “cognitive-perceptual” account of the movie-going experience in relation to pleasures which could originate from five sources: cognitive play, visceral experience, sympathy, narrative satisfactions, and reflexivity. He advocated that pleasures for the spectators differ significantly between individuals and genres.

Whether seen as passive or active participant, the film spectator in the above discussed traditions and theorizations has always been seen as secondary to the structure of filmic text or the characteristics of cinematic features since the focus of much of these academic works is less about reception in the real world than an implied spectatorship. Judith Mayne (1993) claimed that more empirical works need to be done in order to challenge, or at least test, such conceptualizations of the film spectators and spectatorship.

To propose an alternative, Janet Staiger (1992) studied the historical reception of American cinema by referring to historical sources such as film reviews, academic writings, and magazines. Addressing the audiences in the past, she illustrated that film audiences call on interpretive frames which are influenced by the social, cultural, and material aspects in history (Staiger, 1992). This historical-materialist approach to the cinema audience has been seen as a milestone in film and cinema studies.

Over a hundred years of the history in which researchers and scholars tried to understand people who watch films, it is highly impossible to unify the theorization of film spectators and spectatorship simply because different traditions answer to different conditions. Even so, it is still an issue of agency when talking about audiences being passive or active in reception studies. Considering the material and cultural realities in modern cinema, if a reception study is to focus on not just sense-making in relation to text or context alone, it would be idealistic to presume an implied spectator or spectatorship whether there might be presumptions of a passive or active articulated audience. “The key issue is not so much whether an audience is active but whether that activity is significant” (Silverstone, 1994, p.153). In my study of Chinese millennials watching Hollywood films, I insist on an empirical approach to the actual movie-viewers so as to claim some knowledge on a film audience in the contemporary moment.

On Not Giving Up the Empirical

Emphasizing the variety encountered, Jensen and Rosengren (1990) summarized five main research traditions of doing audience research for analytical purposes: *media effect* is concerned with what the media might do to the people, while *uses and gratifications* is interested at what individuals do with media and why; away from this binary-opposition is *literary criticism* that draws significantly from literature studies to

focuses on how the textual structure of media content guides its audience into their role; more recently, *cultural studies*, which helps to elevate popular culture through the re-definition of culture as “a process of meaning production” (p. 213), is seen mingled into *reception analysis*, a qualitative empirical study on audiences which, by taking into account the context of reception, balances between content and content receivers. This study stays away from the *media effects* model not only because of its implicit association with a passive-audience affirmation. While audience reception studies very much concern the relationship between media/media content and its audiences, the effect research seems to operate with assumptions that already justify its conclusions: media do have impact on the people in a sense that the media is the cause and the people behave accordingly in some particular way. Instead, I find *uses and gratifications* tradition offers insightful perspectives. It is never an indisputable fact that cinema is the ideal place for consuming movies. Instead, it is rather a notion constructed by the power relation between film studios and movie-goers in modern society in which viewers have been taught, educated more precisely, that distracting behaviors, such as talking, are inappropriate and to be looked down on. As have mentioned before, today’s movie-viewers in a media rich environment do not only consume movies in the theaters. To understand how common people incorporate movie-viewing into their everyday activities, it is necessary to inquire into daily lifestyles.

“The Birmingham Center’s encoding/decoding theory and its *Nationwide* research project made a vital breakthrough in debates about the media and their audiences – taking into account the relative power of text and reader in cultural struggles over meaning” (Moore, 1993, p.7). Even though Hall’s encoding/decoding model was initiated within the context of the UK and originally only considered individual interaction with television,

it is almost impossible to identify a recent work on audience research that does not make reference to it. I consider two implications in Hall's encoding/decoding theory of significance to my reception studies in a cross-cultural situation. For the first, the encoding/decoding reception theory sees media production and reception as separate circulations of meanings grounded in different discourses. As the figure of the model demonstrates below, decoding of the mediated message can have little to do with encoding if "meaning structures 1" and "meaning structures 2" are not the same. Accordingly, meanings articulated in the process of decoding depend more on the frameworks of knowledge, relations of production, and technical infrastructure in the context of reception than in that of production. In this sense, it becomes possible to examine cross-cultural consumption of media without paying too much attention to the conditions and mechanism of its original production.

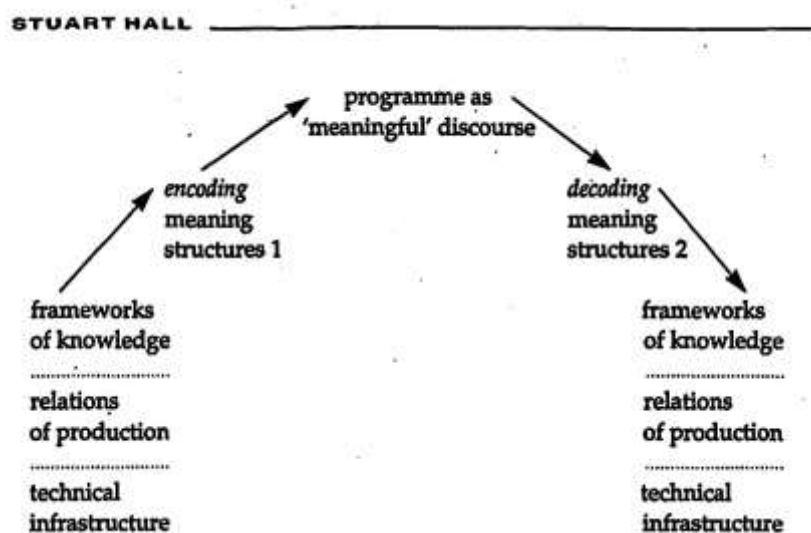


Fig. 3. Encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1993, p.94)

For the second, encoding/decoding theory is concerned with an active audience articulation which seeks to give power to individual viewers yet not without restrictions.

Within the encoding/decoding model, audience interpretations of media message may take place in one of the three positions: the dominant-hegemonic position (the preferred reading), the negotiated position (negotiated reading), and the oppositional position (oppositional reading). Decoders can never be entirely free to choose any position in the reading of any text. What reception studies need to reveal should be not only what type of reading an audience makes but also how that type of reading happens.

Since the mid-1980s, there have been an increasing number of qualitative audience research studies inspired by the traditions of interpretive ethnography in communication and media studies. This is sometimes called the New Audience Research or referred to as the “ethnographic turn” in media research, or cultural studies approach to media consumptions. The ethnographic perspective emphasizes situating the subject in its natural settings. It is worth noticing that de Certeau’s (1988) examination on common people’s everyday life practices in modern society helped promote the importance of context in media audience research with his theory that meaning is created by individuals in relation to their circumstances and experiences, claiming that “relation determines its terms, and not the reverse” to reject textual determinism. In addition, Fish’s (1980) notion of interpretive community has its significance in the New Audience Research approach. With its reference to the grouping of people, the “audiencing”, Fish’s argument refuses to accept both that text alone is adequate to support one true meaning and that various meanings can be deduced from the people alone. By favoring qualitative methods such as group discussions and interviews instead of quantitative ones such as questionnaire survey, the New Audience Research invites subjects to use their own words to produce rich materials. In what follows, I briefly consider a series of empirically based

ethnographic studies of media reception (or in some cases, cultural consumption) that are relevant to the research design of my work.

To empirically test Hall's encoding/decoding model, David Morley, through the project of *The 'Nationwide' Audience: Structure and Decoding* (1980), examined the connection between audience interpretations of television programs and their socio-cultural backgrounds. As he himself admitted, Morley was then more interested in explaining the problem of cultural power and media power through the interaction between television and its audience from the Birmingham School's Marxist perspective (Morley, as cited in Jin, 2011). In this study, twenty-nine different audience groups, each consisting of five to ten people, were selected to watch an episode from the BBC evening news program *Nationwide* (1969-1983). These people were divided into different groups according to their socio-cultural positions, for example, university art students, working-class apprentices, or middle-class bank managers, and thus were expected to differ in their decodings of the news episode they viewed (Storey, 1999). Many of the findings from the focus group interviews after the viewing of the episode seemed to confirm the encoding/decoding hypothesis. However, it is the discussion on the cases where the correlation between classes and reading positions is not unconditionally stable that needs to be paid attention to. Morley acknowledged that decoding positions are not solely determined by class positions: instead, it is "social position *plus* particular discourse positions produce specific readings" (Morley, 1980, p.134). Although Morley's accounting of the *Nationwide* audience prioritized the interaction between text and reader, he did realize the significance of the context of reception in that the text-reader encounter always occurs "in a field of many discourses" (Storey, 1999, p.79). Moores (1993), however, pointed out a shortcoming of Morley's study where the relevance of media

genres had for different reading groups needs to supplement the readers' responses to the ideological problematics of a specific media text. That is, would the selected groups who were asked to decode the news episode usually be watching news program at all?

Ien Ang managed to overcome the problem regarding the salience a media genre had for her researched audiences. To understand the popularity of the American soap opera *Dallas* (1978-1991) in the Netherlands, Ang conducted her reception study also by approaching the actual audience. In a Dutch women's magazine, she posted an advertisement asking people to write to her about why they like or dislike the show. Ang was able to collect forty-two letters from, though mostly female, both lovers and haters of the television series. In *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and Melodramatic Imagination* (1985), these responses were read "symptomatically", treated as texts and as discourses that audiences produce so analysis must go beyond the explicit (p.11). In addition, Ang's *Watching Dallas* is particularly concerned with "the mechanisms by which pleasure is aroused" (p.9) for she accepted that the program is popular because many people must "somehow enjoy watching it" (p.4). On the basis of what was expressed in the letters, Ang discussed how "pleasure" is produced and how it works in relation to the problems of fantasy and fiction, genre, mass culture, and feminism. In this audience reception study, Ang positioned herself as an insider, admitting that she was a viewer who enjoyed *Dallas*. Different from traditional social anthropology that employs the researcher as a complete "foreigner" to the community being studied to avoid biased positioning, interpretative ethnography in the New Audience Research tradition does not disguise the role of the researcher (Corner, 1991). The researcher's involvement in the media or texts under studying can offer insider information, as well as help bring herself closer to other viewers.

A sense of involvement can be a means of accessing similarly involved individuals (Richmond, 2015).

The primetime American melodrama *Dallas* is also the subject of another cross-cultural reception study carried out by Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, who recognized that we know so little of the meanings that overseas audiences find in American television fictions (1990). In *The Export of Meaning: Cross-cultural Readings of Dallas* (1993), they began the study by questioning the concept of cultural imperialism. They wondered whether worldwide distributed American popular culture like films and television programs function as more than just commodities for sale but also “the very substance of cultural imperialism” (Storey, 1999, p.88). In this study, Liebes and Katz recruited participants from four different subcultural groups living in the Jerusalem area: Israeli Arabs, Jewish immigrants from Russia, Moroccan Jews, and kibbutz members of Western origin. There were in total forty-four small groups of Israeli viewers who were asked open-ended questions after watching an episode of *Dallas* in a domestic situation (they were mostly couples who watched the episode at home or at a friend’s home). For comparison, Liebes and Katz also did focus group conversations regarding the same episode with a number of non-ethnic Americans living in Los Angeles and Japanese in Japan.¹¹ Audiences from different sub-groups interpreted *Dallas* by applying different frameworks: for some, it was referential, i.e. they read details in the narrative in relation to their own lives in reality; for others, it was critical, i.e. they decoded the text in relation to genre. What lay underneath were the framing discourses different groups chose in their interpretation of the program: the Americans, kibbutzniks and Japanese chose an aesthetic

¹¹ Japan is one of the few places in the world where *Dallas* has failed.

discourse; Jews of Moroccan ethnicity chose a moral one; Russian immigrants chose an ideological one (Storey, 1999). In Liebes and Katz's conclusion on the "pluralism in the decoding" (1993, p.152), it is evident that such pluralism does not arise from the text but concerns different cultural modes of interpreting and perceiving that audiences bring to their engagement with the text.

Another ethnographic work on television audiences is David Buckingham's *Public Secrets: 'EastEnders' and Its Audience* (1987) in which he focused on children and popular soap opera. His analysis was based on group discussions about the program with young viewers between the age of seven and eighteen. The group size was rather small, on average consisting of five members who were also friends with each other. Although he agreed that a soap opera like *EastEnders* cannot be reduced to a single meaning, he did not accept that meanings made by audiences are "infinite in scope" (Buckingham, 1987, as cited in Storey, 1999 p.93). A text is created for certain purposes. It is clear that people could realize that *EastEnders*, as a soap opera, is produced to be popular, to attract and maintain a large number of viewers. In order to be popular, it needs to be open to multiple possible meanings. That is, it has to be able to invite viewers to "an ideological terrain" (Buckingham, 1987, p.86) constructed by the text, while meanings are negotiated with limits that are grounded by the confrontation between the structure of the program and the agency of an audience. In addition, Buckingham discovered the complex relationship between audience and program in other facets. For example, he noticed that many children interviewed mentioned the social pressure to watch the program in order not to be left out from their friends. In this sense, watching and talking about it reconstructed their friendship through an extensive process of social interaction (Storey, 1999).

So far, the reception studies on the actual viewers discussed above have all been focused on explaining the audience in relation to a singular text, whether it is a television series or an episode from one. Their conclusions and arguments have demonstrated an increasing attention put on the surrounding conditions related to audiences making sense of television. Around the same time, Janice Radway's ethnographic study on a group of female readers who enjoyed romantic fictions is one considering the very act of romance reading itself. In *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* (1987), Radway studied a group of forty-two women who were regular customers at a book shop in a village called Smithton in Midwest America. She utilized multiple research methods including questionnaire surveys, group discussions, individual interviews, and informal discussions, as well as observing customers interacting with bookshop worker Dorothy Evans. In fact, the romance readers in Radway's study were able to function as a symbolic interpretative community in that they were drawn to the shop due to Dorothy Evans for her strategic romance-grading newsletters and her general advice to customers (Storey, 1999). *Reading the Romance* was designed to investigate reading empirically in order that, in addition to textual interpretation in tradition of literary criticism, through empirical based ethnographies of reading, complementary statements could be made about the historical and cultural meaning of literary production and consumption (Radway, 2009). In order to understand reception, the framework of cultural consumption should be expanded so as to treat it as an actual social event.

In a similar attempt to consider the reception of a media genre, Joke Hermes studied the consumption of women's magazines in everyday life. Many media reception studies that concern media texts or genres relevant to the female cannot escape from a feminist perspective (both Ang and Radway, in their reception studies of soap opera and romantic

fictions, had made some statements in relation to feminism). Hermes, in *Reading Women's Magazine: An Analysis of Everyday Media Use*, advocated her standpoint that “feminist struggle should be aimed at claiming respect” rather than showing concerns (1995, p.1). Thinking and working in this way, she presupposed an agency by “accepting the preferences of [the women she interviewed]” (Storey, 1999, p.121). To understand how women’s magazines were read, Hermes interviewed a total of eighty people, both male and female. What makes it distinctive is that Hermes attempted to place her work in the middle between text and context through the exclusive perception of the readers, focusing on both the reconstruction of a diffuse genre called women’s magazines and the mechanism of meaning-making in it (Storey, 1999). In *Reading the Romance* (1987), Radway did not reject that textual analysis on literacy has played a role in understanding the cultural significance of romance reading because she understood that different focuses would produce different answers. Hermes (1995), however, concluded that it is possible to understand genre by not addressing the nature of the text but approaching the pattern of reading and consuming of women’s magazines.

I have discussed a number of outstanding empirically based ethnographic works of media reception and cultural consumption that consider people watching television or reading fictions and magazines. Yet it has been extremely difficult to find corresponding empirical research on film spectators and spectatorship. Jackie Stacey believed that film scholars’ self-claiming position as expert academic critics sometimes did not allow them to “reliably and ethically analyze the interpretations of the film spectators” (Reinhard & Olson, 2016, p.9). Her theoretical interest in cultural studies audience research eventually led her to an analysis of audience in the cinema. In *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994), Stacey considered Hollywood reception by female

audiences in the wartime and postwar UK in relation to concepts of escapism, identification, and consumption. Besides cinema-going, *Star Gazing* (1994), as the title suggests, took into account female audience's "consumption of Hollywood stars and other associated commodities" (as cited in Storey, 1999, p.106). Hermes analyzed letters and questionnaires from a group of English women, all white, mostly over the age of sixty and mostly working-class, who, most importantly, had all been movie fans in their young adulthood during the 1940s and 1950s. Since her topic concerns a specific historical moment of film reception, her research work has also been seen as blending into questions of cinema memory and memories in media studies.

More recently, Richmond (2015) studied UK transnational reception of contemporary Japanese horror films. The doctoral research approached English fans of Japanese horror films through individual interviews and group discussions, trying to understand how audiences make sense of the film genre termed as Japanese horror in its UK reception context. Unlike the others mentioned above, this study touched on audience reception of not one single media text (a clip from a program or one TV show), but a series of films (and some relevant filmic elements) grouped by an abstract concept used in a particular context that is foreign to where the original content creations operate. Its emphasis on receiving context also paid attention to the current media environment in which viewing culture has stretched out from public theaters to domestic spaces. The reception focus in Richmond's work explored audience in relation to (foreign) media in terms of both practices and interpretations.

Researching the people who watch movies in today's rich media environment faces two major fundamental issues concerning the meanings of cinema. There remains the old problem with meanings in relation to the text. As long as movies keep telling stories and

conveying ideas, and as long as movie-viewers keep making sense of the stories and messages, it is necessary to research their interpretations in terms of not only what but also how. Reception studies claim that meanings are produced from the interaction between audience and text within context. Interpretation is thus subject to the power relations that construct where and how the text is produced and consumed. The challenge that lies in researching the cross-cultural interpretation of media contents is that movies are produced and consumed in different socio-political systems, although the systems are not necessarily opposed but are more likely to intervene with each other in the time of globalization. There are also problems with meanings in relation to the viewing practices. Although the industry is still advocating the big silver screen as the essence of motion picture viewing, watching films on smaller screens has been in people's daily lives for decades. As the singular and unified activity of cinema-going does not fully explain how people engage with movies today, film audiences cannot be studied based on the assumption that they come together in one place, at one time, lost in the same dark dimension, and immersed in the same text. It is expected to move into analysis of the general culture, consumption, and everyday life (Livingstone, 1998).

Many ethnographies of transnational audiences nowadays have been criticized for a tendency to rely on direct or indirect inquiries with participants, for example, group discussions or solicited emails, which lack what is traditionally required of the fieldwork in ethnographic research: "a commitment to immersion, the building of trust, long-term observation, and the participation in the daily lives of research participants" (Murphy & Kraidy, 2003, p. 5). Yet, as researchers attempting to confront a global media that is endlessly refining itself according to local adaptations, surely we should consider adjusting some epistemological issues within media ethnography so as to keep abreast of

the ever-changing interaction between the local and the global? Is a commitment to fieldwork conventions the only way to position media recipients in the natural setting of their everyday life? When a millennial participant reported that he probably had watched a particular movie more than ten times in his life and he still planned to watch it at least once every year or two, the assumed scale of media reception, here, is severely challenged. It seems entirely inappropriate to assert that one singular instance of him watching the film under observation would be more significant than all the others. The collective importance of the “more than ten times” is the consumption pattern that constitutes the “fieldwork” through which reception is linked to the media. That being the case, the researcher’s absence in the informant’s personal life should by no means disqualify the ethnographic perspective in a research process of forming conversations with him.

Sampling, Data Collection and Analytical Strategy

More than ten years ago, Zhang (2006) pointed out that audience research was one of the most neglected and underdeveloped areas in Chinese film studies. The purpose of this research is to explore the local audience’s everyday engagement with Hollywood cinema, in which both practices of viewing and interpretations of certain filmic contents are under consideration. Three methods of data collection were used, including questionnaire survey, focus group discussion, and individual in-depth interview. Although the questionnaire survey provides both numerical and open-ended elements, this research primarily takes a qualitative approach whose design is rather open and emergent than fixed and rigid.

Sampling

The fieldwork started with a preliminary questionnaire survey in the late spring of 2017 when the concrete research sample and research questions of this study had not even

been decided. The questionnaire survey was designed to gain demographic, contextual, and perceptual information about ordinary Chinese audience's movie-viewing activities and their general conceptualization of Hollywood as well as comments on American pop culture. It was intended to help develop themes and topics germane to future steps of data collection and to identify engaging participants. Just as Bourdieu suggested, survey method is preferable to demonstrate broad patterns of media consumption and taste, especially when used along with other qualitative methods (Hung, 2013). The questionnaire survey was published online at www.lediaocha.com in May 2017. In total, there are 130 valid responses, among which 103 were completed by Chinese post-80s and post-90s.¹² It is not a surprise to see this result given that younger generations are presumably more digital-friendly. In general, these millennial respondents formed a generational community that shows characteristics of urban-born, high-educational background, and positive attitudes towards foreign lifestyles and cultures. In terms of film appreciation, there was a contradictory tendency between millennials' perception of cinema as high art and popular culture. In addition, distinguished cinematic activities identified by the millennials during formative years seemed specific to the generation, which deserved further explanation. In particular, millennials frequently selected certain American films (e.g., *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Titanic*) as their favorites. However, they expressed mixed feelings towards Hollywood in relation to American mainstream ideology. On the one hand, they showed patriotic support to Hollywood's appropriation of Chinese culture, while they were uncomfortable with the capitalist logic behind film business operations on the other. These seemingly random outcomes

¹² For a sample questionnaire, please see Appendix VII. In addition, please see Appendix VIII for a brief summary concerning millennial respondents.

structure the well-educated urban millennials as an interpretive community, restrained yet critical. Taking into account that their formative years were in parallel with China's cinema reform in which Hollywood played a crucial role, I have decided to focus on searching for special meanings in this generational consumption and interpretation of Hollywood in China.

This study thus employs criterion sampling in which all participants must meet the criteria predetermined by the research. At the end of the questionnaire survey, I asked the respondents who were interested in participating in further group discussions and in-depth interviews to leave their contact information (email address). Through this means I was able to secure three discussion groups and twenty individual interviewees, all of whom were born between 1981 and 1995 in the urban areas of China.

Data Collection

In the following step, this research moved into the second stage of data collection: focus group discussions. In the 1940s when first used in radio audience research, running focus groups was considered more "as an addendum to the questionnaire or experimental study conducted with a random sample", putting weight primarily to the quantitative methods (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Now there is considerable diversity existing in the uses of focus groups. Although it is also used as a stand-alone method in many other media and communication studies, in my research focus group discussion is for digging up deeper contextual information regarding millennials' movie-viewing habits as well as narrowing down research questions in the next step of in-depth interview. All focus group discussions took place between June and September of 2017, with one in Shanghai and

two in Beijing. Each discussion session lasted at least 120 minutes.¹³ Firstly, group discussions, by fostering interactivity and dialogue among participants, recalled Chinese millennial's collective memories of early film experiences that are exclusive to the generation due to special social and cultural histories. It was also to discover how well and in what way Hollywood fits in different modes of consuming within these early film experiences. Findings resonated with China encountering global Hollywood during the 1990s and 2000s in a way that oral histories supplemented cultural event in the past with off-record sources. In spite of guided questions, participants were encouraged to elaborate on their answers so as to raise issues or commonalities they thought important to their consumption and reception of Hollywood films then and now. Again, I was faced with a group of restrained and critical audiences whose sense-making of foreign pop culture is not asocial and apolitical. For instance, they expressed concerns about government censorship on both foreign imports and domestic creations. They were also aware of Hollywood's hegemonic strategies in narratives and representations in the effort to win world audiences. I believe it is the generational bonding and the sense of daily conversational atmosphere of group discussion that have helped allow for increased richness of responses.

In the last stage, twenty individual in-depth interviews were conducted with Chinese millennials in November 2017, with eighteen through online face-to-face conversation and two via email communication. Although there is a rather detailed question list, I characterize my interviews as between structured and semi-structured. Interview methods generate interactivity with participants, which helps clear

¹³ For more information on focus group discussion settings and topics, please see Appendix IX.

misunderstandings and extends follow-up questioning. Qualitative interviewing elicits in-depth, context-rich personal accounts, perceptions and perspectives, which facilitate discovery of nuances in nature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The in-depth interview is most crucial to my research as answers to the key research questions are primarily drawn from analysis of interview data. As far as I am concerned, it is equally important to get access to the audience's expression as well as their critical thinking behind the expression. Therefore, a minimal degree of limitations and definitions were set in order to urge the participants to discuss in their own words in a natural setting. This is one way that, as the researcher, I intentionally allowed more power to be exerted from the audience's sense-making.

There are three sections in the in-depth interview, corresponding to the three major research questions. Part one, relating to one of the most heatedly discussed topics in the focus group discussions, was concerned with how the idea of Hollywood cinema is located and understood by Chinese millennials. As I have mentioned, audience's sense-making is realized in relation to both media text and reception context. When Chinese millennials watch Hollywood films, they are in negotiation with Hollywood hegemony, as embodied in the filmic text, as well as with the mainstream ideology regarding Hollywood in China. In the second part, I borrowed the idea of "viewing strategy" from Barker to investigate how Chinese millennials consume different types of Hollywood films. The three types under discussion, superhero movies, Oscar classics, and brain-burning films, are terms used by movie-viewers in their daily life conversations. Although they are not strictly within industrial standards or under academic categories, they were chosen according to the outcomes from the preliminary questionnaire survey regarding millennial's favorite genre and favorite Hollywood genre: action, drama, and sci-fi.

Superhero movies are basically adaptations of works from the two major American comic publishers – Marvel and DC – the most popular Hollywood blockbusters nowadays in the world. Oscar classic is a literal translation from mandarin Chinese which indicates American films nominated or awarded at the Academy Awards. Brain-burning, similar to puzzle films or mind-game films in western scholarship, deploys profound themes usually centered on the relationship between dream/VR and reality, men and A.I., or extreme crime and mental issue in unfamiliar narrative structures. It has recently become a catchphrase among audiences and fans in China. Last but not least, recent years have seen Hollywood's increasing incorporation of Chinese cultural element in the form of, mostly, brands, locations, actors, and folktale adaptations. Even though some were still able to achieve commercial success in the mainland (for example, *The Martian*), they generated mixed discussions both online and offline as local audiences sought for validity and reliability within the narratives. By introducing the history of Hollywood's stereotypical representation of the Orient, such as yellow face, the last part of the interview asked how Chinese millennials interpret Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films. Instead of examining how identities are constructed through media, the last part of the interview is more concerned with how millennials' cultural identity facilitates and constrains their sense-making regarding the elements from their own culture.

Analytical Strategy

Analyzing interview data can be of great value to our understanding of the social world. In particular, what increases the difficulty and requires further decision-making is conducting interviews in a language other than that of presentation, as well as looking beyond the interview materials as transparent windows of other's thinking (Roulston,

2014). This research is special in the way that all steps of data collection, from preliminary questionnaire surveys to focus group discussions to individual in-depth interviews, were done in mandarin Chinese. To convey the original meanings of cultural and contextual variations properly, or even just comprehensibly, into English is the most challenging sector in this research. In terms of data synthesis and analysis, I decided not to apply word-to-word translation and transcription. Instead, I first identified keywords and theme topics in original responses and formed conceptual frameworks in mandarin Chinese. This is to generate ideas of what these theme topics represent. And then I translated and transcribed the keywords, the conceptual frameworks, and corresponding paragraphs into English. Both prepared data in mandarin Chinese and in English were interpreted so as to come up with findings and conclusions. A common standpoint of data analysis in audience research is not to take responses as a direct reflection of actual opinions (Buckingham, 1993; Waldon, 2004). Accordingly, it is necessary to be aware of language as both constructive and performative, as well as to uncover the native use of language in the setting of interest.

Rationale and Limitations

Reception analysis is not flawless. The assumption that meaning of a message is the product of audience's interpretation gives priority to the media text while overlooks meanings in audience's consumption of the medium itself. That is, in terms of watching movies, there are meanings in relation to the film, i.e., what does the story mean to its viewers; there are also meanings in relation to the viewing practice, i.e., what does going-to-the-cinema or watching-at-home mean. Film audiences are increasingly difficult to theorize in today's rich media environment, especially with regards to the second meaning, since cinema-going does not fully account for how people engage with movies

anymore. Since the focus of this research is the actual audience in their real life, I stand with the New Audience Research, favoring qualitative over quantitative research methods (though both have been used in this thesis).

The focus of this research on a specific generation of audience, Chinese millennials, is in accord with the distinctive role that Hollywood plays in the development of contemporary Chinese cinema. I will elaborate more on the implications and significance of the generational audience in the next chapter. I ended up with a small group of millennial participants who, as the participant demographic appendix show, were all born and grew up in the urban area of the eastern part of China. Additionally, they are, far more than expected, well educated. I am aware of the limitation of this group so that, by no means, can they be taken to represent the overall millennial generation in China. However, considering the considerable differences in economy and culture between rural and urban societies in the mainland, it is reasonable to accept this group as representative in certain terms.

There are limitations in focus group and interview methodologies. It is generally acknowledged that group discussion can be affected by an opinion leader. In this research, my use of focus group discussion is to build a relationship with participants and through group discussion, in its open and interactive sense, to come up with main topics to further investigate during the interview sessions. The opinion leaders and their influence on group discussion can rather be seen as an advantage regarding the object of this research. There are problems in terms of researcher being influenced by responses and the reliability of interviewee answers. Audience research under the scope of active audience theory subscribe to the idea that interviewee's responses are presented with frames of

references that are familiar to themselves. Whether true or false, they are useful in the context of this study.

There are also limitations in the cross-cultural translation of participant responses. As have mentioned earlier in this chapter, all processes of data collection were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The differences between language use and the issues of interpreting slang and informal phrases has created one of the biggest challenges for the researcher in this study and, without a doubt, required much more effort. My strategy of preparing and analyzing data as discussed above from a cultural studies perspective (together with grounded theory as well as phenomenological perspective) is to limit the influence of cultural barriers yet without ignoring them.

Chapter Two: Millennial Generation and Their Film Experiences

Netflix is officially out at Cannes – out of the competition lineup, at least.

The Hollywood Reporter, March 23, 2018

As a matter of fact, it is extremely hard for me to understand why Cannes Festival ruled Netflix's films out of competition. As for my generation, it was primarily through television and online streaming that we've got to watch films when we began to enjoy watching them. Going to the cinema, on the contrary, is the mistress. Then movie theaters did revive but people also get used to enjoy watching on their smartphones. For us, cinema is never a necessity.¹⁴

Grey Fortress (Douban user, registered name), March 28, 2018

In his discussion on the fundamental facts in relation to generation as a sociological concept, Mannheim (1928/1952) points out that, in the case of specific generation groups, it is the underlying biological factors that determine the “fresh contacts” with the social and cultural heritage (p.293). This indicates that certain common experiences of the same events, especially during the formative years, have a profound impact on the formation of generational consciousness. To introduce such an idea into media studies, shared media experiences in the period of youth, in terms of both contents and technologies, contribute to the construction of generation building and identity (Siibak, Vittadini, & Nimord, 2014). To research the audience from a generational perspective, it is therefore necessary to look into the past so as to make sense of the present. My intention in this thesis is, taking film consumption as a social event, to inspect the role of popular American cinema in the daily lives of a generation audience. I seek to understand how Chinese millennials

¹⁴ Original text is in Chinese and translated by the author.

make sense and make use of Hollywood to fulfill their personal agenda. Film consumption, thus, should be interpreted in a broader sense, from the public spectacle of the motion picture experience, to film experienced in private places, and much more (Meers & Biltereyst, 2012). This chapter, drawing its empirical findings from the preliminary questionnaire responses and focus group discussions which I conducted in 2017, introduces the millennial movie-viewers in China in order to elaborate on an extensive understanding of historical and contemporary film reception. It reveals the history of generational movie-viewing activities, focusing on millennials' memories of early film experiences and reflections on the changing modes of film consumption in the mainland. In particular, it concerns not only on what platforms millennials have been watching movies, but the practices and contexts that come together to enable certain types of films to be consumed in certain ways.

Audiences are not without their own history, and generational audiences especially so. Chinese post-80s and post-90s are the generation born under the CPC's single child policy. They inherently lack sibling bonds and experiences. A number of them were brought up by grandparents when their own parents were too busy with work or working in another city. School days are rather unpleasant memories for Chinese millennials because the pressures and burdens were too much for them to bear. The national entrance examination was the primary way to go to a prestigious university or college in China. School hours thus could be from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, sometimes even six or seven days a week. Under such circumstances, movie-watching, mainly via pirating, became probably the most economical and efficient leisure activity via which they temporarily escaped from the overwhelming pressure of homework and studies. However, the social and material conditions during China's reform era has made movie-

viewing practices, particularly for the millennial generation, highly discursive. Before the reconfiguration of the domestic film business, even the post-80s group were still too young to be taken to the movie theaters. Although television became a household necessity in the early 1990s, there weren't many channels playing films, while more particularly, there weren't many films produced in or imported to China at that moment. When Hollywood re-entered the mainland, millennials were mostly still in their school days. Around the turn of the century, cinemas were primarily filled with two types of movies: domestic main-melodies such as *Red Cherry* (Ye, 1996) and *Grief Over the Yellow River* (Feng, 1999), and imported Hollywood *dapian*¹⁵ such as *The Lion King* (Minkoff & Allers, 1995) and *Titanic* (Cameron 1997). After the success of Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002), a group of Chinese mega-productions emerged, including *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* (He, 2003), *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang, 2004), and *The Promise* (Chen, 2005). In the meanwhile, as disk players became more affordable and desktops invaded Chinese people's homes, the adolescent millennials quickly turned to the small screens on which solitary watching was normalized and repeat viewing was common. With the help of piracy, physical as well as digital, they were able to get access to a much wider range of video entertainment than ever before: from *Rear Window* (Hitchcock, 1954) to *Ju-On: The Grudge* (Shimizu, 2002), from *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953) to *My Sassy Girl* (Kwak, 2001), from *Evita* (Parker, 1996) to *La Vie en Rose* (Dahan, 2007). On the record, Chinese authorities maintained strict control over cultural

¹⁵ *Dapian* (in Simplified Chinese: 大片), literally means big picture or mega-film. It is a similar expression to "high-concept" in Mandarin, in that Da (in Simplified Chinese: 大) indicates a feature film characterized by huge production budget, magnificent special visual effects, celebrity film director, famous movie stars, and enormous box office potential, which are typical marketable variables during a film's P&A campaign.

importation; off the record, the young poachers found great enjoyment from the grey zone. After more than a decade's efforts in cinematic reform, Chinese cinema was seen to experience a remarkable boom after 2008. As a result, urban areas have become equipped with multiplexes and cinema-going, refined as part of the modern lifestyle, has revived. At this time, the youngest millennials had already begun college life. With more disposable money and spare time to spend, they returned to the public space of movie-viewing. The contemporary Chinese cinematic field of domestic production now consisted of political main-melody film, commercial film, international Chinese film, and independent film (Nakajima, 2016). Yet imported Hollywood *dapian* such as *Transformer: Age of Extinction* (Bay, 2014) and *Furious 7* (Wen, 2015) continue to dominate China's box office. Chinese millennials are similar to the VHS generation in the West (Jones, 2013), growing up watching movies both at home and in cinemas, but there are considerable differences in the social, cultural, and political backgrounds. What they enjoy is not simply the theatrical spectacles of blockbusters or the private flexibility of home videos.

In the following, I first briefly summarize millennial informants' contemporary movie-viewing habits and preference. Then the main section of this chapter revolves around a few distinctive viewing practices that, identified by the participants, are of significance to their everyday life engagement with cinema: early cinema-going was occupied by school-organized events; the television program *The Best* on CCTV-6 was the most frequently mentioned in their domestic viewing with families; physical and digital pirating enabled repeat viewing and helped develop personal tastes and preferences; watching with bullet-screens gradually became trendy both online and in theaters. Through analysis of Chinese millennial's lived experiences and social practices

in relation to movie-viewing, this chapter addresses how they navigate between the public and the private, between the disciplined and the rebellious, so as to achieve audience agency in accordance to social realities under different circumstances. To be sure, the fieldwork scale of a reception study like this cannot offer definitive conclusions on behalf of the complete millennial generation in China (especially not those in rural or underdeveloped areas). The descriptions and analysis, nevertheless, cast light on the ways in which members of the urban post-80s and post-90s generation experience movies at home and at the theaters.

Millennial Movie-viewers in China

Among the 130 valid responses acquired from the preliminary online questionnaire survey, 103 were completed by Chinese millennials, in other words, the generation born between 1980 and 1999. Most of them are now professional rookies or college students (undergraduate and postgraduate) living in the urban areas of China. There are 11 ethnic minority respondents, the majority of whom are from the Manchu ethnic group. Unsurprisingly, these millennial respondents are overall well-educated, 88 percent with bachelor's degrees or even higher. In addition, almost one-fourth of the respondents have had long-term overseas experiences. Many had been to English-speaking countries, such as the US, the UK, and Australia, on college exchange programs or for higher education degrees. The rest generally went to other European countries, including France, Germany, and Spain, and a few have been living in Japan and Mexico.

In general, millennial audiences enjoy watching movies, although not significantly more than other leisure and entertainment activities. Slightly more than one-third of the survey respondents suggested that they enjoy watching films more than other recreations, while in fact only twenty-one percent would self-identify as a movie buff. In the group

discussion sessions, however, participants associate motion pictures with serious meanings: it is a special form of cultural creation “to get in touch with the world” (**YJ01-M8WMY**), “to reflect on social concerns” (**TM03-F8WMY**), and “to feel empathy with the protagonist” (**HL04-F9WBY**). Millennial audiences expressed contradictory feelings in which although movies are considered to some degree highbrow, watching films is nothing more than a leisure activity that seems to be part of the mass culture.

The movie theater, to the millennial generation in China, is not a must in their consumption of movies. Although almost ninety percent of the survey respondents suggested that they like or extremely like watching films, more than half admitted that they only occasionally visit movie theaters. This may be largely due to the fact that in China, going to the movies is relatively more an “experience luxury” for the emerging middle-class rather than simply to “enjoy some pop culture” (Fritz, 2018, p.209). As of 2018, mean disposable income for urban citizens in China is RMB 39,251 yuan per person per year, which is RMB 3,270 yuan per month.¹⁶ The average film ticket price in 2018 is 35.3 yuan, and watching in special formats, for instance, in 3D and/or IMAX, costs much more than that.¹⁷ For the working millennials, going to the theater with friends or colleagues to watch whatever is trendy at the moment is out of social needs, and sometimes even under “social or peer pressure” (**TM03-F8WMY**, **LX19-F8WMY**); that is, they rush to the theaters to watch new releases in order not to be left out from conversations with school friends or co-workers. On the other hand, solitary viewing is very common among Chinese youth. Participants of the focus group discussions

¹⁶ Data Source: National Bureau of Statistics, http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201901/t20190121_1645791.html .

¹⁷ Data Source: chinafilm.com, <https://www.chinafilm.com/hygc/7238.jhtml> .

mentioned that even when they choose to watch films at home, viewing still requires “a sense of ritual”— they try to recreate an imitative environment of darkness and quietness, in which they can better “immerse into the film” (YH05-M8WMY, MQ13-F8WMY). Another significant practice for Chinese millennials is repeat viewing, for 83 percent have watched or are more than willing to watch a given film more than once. Considering the material realities and cultural policies of film culture in China, piracy, in this case, greatly contributes to millennial’s intensive consumption of film contents outside theaters.

Celebrities (including, but not limited to, actors, actress, and directors), personal genre preferences, and professional critical reviews are among the most important factors that may influence their decisions whether or not to watch a specific film. It is worth noticing that these are typical marketing variables that mostly function as the selling point for a commercial film. Drama, comedy, crime, and science fiction are among millennial audience’s favorite genres. After watching a film, more than 90 percent of the questionnaire respondents admitted that they need or want to talk about it. Within this kind of social interaction, millennials are mostly keen on sharing their thoughts of and evaluations on narratives and storytelling, actor’s performance, and meanings as well as inspirations they associate with the film.

Even though Hollywood has been reported to dominate China’s film market for many decades, Chinese millennials, according to the results from questionnaire survey, seem not to have a strong preference for American films. Less than one-third of the survey respondents explicitly prefer Hollywood films to others. However, eighty percent of them believed that of all the films they’ve consumed, at least thirty percent are Hollywood productions. In the case of Hollywood cinema, millennial respondents’ favorite genres reveal some differences: they still very much enjoy drama and comedy, but action and

science fiction represent Hollywood's advantage the most at the international film market. Millennial participants disagree on whether contemporary Hollywood is still American. Their opinions diverge regarding the globalization of Hollywood in relation to its Americanness but agree that "Hollywood cinema is commercial" (YJ01-M8WMY, HL04-F9WBY, JC08-F8WMY, SQ14-M8WMY, DJ15-F8WMN, SX18-M9WBN).

Between the Public and the Private, between the Disciplined and the Rebellious

Through a statistical description of data gathered from the preliminary questionnaire survey, I have tried to demonstrate in general Chinese millennial's movie-viewing habits and some facts in relation to their perception of Hollywood cinema. To complement knowledge on the generational audience, it is necessary to situate Chinese millennials' film experiences in the context of different social, cultural, and historical moments. In this section, I intend to elaborate on Chinese millennial's movie-viewing activity in everyday life by discussing a series of distinctive film experiences mentioned in questionnaire surveys and focus group discussions. There are memories as well as oral histories regarding cinema-going and movie-viewing. Memories can provide ample sources for evidence of audience relationships with cinema (Staiger, 2005). We need to look beyond what millennial participants remember, looking into how they remember, in other words, the recreation of those memories. Oral history is valuable because it gives the voice to the kind of memories that are seldom written down and would thus be lost to the official record (Kuhn, Biltereyst, & Meers, 2017).

School-outings

Results from the preliminary questionnaire survey demonstrate that about half of the millennial respondents claimed that their first-time experiences with movies were in the movie theater. However, many replies suggest that it was not with parents or senior

family members or even friends, but an extracurricular activity organized by the educational institutions. When Chinese millennials were in their school days, this kind of cinema-going was more common, compared to movie-going out of self-volition. In fact, the school-organized cinema-going activity was one of the most heated discussed topics for all focus groups. No participant was unfamiliar with it.

Typically among primary and middle schools in the urban areas of China in the late 1990s and early 2000s, a school-outing cinema-going program was mandatory for all students. Instead of having classes in the afternoon as usual, students were taken to the nearby cinema or community auditorium to watch one or two feature films (sometimes educational documentaries). Walking together filled the routes from campus to movie theater and vice versa. Sometimes the students were even asked to submit feedback and reviews after watching the film. School- outings' contribution to the attendance figure was crucial during the tail-end period when Chinese domestic productions and many local theaters were still heavily dependent on group-tickets sales by state-owned enterprises or institutions. Main-melody propaganda films thus accounted for a large portion of what students had watched in the school-organized cinema events.

The Red Detachment of Women, at the cinema, I watched it with classmates from primary school. This has left a deep impression on me cuz I remember we walked from school to the theater. And our primary school organized this kind of event quite often. Maybe because it's Shangdong, you know, very red.¹⁸ We've watched many classic red films, like *Tunnel War* and *Landmine Warfare*. (WW06-F8WMY)

WW06-F8WMY's answer is rare among discussion participants. She recalled not only the title of the red/main-melody films, but also what the story is generally about.

¹⁸ Shandong province is in Eastern China and is a relatively conservative province which is usually considered as celebrating the CPC's core values and advocating traditions in Confucianism.

Many others only have vague memories of having watched some kind of main-melodies and fragments of the plot at best. As with **WW06-F8WMY**, the adjective they used the most to describe these movies is *red*, and they did not associate going to watch *red* films with leisure at all. On the contrary, discussions on experiences of Hollywood or Hong Kong/Taiwanese films were much more enthusiastic.

Moderator: I guess because you are roughly the same age, this kind of school-outing was common at that time.

LX19-F8WMY: I remember my primary school took us for this, maybe it was called *Mama, Please Love Me One More Time*¹⁹...

[multiple]: Yes, yes, that too! I think we also watched that one.

TM03-F8WMY: ...I'm not sure if it's the first time, but as early as I remember, it was a Jackie Chan film, *Who I Am?* And yes, it was also school organized...

Moderator: I think *Who I Am?* is coproduced between Hong Kong and Hollywood.

[FG-Participant-02]: For us, it's like that. They took us to watch two films (in a row). The first one is domestic, mostly main-melody or classic red films. But when the lights were out and the second film begun, *Jurassic Park* or whatever, the whole theater room cheered and clapped.

Cinema education can be seen in many other countries. For example, school outings to watch movies in theaters have been a regular practice in France since the 1970s, which is treated as an ongoing institutional effort endorsed by the school system to introduce cinema (primarily art-house cinema) to the students as an art form (Marx, 2014). However, it is difficult for me to consider school-outings in China in a similar way as cinema initiatives within the education system aiming to mold an upper-class sense of cinephilia onto the students. First and foremost, no participants recalled any memories of ever being

¹⁹ The film *My Beloved* (Chen, 1989) is a Taiwan independent drama. Its mandarin title *Mama Zai Ai Wo Yici* (in Simplified Chinese: 妈妈, 再爱我一次) literally means mama please love me one more time, as the participant remembered.

taught how to be a good film audience in the theater, for example, no talking or no disturbing others. For the millennials, film experience in terms of encountering cinema for the first time is more about socially interacting with friends and classmates outside the school environment. It is ironically reflected in group discussions when they talked about nowadays viewing culture in China, complaining that disturbance like talking, texting, and baby crying is a major factor driving them away from cinemas.

Unlike in the French cinema education program, the kind of theaters that juvenile millennial Chinese visited in school-outings were ordinary and mainstream, not independent art-house cinemas. As a matter of fact, theater condition in China in the late 1990s was so poor that the majority of them were still single-screened. Young millennials were taken from one public space, the school, to another, the movie theater. But in the case of school-organized events, the movie theater was not a place shared with strangers but with members belonging to the same community. Furthermore, neither were the young audiences free from authority surveillance since they were accompanied by headmasters and teachers all along. The main power relation under such circumstance was still about the educational institution versus individual student. As a result, their identity did not shift to become film audiences. For millennial Chinese, the public space of cinema in the school-outings was not safe nor attractive to navigate. The kind of pleasures they were able to achieve seemed to come from the film text itself, the story (though this was not always guaranteed), and from the social interaction with group members.

Family Viewing and *The Best* on CCTV-6

Domestic consumption of films is common for the millennial generation. One-third of the survey respondents remembered that their first experience with movies happened

either at home of their own or at a friend's place, mostly accompanied by parents, older family members, or friends of the same age. Sociality, as a fundamental characteristic of movie experience, endures into film consumption's domestic territory (Jones, 2013). In many cases, the presence of parents was not unpleasant nor stressful in millennial's memories of domestic movie-viewing. Sometimes it could be rather awkward when there were erotic depictions such as kissing scenes or nudity on screen if they were watching with parents. Until the present day, there is no film rating system in China, resulting in audiences, whether young or mature, all having access to the same content available to them. Several participants remembered when watching *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) or *The Bridges of Madison County* (Eastwood, 1995) at home, their parents quickly turned around to cover their eyes when nudity or sex scene was on the screen. Overall, watching on disk players with families at home is an important event that has the capacity to improve family dynamics.



Fig. 4. *The Best* (September 29, 2018), featuring *Manchester By the Sea*

However, it is another form of domestic consumption that stands out in millennial's historical reception of Hollywood. Television in China is subject to control and

ensorship by both the state administration, i.e. State Administration of Press, Publication, Ration, Film and Television (SAPPRFT), and the Communist Party, i.e. The Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCPPD). During the cinematic reform era, the state government was keen to cultivate modern cinema culture. Some questionnaire informants suggested that, when they were young children, their families enjoyed watching together a particular television program *The Best (Jia Pian You Yue)*²⁰ on CCTV-6. CCTV-6 is a satellite television channel within the predominant state television broadcasting agency, China Central Television.²¹ It was launched as the first and only nationwide movie channel in 1996. The channel is exclusively for presenting feature films, including narrative, translated and special films, as well as news and other programs related to cinema. *The Best*, initiated in September 1998, is a Saturday night prime-time program dedicated to bringing excellent foreign films to the public. The program consists of three sections: a brief introduction of the film presented, the screening of the film, and afterwards an appreciation of the film. The program usually features a host, a narrator, and specially invited guests, including film scholars, critics, and professionals, from time to time. The foreign films played on *The Best* are either classics, mega-produced, award-winners, or box-office successes, which in a sense aligns with the official definition of excellent foreign imports discussed in the Introduction chapter. The program covers a wide range of foreign films that are difficult to summarize, but all the Top 10 films on Douban Movie 250 have been showed in the

²⁰ *Jia Pian You Yue* (in Simplified Chinese: 佳片有约), literally means having an appointment with good films.

²¹ China Central Television (in short: CCTV) falls under direct supervision of the SAPPRFT, now NRTA, which is subordinate to the State Council of the People's Republic of China. Since 2018, CCTV-6 is required to report to CCPPD as well (Shi, 2018).

program. Although it declares that selections are global, the majority are still from the US. *The Best* is still running in present day and now all the episodes can be streamed online on CCTV official website (cntv.cn) and CCTV-6 partner platform (1905.com).

Watching films on television is different from watching on DVDs. First and foremost, audiences have to accommodate themselves according to the schedule of the channel. In China, no foreign drama series or programs can be played on television during the early prime-time hours, between 19:00 and 22:00. *The Best* is on Saturday night at ten o'clock and re-broadcasted the next Sunday afternoon. There is a slight variation in millennial respondents' tone of expression when talking about watching films on television. In the case of DVD consuming, it was the parents who possessed the capital resources and controlled the domestic activities as they decided when to watch what. The young millennials, as a result, had to cooperate with their parents' decisions and their own film experiences were highly affected by adult movie controls. Watching on DVDs gave much power to those who controlled the monitor to play, to pause, to fast-forward or backward. On the contrary, parents could not determine what was to be consumed on television. Millennial remembrance thus changed to "my dad used to watch *The Best* on CCTV-6 with me, and he wouldn't blame me even though it was late" (survey respondent No.101). By taking away control power from the parents, watching feature films on television facilitated young millennials' audience agency.

Pirating

If the school-outings and tele-viewings can be considered supporting roles in Chinese millennials everyday-life engagement with films, pirating would definitely be the leading character. Wang (2003) has inclusively investigated the seriousness of the issue of audio-visual infringement in the greater China area. In 1999, a pirated copy of

Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace (Lucas) could reach the grey market in mainland China within two weeks after its international release (Wang, 2003). At the time when millennials were in their middle and high school years, video shops, where they could either buy or rent disk copies of filmed entertainment, were popular around the country. In the video shops, they could find not only newly released Hollywood blockbusters, but copies of the old classical pictures illicitly copied from legal versions in Hong Kong or Taiwan, which were subtitled in traditional Chinese.



Fig. 5. Image of a video shop in China (online source)

From the millennials' responses regarding their pirated consumption of movies and other forms of visual entertainment, I argue that pleasure and enjoyment of pirating does not come from a political standpoint, that is, resisting the censorship or state control over cultural importation. Pirating, in the physical format, requires human labor. It is the going out, the selecting, the buying, and the feedback sharing collectively attributed to Chinese millennials' pirated consumption of filmed content. As one participant detailed her experience:

I particularly remember that, when I was in middle school, there was a small video shop on my way home. A few friends of mine, we lived really close to each other. The primary source of our film consumption came

from that shop; we always went to buy DVDs. I assume that those kind of small shops are highly dependent on regular customers. So if you found the disk is not a HD version, like those videotaped in a theater, you could return for another one, which is good, I guess. It helped to build a seller-buyer relationship. I remember the owner was in his 20s, and he was a movie buff himself for sure because he stayed in the shop watching films all the time. Therefore what you went to buy were often from his recommendations. And when you'd become quite familiar with him, he would know what kinds of movies you liked too. That was a big influence. It was during the golden days of DVDs, probably lasting several years. (MQ13-F8WMY)

There is even a vernacular term for this: *taodie*,²² literally meaning seeking out disks. It was more the social and material conditions than the political ones in the early 2000s that encouraged millennials' pirated consumption of foreign cultural products in terms of *taodie*. Teenage millennials at that moment did visit the movie theaters but not on a regular base due to their busy school schedules. Furthermore, as deregulation in the exhibition sector freed film ticket prices, popular American blockbusters were always sold at higher prices than the regular offerings. In 2004, the ticket price of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) was as high as eighty yuan. Yet it barely cost more than ten yuan for a pirated illegal copy, two yuan if it was rented. Although it was then quickly replaced by pirating in digital formats, the sociality of *taodie* is a crucial part in Chinese millennials' historical reception of films.

Klinger (2006), in her study of the innovative forms of film reception outside the multiplex, suggested that on average, films in cinema in the US can be lucky to draw a 2 percent repeat audience, while blockbusters can draw as high as 20 percent. I wonder what the number would be in the mainland.²³ When *Titanic 3D* was released in China in

²² *Taodie* (in Simplified Chinese: 淘碟). The verb *tao* (in Simplified Chinese: 淘) usually indicates searching for something valuable. For example, it is used in the word *taojin* (in Simplified Chinese: 淘金) which means gold prospecting.

²³ As hard as I have tried, I could not find reliable figures regarding this problem in China.

2012, it once again became the most grossed foreign import of the year. Media industries in consumer societies contribute to the home's discursive construction as an exhibition venue for cinema by promoting the home video systems as part of the new media aristocratic culture (Klinger, 2006). Thanks to their parents' enthusiasm to build home theaters, the millennials took advantage and became the intensive consumer of movies in domestic areas; repeat viewing was thus more frequent. Returning to certain titles can derive from various motives: nostalgia, therapy, aesthetic appreciation, boredom, et cetera. (Klinger, 2006). In Chapter Four where I particularly investigate Chinese millennials' viewing strategies of different types of films, repeat viewing is crucial to millennial audience's appreciation of their favorite Oscar classic movies as they repeatedly return to them for refreshed inspiration and empathy.

Around the mid-2000s, desktops took over and pirating transformed into digital formats. Downloading and online streaming freed the human labor necessary to *taodie* and even granted young movie-viewers a wider range of visual leisure. Millennial informants reported that their solitary and repeat viewings were more significant during college periods through online activities. At this point, we cannot avoid paying attention to the subtitle groups in China whose invasion into the legal realm of content distribution has drawn attention from administrative forces as well as academia. Pirated foreign films translated by fan-sub groups are preferable for a series of reasons. Firstly, millennial media poachers are not without requirements regarding the quality of the contents they are about to consume. In general they refused the kind of infringement secretly recorded in the movie theaters. In their opinion, it was a desecration towards the film. Most of the online fan-sub products are of high definition or the equivalent. Moreover, when a foreign film is to be released in China, it sometimes has to be delayed due to domestic protection.

The development of Chinese cinema marketization has resulted in the diversification of screening slots. However, suppression of foreign release could be observed in various cases at sensitive times such as the National Day on October 1st or CPC Founding Day on July 1st. June and July are *de facto* domestic protection months²⁴ when very few foreign films can be released theatrically. In addition, holidays during the Chinese Lunar New Year, traditionally considered as *hesui dang*,²⁵ also rarely see foreign blockbusters. Among the millennial youth, there is an urgency to watch the newly released American *dapian* as soon as possible. If a foreign importation is to be screened in China but subject to domestic protection, millennials may not want to wait for two months. Fan-sub products have filled such release gaps.

Hoskins and Mirus (1988) proposed the concept of cultural discount, suggesting that a cultural product may be devalued by the audiences who do not share the common cultural background or knowledge needed to fully appreciate that product. In the series of studies by Lee (2006, 2008, 2009) investigating Hollywood's performance in East Asia, comedy and drama appear to be the most culturally specific genres and may suffer cultural discount to a larger degree. However, as my questionnaire survey results suggested, comedy and drama are still among Chinese millennials' favorite Hollywood films.

²⁴ Domestic protection month (in Simplified Chinese: 国产保护月, *guochan baohu yue*) is believed to have begun in 2004. It is reported that in order to secure enough screening hours for Zhang Yimou's *House of Flying Daggers*, the Film Bureau advised theaters across the country to dedicate more slots for the film instead of other foreign ones (Ye & Davis, 2008; Yeh, 2009). Since then, every year normally during the first half of the summer holidays, very few foreign films would be able to make it to the big screen in China. Even for imported Hollywood blockbusters under the agreement of revenue-sharing, they will be postponed until August.

²⁵ *Hesui dang* (in Simplified Chinese: 贺岁档), comes from *hesui pian* (in Simplified Chinese: 贺岁片), a term initiated in Hong Kong to describe films released during the Lunar New Year when families gather together to celebrate. Most of the films released during *hesui dang* are family-friendly dramas and comedies. The concept traveled to the mainland in the 1980s and the Chinese New Year slot is considered a typical time for families to go to the cinema.

Participants also claimed that they prefer American comedies (YJ01-M8WMY, HL04-F9WBY). Besides their long history of consuming Hollywood cinema, fan-sub groups have indeed contributed to a great extent to help Chinese film audiences overcome cultural differences. Translators in fan-sub groups mostly consist of young scholars, professional interpreters, and volunteer amateurs. Some of their works have been highly valued and, in recent years, they have been seen to practice legitimate translation, collaborating with legal online streaming services and participating in film festivals. In addition, most fan-sub groups are contributing interpretations on a large scale where they explain, on the screen, social issues and cultural memes that ordinary Chinese viewers may have difficulty in comprehending. For example, Fig.6 is a screenshot of CBS's *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre & Prady, 2007-2019) in which the characters are talking about car-racing. Considering that the sport does not generate a great number of followers in China, on the top of the screen is the explanation of basic racing rules.



Fig. 6. Screenshot of *The Big Bang Theory* (Lorre & Prady, 2007-2019).

Similarly, Fig.7 is from Netflix's *The House of Cards* (Willimon, 2013-2018) where Deep Web forum was mentioned. The literal translation of Deep Web would give no accurate sense of the term. On the top of the screen, fan-sub translations insert a more meaningful

explanation of it. As Hu (2017) concluded, famous subtitle groups establish good reputation with high quality translations, regular schedules, and a rapid release speed.



Fig. 7. Screenshot of *The House of Cards* (Willimon, 2013-2018).

Bullet-screens

Originated in Japan on the video portal Niconico, the bullet-screen (barrage, or pop-up subtitles, in other words) is a live-commenting service offered by video sharing websites to encourage media participation by users. It allows real-time comments to fly across or float on the screen like bullets. The technology was adopted in China ten years ago and soon became popular among young people a generation below the millennials. Nowadays, almost all online streaming and video-on-demand websites in China have incorporated the bullet-screen as a necessary feature. Watching films with bullet-screens has become a new fashion and some movie theaters even include it at special screenings. Discussion on movie-viewing with bullet-screens was, besides school-outings, another heated topic during all focus group sessions. Overall, millennial participants showed a receptive attitude towards new technology but were often indifferent to actual activities featuring live-commenting.

In general, they expressed little interest, if any, in taking part in live-commenting while watching films; they were resistant to typing or sending anything themselves. The disagreement lay in whether to look at other comments during their reception of movies. For some, they needed to turn it off in that real-time comments were considered a complete distraction during movie-viewing (YJ01-M8WMY). Although solitary viewing at home has been normalized by the millennials on their laptops or portable devices, they still longed for a recreation of the dark, quiet cinematic environment where full concentration on the film could be enabled. In particular when a mystery or detective film was being watched, they were afraid of spoilers. For others, watching films with the bullet-screen on represents a plus to the solitary viewing as they sought for shared feelings and shared judgements (TM03-F8WMY, HL04-F9WBY, DJ15-F8WMN). Especially when there was a special gag, or a twisted plot, they looked to other's evaluation as a source of pleasure. In some extreme cases, reading the comments became more enjoyable than the film itself when harsh comments were made on a really bad film, or comments reacted intensely to the scary images from a horror film (YH05-M8WMY).



Fig. 8. Bullet-screens on *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), on Bilibili, screenshot in 2014.

The millennial informants, regarding their contemporary movie-viewing practices, have demonstrated a discursive viewing strategy in a media-rich environment. Cinema is for visual spectacle and social interactivity, while domestic consumption is more private and for personal inspiration from stories. Zhang (2016) argues that online bullet-screen activity channels the kind of community experience offered by traditional cinema-going in the digital age. Yet according to the millennial film audiences, it also destroyed the unique silent, immersive screen feature of the traditional cinema experience. Hence regarding equipping bullet-screens in actual movie theaters, they were again united in rejection.

Watching Films in a Media-Rich Environment

The school-outing in China indicates an alternative cinema-going experience that is different from the historical classical cinema generations described in Western discourses. Even though for many Chinese millennials their first-time cinema experience was in school-outings, they remember them much more for the amusement of the foreign imported blockbusters in contrast to *redness* of domestic main-melodies than on the theater landscape or disciplined viewing behavior. School-outing, as the authority's effort to cultivate young millennials to become part of the national audience of main-melody, failed to transform students into anonymous cinema audiences. In addition, main-melody in general did not succeed in functioning as a political and education propaganda tool to promote nationalism and patriotism since Chinese millennials were obviously more impressed by those Hollywood and Hong Kong or Taiwanese productions they had watched in school-outings. Parents' taste and preference highly affected millennials film consumption in the circumstance of family viewing at an early stage. Although television has been a household necessity in China since the 1990s, it is the least popular site for

watching American films according to the millennial generation. This is highly likely due to China's cultural policy to strictly limit foreign media products on national and regional broadcasting systems. In spite of that, CCTV-6's program *The Best* stands out in millennial respondents' memories of early domestic viewing with families in which a subtle change in the power-relations with both media and elder authorities played a role. Piracy, in both physical and digital formats, has enabled practices of intensive consuming and repeat viewing and, as a result, helped millennial movie-viewers develop their personal tastes and preferences. Yet my research does not support the view that pirate-consuming is implicitly a political activity. Especially for juvenile millennials, social and material realities in the past prioritized pirate-consuming simply because it was more affordable and accessible. More recently, the bullet-screen has become popular and common in consuming audiovisual creations in China. Millennial audiences' usage of the bullet-screen in film consumption demonstrates their old-fashioned spectator position: they are more willing to passively accept technology than to actively take part in the actual practicing.

As the millennial generation has now reached their period of adulthood, they depict a highly discursive image of a film audience that tries to access filmic pleasure everywhere. Going to the cinema and watching at home are two completely different experiences where neither takes the place of the other. Although the school-organized event did not contribute to a traditional movie-going experience, the movie theater is still associated with a sense of sacredness. After all, it is not cheap in China. They pursue enjoyments that cannot be replaced elsewhere: the visual spectacles, 3D and IMAX, social interactions, et cetera. It echoes the point that cinema, in addition to selling individual pictures, serves to sell a habit, a socialized experience (Morley, 1992). Chinese

cinema and Hollywood imports have been criticized for being too commercialized and commodified. Are these high-concept mega-productions exactly what the millennial are audiences looking for? Solitary viewing, on the other hand, is also filled with a sense of ritual, in that millennials intend to rebuild a cinematic environment where they can fully concentrate. Yet such reconstructions are merely for visual or audio satisfactions. Meanings and inspirations from the stories seem to be what they are most eager for. Under such circumstance, is there a different viewing strategy that millennial audiences apply?

At this point, I would like to address the merits of knowing Chinese millennials' film consumption history and movie-viewing habits. It reminds us and also helps us to stay cautious about the sense of technological determinism, by which I mean that audience practices should not be arbitrarily integrated into media technologies alone. As this chapter has illustrated, Chinese millennials, through their formative and teenage years, have come across what can be called the digital revolution of modern cinema. Although it is undeniable that technology impacts on people's media consumption by offering more options in consuming devices and/or service providers, reception is nevertheless a much more organic process in which viewing pattern transcends platforms. Television, home theaters, online pirating, then, now it is online streaming. Technologies come and go, but intensive consuming and repeat viewing carries on. In addition, memories of millennials' early film experiences and reflections of the changing modes of film consumption in China elaborate our understanding of the micro-level reception context. The purpose of audience research is to understand both micro- and macro-narratives in relation to each other (Ang, 1996). Media usage on the micro-level is not isolated, and thus such usage needs to be understood in terms of how it engages with the wider reality of society. Macro structures of a media culture are typically tagged with the economic, political, and social

issues in societies. I have demonstrated this in the introductory chapter with regard to China's encounters with global Hollywood during its reform era. Together with the findings in this chapter, I try to articulate a synthesis of context, including both the macro-level and the micro-level, without prioritizing either, of millennials' reception of Hollywood cinema in China. Millennial's "fresh contact" with cinema and Hollywood reminds us that audiences are not without history. Regardless of the form of reception study, when focusing on an audience's interpretation of a filmic text as well as their usage of cinema, it is unwise to ignore such facets in the analysis of meanings ascribed to the audience or their media practices.

Chapter Three: How is the Idea of Hollywood Understood by Chinese Millennials?

In order to further fulfill its obligations after joining the WTO, China increased its import quota to 20 foreign films per year under the agreement of revenue-sharing, and about 30 under the flat-fee contract system, predictably the majority being Hollywood blockbusters. In an interview with *Southern Weekly* in March 2002, film scholar Dai Jinhua, once again, voiced her concern about Hollywood's domination of China's film market.²⁶ Additionally, she was worried that Hollywood's invasion, both inside and outside the movie theaters, might cultivate the Chinese audience's viewing tastes generation after generation until a universalized desire – for thrills, actions, and spectacles – was developed to the extent that such filmmaking became the only cinematic practice, or worse, the benchmark, that every other culture might end up following (Dai, as cited in Xia, 2002). I am disappointed, but not surprised, to say that, as far as this research has revealed, what Dai was perturbed about is at least partially true now according to the millennials' responses. Though not without reservations, they did speak highly of Hollywood to a large degree. At the extreme end, "Hollywood represents the best motion picture industry" (YJ01-M8WMY).

But what does it mean to say that Hollywood represents the best cinematic industry? To be precise, how is the idea of Hollywood cinema located and understood by Chinese millennials?

In this research, I turn away from questions such as the influence of global financing on the production of blockbusters, or the geography and mobility of film labor in the

²⁶ After the state administration's announcement of foreign film importation, Dai had expressed her concerns about the threat to Chinese cinema from American blockbusters in an article she published in 1995 entitled "The Wolf is Coming!". She was one of the very few public figures who had explicitly cast doubt upon Hollywood's return, while others, including both industrial professionals and cultural commentators, were generally enthusiastic about the opening of domestic film market at that time.

globalization of Hollywood.²⁷ This is not to say that I disagree with what has been argued in the investigations as such. In fact, they are extremely important components in today's discourse on Hollywood globalization. However difficult Hollywood has become to define (especially its nationality), "global media do affect (but cannot control) local meanings" (Ang, 1996, p.151), not only "materially" but also "discursively" (Murphy & Kraidy, 2003, p.5). On the other hand, it is also necessary to bear in mind that reception after all takes place somewhere, and therefore the audience's perception of Hollywood is framed by local realities. This chapter, instead of limiting the articulation of Hollywood only in its texts or contexts, rather hands the control to the people who actually like (or dislike) the films. I address how the interviewees define Hollywood and how such popular reading is too diverse to permit an absolute definition.

The Classical, the Nostalgic, and the Modern

In the preliminary questionnaire survey, Q.33 directly asked respondents to define Hollywood in their own words. As expected, their answers ranged from briefly citing *American dapian* to thoroughly describing the practice of watching Hollywood films. As one post-80s millennial wrote:

Hollywood encompassed traditional genres and themes, classic plot settings, a few big movie stars, exquisite photography and production, global promotion and distribution, universal values that everyone can agree on, enjoyed by both the young and the old, provoking small talk with enthusiasm afterwards, and then you can forget about it. (**Survey Respondent 06**)

For millennials, the collective noun "Hollywood cinema" invokes an idea that is too abstract and in flux to define. Throughout both focus group discussions and individual interview sessions, from time to time my participants also questioned what Hollywood

²⁷ For such topics, please see Wasser, 1995, and Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell, & Wang, 2004.

cinema is. Every time I carefully replied that is what I am trying to figure out: what does it mean to you, a Chinese millennial? I was cautious not to put impositions on participants in terms of which films they could refer to in their discussions. Hollywood, either indicating an individual picture or the collective filmmaking at the other side of the Pacific, has been widely used across China in almost all areas: academia, business, politics, et cetera. A name as such can hold abundant implications. Yet savvy viewers practice their own critical theories in the everyday life (McLaughlin, 1996). Therefore, I started with the easiest question: what kind of films do Chinese millennials consider a Hollywood production?

Millennial interviewees' responses to the question can be divided into three categories: the classical, the nostalgic, and the modern. A few participants, both male and female, both post-80s and post-90s, cited movies dated back to the Golden Age of Hollywood in their answers. The movies they considered representative are classical Hollywood productions such as *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), *Roman Holiday* (Wyler, 1953), *12 Angry Men* (Lumet, 1957) and *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960). These are the films that Chinese millennials are most likely to have experienced on small screens instead of watching in movie theaters. Notably, studio logos, especially the MGM lion roar and the Twentieth Century Fox sign, were frequently mentioned when interviewees elaborated on their responses. Referring to the classical American films, they kept their distance from Hollywood cinema in order to look up to it. On the other hand, more recent releases, including Marvel's superhero movies and action/adventure franchises such as *Fast & Furious*, were also mentioned as typical Hollywood productions. *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009) and *Transformers* (Bay, 2007) both belonged to this category. In this situation, they focused on the sense of commodity and high-concept conveyed through

these movies. Millennial participants also pointed out the Hollywood sign in California, indicating its geographical origins. The post-90s respondents were more likely to cite movies from the modern period as the most Hollywood, the ones they enjoy as sensual spectacles.

We have learnt that Chinese millennials represent the generation who grew up with the invasion of Hollywood into mainland China. Schools organized them to go to see *The Lost World: Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1997) and *The Lion King* (Minkoff & Allers, 1994). They enjoyed *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) and *True Lies* (Cameron, 1994) with their parents. *The Best* helped them understand *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994). The kind of American films that Chinese millennials experienced “fresh contact” with during their formative years left a profound impression on them. Accordingly, almost all participants have put as examples some titles belonging to the first batch of Hollywood imports, that is, American films imported into China between 1994 and 2001, as the most representative.²⁸ In particular, *Titanic* (1997) alone was mentioned by ten interviewees. In 1998 when *Titanic* (1997) was released in China, the post-80s millennials were in primary or middle schools. After a pre-screening held especially for government officials, Jiang Zemin, then president of the People’s Republic of China, was enthusiastic about the film. According to *Yangchen Evening News*, he spoke highly of the morality the film expressed and encouraged people to learn such ideology-making from capitalism (Song & Yan, 2012). *Titanic* thus turned out to be, not an event film, but *the* event film that every Chinese wanted to see and talk about. It set China’s box office record with a total revenue of RMB 360 million, accounting for one-

²⁸ For a list of these American imports, please see Appendix IV.

fifth of the country's overall grosses in 1998. When *Titanic 3D* was released in 2012, millennials were in or going to be in college. The film beat Tom Cruise's *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* (Bird, 2011) and topped China's film market again with a box office of RMB 947 million. As participants explained to me why *Titanic* best exemplifies Hollywood cinema, there was a nostalgic sentiment indicating that movies then were better, much better:

I went to watch *Titanic* with my parents in 1999 or around that time. It impressed an image of Hollywood *dapian* on me, meaning that Hollywood cinema is mega-produced masterpiece. The film industry there is highly developed. Studios there use strong financial resources and advanced technologies. Directors are relatively more proficient, and actors more handsome. Movies made by Hollywood are of high quality. After I watched a great number of films, (I realize that) roughly between the 1990s and early 2000s, Hollywood produced plenty of classics that are of not only commercial value but artistic value, and the stories are good too. It feels like the golden ten years of Hollywood. (YH05-M8WMY)

Such a justification seems consistent with China Film's definition of excellent foreign importation at the time when Hollywood returned to China: films that "basically reflect the finest global cultural achievements and represent the latest artistic and technological accomplishments in contemporary world cinema". In fact, the *Titanic* phenomenon was made possible because it reached China in a unique time during its own cultural transition (Dillon, 2015). In the late 1990s, marketization of Chinese cinema encouraged it to embrace, not oppose capitalism. Aiming to make money in the film business was considered not a bad thing. A Chinese discourse on Hollywood at that moment suggested that a highly industrialized filmmaking system, an exceptional production dependent on ample financial resources, and technological advancement were all merits from which Chinese filmmaking should learn and look up to. These ideologies, widespread in Chinese cinema culture, were endorsed by the Party as its motto at that

time was commercial enterprise and economic growth (Noble, 2000). Chinese millennials who grew up in that period of time were subordinate to the capitalist ideology of filmmaking and this, reciprocally, had an impact on their sensemaking of not only Hollywood but cinema in general. Films in the category of the nostalgic (a sense pointing to millennial's fresh contact with Hollywood imports in their formative years) represent not only Hollywood, but what a good film should be. Then what do Chinese millennials consider a good film?

Hollywood within an Art-Commerce Dichotomy Framework

The differences between the above mentioned three categories, the classical, the nostalgic, and the modern, are clear: films to represent Hollywood cited by Chinese millennials are from different time periods. As participants identified pictures they believed are most representative and as they explained the reasons why they'd chosen them, millennials approached the definition of Hollywood by pointing out what they deemed to be the common features of Hollywood production. The characteristics they often associated with Hollywood are big-budget, mega-production, fine spectacle, and famous movie celebrities. In addition, those who gave examples of more recent releases indicated global distribution as another. A few of them mentioned the importance of a good story, the kind of story that concerned social issues and human values, and thus could provoke deep thinking. And some suggested a predictable narrative structure in Hollywood's storytelling, for instance, the good guy always wins, or a romance is always part of the storyline. Accordingly, Chinese millennials did not use a timeline framework to make sense of Hollywood cinema. Instead, their perception falls within an art-commerce dichotomy. It is through the evaluations of these variables that they make sense of the idea of Hollywood.

In the eyes of the millennials, Hollywood represents a highly industrialized filmmaking system. They were well aware of the producing process of its filmmaking:

(If it's a Hollywood film,) it has to be exceptionally made. Then it needs a comprehensive narrative structure. It feels like that Hollywood screenwriters, each of them is responsible for a small part of the story, and then they put them together. But in China, mostly there is only one screenwriter. Hollywood production, the big studio feels like a factory, making films out of an assembly line. After I've watched many films, all the stories feel like the same. (XZ09-M9WMN)

The variables mentioned above are the components on this assembly line and they were associated with different values:

A fine production requires good visual effects and good music backgrounds. Both the audio and the visual are important. It needs (to be able) to shake minds. (WT11-M8WMY)

I think Hollywood represents a high level of technology and techniques. Of course there have to be some superstars. (SX18-M9WBN)

An art-commerce dichotomy assumes that values on each end are inherently exclusive. Increase in one side inevitably results in decrease in the other. The best a cultural product can do is to balance between but not converge the two. To some extent, the commercialism of Hollywood filmmaking is not only acceptable but also necessary. According to millennial interviewees, big-budget, mega-production, global distribution, visual effects, and celebrities are the commercial materials on Hollywood's assembly line, while story and storytelling belong to the artistic end. The commercial materials are necessary for, but do not guarantee the quality of an exceptional production. As a result, when too much emphasis has been placed on the commerce end, it generates a sense of disappointment with more recent Hollywood productions:

The Shawshank Redemption, Forrest Gump, Titanic. I always believe that those classics at the end of last century are what Hollywood films are. At that time, the mega-productions, all corresponding aspects were rather balanced. Unlike today, big-budget only means gorgeous visual effects. (JC08-F8WMY)

Speaking of Hollywood, it's mega-production, mega-spectacle, and big stars. In the past, these factors could provoke intuitive stimulation. Then as we grew older and have watched many films, we became insensitive to this kind of mega-production. They put too much effort on the action/adventure scenes, the narrative structure became weak. ... I think finely produced is not enough, the story needs to be attractive. ... (WT11-M8WMY)

To make sense of the idea of Hollywood cinema within a framework of art-commerce dichotomy and to evaluate Hollywood according to its art-commerce ratio, millennial audiences used their own critical theories based on "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980, p.88) that they acquired through the years of everyday life engagement with cinema. These knowledges do not require the validation from the established regimes. Instead, they challenge them. Chinese discourses on Hollywood, particularly the official discourses, were brought into their perception as once again the millennials came to realize the local authority's control over cultural importation and, less explicitly, on cultural creation and ideology dominance:

Chinese media has constructed Hollywood as the biggest, the most mainstream, and the most commercial... so it is the best exceptional production. (XC02-F8SDN)

... I guess every year there must be thousands of films to be made on Hollywood's assembly line, but in the end, what actually gets done and what can be played in China, what we get to watch must be the exceptions. (SX18-M9WBN)

Hollywood in China is ... stylish? A guarantee of box office? The benchmark of filmmaking? For me, it feels like if you have money you can be part of Hollywood, for example, Jing Tian, *The Great Wall*... Personally speaking, I think it affects the development of domestic film in that now they're not trying to make good films but only pursuing commercial success. (ZY20-F9SMY)

It has been concluded that the marketization of Chinese cinema since the end of the last century is to develop the industry towards international, or more precisely, the Hollywood standards, not a way towards absolute openness without ideological

constrains (Davis, 2010). During the period of market transition, the business mode of Hollywood filmmaking was what Chinese filmmakers were looking up to. Correspondingly, the local dominant paradigm promoted the commercial value of cinema as a standard. The kind of Hollywood films released on China's big screens reinforced this promotion.²⁹ Hence, the big-budget, the mega-production, the visual effects, and even the movie stars, within the local discourse, should be adequate to construct and thus signify a good film. As cinema marketization has been achieved, China, as the world's second largest economy, does not need to embrace Western capitalism anymore. It practices state capitalism itself. Hollywood in China is to make money for the Chinese practitioners. Millennials still recognize the commercial value of Hollywood cinema. The visual spectacles and the superstars, these kinds of entertainment still contribute to their pleasure of enjoying these movies, which is the follow-up to their "fresh contact" with American *dapian* during formative years. Yet it is this exact consent that irritates them: their questioning about the increasing imbalance between the artistic and commercial value in Hollywood imports depict the vernacular theory, as in McLaughlin's (1996) explanation, the critical theory of the ordinary people, that raises questions about the dominant paradigm, a distrust of the local established institutions.

Making-sense of *Americanness*

In the preliminary questionnaire survey, I asked about millennial respondents' opinions on to what degree do they accept that Hollywood represents American cinema. The responses fairly equally divided into three: twenty-eight percent thought Hollywood is still American; thirty-three percent believed it is only mainstream American; thirty

²⁹ For more information on China's imports of Hollywood movies, please see Appendix V and Appendix VI.

percent considered Hollywood rather international. The trans-nationalization of the American film industry has made clear that Hollywood no longer addresses American national audiences alone (Wasser, 1995). Did Hollywood manage to remove cultural specificities by elaborating more universal values? In the focus group discussions, millennial participants spoke about engagement with universal values in Hollywood blockbusters so as to reach a global audience. In the end, what they deciphered as the essence of Hollywood is its full subjection to capitalist ideology: Hollywood film is made for making money.

However, as hard as it has tried, for Chinese millennials, Hollywood cinema remains a cultural other: it is, after all, not about them nor about there. Under such circumstances, is Hollywood still American to them? And if yes, which elements in Hollywood cinema still signified the sense of *Americanness*? To propose these questions, I do not intend to discover what kind of American dream they see from Hollywood films, nor am I concerned whether they believe popular cinema reflects real American life and culture. I seek to know how they comprehend and negotiated the meanings of *Americanness* as they make the negotiation relevant to themselves and their own lives.

Individualism in Hollywood cinema was considered the most American trait in millennials' responses. On the one hand, they pointed out the old-fashioned individualistic heroism, as an embodiment of American capitalist ideology, in the superhero movies. This is a very Chinese sense of a vernacular term, widely used in both public and private discourse, to criticize American cultural imperialism. Originally, with a sense of cynicism and sarcasm, American individualistic heroism, in Chinese discourses, describes the construction of an American hero (mostly white male) saving the world. The meaning and implication of individualism is also fluctuating in China. However,

dramatic cultural changes since the reform era have proposed a new trend of individualism among the millennial youth: their perception of it is more concerned with the freedom to act by one's own will than just a sense of selfishness (Moore, 2005). In this sense, Hollywood's depiction of individualism is not a bad thing anymore. Millennial interviewees spoke of the emphasis on the moral values of individuals within American pop culture:

... Hollywood is good at depicting a nonentity within a huge historical background... I enjoy war movies because Hollywood always tells the story from the perspective of a nobody. China would never make a film like that. We prefer big stories... (HL04-F9WBY)

Speaking of *Saving Private Ryan*, don't you find it ironical that they've sacrificed so many people in order to save one? There're so many films like this, do you think it's worthwhile? But maybe this is their belief, do not give up on anyone. (XJ12-M9WMN)

... it shows that a nonentity matters too. The nonentity can make a change. (SQ14-M8WMY)

With the economic boom and cultural change throughout Chinese societies since the reform and opening-up, social class hierarchy has become even more complex to address. To be sure, none of my millennial interviewees are from the upper class in China.³⁰ They are not even considered the privileged. Although all of them are very well educated and many have been abroad, the majority of them are currently just young white collars and postgraduate students. Their readings of individualism in Hollywood cinema as the caring for nonentities was made in relation to their own social status in China.

In addition, millennials generally agreed that Hollywood films can be decoded as socially reflexive. They take popular American films as a window through which they may make sense of American society. Hollywood cinema is thus realistic since they

³⁰ For a demographic and biographic description of the interviewees, please see Appendix X.

believe that realities in a text correspond with realities outside the text. In particular, they address the political correctness perceived from recent Hollywood films to make sense of the social realities in America, for instance, discrimination against minority groups in the US. Regarding this issue, I am less concerned about whether Chinese millennials might be fooled by American pop culture in that audiences subordinated themselves to the filmic texts, reaching false consciousness. Obviously, realism contains unambiguous definitions (Ang, 1985). It is rather the way millennial participants used the realistic sense of Hollywood cinema in terms of reflecting social issues in American society. To make sense of what signifies Americanness in Hollywood cinema, they used Chinese cinema for references and differences. To conclude that Hollywood stories can sharply comment on sensitive subjects in current American communities, Chinese millennials were claiming that Chinese cinema does not pay enough attention to the social problems within current Chinese societies. In fact, throughout my interviews with these participants, sighing over “when can we make a film like that” was often expressed.

Compared to Chinese films, Hollywood and American indie films reflect social issues with a very sharp vision...they [American filmmakers] managed to find out a lot of social concerns from everyday life, and then expressed them through movies. (YH05-M8WMY)

Movies like *Once Upon a Time in America* and *The Shawshank Redemption*, they reflect the social issues and struggles in real time American communities. Especially recently, there are more films concerning the female, or black people, the minority groups. I think that reflects the problem in current American society. These kinds of films are very rare in our country. (XZ09-M9WMN)

The new Mark Wahlberg film, *Patriots Day*. It's about the Boston marathon bombing. ... Terrorism, racism, gay issues, feminism, I think many films mentioned these problems in modern society. They're using cinema to help disadvantaged groups. It brings these minority groups under the spotlight of the mass and promotes equality. (XJ12-M9WMN)

Furthermore, there was a modest praise of Hollywood cinema from Chinese millennials in that American cinematic creations were keen on communicating politics. Until this point, it is clear that millennials' sensemaking of Americanness in Hollywood cinema is in close relationship with freedom of cultural creation, or more broadly, freedom of speech. Again, it matters less whether freedom of speech, in the millennial's opinion, is a true American spirit or not. Meanings are made in terms of differences rather than references. Referring to selected elements in American films, their perception of Americanness is made possible by reflecting on the differences between us and them.

... well the American has always been unscrupulous in making movies. You can even criticize the president. (JC08-F8WMY)

... like in *Kingsman*, I think the president in the film was suggesting Trump, white supremacy. He thought all the people on drugs should be dead. (HL04-F9WBY)

Exactly. Every film incorporates some kind of realities of current society. And many directors will impose their own political standpoints when making a film. For example, George Clooney's *Suburbicon* completely demonstrated his own political views. It's about black people in America. Opposing Trump, claiming Trump's political stance is completely wrong. (ZR16-F9SBY)

With these senses of Americanness, Hollywood is regarded as American main-melody. As cinema is not innocent of ideology making, individualism, social reflexivity, and freedom of speech are what Chinese millennials believed to be important factors of American mainstream ideology. Identifying the influential characters within American mainstream ideology is how they approach to making sense of Americanness in Hollywood films. Moreover, themes were selected in that they could make relevance to their own social status and the cultural, social, and political conditions in their own everyday life. Their readings of these themes were enabled by making references and differences between Hollywood and Chinese cinema. From their responses, we can agree

that Chinese millennials are not apolitical. Hollywood offered them resources and repertoires with which they could, although not explicitly, make their own political reasoning.

Through an Ambivalent Popular Reading

Hollywood is part of contemporary Chinese cinema culture. How much it has contributed to reinvigorating China's film market, how much it has transformed Chinese filmmaking, and how much it has affected China's cultural policy have already been addressed in the background introduction at the beginning of this thesis. Chinese people, who inhabit such a cinematic environment, more or less realize that watching American blockbusters has gradually become part of their everyday life activity. The particular situation in China is that an obdurate state administration is always in position to maintain control over ideological creation and recreation, whose implications shall not be neglected in understanding individual's reception of the cultural other. For Chinese millennials, a universal idea of Hollywood is extremely difficult to locate. There are two types of Hollywood that millennial audiences have been encountering in daily lives: the official one imported to be released on big screens, the rest they can get access to on whatever devices that are handy.

Widely consumed but also widely discussed, Hollywood has been made a popular cultural phenomenon in China. Popular experience is always ambiguous and ambivalent. On the one hand, Chinese millennials disagree with the increasing emphasis on the commercial value evident in Hollywood imports in China. Lacking artistic values, these films are unable to match with the good film image in their minds. On the other hand, they appreciate the Americanness of Hollywood cinema, which has offered them resources that are missing in domestic cultural creations and with which they can relate

to regarding their own conditions in real life. The collective idea of Hollywood, in de Certeau's words, functions as a supermarket that presents a variety of repertoires from which Chinese millennials select the ones they prefer to make meanings and construct identities. It is through the contradictory reading of popular culture that the idea of Hollywood is understood by the millennial audiences. Therefore, there can be no absolute definition of Hollywood cinema by Chinese millennials, since popular reading is always selective and spasmodic (Fiske, 1989).

Here I would like to elaborate more on Chinese millennials' popular reading of Hollywood cinema in China, and it is necessary to refer back to the history of China encountering global Hollywood as well as millennial generation film consumption history. As we have seen, in Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, an audience encountering a message may decode it in potentially three different positions: a dominant-hegemonic position, a negotiated position, and an oppositional position (1980). In Chinese millennials' decoding of Hollywood in China, they confront two "dominants": the hegemonic global Hollywood and the dominant ideology of mass culture in the local. I do not conclude that millennials' reading of Hollywood in China has always ended in an oppositional position resisting both. In fact, as we have gone through this chapter, it is obvious that audience's decoding positions vary in time as the relationship between global Hollywood and local culture changes.

Back during the *Titanic* phenomenon period, the ideology of mass culture in China approved capitalism. In that sense, Hollywood was China's American dream and the commercial value of its filmmaking practice was recognized. According to the millennials, Hollywood cinema in the nostalgic category, balancing between an art-commerce dichotomy, served as the benchmark of good film and good filmmaking. The

characteristics they identify, i.e., big-budget, mega-production, visual spectacle, celebrity filmmakers, provoking story, comprehensive storytelling, etc., become expectations in future experiences. Under such circumstances, millennial audiences were subject to both “dominants”. However, the contemporary Hollywood imports on China’s silver screens, those superhero movies and franchises in the modern category, are considered of more commercial value than artistic value, which, as millennials look at it, have strengthened Hollywood’s functioning according to the capitalist economy. The ideology of mass culture in current China does not overrule capitalism. With China’s rising awareness of culture as soft power, it has tightened controls over cinematic creation. Under such circumstances, Chinese millennials’ reading of Hollywood in China resists both “dominants”. When the standards of the ideology of mass culture in the local get too strict, they will be felt too oppressive, driving people towards what Ang (1985) has described as the populist position. This explains that some millennial participants, although recognizing the over-commercialized features of Hollywood imports in China, still declare fondness for it, calling themselves “superficial movie-viewers.”

Chapter Four: What “Viewing Strategy” do Chinese Millennials Apply when Watching Hollywood Films?

In the previous chapter, I began my investigation of Chinese millennial’s reception of Hollywood on a conceptual level, demonstrating how, through the audience’s own vernacular principles, the idea of Hollywood was understood by the generational audience. This chapter intends to move the lens from the collective notion of Hollywood cinema to individual Hollywood films. But let’s first take a look at the following transcript from a group discussion session held at Beijing in the early fall of 2017. Some millennial participants were talking about the kind of universal values that mainstream Hollywood demonstrates:

[FG-Participant-07]: Well, they [universal values communicated through Hollywood films] are American mainstream values...

[FG-Participant-10]: Exactly. Including Disney, Disney also has its own world (view).

[FG-Participant-07]: It’s the justice-defeating-evil (thing), always.

Moderator: Is that a universal value?

[FG-Participant-07]: Kind of. It’s considered (universal) in Hollywood films.

[FG-Participant-10]: It’s the love triumphs everything, the family is in the first place forever, and then justice defeats evil, and individuals against institutions. These are the eternal [central] themes that will never change in Hollywood films. That’s its [Hollywood production’s] *taolu*. Also from the (screenwriting) structure, for example, BMOC, that’s what they call it, right? It is divided into 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, and so on. There needs to be something happening at every time spot. And they are all arranged according to that theme.

MQ13-F8WMY: That’s exactly their [Hollywood’s] “magical” *taolu*.

[FG-Participant-10]: Yes. I think if you ever take a look at the script, like one page is one minute? Then if you turn to page 15, there’s what’s gonna happen at the 15th minute. Then if nothing happens to the main protagonist at the 15th minute, you can throw the script away. It’s unqualified.

MQ13-F8WMY: I think these kinds of *taolu* values, everybody can summarize (after having watched so many films). It's for making the film easy to sell?

[FG-Participant-10]: Well, it's also for arousing the audience's sympathy. Cuz most of the people will sympathize with these themes.

MQ13-F8WMY: Yes! It's exactly because people sympathize with them, to sum up [to say in another way], makes the film easy to sell. Especially those (Hollywood) big-budget blockbusters, the commercial productions, these [the universal values, the *taolu*] all serve to help sell the film. So I think when watching (Hollywood films), it is so obvious to notice its *taolu*, including some of the values. In terms of the values, they have to think about the tastes that the majority people will accept, what can imbue the majority audience. ...

As transcribed above, Chinese millennials discussed the universal value in Hollywood cinema by elaborating on what they believe is the Hollywood storytelling formula as they perceived from their film experiences. *Taolu* is commonly used by the participants in both focus group discussions and interview sessions in their sense-making of popular American feature films. The word “*taolu*”³¹ in Chinese, can be used as a noun, a verb, or an adjective. As a noun, *taolu* can be explained as an established series of techniques and sometimes even tricks for achieving something. Millennial viewers used *taolu* to indicate the kind of narrative structure of mainstream Hollywood cinema that they are familiar with. In making sense of Hollywood, audience agency can be seen in the act of acknowledging and outlining Hollywood's *taolu*. Being familiar with *taolu* served as a precondition for their future film experience. That being the case, Chinese millennials watching Hollywood films is not an innocent activity but a prepared one.

³¹ In the word *taolu* (in Simplified Chinese, 套路), “*tao*” means a set of something and “*lu*” can be interpreted as routine, a set sequence of a performance or similar act. In this research *taolu* is the phrase that I find most difficult to translate into English. In the interview schedule, I translated it as the “formulaic substance” in genre films.

Furthermore, being able to summarize Hollywood's *taolu* challenges what has been dominating reception theory: the audience is without history.

Under the umbrella of active audience research, the *uses and gratifications* tradition not only asks what an individual does with media but, more importantly, the origins for those *dos* (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990). Paying tribute to the *uses and gratifications* theory, Martin Barker proposed the concept of "viewing strategy" (2006, p.134) which pictures watching films as a motivated activity. Film audiences prepare, though not necessarily deliberately, to encounter cinema: they have expectations towards not only the film, but also their viewing activities. These expectations result in some conditions, for example, fear or hope, their prior knowledge or previous experience, with whom, at what place, and in what occasion to watch a film. With conditions, people make sense of, again, the film, including but not limited to its plots and characters, as well as the viewing experience. According to Barker, the audience arrives at a combination of experiences and judgements after noticing certain facets of the film, but not others, due to the conditions the individual viewer brings with himself (2006). It is necessary to point out that the concept of viewing strategy calls into question the end of an experience. The small talks after a screening, or watching it again, entails audience's encountering with the film. The concept of viewing strategy thus covers the whole range of practices that are initiated and centered around movie-viewing: what the audience does in relation to it, as well as what the audience says in relation to it.

In this chapter, I adopt Barker's concept of viewing strategy to explore Chinese millennial's reception of different Hollywood films. In particular, three different types of films were selected, and individual in-depth interviews were conducted according to participants' favorite films in each category: superhero movies, Oscar classics, and brain-

burning films. As can be seen, the categories are not well-established genres within academic or industrial disciplines, but instead idiomatic terms widely used by the typical audiences themselves. They were picked partly according to findings from the preliminary questionnaire surveys: in general, drama, comedy, sci-fi, and crime stories, in descending order, are Chinese millennial's favorite film genres; however, in terms of consuming Hollywood films, millennial audiences prefer action, sci-fi, comedy, and drama.³² Such a difference is not unexpected as Hollywood big-budget blockbusters have always been associated with spectacular effects, mostly represented by action/adventure and sci-fi/thriller productions. But that drama and comedy are also in the top spots is a rather surprising result. In the following analysis, the chosen types will be examined according to the definition given by participating millennials themselves. As this research puts the actual movie-viewer at the center of understanding audience and "audiencing" (Fiske, 1992, p.345), choosing audience's self-defined categories fits with the conceptual approach of viewing strategy. It does so because audiences locating their favorite titles in each category is a dual process whereby, on the one hand, their classifications belong to the discourse that helps shape the framework of each type, while, on the other, their identification of favorite titles reveals the expectations they bring with them for future viewing of films of the same type. To be specific, my intention in this chapter is to interrogate millennial participants' movie-viewing practice regarding their favorite films of different types. Since the films under discussion are already their favorite titles, it is acceptable to agree that millennials have arrived at the enjoyment as a consequence of

³² For more information, please see Appendix VIII.

their encountering with the title. I will focus on how, with what conditions, they meet their ideal expectations in viewing each type of film.

Superhero Movies

As the twenty-first century has been quickly rolling on, it is believed that now there are enough superhero movies (and of course also programs) to consider them “a distinct genre” (Brown, 2017, p.3). This genre is hugely popular in China. One week after its release in the mainland, *Avengers: Endgame* (Russo & Russo, 2019) hit the half-billion-dollar height, becoming the most grossed foreign import of all time in the country (Davis, 2019). It is reported that a ticket for the midnight premiere screening had even been sold for almost \$100 (Huang, 2019). Considering that American comics have never reached the degree of popularity that Japanese anime does in China, the extreme success of Marvel Cinematic Universe stabbed an icy dagger in the heart of many of its competitors.

American superheroes are no strangers to Chinese youth. ABC’s *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (LeVine, Shuster & Seigel, 1993-1997) was broadcasted on many regional television stations in China in the late 1990s. CCTV-6’s *The Best* had also presented programs with multiple Batman movies. Millennial interviewees have no trouble in locating the superhero category. Yet it is worth noticing that only one of the interviewees have ever read the original comics. At best, some of them have heard of DC and Marvel and realized that movies are adapted from those comics. Going to the movies, for the millennials, is not an experience of trans-media storytelling. In this section, I focus on more recent blockbuster successes from either Marvel Studios or DC films, examining the millennial audience’s encountering with such a popular genre and how they enjoy the movies. The conversation about millennial’s favorite superhero movies (or franchises) is linked with discussions on their favorite superhero characters.

My Favorite Superhero

Addressing audience engagement with fictional characters is not a new research topic, but many studies in the past were situated within the concept of identification. In a more recent study on audience's favorite characters in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Barker (2017) posted a list of "reasons for liking", suggesting that real audience's affective links with their best-loved characters on the screen are far too complex and diverse. In this sense, how do Chinese millennials choose their favorite superhero characters? What does this choice mean? Unsurprisingly, Iron-man, as the forefather of the current MCU, is the most popular superhero among Chinese millennials. Reasons for liking Iron-man include his witty and even sarcastic personality and the sense of technological advancement depicted in the films. In particular, Iron-man is associated with the label *gaofushuai*.³³

I like Iron-man! Because he's sarcastic, but cute. ... He's *gaofushuai*. I think the characterization of Iron-man is very successful. His appearance, the Iron-man suit, ... I think [the building of] Iron-man is very very successful. I feel like the actor of Iron-man was born to play it. RDJ himself is like, I'm smart, but I'm mean... (HL04-F9WBY)

In the MCU, I like Iron-man. The actor did a great job in playing the character. And it's full of the sense of technology. (WW06-F8WMY)

I prefer MCU, and my favorite is Iron-man. ... [to turn into a superhero,] *diaosi* depends on mutation while [*gao*]fushuai depends on science and technology. The actor is handsome. ... And he feels real, something similar could happen in real life. Like [Elon] Musk. As the US is growing more and more powerful, there could be someone like him [Iron-man in real life]. (MQ13-F8WMY)

³³ *Gaofushuai* (in Simplified Chinese: 高富帅), is a Chinese slang term literally meaning tall, rich, and handsome. The term is exclusively used to describe men. The opposite is *diaosi* (in Simplified Chinese: 屌丝), literally meaning genital hair, which is used to describe young males who were born in a humble family with no cars, no houses, and no connections.

Simple, he [Iron-man] is the first one to open the MCU and he lives such a great life, you know, [*gao*]/*fushuai*. He's our imagination about the upper class. (MB17-F9WMY)

... I like his [Iron-man] role setting, rich yet funny. (ZX20-F9SMY)

Some millennials are fond of other superheroes but for the same reason: a tribute to their cinema memories in the past. These choices mostly fell for the old *Spider-man* series (all of the Tobey Maguire *Spider-man* movies were imported to China between 2002 and 2007, all released in theaters) and Batman (Tim Burton's *Batman* (1989) was a regular airing on CCTV-6 and Christopher Nolan's *Batman* trilogy were imported under the revenue-sharing agreement between 2005 and 2012).

Spider-man, Tobey Maguire's Spider-man. Firstly, the first *Spider-man*, (.) is (.) I remember the first kind of American superhero movie I've seen in the theater. The first kind of comic superhero [I've seen]. Then I'm particularly fond of the actor, his smile. ... Although Spider-man is like the *diaosi* among superheroes... he's like the last one to be a superhero. (DJ15-F8WMN)

I've seen Batman when I was a kid, the Tim Burton one on TV. ... who, which boy doesn't want to be someone like Batman? Thinking about Bruce Wayne, his family with that wealth, his combat power, the technology and his money, the beauty around him. (YH05-M8WMY)

My favorite is Batman. Because (.) he is the first superhero I've got to see. ... on CCTV-6, the Tim Burton one, the Michael Keaton one, and the George Clooney one. And of course Nolan's trilogy. ... I envy him, rich playboy. (XJ12-M8WMN)

For some male participants, their favorite superheroes indicate a figure they want to become. For others, they chose Black Widow (played by Scarlett Johansson) simply based on sexual attraction (XZ09-M9WMN, SX18-M9WBN). The rest of the interviewees related their favorite superheroes to their own personal attraction to something else. For example, JC08-F8WMY likes Captain America because she is a fan of actor Chris Evans (she claimed it's not the opposite); LX19-F8WMY chose Thor due to her own interest in Nordic fairy tales; ZX16-F9SBY is fond of Dr. Strange as she is a

mathematics/computer science major. Among them all, one post-80s specially chose Loki, who first appeared as an anti-superhero in the MCU. He elaborated on the character's duality:

Thor's brother. Why do I like him? All the other ones, they all have distinctive personalities. But Hiddleston [Loki], he's good and evil, he doesn't belong, sometimes good and sometimes bad. He's more human, like people in real life. Like bad people can be good and good people can turn bad. ... Loki depicts the multiple aspects of humanity. (SQ14-M8WMY)

As we can see, individual choice of favorite superhero characters has little to do with the origins of the character, as ultimately the figures remain particularly American, symbolizing American culture, politics, and morality (Brown, 2017). Instead, it shows an intertwining of personal, cultural, and demographic factors in reasons for liking. Superhero lives demonstrated in superhero movies are too far from Chinese millennial's own reality, which makes it nearly impossible for them to relate to their own lives. In identifying their favorite superhero characters, millennials have to build, not find, a connection with the superhero and such connections eventually point to something that, on one hand, relates to millennials themselves, on the other hand, is outside the film itself.

“Don't Bring Your Brain!”

Chinese millennials united in the mode of consuming superhero movies: cinema and only in cinemas. Findings in the questionnaire survey have shown Chinese millennials do not consider themselves frequent movie-goers. Yet in terms of enjoying superhero blockbusters, the majority of them have insisted that cinema is a must; the rest, cinema is better. This is because for millennial participants, enjoying sound effects and visual spectacles is one of the most important factors in their engagement with hyper live action superhero genre. If conditions allowed, they would prefer 3D and IMAX.

Watching at home or consuming on a laptop would severely degrade the viewing experience.

Actros, audio-visual effects, and Easter eggs. Because the main purpose for watching a Marvel movie is to enjoy audio [and visual] effects in cinema. I wouldn't have big expectations for the plot. ... (ZX20-F9SMY)

The first place has to be special effects, then comes the plot, and Easter eggs. As for other types of films I've watched before, the plot definitely comes first. But for movies like these [superhero movies], scenes of fighting, are far more exciting. Especially in *The Avengers*, the crackling scenes between the two opposite groups, that's far more attracting. Because of the routine plot... [there is really nothing to look forward to] (XZ09-M9WMN)

As a matter of fact, when you go to watch Marvels, basically you would ignore the story. Mainly it's for the audio-visual effect, especially as nowadays special effects technology is getting more and more fancy. (JC08-F8WMY)

I feel like if the fighting scenes are fantastic, that's enough. Even for *Thor* or *Wonder Woman*, they [superhero movies] are just for fun. To be honest, I don't bring my brain while watching superhero movies. ... As long as the plot is not too ridiculous, ... It's for entertainment and amusement. (LX19-F8WMY)

Another frequently mentioned condition that affects their consumption of superhero movies (mostly the Marvel franchises) is Easter egg. Easter egg originally refers to the hidden messages, characters, or images in media, mostly in computer games and movies. They are called Easter eggs because they mimic the idea of an Easter egg hunt where a trail of clues has to be followed. Hidden clues in movies are nothing new but can be traced back as early as in Hitchcock's horror/mysteries. The kind of Easter egg in millennial's words primarily refers to the extra scenes at the end of a film before and/or after the ending credits. Modern cinema-goers in China considerably overlook this part of theater experiences as they normally step out of the stadium room immediately after the closing scene. In the MCU, Easter eggs mostly would give away important messages related to the upcoming new releases so as to build a strong sense of intertextuality. The newly

emerging style of Easter eggs in Marvel movies, however, can hold these young audiences until the lights are turned on again.

In addition, it is not difficult to notice that millennial interviewees spoke of their extremely low expectations for the quality of stories in superhero movies. For them, superhero movies are typical Hollywood live action blockbusters embedded with formulated narrative of an old-fashioned good-vs-evil type, where leading characters encounter but eventually overcome difficulties, the kind of formulaic substance from which they can find little, if any, pleasure. It is obvious that, by insisting on consuming superheroes on the big screen, millennials are willing to sacrifice the enjoyment of a sophisticated film story in order to experience the sensual pleasure. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that Chinese millennials' sense-making of Hollywood cinema is within an art-commerce dichotomy framework; too much emphasis on the commerce end could result in a devaluation of the quality of a film. However, judgement and experience of movie-viewing, in the case of millennial audiences enjoying superhero blockbusters, are separated: going to the cinema is to experience the screen spectacles rather than to engage in deep thinking.

Social Enjoyment and Social Pressure

Superhero movies are event films. Even though in foreign markets, world audiences of Hollywood blockbusters may lack the opportunity of premiere experience or grand openings in malls, American superhero movies still craft a sense of cinema spectacle in which large crowds are attracted and create a carnival-like atmosphere (Jones, 2013). The sociality of cinema contributes to the millennials' enjoyment of the film:

Mostly I would go to watch in theaters, because these films are for [enjoying] the visual effects. 3D&IMAX are much better. And many of the twists and memes need to be shared with others. As you can feel other

people [in the theater], how they react to it. This kind of interactivity in cinema is a good experience. (TM03-F8WMY)

Moreover, the social functions of cinema in the case of superhero movies also provide

Chinese millennials opportunity to identify with certain communities:

(I usually watch superhero movies) with my husband or friends. Like for Thor 3 [*Thor: Ragnarok*], I went to the cinema with a Hiddlestoner.³⁴ (JC08-F8WMY)

I go to the cinema with friends who also love the Marvel franchise. Because those who haven't watched the franchise or the previous films may think they're rubbish. Only fans like me can understand watching for the sake of watching Marvels work in spite of the stories or plots. (ZX20-F9SMY)

As for those who are not strongly fond of the live action genre, social interactivity can also turn into peer pressures:

As for me, I'm not that familiar with Marvel stories (in comics). All I know are the movies. I'm not a fan. It's just popcorn entertainment. ... Most of the time I go accompanying friends. You need to find something, so you can have a conversation with them. ... mostly if we go out for dinner and friends recommend to watch [a superhero newly release], I'd say yes. (YH05-M8WMY)

A friend of mine strongly insisted we go to watch *Wonder Woman* so we did... (LZ10-F9WMN)

The New York Times once criticized the hegemony of the superhero movie: "... (it) leaves an increasingly sour taste in my mouth, and that their commercial ascendance has produced, with a few exceptions, diminishing creative returns" (Dargis, 2012). It seems urgent and critical to recall the warning of "the decay of cinema" (Sontag, 1996). However, I would like to argue on behalf of millennial movie-goers that, as least according to those interviewed in this study and their viewing strategy of watching superhero movies, the homogenization of live action blockbusters released on the big

³⁴ Hiddlestoner is the term for a fan of Tom Hiddleston (who plays Loki in the *Thor* trilogy and other MCU movies).

screen does not render the film audience incapable of critical thinking. Audiences are not unable to identify the fact that there is a lack of cinematic creativity in superhero movies. Instead, they are far too familiar with the formulated narrative structure. The strategy is that they do not look for pleasure in the narratives because they're afraid they would not be able to find any. It is ignored intentionally, repressed by Chinese millennials as they prepare to enjoy this type of movie with expectations in relation to the senses rather than cognition or emotion. Without doubt, the immense popularity of superhero blockbusters, fostering either social motive or social pressure, contributes to the reinvigoration of cinema-going among millennials.

Oscar Classics

In 2002, Zhang Yimou's *Hero* was released with a grand premier in the Great Hall of the People's Republic of China. Although the film soon became a box-office hit in the mainland, there were a great number of mixed comments on the status and quality of it. Cultural elites mainly condemned and derided *Hero* rather than praising and supporting it (Yu, 2010). On Sina.com, one of the most popular portal websites in China, *Hero* was considered as "Hollywood rubbish" (Shang, 2002). However, the situation changed dramatically shortly afterwards. *Hero* was nominated the Best Foreign Language Film at the 2002 Academy Awards. With rising awareness of cinema as soft power under the politics of globalization, the fever of producing domestic *dapian* became fiercer in the post-WTO era (Wang, 2019). The Chinese reception of *Hero* was seen as an attitude shift in which reviews of *Hero* after 2004 were not as critical as prior to 2004 (Yu, 2010). It seems that being nominated or awarded at the Academy Awards can influence Chinese audience's perception of the quality and cinematic achievement of a film work. Currently due to the importation quota system, every year only a limited number of American films

can be released in China. While blockbusters are normally imported under the agreement of revenue-sharing, others, especially those which have been nominated for and won key Oscars such as *The Revenant* (Iñárritu, 2015) and *Green Book* (Farrelly, 2018) can take the chance under the flat-fee contract. However, in an empirical analysis regarding the Academy Awards as indicator of cinematic qualities and achievement, Lee (2009) pointed out that Academy Awards winners may not always sell well to East Asian audiences.

The term Oscar Classics is literally translated from Chinese *aosika jingdian* (in Simplified Chinese: 奥斯卡经典). In China, it is a categorizing phrase most commonly seen as a genre in video shops, as a watchlist collection on the Internet, or even used by the state administrations to describe a group of acclaimed films produced during the Hollywood Golden Age. Compared to superhero movies, Oscar classics, though widely accepted in the local landscape, is rather a loosely defined canon.

Generational (P)Reference

In China, Oscar seems to be a by-product of Hollywood imports since its re-entry in the 1990s. The millennial generation who grew up watching American popular films are not strangers to the Oscar. In fact, some of the participants (**HL04-F9WBY**, **YH05-M8WMY**, **LZ10-F9WMN** and **WT11-M8WMY** among others) admitted they regularly follow the Academy Awards every year. The relationship between Hollywood and the Academy Awards is a complex one that even industrial professionals and academics find difficult to address. For Chinese millennials, “Oscar” bears a connotative sense signifying the kind of cinematic achievement more cultural and aesthetic than commercial.

(An Oscar classic) represents the (American film) industry. It can't be for a small group of people. But can't be too commercial either. The scale of the story is huge, (and the story is) profound. It needs to resonate with the

audiences. ... The best Hollywood production is worth an Oscar. ... [the Oscar classic] should keep up with the pace of the times. (YJ01-M8WMY, on *Titanic*)

The most cited Oscar classic representative that millennial participants suggested is, without any surprise, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), followed by *Forrest Gump* (1994), *Titanic* (1997), *The Legend of 1900* (1998) and *Schindler's List* (1993). Besides popular films in the 1990s, movies from the Golden Age of Hollywood such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and more recent Oscar winners such as *La La Land* (2016) were also used by Chinese millennials, though much less frequently, in their discussion of Oscar classics. It is significant when films from a certain period of time were listed repeatedly, that preference is rooted in generation identity. But we should keep in mind the local media environment in China: for the 1990s Hollywood films presented by the millennials, Chinese audiences might not have access to them all during the 1990s, and surely they might not have access to them all in the Chinese theaters.

In determining factors that are crucial to their consuming of Oscar classics, Chinese millennials did not associate too much with the Academy Awards. An Oscar classic winning the Oscar did not play too much of a role in Chinese audience's appreciation of the film. Instead, what they considered important to define an Oscar classic can be categorized into two: the theme of the narrative and the cinematic quality of the film. For millennials, Oscar classic pictures usually touch on profound topics such as death (TM03-F8WMY), social concerns (XZ09-M9WMN), and human issues (WW06-F8WMY). To provoke deep-thinking and inspirational insights, these profound stories need to be told in a way that is able to arouse empathy. As a result, they tend to pay close attention to the cinematography, the screenplay, the performance, the music, et cetera.

This kind of film [Oscar Classic] puts a lot of effort in thinking about human nature and humanity. It casts a suspicion on society, and the power in society. The film makes you think about hope and our obsession on maintaining political power. It is to see the real world through the movie. (XZ09-M9WMN)

It is an Oscar, so we need to raise (the standard). After you watch the film, you can think about something. No matter it's on life, or on humanities. From any perspective, from some perspective, you need to think about it. Somehow it is inspiring. (SQ14-M8WMY)

I feel like, first (it) is the whole narrative. The story the film is telling, it needs to have some profound meanings. It should not be superficial. Well, not superficial exactly. But at least the film [an Oscar classic] should communicate some values to me. It needs to be heavy. (LX19-F8WMY)

Its ability in telling a good story, how you tell the story. ... I think for me, the actor's performance, the narrative and its structure, and some detailed parts that are smartly designed, and the audio-visual language. (ZX20-F9SMY)

It is most evident that Chinese millennials, in their viewing of films that they considered Oscar classics, seek to be moved, to be inspired, and to engage in some kind of deep thinking regarding life. By giving values to the loose canon called Oscar classics, they formed their expectations for consuming this type of cinema. Their expectations towards encountering an Oscar classic are to be able to get engaged with the filmic text emotionally, which is significantly different from their viewing of superhero movies. It is the audiences' negotiating of the "Factor X", the internal essence of the film itself (in the eyes of the audience) that brings out the conditions for their future film experiences of a similar kind. It is worth noticing that the commercial character of cinema is largely ignored in the discussion of appreciating Oscar classics. Very few of the millennial participants mentioned requirements regarding special audial or visual effects. From this initiating point, their viewing strategy of watching Oscar classics diverge from that of enjoying live action superhero movies.

Within the loose canon framed by the values and factors as suggested above, millennial participants identified their favorite Oscar classic. The following list indicates their favorite titles considered appropriate under this category. It seems inevitable that these titles cover a wide range of genre films. But genre classification is in itself a projected notion that is more concerned about the commercial strategies in film consumption (Jancovich, 2001; Klinger, 2006). The use of Oscar classic as defined in the words of audiences themselves resonates better with the research aim in this study.

Table 1.
Chinese Millennials' Favorite Oscar Classics³⁵

Mainstream	Independent
<i>Godfather (1972)</i>	<i>Shine (1996)</i>
<i>The Shawshank Redemption (1994)</i>	<i>The Thin Red Line (1998)</i>
<i>Good Will Hunting (1997)</i>	<i>American Beauty (1999)</i>
<i>Titanic (1997)</i>	<i>The Reader (2008)</i>
<i>The Legend of 1900 (1998)</i>	<i>12 Years A Slave (2013)</i>
<i>City of Angels (1998)</i>	
<i>Up in the Air (2009)</i>	Classical
<i>Interstellar (2014)</i>	<i>Roman Holiday (1953)</i>
	<i>12 Angry Men (1957)</i>
	<i>Some Like it Hot (1959)</i>

Towards a Private Repetition

For millennial participants, Oscar classics should be appreciated alone. The situation when they first encountered their favorite titles varied: some watched with families or friends, some watched during classes at school, and some were in the movie

³⁵ All of these movies have been nominated and/or awarded The Best Picture at the Academy Awards except for *Some Like it Hot*, which was nominated in other categories, *City of Angels* and *The Legend of 1900*, which did not receive any Oscar nomination.

theaters. However, they all admitted that they would prefer watching it all by themselves in a private environment, at home in general. The following dialogues demonstrate a particular sense of ceremony in the case of watching an Oscar classic:

TM03-F8WMY: Maybe at normal times I would prefer Marvel or Hollywood blockbusters, those that don't require too much deep thinking to understand. For an Oscar (classic), (you) need to settle down, to watch alone with your heart. (Oscar classics) should be watched alone (by yourself).

Moderator: So will you say, for example, today I want or decide to watch an Oscar classic, will you adjust yourself so you could (quickly) immerse yourself into the story and comprehend it? Like in a sense of ceremony?

TM03-F8WMY: Yes! Yes! Exactly!

In addition, all of them have watched their favorite titles more than once. Especially for those whose first-time experience with the film was outside the domestic area, they had for sure watched it again in a private environment, most typically at home. The tendency of repeated viewing in mostly a domestic place without disturbance is the unified mode of consumption for Chinese millennials' reception of the Oscar classic. There are multiple reasons that a viewer chose a favorite title. Some were personal, as with **YJ01-M8WMY** who saw a similar situation of his middle-age crisis in *Up in the Air* (2009). Some were ideological and critical, when **DJ15-F8WMN** praised *American Beauty* (1999) because it's believed to be anti-mainstream-cinema. But returning to favorite titles repeatedly in a private and isolated place requires more explanation.

There is pleasure from watching the same old film. The ultimate goal is to create a moment that is only between the favorite Oscar classic and oneself. **SX18-M9WBN** described a typical way he would return to *Some Like it Hot* (1959): when it's late and quiet, I can enjoy the film all by myself, until the last line, "Well, nobody is perfect". Millennials returning to favorite titles also learn inspirational life lessons. **ZR16-F9SBY**

majored in mathematics in college so when she is low and needs to find new energy, *Good Will Hunting* (1997) is what she would turn to. Repeated use of media in the domestic environment can transform it to become part of people's everyday life, so that the favorite title becomes a friend: **WY07-M8WBY** has watched *Shine* (1996) for more than 15 times, once every other year or so, just to feel the difference through time. It is when millennial viewers intend to get fully absorbed into their favorite Oscar classics, they choose private-viewing over cinema exhibition.

Returning to the same title also enables familiarity, familiar with film texts. It has often been criticized for the reason that narrative consumption is a one-time thing. Yet researched participants oppose the idea that once "consumed, it is spent" (Klinger, 2006, p.153). In discussion of their favorite titles, millennial participants can easily recall the scenes or plots that impressed them the most. For example, **XC02-F8SDN** detailed the part when Andy, the protagonist in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), reunited with his black friend outside the prison, confirming that it is the one that moved her the most. **DJ15-F8WMN** recalled the scene of the death of the leading male character's grandma in *American Beauty*, resonating with her personal experience of losing family members. **LX19-F8WMY** identified a scene in *The Legend of 1900* (1998) when Danny, the pianist, who arrived at New York and saw the Statue of Liberty for the first time, a strong empathy because the feelings were similar to herself when she first arrived at Manhattan. Repeated viewing has made possible remembering familiar textual materials through which the participants create relevance in the narratives.

The End of Experience Prolonged

Repeated viewing itself has prolonged viewer's experience with cinema, but there are also adverse judgements. As I have mentioned, Chinese millennials prepare to watch

an Oscar classic with the condition that they seek empathy arousal, inspiration, or deep-thinking upon watching the film. Making sense of a movie includes not only making sense of what happened but also making meaning from the happening. When the film ends, their whole encounter with the film does not. To complete the enjoyment, they make it relevant to themselves. Some types of relevance are easy to make because the narrative or the protagonist is close to their personal experiences. For instance, **WY07-M8WBY** remembered he was forced to learn playing the drums since he was young; his favorite title *Shine* is about a pianist suffering mental issues throughout life. **WT11-M8WMY** has also been playing piano for more than twenty years; he resonated with the music in *The Legend of 1900* (1998) very much. **ZX20-F9SMY** again was deeply touched by *Good Will Hunting* because she once majored in mathematics.

Some other favorite films, generally regarded as highly culturally specific, such as *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972) and *12 Years A Slave* (McQueen, 2013), did not seem vulnerable to suffering from cultural difference:

12 Years A Slave is really touching. The performance was brilliant. And the story, for me, I was only an audience. It [story in the film] is such a cruel thing, and they [filmmakers] showed it on the big screen. In between, you can see many dark sides of humanity. It's the kind of film to make you cry. I was about the stand up and clap when he [the protagonist] finally ran away. ... Because I AM easily touched. (**WW06-F8WMY**, on *12 Years A Slave*)

Godfather, for boys, maybe it's more exciting. It's like a young boy always wants to be the lead. Men worship power. And although it's a gang, they also have rules and disciplines. These attracted me a lot. ... When the youngest son took over from his father, and then he had to, in order to take control, he turned to a cold blood, killing many people. (**SQ14-M8WMY**, on *Godfather*)

SQ14-M8WMY related to *The Godfather* in its depiction regarding young men approaching maturity and responsibility, whereas **WW06-F8WMY** was deeply moved

by *12 Years A Slave* in the universal values of humanity and freedom despite his lack in connection to the history of black culture in the US. They both explained that movies could serve as a venue to understand the past. This loosely defined canon serves as cultural resources to which audiences refer to make their own meanings.

Brain-burning Films

Mind-game or puzzle films, known for rejecting classical storytelling, began to gain popularity in America from the 1990s (Buckland, 2009). Although the mode is different from that of traditional genres, there has been some serious work done on this popular cycle. Some may consider mind-game and puzzle films two different categories that considerably overlap with each other (Elsaesser, 2009, as an example), but audiences and fans roughly speak of the two terms interchangeably. As the name suggests, puzzle films, with profound themes usually centered on the relationship between dream/VR and reality, men and A.I., or extreme crime and mental issues in an unfamiliar narrative structure, are excitingly enjoyable for viewers who process various interpretations following after the experience of spectatorship. While successful cases such as *The Matrix* (1999), *Inception* (2009) and *Source Code* (2011) encouraged discussion on the cultural changes these films might represent in its original context, there has been little attention paid to the transnational reception of this genre.

More likely to be called "brain-burning films", a literal translation of the mandarin Chinese *shaonaopian* (in Simplified Chinese: 烧脑片), this genre is quite popular in China too. For example, Christopher Nolan's *Inception* is a sci-fi thriller about a group of thieves using dream-sharing technology to steal secrets and plant ideas in other people's minds. The film was released in mainland China on September 1st, 2010 and achieved a total box office of RMB 462 million (Chinese currency, about \$68.45 million US). It

ranked No.5 on the country's top-grossing list of that year and was the second highest selling foreign film following Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). In addition, David Fincher's 2014 thriller/drama *Gone Girl* (2012) tells a story about how the disappearance of a married woman rendered the couple under the spotlight of media via multiple unexpected reversals. Available through a number of online platforms, the film never made it to China's big screen. Nevertheless, it is on Douban Movie 250 and is graded 8.7/10 by more than 550 thousand registered users.

A Chinese Perspective

To elaborate on the Chinese phrase *shaonao*, *shao* literally means to burn, but in the local speaking context, it can also be translated as “to cost too much”; *nao* is the brain. Therefore, the term *shaonao* indicates that it requires extra intellectual or cognitive effort to make sense of what has happened, how and maybe even why it happened. Then why do brain-burning films cost so much to decode? According to millennial responses, brain-burning films display at least some of the following characteristics: an unexpected ending that makes you wonder why and how, an atypical narrative that requires full concentration on the film to find enough cues, a quick editing that leaves audiences not enough time to acquire all necessary cues, blurred differences between reality and virtual reality, unfamiliar subject matters that are often associated with science-fiction and thriller, and pleasures from recognizing a solution and communicating it with others. The films mentioned by participants that meet some or all of the above criteria include: *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Memento* (2000), *Identity* (2003), *Saw* (2004), *The Skeleton Key* (2005), *The Man from Earth* (2007), *Inception* (2009), *Triangle* (2009), *Shutter Island* (2010), *Black Swan* (2010), *Source Code* (2011), and *Gone Girl* (2014). Some of these films are millennials' favorite titles and they had

watched them several times. It is obvious that these movies covered a range of time from when brain-burning became popular in its home country to the present day. Christopher Nolan seems to have established his author status in China with two of his works not only frequently mentioned in the discussion but also most identified favorite titles.

I like *Inception*... He [Nolan] is the kind of director who has his own thoughts. (From)The contents and its camera use, until the open ending, it makes you think on it. Many people went to watch a second time in case they missed some details. When they watched a second time, (they) found that, oh, in what-what minute, he [someone] has said something (in the film), and this is the proof (that some explanations are correct). I think films like this are interesting. ... And I care about story logic, a lot! Whether the logic makes sense (matters a lot to me)! ... Whether the truth is really true, it doesn't matter too much. But it's pity that sometimes (I don't know those hardcore knowledges). (LZ10-F9WMN)

There is the trend (that brain-burning is getting popular). And I am surprised, like, AH! The screenwriter's brain is really big! And the logic (reasoning) is rigorous. There's no bug. This kind of work makes me admire the screenwriter. So personally I really enjoy this kind of film. Sometime I even go to challenge their [screenwriter's] logic (in the story). To watch again, starring at those plots that might be a bug to see if there's a problem. If I find one, I may even go online to talk about it. (XJ12-M9WMN)

I really enjoy watching brain-burning films. But most of the time I couldn't fully understand it, so I'll have to go watch it again or several times. It is the ending (that's really important), it makes you think (why and how it all happened). It is the thinking that makes you fully concentrate on the film (narrative). I think it's rare these days. To be able to fully concentrate on watching a film is what I enjoy. And I do like some of the over-readings [reviews, critiques, analysis] of films online. They're interesting. And I will go to learn knowledges that's related to the film. [I want to know if the thing the film is telling us can be real or not.] But the more important part is the logic. As long as the logic of the story makes sense, is reasonable, I'm OK. (MB17-F9WMY)

The “logic” thing, as cited above in the responses, is a crucial factor in millennials' discussion of brain-burning films. However, “logic” here is a direct translation, a rather Chinese use of the word. It needs to be understood according to the language context. In China, logic, or the logic of a story, is often used in making sense of cinema and other

narrative media. In general, logic indicates that things happened in a linear, step-by-step manner. The group discussion transcript at the beginning of this chapter has demonstrated Chinese millennials explaining Hollywood *taolu*, which enable them to predict in a film what is going to happen every 15 minutes in the following. Chinese audiences are familiar with the predictable “logical (linear)” narrative that the Hollywood mainstream system has been offering. What millennial participants have revealed as a main feature of brain-burning films is the atypical narrative (non-linear, complex, or even multilayered). Surely those responses were not saying that they cannot come to appreciate a narrative that is not logical, not linear. Thus sometimes, “logic” can also be seen as something reasonable or can be explained reasonably. It is under the Chinese perspective that the word logic is used in the following section.

Obsessed with Narrative and Narration

The atypical narrative and the unpredictable ending (sometimes even an open ending), among other characteristics as discussed above, are what millennials found most attractive in brain-burning films, which is highly different from the kind of action/adventure Hollywood blockbusters they grew up watching. Thus, understanding what happened and how it happened in the films seems to be a challenge for millennial viewers. It is the individual success to resolve the problems that gives an audience pleasure. Re-viewing pleasure arises with the kind of aesthetic appreciation, formal or casual, of film that is substantially different from contemporary mainstream Hollywood. It is reasonable to assume that viewers would watch again if they believe they’ve missed some important messages to complete their sense-making. Repeated viewing is therefore also common in millennial participants’ reception of brain-burning films. Unlike watching Oscar classics, repetition in the case of brain-burning movies does not have a

preference for consuming location. When *Inception* was released in China, almost all millennial participants who liked the film watched in on the big screen. For other titles not imported into China, there seems no other way but to enjoy it on platforms or other small screens.

My favorite is *Identity*. Think I've watched it 2 or 3 times. The first time I watched it, I was in a shock! I couldn't understand, I was, like, so slow. Why is the end like that? How did it happen? And then I watched it a second time. This time as I already knew the ending, I could notice many cues that I missed, the character's expression, their movements. (TM03-F8WMY)

What if viewers believe they have already fully understood the film? For millennials, excellent brain-burning films are perceived as complex and they assume that a film of this kind cannot be adequately consumed in only one viewing. Films with cultural capitals can invite aesthetic assessment either as being significantly different from local products, or as embracing local standard to work into local consciousness. American brain-burning films appear not able to perform in either. For millennial participants, the kind of aesthetic evaluation of brain-burning films stays on the level of cinematic quality: they are obsessed with film narrative and narration. Even so, to discover something previously unnoticed is a pleasure. To gain new information from repeat viewing may transform into new insights.

I watched *Inception* twice at a cinema, 3 or 4 times at home. Cuz it's good, why not? The second time I remember I went to Alaska for travel and I went to the cinema again. The film is easy to understand, once is enough. But there were spoilers online. It didn't affect me too much though. After watching it, I also read some reviews and analysis, the ending explained, things like that. (YJ01-M8WMY)

Memento is very engaging. I've watched it 3 or 4 times at home all alone. You need to be very focused! Don't talk to others during the film. I got the whole thing the first time but of course you'll want to watch a second time. Re-viewing is for noticing the details missed the first time. I also like to

find those reviews and explanations to read. It helps you understand how other people are making sense of the film. (WT11-M8WMY)

As many of the millennial responded, Chinese viewing brain-burning films care about “what happened” and “how did it happen” the most. In millennial answers, a slight discrimination on film literacy and a competition on film knowledge is clear to influence millennials’ reading and re-reading of brain-burning movies. Those who claimed to have grasped the whole story within a one-time viewing were proud to admit it. However, films in this category associate with an increasing number of subjects that need scientific knowledge to understand them. For example, the detailed Astrophysics analysis to help understand the scientific background of the story of *Interstellar* can be seen everywhere on Internet blogs and discussion boards after the film released in China. While some millennial participants were interested in reading relevant information out of personal motives, the indulgence of repeated viewing accompanied by such extra-work would be considered over-reading of the film.

“Spoiler” Preferred

There are many media messages that can leverage an audience’s film experience: the director’s cut, critical reviews, a friend’s tweets, et cetera. The example of *Interstellar* and its online explanatory essays is not a rare case in modern-day China. Here I would like to focus on the amateur created contents, mostly textual, and the role they play in millennial participants’ reception of brain-burning films in China. Audience reviews are largely gathered on a few popular social networking websites such as Douban, Zhihu, and Mtime. For instance, on Douban.com, registered users can post short reviews and long reviews on each film’s individual webpage, while they can also write diaries about film analysis or explanations on the user’s personal page. Audience responses range from

simply personal thoughts on films and film experiences to comprehensive evaluations of a movie's quality and, as in the case of many brain-burning films, professional introduction of scientific knowledge relevant to events in the story. As social media accelerates the transmission of messages, it is no surprise that Chinese movie viewers are surrounded with extensive information about the films they have consumed, the films they are consuming, and those they will consume.

Millennial viewers' perception of brain-burning films assumed that these films require extra effort to decode. Most of the participants have demonstrated that after watching brain-burning films, they would refer to other people's interpretations in order to better understand the narratives and/or to enrich deciphering. In fact, some of them even consider this after-reading a must in their brain-burning experience (for example, **DJ15-F8WMN** and **ZR16-F9SBY**). This post-reading of other's explanations is different from the small talk that viewers have with friends after watching a film, in that it is between the viewing and re-viewing of a certain brain-burning film. As a consequence, this post-reading is part of the millennial's overall film consumption, occupying both practices and hermeneutics. Chinese millennials' movie-viewing of brain-burning films expands into an intermedia and intertextual activity that further questions the end of film experience in modern times.

Shutter Island, I watched it two times, both at home, on my laptop. I think I got the whole thing the first time I watched it but I still went online to search for reviews and explanations. It helps you to recognize more details and cues so the next time, you would notice and it'd be a different experience. (**WW06-F8WMY**)

Black Swan, it's quite burning for me. Firstly I prefer films on female issues, on woman power. And I like the leading actress of *Black Swan*. To me, she is more than a celebrity but a true actor. I've watched it a few times. How many I couldn't remember. It's impressive. But, I couldn't understand everything in one time viewing. So then I went to read reviews

and analysis, and realized that there are so many details I absolutely didn't notice. But overall, it's a surprise. (XC02-F8SDN)

Nonetheless, we should keep in mind that viewing and pet-reading have much to do with the viewer's personality. As a matter of fact, two participants, YH05-M8WMY and WY07-M8WBY, have made clear that they would rather not damage their film experience with other people's opinions. Both of them have strong personal preferences in terms of movie-viewing. In fact, their choices of favorite brain-burning titles are quite different from others. In the interview session, YH05-M8WMY talked about *Gone Girl* as his favorite brain-burning basically due to a series of unpredictable plots that upon a second viewing could be properly explained with attention to the arrangement of stage props in the film. WY07-M8WBY elaborated on his experience with *Eyes Wide Shut* for more than a decade to demonstrate his sexual awareness and relationships inspired by the film. Both of these favorite brain-burning viewings are significantly different from other millennial participants. They both tried to maintain a relationship with cinema claiming that "my viewing experience is my own and thus should be connected with that of others as little as possible."

***Taolu* vs. Viewing Strategy**

For each of the categories under discussion, I have asked my millennial interviewees whether they believe there are any *taolu* in these different types of films. As might be expected, without intentional limitation, they have suggested a wide range of factors they perceived repeatedly in movies of each type. If we can consider the classification of superhero movies, Oscar classics, and brain-burning films in a similar sense of the structuring of genre, these formulaic substances identified by millennial audiences can be understood in a similar sense of the "Factor X" as deemed the essential

nature of a given genre. In the responses, some *taolu* concern the structural nature of the film, while some concern the decoding effort. What matters is not whether the interviewees are able to identify the correct formulaic substances but their very capability of articulating a series of *taolu*. Audiences are able to do so only when they have become familiar enough with a certain type of film. I'd refer the concept of media literacy as the competence in using media and the ability to think critically about them to understand the issue of *taolu* and viewing strategy. Such competence and ability can only be learnt as audiences repeatedly encounter the same type of films over time. Therefore, millennial's strategy of consuming superhero movies is one that has much to do with the blockbuster nature of the films, yet little with superheroes themselves. One reason is that Chinese millennials know little about American comic heroes. It can also be seen as a consequence of the experience of school-outings in their formative years. Back then, the only two types of films they'd been watching in cinema were foreign commercial productions and domestic main-melodies.

On the other hand, it would be too ideal and too idle to conclude that Chinese millennials, upon encountering superhero movies, Oscar classics, and brain-burning films, apply different viewing strategies. From the discussion on interview findings above, it's not difficult to observe that millennial movie-viewers have a clear ultimate goal for each type of films: if they were to watch a superhero movie, they wish to satisfy the expectation for sensual enjoyment; if an Oscar classic, they wish to be able to empathized with the story and moved by it; if a brain-burning, the goal is to fully understand what happened in the story. To achieve that goal, millennial audiences go to the cinema while having no expectation for the narrative; they re-watch and re-watch in private and quiet environment; they concentrate in order to find hidden clues or refer to other materials. It is not to say

that in Chinese millennial reception of certain types of Hollywood films, these are the correct or appropriate strategies to apply. In this specific case study, these viewing strategies were made possible because the audiences have had experiences with these types of films. Upon encountering one, they know what to expect and what not to, they know what materials they can borrow, and what references they can reach to. I have no intention to conclude that a certain viewing strategy is always ready for the audience to apply, but that strategies are developed with an audience continuously encountering similar films.

As the discussion goes, I have noticed a striking issue that the topic of Americanness has hardly been mentioned in interviews with Chinese millennials on their viewing strategy of different types of Hollywood films. This could partially be explained that during the interviews, I did not propose any questions intentionally refer to culturally specific contents. However, the lost Americanness in millennials' interpretations of superhero movies, Oscar classics, and brain-burning films, which are all popular Hollywood products, deserves further examination. Does this justify the global success of Hollywood hegemony? The absence of America, in whatever sense it may be, in millennial's discussion of certain types of Hollywood experience, seems to indicate the indolence of the audience in that in the process of meaning-making, Chinese millennials are more likely to pick up what's handy for them.

Chapter Five: How do Chinese Millennials Interpret Chinese Cultural Elements in Hollywood Films?

Ridley Scott's 2015 science-fiction movie *The Martian* was about US astronaut Mark Watney's adventure journey back home. Set in the future of 2035, the crew of Ares III's mission to explore Mars was accidentally interrupted by a storm, in which Watney was found missing and believed dead. After the rest of the team took off with their spaceship *Hermes*, Watney came out of a coma and made it back to the habitat on Mars. Unfortunately left alone on the planet, Watney managed to apply his botanist knowledge to find a way to supply himself with enough water and food for four years so as to reunite with the next crew coming to Mars, his only chance of rescue. Soon, NASA learnt of Watney's survival and "rescuing Mark from Mars" soon became a news spotlight around the world. When a breakdown of the habitat airlock destroyed Watney's stores, NASA had no choice but to send additional food supplies. However, the rocket carrying Watney's delivery exploded seconds after liftoff, which was witnessed by global audiences. Under such circumstances, China National Space Administration offered NASA *Taiyang-Shen*,³⁶ a secret booster that was supposed to be used on a Chinese national mission. *Taiyang-Shen* was capable of carrying a payload to resupply the *Hermes* crew so that they could go back to Mars to rescue Watney two years earlier than planned, which seemed to be everyone's last and only option. In spite of the risk, the *Hermes* crew

³⁶ *Taiyang-shen* (in Simplified Chinese: 太阳神), literally means "god of the sun". There are several ancient mythologies about the "god of the sun" in China. In *Classic of Mountains and Seas (Shang Hai Jing)*, Xihe is recognized as "god of the sun" because she is the mother of ten suns and responsible for monitoring all the stars. The Yan Emperor (Yan Di) is also called "god of the sun" and he teaches people how to cultivate and prepare foods. In some other myths, "god of the sun" is believed to bring good luck and happiness to the human world.

accepted this additional mission and eventually achieved a successful rendezvous with Mark Watney under worldwide attention.

The Martian was 20th Century Fox's most successful film in 2015, grossing \$228 million in the US and \$401.7 million overseas.³⁷ Adapted from Andy Weir's self-published novel of the same title, the film was directed by Ridley Scott and Hollywood star Matt Damon played the protagonist Mark Watney. With an estimated budget of \$108 million, *The Martian* was able to construct outstanding visual spectacles of outer space thanks to the exquisite craftsmanship of both set designs and CGI technologies. In China, Hollywood's most important foreign market, the film achieved a box office gross of RMB 586.90 million (about \$94 million). In addition, it was graded 8.4/10 on Douban (based on 325,115 reviews), 9.0/10 on Maoyan (based on around 560,000 reviews), and 8.1/10 on Mtime (based on 10,079 reviews).³⁸ For Chinese movie-goers, *The Martian* perfectly met their expectation towards a typical Hollywood blockbuster: big production budget, celebrity director and actors, adventure narratives, and striking spectacles.

In the meanwhile, Chinese online communities were drawn into heated discussion on particular minor plots exposing the movie's employment of some Chinese cultural elements, for example, the portrayal of China's government officers and the cooperation between China National Space Administration (CNSA) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration of the United States (NASA). In the original book, Andy Weir deliberately chose China as a partner in order to protest against NASA's Chinese Exclusive Policy.³⁹ In response, leaders of China's space program, upon watching the

³⁷ Data Source: <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=scott2016.htm>

³⁸ As of 2018. Douban, Maoyan, and Mtime are all popular movie-rating social networking websites in China.

³⁹ In 2011, the 112th US Congress banned NASA from working with its Chinese counterpart. According to Public Law 112-55, SEC. 539, "none of the funds made available by this Act may be

film, also advocated future joint projects with the US (Sinclair, 2016). Chinese audiences who were unaware of such issues or had not yet read the book interpreted the presence of CNSA according to their previous experience with Hollywood. A few years ago, *Looper* (Johnson, 2012) and *Iron Man 3* (Black, 2013), in order to secure releasing spots in China and appeal to local audiences, both added extra scenes featuring characters played by well-known local actors exclusively for the mainland market. However, the made-for-China version of Hollywood imports was criticized by both Chinese movie-goers and official media outlets on the grounds that most of the added scenes had little to do with the main narratives, and were considered unnecessary. In a similar way, on the discussion board of *The Martian*'s Douban webpage, mr light make-up (registered user name) wrote:

The Chinese elements seem so awkward, which made me almost feel embarrassed. Did they do this to flatter us so they can make more money from China? ⁴⁰

China's reception of *The Martian*, as mentioned above, reminds us of the paradoxical state of Hollywood's globalization: while American blockbusters have often been censured for the lack of cultural diversity and/or the problem of cultural (mis)appropriation, they continue to be popular on a global scale. There are longstanding pressures from the domestic market to urge American studios to increase the appearance of minority groups and people of color on-screen, as can be seen in both UCLA's *Hollywood Diversity Report 2018* and USC-Annenberg's report of *Inequality in 1,100 Popular Film (from 2007 to 2017)*. With successful Hollywood hits increasingly relying on an international audience, there are also incentives from foreign markets for

used for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) or the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to develop, design, plan, promulgate, implement, or execute a bilateral policy, program, order, or contract of any kind to participate, collaborate, or coordinate bilaterally in any way with China."

⁴⁰ Original text in Chinese and translated by the author.

Hollywood to increase cultural diversity. As China is reportedly to eclipse the US to become home to the globe's largest moviegoing audience in the near future, former production chief of Paramount Pictures Adam Goodman even commented that "We never thought of China 10 years ago. Now, we're at a point where Hollywood can't exist without China" (Schwartzel, 2017). Out of business intuition, studios take advantage of the local, not only collaborating with local filmmakers but also borrowing stories and ideas suitable for adaptation from local histories and folktales. The contemporary Chinese moviegoers have witnessed more and more inclusion of their own cultural elements in imported Hollywood films. Being Chinese, millennial interviewees naturally pay more attention to the on-screen cultural elements that are related to themselves. Yet these symbolic references seem to fail to help bring American movies closer the local audiences, not to mention overcoming the barrier of cultural discount when cinema products travel from one culture to another. How do the millennials interpret the presence of Chinese cultural elements in contemporary Hollywood films? In this chapter, I intend to answer this question by focusing on three tropes which were raised from and recognized in the findings from questionnaire surveys and focus group discussions and were further elaborated by participants during the interview session: product placement of Chinese brands, Chinese actors featuring in Hollywood films, and stories inspired by Chinese histories and folktales. Millennial's interpretations are analyzed with reference to a wide range of contexts regarding the Sino-US cinema relationship from production to reception. In the process of cross-cultural reception, this chapter looks into the role cultural identity (that is, being millennial Chinese) plays and the different priorities it invokes while the audience make sense of different tropes.

Commercialization and Commodification of Culture

Hollywood isn't new to international production. For the studios, shooting in a foreign country can, at the minimum, benefit from some financing aid programs, for instance, tax incentives and cash rebates, which are mostly approved by the local government so as to maintain its own film industry, improve the attractiveness of the country as a location for filmmaking, promote the local culture, et cetera. In the case of co-producing with China, Hollywood producers would additionally be able to acquire a higher percentage of box-office share because, as stated in *China-International Co-production Handbook*, a co-production film is subject to preferential policies that are typically applied to domestic Chinese films within the Chinese marketplace. Under such circumstance, an official Sino-foreign co-production both enjoys the advantages and suffers the potential disadvantages that a domestic production does. To say there are disadvantages, it means going through an even more comprehensive and possibly stricter censoring by the Chinese administrators. Before shooting, filmmakers have to submit the script to China Film Co-production Corporation (CFCC) in order to apply for "The Film Project Establishment Notice"⁴¹ and "The Chinese-Foreign Film Permit co-production"⁴², which can only be issued by the authorities. During the production, detailed shooting schedules and locations are also required to be filed to CFCC for approval. When a film is completed, it needs to undergo reviews by multiple authorities, including but not limited to CFCC, SAPPRT, and provincial or municipal government for the region where the Chinese production party is registered. Only when a "Film Release Permit"⁴³

⁴¹ In Simplified Chinese: <<影片立项通知书>>

⁴² In Simplified Chinese: <<中外合作摄制电影许可证>>

⁴³ In Simplified Chinese: <<公映许可证>>

is issued can the movie finally make it to the silver screens in mainland China. There are also explicit requirements that a Sino-foreign co-production has to meet. For example, overseas actors must not exceed two-thirds of the main cast. There are, at the same time, “soft” conditions that have not been penned in any official guidelines but are generally acknowledged by industry professionals. For example, in most of the official Sino-foreign co-productions, leading antagonists or major villains cannot be Chinese or played by Chinese actors. In her book *Hollywood Made in China*, Aynne Kokas (2017) addressed the complexity of recent Sino-US film collaborations through analysis of the “*faux-production*” works such as *Iron Man 3* (2013) and *Looper* (2012). Both films were officially registered as co-production projects in mainland China but later failed to complete the process as they were unsuccessful in meeting up with the Chinese content restrictions (p.75). They were eventually released as foreign imports under the revenue-sharing agreement with, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, additional scenes especially crafted for the mainland market added.

To secure stable investment but limit risks, Hollywood producers may choose to collaborate with China in another way: product placement of Chinese brands.⁴⁴ Product placement, in other words, embedded marketing, is a commonly used technique, mostly in films and television programs, to promote a specific brand or product by incorporating it in the media work. Successful product placement in films can be seen in cases such as DeLorean motors in the *Back to the Future* franchise (1985-1990) or the partnership between Omega watches and the James-Bond franchise (1995-2015). In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese products and brands have appeared in Hollywood

⁴⁴ Product placement is identified as a form of investment for co-production in *China-International Co-production Handbook* (2017).

blockbusters: corporate executive Joshua Joyce, played by Stanley Tucci, was drinking China's market-leading dairy group Yili's Shuhua Milk in *Transformer: Age of Extinction* (2014); in the same film, a China Construction Bank ATM was seen in a small suburban town in the Midwestern US; and the main characters in *Independence Day: Resurgence* (2016) used QQ IM service for their video calls between space and earth.



Fig.9. Screenshot, Shuhua Milk (Yili Dairy) in *Transformer: Age of Extinction* (2014)



Fig.10. Screenshots, China Construction Bank ATM in *Transformer: Age of Extinction*



Fig.11. Screenshot, video call powered by QQ IM Service in *Independence Day: Resurgence*

According to the results of the questionnaire surveys, in general Chinese movie-viewers, upon being aware of the commercial activity of Chinese businesses investing in American cinema, expressed a mixed feeling about each and every product placement of these local brands.⁴⁵ Two of the interview participants (**WW06-F8WMY** and **ZR16-F9SBY**) recalled a slightly warm reaction, in the senses of familiarity and nostalgia, when they first encountered a product placement of Chinese brands in Hollywood movies at the time they were studying and living abroad. Other than that, millennial audiences accounted for the appearance of Chinese products mainly from a business point of view. Moreover, with increasing awareness of the development of the Chinese film market, they continued to make conjectures regarding the power relation within Sino-US cinematic communication.

It seems too deliberate. Every time when I see (product placement of Chinese brands), my first impression is: that's for (our) box office money... Sometimes it makes you jump (out of the story) because they don't fit the plots. (**MB17-F9WMN**)

(Incorporating Chinese products) is just for making money. Sometimes there is even negative influence. In some scenes, it is unnecessary (for the

⁴⁵ For more information, please see Appendix VIII, Q43.

character) to drink milk but they just deliberately put the milk in. I think they [the product and the plot] don't match. (LX19-F8WMY)

Chinese products intend to increase their popularity and acceptance by going to Hollywood for “gold-plating”, as if appearing on the Hollywood silver screen makes them more stylish and upscale. With all those efforts, after all, only Chinese audiences would notice them. (ZY20-F9SMY)

Hollywood’s product placement of Chinese brands, for these young Chinese audiences, is considered as a common commercial activity within media creations. Interviewees evaluated the effectiveness of this marketing strategy with their knowledge of relevant issues through inter-media readings. Millennial audiences presume that the placing of Chinese products in Hollywood blockbusters could help the manufacturer generate global awareness and thus reach global consumers. When certain brands or products fail to establish a world-leading status, the placement is considered misplaced. Yili was reported to be involved in the 2008 Chinese milk scandal.⁴⁶ Therefore, its presence in *Transformer* was criticized. In some other cases, a participant’s evaluation also drew attention to the realistic sense of cinema. In Chapter Three, I have demonstrated that millennial participants make sense of Hollywood according to an art-commerce axis, in which weighting too much on either side would result in a devaluation. Under such circumstances, product placement of Chinese brands in Hollywood films does not always convey affirmative value for Chinese manufacturing or the image of made-in-China. Millennial’s discussions and comments are rather contemptuous. Accordingly, product placement of Chinese brands sometimes becomes a highly disruptive factor, if not the most disruptive one, during millennial audience’s film experience:

⁴⁶ The 2008 Chinese milk scandal is a food safety incident in which milk and infant formula were found contaminated by melamine, resulting in estimated 300,000 victims in China, with six deaths and about 54,000 babies hospitalized (Branigan, 2008; Macartney, 2008). Government investigation revealed that the problem existed in products from more than 20 dairy companies, including market leaders such as Sanlu, Mengniu, and Yili.

As far as I am concerned, first of all, Chinese brands being able to be implanted (in Hollywood blockbusters) is supposed to win credit for the Chinese people. But, don't turn it into something that smacks (our own) faces [in the end]. For example, it is obvious that Chinese people don't even have confidence in our own milk, and then there is the product placement of Shuhua milk (in *Transformer*). Isn't that shameless? There're so many (Chinese) people purchasing baby formula through personal shopper abroad. But then, if it's Huawei cellphone (placed in a Hollywood film), it seems reasonable. Cuz the cellphone is well-produced (and competitive) ... I think, it is more than an art, that these brands should first think about the weight of their own products at the international market. Unlike Huawei cellphone, you don't see Huawei doing product placement of their tablets because Huawei tablets weren't so good... I think it is stupid (of Chinese companies) to do product placement (in Hollywood blockbusters) for the sake of doing product placement. They could have spent the money in a smarter way... It affected (the coherence of) the narrative. Maybe foreign audiences wouldn't notice that. But for the Chinese audiences, it highly damaged my (film) experience. (HL04-F9WBY)

It is easy for me to notice that our daily products appear on the (Hollywood) silver screen since I am a Chinese. But I don't think there are any practical meanings because, for instance, with Yili in *Transformer*, only Chinese people know what Yili is. You can't buy it in the US. There is no business value of it at either the US market or global market. From marketing and advertising perspectives, it is such a failure. If I were American, when I saw unknown words on the milk product, perhaps I would believe it's a made-up or fiction brand... personally I dislike it because it destroys the narrative structure. It's difficult to understand how an American comes to drink Yili milk. It's reasonable if, like, (the character) uses a Lenovo laptop. But drinking (Yili) milk, it ruined my cinema experience. (WY07-M8WBY)

A similar perception mode can be found in Chinese millennial's interpretation of the characters (mostly insignificant or minor supporting roles) played by renowned Chinese celebrities in Hollywood films. As I have mentioned above, Hollywood has been increasing cultural diversity on screen due to both pressures from inside domestic America and incentives from the outside global market. Yet the representation of the Chinese is not new. Yellow-face, Hollywood's tactical manipulation of making Asians invisible at best or the butt of a cruel jokes at worst, can be dated back to almost a century

ago. Millennial participants were unfamiliar with cases of Chinese yellow-face such as Christopher Lee as Fu Manchu or Katherine Hepburn in *Dragon Seed* (Conway & Bucquet, 1944) in the past. They nonetheless couldn't understand Jim Sturgess and Hugo Weaving reincarnated as Asians in *Cloud Atlas* (Tywer, La. Wachowski, & Li. Wachowski, 2012). The Asian characters performed by white Americans with face-off makeups were not offensive (YJ01-M8WMY), though ridiculous (WW06-F8WMY), but overall tolerable.⁴⁷ Millennial responses quickly moved to questioning the reason for not casting ethnic Asians for Asian roles under the current situation where international cinematic collaboration is neither difficult nor usual.



Fig. 12. & 13. Hugo Weaving and Jim Sturgess in *Cloud Atlas*.

In China, Hollywood is seen as a cinema ideal. With the success of Jackie Chan, Ang Lee and John Woo, Chinese filmmakers look forward to getting involved in Hollywood productions. On screen, Jackie Chan's unique position as a transnational cinematic superstar invokes issues of cultural, national, and racial identities, which also makes his success almost impossible to be duplicated (Chan, 2004). This, nevertheless, does not prevent Chinese actors from longing to debut on the other side of the ocean. In recent years, an increasing number of well-known Chinese actors and actresses appeared

⁴⁷ I explained the issue of yellow-face in Hollywood during the interview session and showed participants example pictures. To my surprise, nearly all of them demonstrated a tolerant attitude without extreme criticism. Certainly there were opinions regarding the differences in aesthetic standards between cultures, but very few of the millennials adopted a highly racial/political position upon encountering those examples.

on the Hollywood silver screen. Except for Li Bingbing, who played Ada Wong in *Resident Evil: Retribution* (Anderson, 2012) and Su Yueming in *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014), both among the main casts, many others were seen to sign up for minor roles with an appearance of only a few seconds. For example, Fan Bingbing played the mutant Blink in *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Singer, 2014), whose total scenes together occupy less than one minute. Angela Yeung Wing played pilot Rain Lao in *Independence Day: Resurgence* (2016), whose character makes little contribution to the narrative of the film. It is reasonable to admit that Hollywood's employment of famous local performers is able to help promote the films in local markets. Yet the local audience's reception is hard to predict.



Fig. 14. & 15. Fan Bingbing in *X-Men*, Angela Yeung Wing (right) in *Independence Day*

Millennial participants used two striking slang terms to interpret this kind of Chinese presence (acting in small roles) in Hollywood blockbusters: *dajiangyou* to describe the meaning of such minor roles and *huaping* to indicate the meaning of such presentations. *Dajiangyou* (in Simplified Chinese: 打酱油), literally means to buy soy sauce. The word first appeared on the Internet in China in 2008, used to describe a situation that is none of someone's business. For Chinese millennials, such soy-sauce characters played by Chinese actors are of little textual significance. Although they seem to add people of color to the Hollywood big screen, such presentations performed by local

actors only reinforce the Hollywood tendency to make Asians/Chinese invisible. The word *huaping* (in Simplified Chinese: 花瓶), literally means vase. It is commonly used to indicate a woman employed only for her beauty instead of her capability.⁴⁸ On exploring mainland Chinese actresses appearing in Hollywood films within the dominant paradigm between Asian women and white men, Khoo (2013), referring to the story of *Madame Butterfly*, demonstrated that the third generation of female Chinese appearance in Hollywood films currently suggest a modern “butterfly” that speaks of white male disempowerment. In most of the above-mentioned cases, Chinese actress’ minor roles in those American commercial productions rarely found romance, if at all. It is therefore impossible for me to make comparison with the same Asian female/white male paradigm in Khoo’s examination. Millennial’s *huaping* responses, nonetheless, demonstrate that Chinese actresses’ appearance in Hollywood, as in the case of Fan and Yeung, is the objectification of female Chinese in their minds.

It is clear that for both tropes, that is product placement of Chinese brands and minor characters played by Chinese actors, millennial audiences interpret the presence of Chinese cultural elements simply as Hollywood’s commercialization and commodification of culture according to the logic of capitalism: to exhibit manifest symbols for more profit. It is not hard for Chinese audiences to notice these symbols and their sense-making is within a framework of critical discourse. However, in the particular instances discussed above, audience’s cultural identity facilitated the millennials’ critical assessment of the two tropes, which eventually served to trouble their film experience.

⁴⁸ In their reception of local celebrities participating in Hollywood films, millennials also used *huaping* to describe male Chinese actors, for instance, Kris Wu in *XXX: Return of Xander Cage* (Caruso, 2017).

A Western Perspective: Cherished

In this research, the young Chinese audiences have impressed me with many novel perspectives in their reception of modern-day Hollywood cinema. The most unforeseen responses are found in my dialogue with them regarding a particular film: *The Last Emperor* (Bertolucci, 1987).⁴⁹ Made by famed Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci, the film casted a large number of Chinese actors and actresses for all significant and essential roles even though the film is dialogued in English. The epic biographical drama is about the last Emperor of the Qing dynasty, Pu Yi, depicting his life story that parallels the tragic histories of contemporary China, including the Japanese Invasion, founding of the People's Republic of China, and the Cultural Revolution. With local assistance from China Film Group Corporation (CFG) and Beijing Film Studio, it was filmed during the second phase of the Chinese economic reform, a period when Western ideology, however blurred or censored, became a stimulus for various aspects of the cultural change in China (Chu & Ju, 1993). It was also the first, possibly the only, foreign feature film authorized to be shot in the Forbidden City in Beijing. Independently produced but distributed by Columbia Pictures, *The Last Emperor* (1987) received critical acclaim in the US and won all nine Academy Awards nominations in 1988 including Best Picture and Best Director. It was considered one of the first attempts, a successful one to a large degree, of cinematic collaboration between the west and the east (Baschiera, 2014).

Pu Yi was born in 1906 and while still an infant reigned as Xuantong Emperor of the Qing dynasty from 1908. After the Xinhai Revolution in 1912, he was forced to

⁴⁹ Financially, *The Last Emperor* was a Sino-Italo-UK co-production. I originally included this film in the interview session in order to prepare questions regarding more recent Sino-US co-productions such as *The Great Wall* (Zhang, 2016). Although *The Last Emperor* (1987) may not directly connect to Hollywood capital, participants' extensive and fruitful comments have made it impossible to overlook the significance of the film in Chinese millennials' reception of foreign pop culture.

abdicate. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, Pu Yi was chosen to become emperor of Manchukuo, the Japanese puppet state in current Northeast China. As a result, he was imprisoned after the PRC was founded in 1949. Pu Yi died in 1967 at the age of 61, shortly after Mao Zedong started the Cultural Revolution in China. The life story of Pu Yi inevitably covers historically and politically sensitive matters, which might be censored by the ruling party. Accordingly, *The Last Emperor* (1987) had confronted a series of issues upon its original release in the mainland. Nonetheless, it is now available free of charge on most of the popular online streaming platforms in China, including iQiyi, Tencent Video, and Youku. On the list of Douban Movie 250, Bertolucci's Chinese epic is ranked No.41, rated 9.2/10 by almost 400 thousand movie-viewers. Even though none of the interview participants have ever watched the film in the theater, overall they spoke highly of it: "an excellent masterpiece of cinematic production, the best portrayal of China by the West." (WY07-M8WBY).

There are a few factors contributing to the millennials' enjoyment of *The Last Emperor*. Amongst these, the soundtrack music produced by Japanese composer Ryuichi Sakamoto in particular appealed to interviewees who themselves play piano, drums, or other musical instruments (WY07-M8WBY and WT11-M8WMY). For others (TM03-F8WMY, MQ13-F8WMY and MB17-F9WMN), the splendid colorful mise-en-scène added to the artistic value of the film. The fact that *The Last Emperor* was filmed in the actual Forbidden City in the ancient capital, above all, reinforced the sense of cinematic realism in the audience's sense-making process. With what Rudolf Arnheim called "the mechanical imitation of nature", the film offered Chinese millennials the possibility of reviewing their own history and culture through the lens of another:

I really like (*The Last Emperor*). It is (like) what couldn't be done by the Chinese was (eventually) done by the foreigner. He is a foreign director, and he was the first to shoot in the Forbidden City. The histories since those last days of the Qing dynasty, (we) don't know exactly (what happened). (About) those ages, (we are) not very clear either. Through (Bertolucci's) cinematic portrayal, we get to know the historical change, how Pu Yi grew from a young boy to the last emperor, his destiny, he was pushed through the flow of history (and change). Nothing happened out of his own intention. To be a king, to be "assisted" by the Japanese, and in the end, he became nobody, common, so that he even had to pay for the ticket to visit the Imperial Palace. His whole life is not his own. Such a tragedy. I really like the film. It has a great sense of history. (XJ12-M9WMN)

Why I like *The Last Emperor*, because it is the only film about the kingdom and emperor that was actually filmed in the Forbidden City. The realistic sense of the scenes brought me the sense of realism in cinema. The realistic sense from the locations (in the film) is above all other Qing historical dramas. It [*The Last Emperor*] is second to no other (Chinese) history movies. Since *The Last Emperor* was completed, no filmmaking has ever been allowed in the Forbidden City. This is the last one. All other historical dramas, *My Fair Princess* or *Kangxi Dynasty*, were filmed in the studios. ... It matters a lot, the shooting location. It makes the film so different. (YH05-M8WMY)

While they repeatedly applauded the location shooting of *The Last Emperor*, millennial interviewees who elaborated on the narrative of the film during the interview could not help leading the discussion to its inclusion of China's Cultural Revolution. In fact, Pu Yi died the second year after the chaotic movement started. He himself had never been publicly humiliated or tortured during the Revolution. In the movie, Pu Yi's last days and his experience during the Revolution accounted for a rather small section of the three-and-half-hour-long biographical drama. Lacking relevant contents tackling the historical memory of this period from their own cultural creations, Chinese millennials considered Bertolucci's portrayal of the Cultural Revolution, though symbolized, valuable in their appreciation of the film.



Fig.16. Screenshot, *The Last Emperor*, Pu Yi on the right.



Fig. 17. Screenshot, *The Last Emperor*, the Red Guards.

I think it [*The Last Emperor*] is such a good film. It [the story of Pu Yi] is until the Cultural Revolution, right? If you go and look at our [Chinese] movie narrative, there are hardly any films talking about the history of this period [the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution]. Chinese cinema, our directors and producers, when they decide to make a film, I would rather believe that many of them do want to write scripts about stories in this period. But they all would be censored, (edited and/or banned). They [Chinese filmmakers] first performed self-censoring, then were censored (by the party for) political (reasons). Later you couldn't find any stories (of this period) on screen, for political reasons. It [making stories of this period] becomes such a risk ... It cannot be released in domestic (China). What if (the films and filmmakers are) banned?! What could they do? (YH05-M8WMY)

It feels like, there will never be a film made like this since it was made so real. History ... [laughs] I'm not very good at history. Isn't there (some part) about the Cultural Revolution ... (the last days of) Pu Yi? Yes, the film includes (portrayal of) the Cultural Revolution and others. And it is also the only one filmed in the Forbidden City. The thing is, it was made by a foreign director. I think it was sharp... I don't know if there're any misunderstandings, but from what I've learnt, it is because he's a foreigner

that (his film) offers a new standpoint to look at (our) history. (ZR16-F9SBY)

Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, among abundant Western representations of the Far East, evokes the problem of an imaginary China as the Other/the symbol of difference to the West (Zhang, 1988). Even the director himself had said, "China had become the front projection of our confused utopias" (as cited in Loshitzky & Meyuhaz, 1992). *The Last Emperor*, in the eyes of Chinese millennials, was not without flaws. They attacked the English dialogues, the direct but awkward translation of "The Lord of Ten Thousand Years", and the stereotype of China being ultimately exotic (YJ01-M8WMY and SX18-M9WBN). Yet for millennial interviewees, it is exactly this Western perspective, to know China and its history in the eyes of the West, that plays a crucial role in their perception of the film. In Chapter Three which investigates how Chinese millennials understand the idea of Hollywood, I have argued that in their decoding process they face two dominant forces: one from the global Hollywood and one from the local regime. Resisting one of the dominant ideologies does not necessarily means surrendering to the other. In their transnational reception of *The Last Emperor*, millennials' open acceptance of Bertolucci's Western point of perspective should not be read as simply a sign of the millennial audience's complicity with or manipulation by the Western media. After all, they barely affirmed any form of identification with the cinematic representation of their own culture in the film, from rejecting the English dialogues to condemning a stereotypical China as the exotic. To understand this particular sense-making, it is necessary to concentrate on the local. In China, the state's use of history education helped constrain the modern historical consciousness with distinct characteristic as "one hundred years of humiliation" from the mid-1800s to mid-1900s, which has been reinforced by

the regime through the “Patriotic Education Campaign” since the 1990s (Wang, 2008). Pu Yi’s life glided through the humiliation period and the millennial generation grew up under the institutionalized patriotism. Under such circumstances, the audience’s cultural identity, being Chinese, is a shameful burden in their appreciation of the film. Chinese millennials are like the elder Pu Yi at the end of the movie who had to buy a ticket in order to go inside his old home, the Imperial Palace, in that they were able to approach their own culture regarding a particular period of history only by watching a Western creative production. The audiences appropriate *The Last Emperor* as a reference with which they can make a, if not resistant, then at least negotiating expression towards the dominant, in which case the dominant is not the West but their own authorities.

“It’s Not Us, But That’s OK.”

Shortly after Hollywood’s re-entry into mainland China, Disney produced the animated musical feature film *Mulan* (Bancroft & Cook, 1998) so as to appeal to the local audiences. It was based on the Chinese legend of the female warrior Hua Mulan from the Northern and Southern dynasties period (420-589). In Disney’s *Mulan*, the young heroine, after failing her arranged courtship encounters and learning that her wounded father was to be called up into the army, disguised herself and took his place. She eventually returned home safe, bringing back not only the honor of winning the war but also the love of General Li. In its home territory of the United States, *Mulan* was well received in terms of both ticket grosses and critical reviews. It was released in China in 1999 and acquired a modest box office receipt of about RMB 11 million. A Chinese animated film *Lotus Lantern* (Chang, 1999), produced by Shanghai Animation Film Studio, was released at the same time and achieved a total box office of RMB 29 million. In her research of China’s interplay with Hollywood, Wang (2006) believed that the film was a relative flop

because of the soft cultural discount barrier, that Americanized or Disneyized Chinese stories are unlikely to resonate culturally with local audiences.

Ten years later, DreamWorks produced the computer-animated martial art comedy *Kung Fu Panda* (Osborne & Stevenson, 2008). The protagonist panda, Po, a kung-fu fanatic, lived with his adoptive father, a duck who owned a noodle shop in a valley land in ancient China. Po, under the mentoring of a red panda, Master Shifu, assumed the Dragon Warrior mantle and together with the Furious Five – Tigress, Monkey, Viper, Mantis, and Crane – defeated the antagonist Tai Lung, a snow leopard who once was a student of Master Shifu. In the States, *Kung Fu Panda* was a successful summer blockbuster, grossing more than \$200 million. It was also well received in China during the same summer of 2008, becoming the first animated film to earn more than RMB 100 million at China's box office (Landreth, 2011). In the following years, *Kung Fu Panda 2* and *3* continued to record great box office achievements in China.

In general, millennial audiences enjoyed both *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda*, considering them the two most successful cultural collaborations between the East and the West. Although modern Hollywood animated creations are strategically targeting a wider range of audiences rather than children alone, Chinese millennials agreed unanimously that *Kung Fu Panda* is more for juvenile viewers. They seemed to forget that when they first watched *Mulan* decades ago, they were also children themselves. In particular, the soundtrack, including both background music and theme songs, in *Mulan* was often praised by the millennials in their evaluation of the film (**YH05-M8WMY**, **WW06-F8WMY**, and **WY07-M8WBY**). The song *Reflection* in the original movie was recorded by Broadway actress Lea Salonga. There were more than 30 dubbed versions worldwide upon its first release. Coco Lee, a Chinese-American singer performed the

Mandarin version of the song, which is popular among Chinese millennials. Disney's endeavor to transform theme songs into other local languages seemed to pay off. On the other hand, *Kung Fu Panda* won millennial audiences' applause with its graphic designs, especially the style of its natural scenery and architectures (YJ01-M8WMY, JC08-F8WMY, and XJ12-M9WMN).

In the case of the millennials' reception of *The Last Emperor* as discussed above, even though the narrator was non-resident – Western, to be exact – they were more than willing to accept, even cherish, such a distinctive approach through which they could get a degree of access to the untold history of their own culture. However, interpreting *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda*, Chinese millennials treated them as “dumplings with tomato-bacon fillings” (DJ15-F8WMN). Both of them feature various Chinese cultural symbols. Since *Mulan* was adapted from the legend of a real historical figure, it was considered by the millennials slightly more coherently oriental (with more *Chineseness*). *Kung Fu Panda*, however popular it was reported, was simply a superficial mixture of stereotypical symbols in the eyes of Chinese millennials. Participants refused to associate with any representations of Chinese culture in both movies, not to mention identifying with them.

I think they tried to tell an Eastern story, but the creation is culturally West. You can't say there is absolutely nothing of cultural collaboration. In fact I would say it is good collaboration. But the values it [the film] conveyed, they are Western values. For example, *Mulan*. For the Chinese, the moral of Hua Mulan's story is to be filial to the father, to take on (her) father's duty and responsibility. But the way they [Hollywood] tell it, it becomes another story of individualism and heroism. (WT11-M8WMY)

I genuinely think that *Kung Fu Panda* is for kids, very little kids. It's not like there is a panda and then it's necessarily related to China. ... I think *Kung Fu Panda* is more suitable for the foreigners who don't really know China or Chinese culture. Cuz they don't understand it, they would agree [be interested]. But I am Eastern, I am oriental, I don't know [laugh], it's just a fat panda. ... *Kung Fu Panda* is such a mess! There's a bit of everything in it. It's made for foreign movie-viewers. They just put the

kind of so-called Chinese elements that Westerners like or are interested in together, piled them together as a whole. [sneer] ... (LX19-F8WMY)

Cultural appropriation can be not only potentially offensive but also harmful (Matthes, 2016). In the around one-hundred-year history of Hollywood filmmaking, the image of China has served as the very embodiment of “otherness” vis-à-vis America itself (Greene, 2014). It is not difficult for ordinary viewers like these millennial participants to come to think that movies such as *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda* are still American cultural products in Chinese clothing. The audience’s decoding strategy pays special attention to the identity of the leading protagonists. The animated *Mulan* is no more the Chinese female warrior that Chinese millennials used to know but another Disney Princess who always finds true love in the end and living happily ever after. Her legend of marching to war in order to save her father is no more to honor the Chinese traditional virtues of filial piety but rather to prove herself as another overwhelming case of the theme of individualism in American culture. Yin (2011), in her case study of Disney’s appropriation of the *Mulan* story, demonstrated that the US popular cultural text again intended to shape the public imaginary. Millennial interviewees’ responses allied with such a conclusion, though they applied an intertextual framework of interpretation based on their experience with other Disney works.

I’ve definitely watched *Mulan* more than 5 times. I own a DVD copy when I was little, and always watched at home. ... I feel like, in fact, for Disney, it tells a story, same as in the case of *Kung Fu Panda*, the story is only covered with a Chinese-kind-of shelling. Inside, the core is the same old stuff. The character just happened to be a Chinese girl. But if you take a look at the construction of General Li, he’s the tall and brave male, falls in love with her [*Mulan*], and then they live happily ever after. There’s no difference, just another story of Cinderella and prince charming. He is the one who saved the leading female. Feels like his characteristics, what kind of a person he is, doesn’t matter too much. And *Mulan*, (she’s a Disney Princess), cuz Disney was tired of (telling stories about) blonde princesses at that time so *Mulan* came out? They need ethnic diversity. So there is a

yellow Mulan and then an Indian in *Pocahontas*... Not only China, Asian culture, in general, is a spectacle for the West. (DJ15-F8WMN)

I don't think *Mulan* was made from a Chinese point of view, otherwise it wouldn't be in that kind of format and content. But I think Disney, especially in recent years, like in *Frozen*, there is a feminist intention in the core. For *Mulan*, there was this similar spirit at that time. Taking her father's place to join the army, disguising herself to be a man. ... Yes, in the end it's a Western thing. I don't think they can understand the three obediences and four virtues for a woman (according to Confucian ethics) in the feudal society of ancient China. It is not that a simple rebellion (of herself) can make (too much a difference). ... Disney uses its own way to talk about females. (LZ10-F9WMN)



Fig.18. Screenshot, Fa Mulan and General Li in *Mulan*

Kung Fu Panda made it easier for millennials to reach the conclusion that Po, the protagonist panda, represents more *Americanness* than *Chineseness*. For the Chinese audiences, its identity was according to typical Western ideology of individualism and heroism. The overly displayed cultural symbols ranging from scenery, through architecture, to foods did not reinforce but disintegrate the coherence of a sense of *Chineseness* as far as the audience was concerned. In their sense-making of Po's identity, millennial participants seemed deliberately to ignore Po's connection to and interaction with other characters, which could serve to weaken the moral worth of an individual.

I think *Kung Fu Panda* is a good film. They tried to make it East(ernized) but the core is still West(ernized). All the elements (in the film), it was trying to tell an Eastern story but the way of thinking is quite different. If in the East [the Chinese filmmaker were to tell this story], it [Po] would

have made different decisions for some parts. ... Yes, Po is an American individualist kind of hero. (MB17-F9WMN)

Kung Fu Panda tells an American [Hollywood] story. It doesn't matter where the story took place (in a fantasized ancient China or other fiction world). Plots don't matter too much either. It just they happened to use a panda as an image, incorporate some Chinese style architectures. It can be kung-fu anything, a monkey for example, and it'll be the same. (WT11-M8WMY)

Kung Fu Panda 1 and *2* feel so cute. But then they're making too many sequels. People would lose interest. ... It feels like *Kung Fu Panda* was made only for the sake of (utilizing) Chinese elements. The cartoon image (of Po) is not that impressive. It's hard to tell if it [the image of Po] will continue to be popular in the future like Micky Mouse does. ... The oriental (parts), the Five Elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth) and the concept of Yin and Yang. But I think all these oriental elements in *Kung Fu Panda* are what foreigners hear about China and Chinese culture. Tai Chi is so popular outside China, same as Yin and Yang, the Five Element, the Chinese dragon, and kung pao chicken. That's what they [foreigners] like. They don't really know Chinese people. (WW06-F8WMY)



Fig.19. *Kung Fu Panda*, from left to right, Crane, Tigress, Po, Mantis, Monkey, and Viper

From the interviewees' answers, it is clear that millennials are able to recognize Hollywood's appropriation of Chinese culture, dominating the creation of popular texts to reinforce American ideology (as perceived by the Chinese) of individualism and heroism. Contrary to their perception of other cultural tropes, they suppressed themselves, on their own initiative, from being critical or political. As TM03-F8WMY said to me

during the interview, “entertainment is entertainment, let’s not politicalize it”. Acknowledging Hollywood appropriation of their own culture does not affect their overall enjoyment of the films, but I do not intend to argue that it is the perverse pleasure of cinema to enact the transnational audience’s masochistic desire. Recognition itself can trigger a type of pleasure from cinematic experience. Instead, I assume a cosmopolitan positioning facilitated by the audience’s cultural identity in this process of transnational reception of foreign pop culture/cultural creation. A central tenet within Confucian Chinese tradition is harmony.⁵⁰ This generation was born after the Cold War and grew up during the period since the late 1980s when unfettered western ideology had become popular in China. Chinese millennials’ interpretation of Hollywood productions like *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda* can be summarized as recognizing differences but allowing such differences. Through negotiating the differences between *Americanness* and *Chineseness* in the films, the audience’s sense-making has also completed the process of them negotiating their own cultural identity in a way that it is not defined as who/what they are, but who/what they are not.

On Culture Identity in the Process of Meaning-making

Audiences making sense of the Chinese cultural elements on Hollywood silver screens is not without disputes. It is easy for millennials to identify something relevant to their own culture, but it is difficult for them to reach a simple perception of it. Reading Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films, the audiences employ a number of frames. It can be referential, reading it in relation to the real life: whether a Chinese Bank ATM

⁵⁰ The Analects of Confucius, “In practicing the rules of propriety, it is harmony that is prized.” (In Simplified Chinese: 礼之用，和为贵。 <<论语>>)

could really exist in a small town in Midwest US. It can be critical, reading text as text: whether the Chinese character played by Chinese actor is necessary to the film story.

Within the active audience theoretical framework, this chapter explores audience agency in relation to cultural identity. Cultural identity plays a central role in the search for meanings of Hollywood's (re)presentation of Chinese cultural elements but meaning-making is not entirely free. Upon interpreting different tropes, there are different priorities in the audience agency: Chinese millennials can be critical towards Hollywood's commercialization of other cultures, they can be political towards an overly restricted domestic ideology, and they can be tolerant towards cultural differences and (mis)appropriation. Cultural identity enables as well as constrains their desires, experiences, and politics.

Identity is not as transparent as we think (Hall, 1990). A postmodern perspective on cultural identity suggests that it is not a coherent and fixed one. Interpreting Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films and making sense of the implications of such (re)presentation is also the process of meaning-making that defines millennial's cultural identity: by refusing to recognize those on-screen cultural presences, cultural identity is negotiated not as something but *something-not* (e.g. the Disney Mulan is not our Mulan, the kung-fu panda is neither our kung-fu nor our panda). It is only through referring to the other that this *something-not* be proposed and manifested.

Conclusion

Throughout the previous six chapters I have strived to locate the image of a specific generational audience within the global/local interplay between Hollywood and China in terms of cinema. This study has implications in the fields of cinema studies and audience reception studies. However, the implications also come into contact with cross-cultural communication studies.

This thesis offers a new perspective, a generational one, to understand the Sino-US cinematic relationship by making a contribution to completing the cross-cultural communications circuit with previously undisclosed knowledge of the local audience, especially within the English-language dominated academic field of media studies. In terms of audience reception studies, I reiterate the necessary importance of studying transnational audiences in relation to the local receiving context which, as shown in this work, is to be expanded not only horizontally but also vertically. The findings, reached through an engagement with the generational audience's cinema history, challenge the technology-determinism of audiencing. In the contemporary media environment of convergence, we need updated intelligence in terms of both theorizing and approaching the subjects in relation to media. The analysis presented in this thesis inquires into the relationship between the power of global media and the agency of local audience in the transnational context. As demonstrated, in a locale where the local regime is powerful enough, global media is a constructed token resulting from the synergy among interactive parties including itself, the local regime, and the local people. In terms of transnational/cross-cultural reception, it serves the purpose of the local people so as to fulfill their own agenda.

In this chapter, I will first present the main findings and conclusions of this study. From these results, I will then summarize the limitations of this research and briefly suggest recommendations for future study.

Movie-viewing as a Practice

The focus I have attempted, in this reception study of American popular cinemas in mainland China, is on a specific audience group: Chinese millennials. This particular generation of movie viewers has been chosen in accord with the history of the interplay between Hollywood and China in modern times. To understand how these viewers make sense and make use of Hollywood, I cannot ignore the formation of generational audiences, their movie-viewing experiences, and their film consumption habits. The development of contemporary Chinese cinema and changes in film culture over the past few decades have to a large extent defined the receiving context for millennials, in terms of both consuming and interpreting. Their cinema-going experience in pre-adult ages was primarily dominated by commercialized Hollywood blockbusters and domestic propaganda main-melodies. To acquire alternative filmic experiences, they turned to home entertainment largely associated with media pirating which, as I have argued in previous chapters, did not originate from political appeal. In the more recent period, on-time interactive media usage has also blended into the millennial generation's movie-viewing activity, but the generational group have demonstrated limited acceptance of the technology. These findings in this research concerning Chinese millennial's film experience have once again demonstrated that in investigating the relationship between audience and media, what needs to be asked is "how particular people, in particular contexts, perceive the relevance (or irrelevance) of specific media technologies for their lives, and how they then choose to use those technologies – or ignore them, or indeed

‘bend’ them in some ways, to a purpose for which they were not intended” (Jin, 2011, p.128).

The examination on Chinese millennial’s movie-viewing history has significantly challenged the understanding of audience in relation to media where media is seen only as texts or technologies. Instead, considering “media as practice” (Couldry, 2004) frames the understanding of movie-viewing in this study. The millennial generation grows together with the digital revolution of modern cinema. As technological advancement continues to offer new options in consuming devices and service providers, reception needs to be treated as a much more organic process in which viewing patterns transcends platforms or texts. Combining discoveries from exploring China’s encounters with global Hollywood during its reform era and from reviewing millennial generation movie-viewing history jointly completes the reception context for this study on both macro- and micro- levels.

Hollywood Appropriated by Chinese Millennials

The conceptual idea of Hollywood is used by Chinese millennials to make sense of their own cinema. The art-commerce framework they apply to locate the most representative Hollywood movies is a product of the interplay between Hollywood and China. There are two types of Hollywood in the mainland: the one in cinemas and the one outside cinemas. Inside the cinema is the Hollywood *dapian*: the over-commercialized cinematic entertainment coined as capitalist hegemony that the state administration allows the audiences to watch. Outside the cinema are American films that, for millennial participants, not only offer cultural difference and cultural diversity, but more importantly break free from the official control of cultural creation, unlike their Chinese counterparts. For millennials, the difficulty of coming up with a clear definition of Hollywood has

much to do with a discourse in which the state administration has been actively establishing its own agenda regarding cultural creations and communications. The development of Chinese cinema since its opening-up era has exhibited increasing strength in terms of industry and market power, yet still weakness in terms of cultural significance. Millennial audiences who watch Hollywood films, both on big and small screens in China, are facing two “dominants”: the capitalist/western ideology of global Hollywood and the official ideology of local mass culture. While making sense of Hollywood cinema in China, millennial participants were in a particular decoding position where their reception did not get along with either the official ideology in the local or the cultural hegemony in the global, or at least not all the time.

When watching different types of Hollywood films, millennial participants apply different viewing strategies. American superhero movies, for the Chinese, represent a chance to be involved in the global audience community only on the condition that they are always allowed to be released on the big screen in China. As the generation who grew up watching films on both big and small screens, millennials insist that cinema-going is a must for enjoying superhero movies. Their viewing pleasure mostly comes from the sound effects and visual spectacles in blockbusters. The Academy Awards for the Chinese in general signifies the best of Hollywood productions. The Oscar classics, for the millennials, therefore, needs to be able to arouse empathy. Repeated viewing in a private place, in this case, functions as the most common mode of millennial film consumption. Enjoyment is related to emotions, inspirations, and considerations. As a newly emerged genre, the brain-burning film has gained significant popularity in the mainland. Narrative and narration play the most important role in millennials’ viewing of brain-burning films. It is to fully make sense of what happened and how it happened in the film that brings the

young Chinese pleasure and enjoyment. In order to achieve that, they may return to the film or seek help from others. It's not difficult to observe that millennial movie-viewers have a clear ultimate goal for each type of film: if they were to watch a superhero movie, they wish to satisfy the expectation for sensual enjoyment; if an Oscar classic, they wish to be able to empathize with the characters and moved by the story; if a brain-burning, the goal is to fully understand what happened in the story. To achieve that ultimate goal, millennial audiences go to the cinema while giving no expectation for the narrative; they re-watch and re-watch in private and quiet environment; they concentrate in order to find hidden clues or refer to other materials. It is not to say that in Chinese millennial reception of certain types of Hollywood films, these are the correct or appropriate strategies to apply. In this specific case study, these viewing strategies were made possible because the audiences have had experiences with these types of films. Upon encountering one, they know what to expect and what not to, they know what materials they can borrow, and what references they can reach to. I have no intention to conclude that a certain viewing strategy is always ready for the audience to apply, but that strategies are developed with an audience continuously encountering similar films.

To conclude that Chinese millennials uniformly associate different types of Hollywood films with different modes of consumption, seek different satisfactions and apply different critical theories would be to overstate the case. Individual viewing is after all heterogenous. In asking millennials to define these audience-led categories and name their favorite titles, their articulations are shaped by preexisting templates co-created from personal and social histories. Hollywood, in a sense, always serves as a "cinema supermarket" where the audience can achieve amateur film literacy. Millennial participants demonstrate their audience agency by applying different viewing strategies

to different types of films. The only issue is that in the specific cross-cultural context, the favorite titles seem to win rather than to lose value.

Millennial participants continue to demonstrate their audience agency in making sense of Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood. Being Chinese, they are critical towards Hollywood's commercialization of Chinese culture, they are political towards an overly restricted domestic ideology, and they are tolerant towards cultural differences and (mis)appropriation. Cultural identity enables as well as constrains their desires, experiences, and politics. Yet identity is not as transparent as we think (Hall, 1990). Interpreting Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films and making sense of their implications is also the process of meaning-making that defines the millennial's cultural identity: by refusing to identify with those on-screen cultural presences, cultural identity is negotiated not as something but *something-not*. It is only through referring to the other that this *something-not* can be proposed and manifested.

Compared to this excess in audience sensemaking regarding cultural differences, the lack of Americanness in millennial's interpretations of superhero movies, Oscar classics, and brain-burning films, which are all popular Hollywood products, worth further examination. Does this justify the global success of Hollywood hegemony? The absence of America, in whatever sense it may be, in millennial's discussion of certain types of Hollywood experience, seems to indicate the indolence of the audience in that in the process of meaning-making, Chinese millennials are more likely to pick up what's handy for them.

Many responses that millennial participants provided are concerned with sensitive topics in the domestic context, drawing on media censorship and state's control on cultural creations as such. In Chinese millennials' appropriation of American pop culture,

Hollywood cinema serves as a site offering various cultural references which millennial audiences can make to form opinions on problems of their own. To do so, the *Americanness* of Hollywood films is largely ignored or suppressed. How millennial participants make use of Hollywood cinema is to make sense of it in relation to *themselves*. However, it seems impossible for these acts of sense-making to challenge dominant ideologies either from the local or the global perspective.

Limitations

Following on from remarks in Chapter One regarding the methodology and research design of this audience study, it is necessary to restate some of the limitations of this study along with discussing the conclusions of the thesis. These limitations can be understood to have specific and significant implications for the analysis and conclusions discussed here.

Firstly, this study was initiated in the particular case of the relationship between the US and China in terms of cinema in the contemporary period. In specific, it is situated in the occasion of Hollywood re-entering mainland China since 1994. The interactivity between Hollywood and China, as well as the boom of China's film market has made this study historically and culturally specific. The generational audiences under study here, Chinese millennials, were deliberately chosen because they grew up in this era. Their cinema-going history, their media-usage habits, and their sense-making of cinematic media are unique to them. As a result, findings and generalizations of cinema audience in this study are highly unlikely to be applied to other audience groups, other countries, or other periods of time. However, the research approach of this study should be useful in framing future studies.

Secondly, although this study, due to the specificity of the research background, identified the generation of millennials in China as the audience, the final sample group still has its limitations. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, the sample ended up with a group of well-educated post-80s and post-90s mainly from urban cities in the eastern part of China. However, considering the pattern of population density in the PRC, this sample group should be acceptable. In addition, the small size of the sample can only offer a limited image of the whole reception situation of consuming American popular cinema in China. Although a larger size of sample has its advantages, I suggest that this would be appropriate for reception studies favoring quantitative methods rather than qualitative methods.

Thirdly, it is reasonable to assume some degree of researcher bias. This study has been conducted by a single researcher who herself is a member of the millennials. I do admit that part of the incentives to do this research is due to being aware of the unique cinema-consuming pattern of the generation from a personal point of view. Yet being an insider can benefit the research as well. Although the language and cultural differences did provoke significant challenge to translation and data analysis, it is also because of my proficiency in the language that participants were more willing to open up dialogue, hence enhancing the richness of the data material. Besides, researcher bias in this study may not be a major concern, especially in terms of prior knowledge, given that the researcher has not been living in the target country for almost ten years.

Recommendations for Future Study

Morley, in discussing the theorization of film audiences, once wrote, “it is necessary to consider the context of viewing as much as the object of viewing” (2013, p.26). A typical perspective in active audience traditions is that, in claiming an object,

viewing is necessarily a motivated activity. One of the primary purposes of this study is to contribute to the understanding of film audiences in the media-rich environment now generally enjoyed, with regard to more specific, Chinese film audiences. As my fieldwork with millennial audiences continued during the research period, I was increasingly overwhelmed with the fact of how diverse and seemingly complex their movie-viewing practice can be. Film studies' obsession with filmic text and media studies' obsession with cinema have both made it grueling to theorize current movie-viewers, the people who actually watch films. To propose new theories on cinema and movie-viewing that can apply to audiences in a time of media convergence would be an important and demanding area for future study. As streaming service providers such as Netflix and Amazon have already participated in content creating as well as distributing, there is an urgent need to add to our knowledge of both cinema and the theories of cinema.

In addition, as this study limits itself to a particular generation of movie-viewers and their reception of Hollywood in China, future studies on other groups of generation, or on Chinese millennial's reception of other foreign pop culture could make cases that could be compared with this study. Although I have emphasized that the focus on Chinese millennials in this research is intended to correspond with the time period of Hollywood re-entry into mainland China, the framework of cross-cultural communication in terms of reception can be applied to a wider range of situations. The transnational flow of media and texts into China, on the other hand, via both official and illicit paths, can reveal similarities not only on the case of Hollywood films but on other foreign creations.

As this study has concluded, Chinese millennial's cultural appropriation of Hollywood in everyday life has much to do with the conditions within the local. In this particular case, that global media has limited power on local audiences is due to a

restricted official ideology of mass culture in the local. We cannot neglect the role that state administration plays in the interplay between Hollywood and China. What would it be like for audiences from other societies where the official ideology is not as strict as the one discussed? The relationship between media power and audience agency has been under investigation in many countries for years. As not just Hollywood in particular but media more generally is becoming increasingly global in reach, the relationship between local people and foreign media, between local people and global media, will continue to be examined. It is hoped that researchers, including of course myself, will continue to examine such questions and contribute further to the field.

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Appendix I: Abbreviations

CCPPD	The Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (中国共产党中央委员会宣传部)
CFDEA	China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association (中国电影发行放映协会), 1995 – present
CFC	China Film Corporation (中国电影公司), 1949 – 1999, state-owned film enterprises directly under SARFT/SAPPRFT
CFCC	China Film Co-Production Corporation, a subsidiary of CFGC
CFGC	China Film Group Corporation (中国电影集团公司), founded in 1999, business unit directly under the SAPPRFT; according to Bloomberg, state-owned film enterprise that manages theaters, produces and distributes films, and supervises foreign importations.
China Film	China Film Import & Export Corporation, a subsidiary of CFGC
CNSA	China National Space Administration (中国国家航天局)
CPC	The Communist Party of China
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IIPA	International Intellectual Property Alliance
MPAA	Motion Picture Association of America
MRFT	The Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (广播电影电视部), 1986 – 1998
NASA	The National Aeronautics and Space Administration of the United States
NRTA	The National Radio and Television Administration (国家广播电视总局, 简称“广电总局”), 2018 – present
SARFT	The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (国家广播电影电视总局), 1998 – 2013
SAPPRFT	The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (国家新闻出版广电总局), 2013 – 2018
USTR	Office of the United States Trade Representative
WTO	World Trade Organization

Appendix II: Top 10 of Douban Movie 250⁵¹

Rank	Title	Year	Grade /10 (# of users rating)	Country	Notes
1	The Shawshank Redemption	1994	9.6 (1,080,213)	US	Academy Awards, Best Picture, Nominee (1995)
2	Farewell My Concubine	1993	9.5 (788,046)	HK/China	Cannes Film Festival, Palme d'Or, Winner (1993) Academy Awards, Best Foreign Language Film, Nominee (1994)
3	Léon: The Professional	1994	9.4 (1,005,188)	France	Distributed by Buena Vista International, subsidiary of Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures (1994)
4	Forrest Gump	1994	9.4 (856,503)	US	Academy Awards, Best Picture, Winner (1995)
5	Life is Beautiful	1997	9.5 (500,553)	Italy	Academy Awards, Best Foreign Language Film, Winner (1994) Academy Awards, Best Picture, Nominee (1994)
6	Titanic	1997	9.3 (795,759)	US	Academy Awards, Best Picture, Winner (1998)
7	Spirited Away	2001	9.3 (799,933)	Japan	Academy Awards, Best Animated Feature Film, Winner (2003)
8	Schindler's List	1993	9.4 (453,984)	US	Academy Awards, Best Picture, Winner (1994)
9	Inception	2010	9.3 (889,014)	US	Academy Awards, Best Motion Picture, Nominee (2010)
10	WALL·E	2008	9.3 (584,065)	US	Academy Awards, Best Animated Feature Film, Winner (2008)

⁵¹ As of 2018.

Appendix III: Chinese Cinema (the Fifth Generation) at International Film

Awards/Festivals

Year	Director	Film Title	Awards
1987	Zhang Yimou	Red Sorghum	Winner, Golden Bear, 38 th Berlin International Film Festival
1990	Zhang Yimou	Ju Dou	Nominee, Best Foreign Language Film, 63 rd Academy Awards; Nominee, Palme d'Or, 43 rd Cannes Film Festival; Winner, Gold Hugo (Best Feature), Chicago International Film Festival (1990)
1991	Zhang Yimou	Raise the Red Lantern	Nominee, Best Foreign Language Film, 64 th Academy Awards; Winner, Best Film not in the English Language, BAFTA Awards (1993); Winner, Silver Lion, 48 th Venice International Film Festival
1992	Zhang Yimou	The Story of Qiu Ju	Winner, Golden Lion, 49 th Venice International Film Festival; Winner, Golden Clark, 49 th Venice International Film Festival
1993	Chen Kaige	Farewell My Concubine	Nominee, Best Foreign Language Film, 66 th Academy Awards; Winner, Best Foreign Language Film, 51 st Golden Globe Awards; Winner, Best Film not in the English Language, BAFTA Awards (1994); Winner, Palme d'Or, 46 th Cannes Film Festival
1993	Tian Zhuang-zhuang	The Blue Kite	Winner, Tokyo Grand Prix, Tokyo International Film Festival (1993); Winner, Best Actress Award, Tokyo International Film Festival (1993); Winner, Silver Hugo (Best Director), Chicago International Film Festival (1993)
1995	Li Shaohong	Blush	Winner, Silver Bear (Outstanding Single Achievement), 45 th Berlin International Film Festival; Nominee, Golden Bear, 45 th Berlin International Film Festival

Appendix IV: Imported Hollywood Films (under Revenue-sharing Agreement),

1994-2001

Title	Year (US)	Distributor (US)	Genre	Box Office ⁵²
1994				
The Fugitive	1993	Warner Bros.	Action, Adventure, Crime, Drama, Thriller	25.80
1995				
Bad Boys	1995	Columbia	Action, Comedy, Crime, Drama, Thriller	32.80
Die Hard: With A Vengeance	1995	20 th Century Fox	Action, Adventure	47.00
Forrest Gump	1994	Paramount	Drama, Romance	19.60
The Lion King	1994	Walt Disney	Animation, Adventure, Drama, Family, Musical	41.30
True Lies	1994	20 th Century Fox	Action, Comedy, Thriller	102.00
Speed	1994	20 th Century Fox	Action, Adventure, Crime, Thriller	37.80
1996				
The Bridge of Madison County	1995	Warner Bros.	Drama, Romance	39.50
Broken Arrow	1996	20 th Century Fox	Action, Crime, Thriller	50.50
Jumanji	1995	TriStar	Action, Adventure, Family, Fantasy, Thriller	47.70
Outbreak	1995	Warner Bros.	Action, Drama, Thriller	32.60
Toy Story	1995	Buena Vista (Walt Disney)	Animation, Adventure, Comedy, Family	31.80
The Rock	1996	Buena Vista	Action, Adventure, Thriller	47.70
Twister	1996	Warner Bros.	Action, Adventure, Drama, Thriller	54.50
Waterworld	1995	Universal	Action, Adventure, Sci-Fi, Thriller	34.00
Mission Impossible	1996	Paramount	Action, Thriller	45.10

⁵² In million yuan.

A Walk in the Cloud	1995	20 th Century Fox	Drama, Romance	20.50
1997				
Courage Under Fire	1996	20 th Century Fox	Action, Drama, Mystery, Thriller, War	25.00
Dante's Peak	1997	Universal	Action, Adventure, Thriller	47.60
Eraser	1996	Warner Bros.	Action, Drama, Mystery, Thriller	45.80
The Lost World: Jurassic Park	1997	Universal	Action, Adventure, Sci-Fi	72.10
Sabrina	1995	Paramount	Comedy, Drama	20.00
Space Jam	1996	Warner Bros.	Animation, Adventure, Comedy, Family, Fantasy, Sport	24.10
Speed 2	1997	20 th Century Fox	Action, Adventure, Crime, Romance, Thriller	30.40
1998				
Batman and Robin	1997	Warner Bros.	Action, Sci-Fi	20.00
Daylight	1996	Universal	Action, Adventure, Drama, Thriller	15.90
Deep Impact	1998	Paramount	Action, Drama, Romance, Sci-Fi, Thriller	51.30
Home Alone 3	1997	20 th Century Fox	Comedy, Crime, Family	40.20
Volcano	1997	20 th Century Fox	Action, Drama, Sci-Fi, Thriller	17.80
Saving Private Ryan	1998	DreamWorks / Paramount	Action, Drama, War	82.30
Titanic	1997	20 th Century Fox	Drama, Romance	359.50
1999				
Enemy of the State	1998	Touchstone / Buena Vista	Action, Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller	22.00
Entrapment	1999	20 th Century Cinema	Action, Crime, Romance, Thriller	29.00
In Love and War	1997	New Line Cinema	Biography, Drama, Romance, War	---
Mulan	1998	Walt Disney	Animation, Adventure, Family, Fantasy, Musical	11.00

Notting Hill ⁵³	1999	Polygram / Universal	Comedy, Drama, Romance	---
Rush Hour	1998	New Line Cinema	Action, Comedy, Crime, Thriller	25.00
Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace	1999	20 th Century Fox	Action, Adventure, Fantasy, Sci-Fi	33.00
Tarzan	1999	Walt Disney	Animation, Adventure, Family, Music, Romance	11.00
2000				
Big Momma's House	2000	20 th Century Fox	Action, Comedy, Crime	9.94
Dinosaur	2000	Walt Disney	Animation, Adventure, Family, Thriller	28.94
Double Jeopardy	1999	Paramount	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller	15.43
The General's Daughter	1999	Paramount	Crime, Drama, Mystery, Thriller	21.81
Gladiator	2000	DreamWorks	Action, Adventure, Drama	27.96
The Matrix	1999	Warner Bros.	Action, Sci-Fi	17.94
Mission: Impossible II	2000	Paramount	Action, Adventure, Thriller	29.34
The Perfect Storm	2000	Warner Bros.	Action, Adventure, Drama, Thriller	21.00
Stuart Little	1999	Columbia	Animation, Adventure, Comedy, Family, Fantasy	21.41
U-571	2000	Canal+ / Universal	Action, War	29.10
2001				
The 6th Day	2000	Columbia	Action, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller	14.65
AntiTrust	2001	MGM	Action, Crime, Drama, Thriller	60.86
Charlie's Angels	2000	Columbia	Action, Adventure, Comedy, Crime, Thriller	18.54
Chicken Run	2000	DreamWorks	Animation, Adventure, Comedy, Drama, Family	6.00
Enemy at the Gates	2001	Paramount	Drama, History, War	21.30

⁵³ Co-produced by Universal and Polygram Filmed Entertainment (UK).

Lara Croft: Tomb	2001	Paramount	Action, Adventure, Fantasy, Thriller	17.70
Meet the Parents	2000	Universal	Comedy, Romance	6.53
Moulin Rouge!	2001	20 th Century Fox	Drama, Musical, Romance	10.72
The Mummy Returns	2001	Universal	Action Adventure, Fantasy, Thriller	28.75
Pearl Harbor	2001	Touchstone / Buena Vista	Action, Drama, History, Romance, War	106.27
Proof of Life	2000	Warner Bros.	Action, Drama, Thriller	7.30
Swordfish	2001	Warner Bros.	Action, Crime, Thriller	17.22
Vertical Limit	2000	Columbia	Action Adventure, Drama, Thriller	26.53
(p)⁵⁴ The Bachelor	1999	New Line Cinema	Comedy	---
(p) The Cider House Rules	1999	Miramax	Drama, Romance	---
(p) The Mask of Zorro	1998	TriStar	Action, Adventure, Comedy, Romance, Thriller	7.15
(p) The Muse	1999	October Films	Comedy	---
(p) Music of the Heart	1999	Miramax	Drama, Music	---
(p) Stepmom	1998	TriStar	Comedy, Drama	2.10
(p) What Women Want	2000	Paramount	Comedy, Fantasy, Romance	---

Data Source: *China Film Yearbook*, *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, *CFDEA*, *entgroup.cn*, and *SARFT*

⁵⁴ Indicates partial revenue-sharing between China Film and foreign distributors, which is to prepare for the 2002 increase in import quota.

Appendix V: China Filmed Entertainment Business, 1995-2018

Year	Domestic Production (Feature Films)	Box Office (billion yuan)
1995	146	0.95
1996	110	1.15
1997	88	1.00
1998	82	1.50
1999	99	0.85
2000	83	0.96
2001	71	0.80
2002	100	0.90
2003	140	0.95
2004	212	1.57
2005	260	2.00
2006	330	2.62
2007	402	3.32
2008	406	4.34
2009	456	6.20
2010	526	10.17
2011	558	13.11
2012	745	17.07
2013	638	21.76
2014	618	29.63
2015	686	44.06
2016	772	45.71
2017	798	55.91
2018	902	60.97

Data Source: *China Film Yearbook*, *SARFT*, and *entgroup.cn*

Appendix VI: Top 10 Imported Films in China, 2003-2018⁵⁵

Year	Title	Distributor	B.O. (mm yuan)
2003			
	Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	Warner Bros.	52.00
	The Matrix Reloaded	Warner Bros.	42.00
	The Matrix Revolutions	Warner Bros.	42.66
	Finding Nemo	Walt Disney	34.00
	Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	Warner Bros.	32.00
	Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	Walt Disney	27.00
	The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	New Line Cinema	24.00
	The Recruit	Buena Vista	17.23
	The Italian Job	Paramount	17.00
	<i>My Big Fat Greek Wedding (p)</i>	<i>IFC Films</i>	<i>12.70</i>
2004			
	The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King	New Line Cinema	86.33
	The Day after Tomorrow	20 th Century Fox	82.38
	Troy	Warner Bros.	69.18
	Spider-man 2	Columbia	51.56
	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	Warner Bros.	38.14
	King Arthur	Buena Vista	23.77
	Cold Mountain	Miramax	26.50
	Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World	20 th Century Fox / Universal	20.00
	The Rundown	Universal	15.80
	Paycheck	Paramount	13.65
2005			
	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	Warner Bros.	93.77
	Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith	20 th Century Fox	75.54
	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	20 th Century Fox	61.98
	War of the Worlds	Paramount	52.99
	National Treasure	Buena Vista (Walt Disney)	35.92
	The Legend of Zorro	Columbia / Sony	30.76
	Madagascar	DreamWorks	28.20
	Stealth	Columbia	26.40
	The Interpreter	Universal	27.20
	Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid	Columbia / Sony	22.64

⁵⁵ Including Sino-US co-productions.

2006			
	The Da Vinci Code	Columbia	105.83
	King Kong	Universal	102.30
	Mission: Impossible III	Paramount	81.20
	Poseidon	Warner Bros.	68.93
	Superman Returns	Warner Bros.	62.54
	The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe	Buena Vista (Walt Disney)	60.50
	Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties	20 th Century Fox	56.40
	Eight Below	Walt Disney	54.60
	Ice Age: The Meltdown	20 th Century Fox	36.44
	<i>The Transporter (FR & US)</i>	<i>EuropaCorp / 20th Century Fox</i>	30.38
2007			
	Transformers	Paramount	282.32
	Spider-Man 3	Columbia / Sony	149.71
	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	Warner Bros.	145.15
	Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	Buena Vista (Walt Disney)	125.60
	Casino Royal	Columbia	92.71
	Night at the Museum	20 th Century Fox	64.85
	TMNT	Warner Bros.	35.04
	Eragon	20 th Century Fox	32.97
	Ghost Rider	Columbia	29.30
	Live Free or Die Hard	20 th Century Fox	27.28
2008			
	Kung Fu Panda	DreamWorks / Paramount	182.36
	Quantum of Solace	Columbia	139.67
	Hancock	Columbia	108.04
	Iron Man	Paramount	90.63
	The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	Buena Vista (Walt Disney)	82.93
	10,000 BC	Warner Bros	80.13
	Wanted	Universal	73.01
	National Treasure: Book of Secrets	Walt Disney	67.36
	<i>The Water House (NZ, UK & AUS)</i>	<i>Columbia / Sony</i>	62.48
	The Incredible Hulk	Universal	59.91
2009			
	2012	Columbia	466.00
	Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	Paramount	448.00
	Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	20 th Century Fox	157.00
	Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Warner Bros.	156.00
	G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra	Paramount	137.00

	Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian	20 th Century Fox	121.00
	Terminator Salvation	Warner Bros. / Columbia	112.00
	X-men Origins: Wolverine	20 th Century Fox	80.47
	Dragonball Evolution	20 th Century Fox	65.00
	Star Trek	Paramount	58.55
2010			
	Avatar	20 th Century Fox	1,382.00
	Inception	Warner Bros.	460.00
	Alice in Wonderland	Walt Disney	234.00
	The Expendables	Lionsgate	218.76
	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1	Warner Bros.	205.81
	Iron Man 2	Paramount	176.37
	Clash of Titans	Warner Bros.	175.18
	Prince of Persian: The Sands of Time	Walt Disney	158.22
	Resident Evil: Afterlife (flat-fee)	Sony	137.95
	Toy Story 3	Walt Disney	119.20
2011			
	Transformers: Dark of the Moon	Paramount	1,111.60
	Kung Fu Panda 2	DreamWorks / Paramount	617.11
	Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides	Walt Disney	476.35
	Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2	Warner Bros.	419.24
	The Smurfs	Columbia	263.72
	Fast Five	Universal	263.15
	Battle: Los Angeles	Columbia	226.03
	Rise of the Planet of the Apes	20 th Century Fox	184.36
	The Green Hornet	Columbia	138.19
2012			
	Titanic 3D	---	947.58
	Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol	Paramount	674.71
	Life of Pie	20 th Century Fox	571.05
	The Avengers	Walt Disney	567.92
	Men in Black 3	Columbia	504.15
	Ice Age: Continental Drift	20 th Century Fox	449.13
	Journey 2: The Mysterious Island	Warner Bros.	388.49
	The Dark Knight Rises	Warner Bros.	340.12
	The Expendables 2	Lionsgate	334.06
	The Amazing Spider-Man	Columbia / Sony	311.51
2013			
	Iron Man 3	Walt Disney	768.44
	Pacific Rim	Warner Bros.	795.83

	Gravity	Warner Bros.	436.33
	Fast & Furious 6	Universal Pictures	413.85
	The Croods	20 th Century Fox	394.64
	Man of Steel	Warner Bros.	376.78
	Skyfall	Sony	376.78
	Star Trek into Darkness	Paramount	353.90
	Jurassic Park 3D	---	348.96
	Thor: The Dark World	Walt Disney	343.50
2014			
	Transformer: Age of Extinction	Paramount	1,977.51
	Interstellar	Paramount / Warner Bros.	755.32
	X-men: Days of Future Past	20 th Century Fox	722.96
	Captain American: The Winter Soldier	Walt Disney	718.53
	Dawn of the Planet of the Apes	20 th Century Fox	709.22
	Guardians of the Galaxy	Walt Disney	596.01
	The Amazing Spider-Man 2	Sony	585.59
	Godzilla	20 th Century Fox	481.42
	The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug	Warner Bros.	462.71
	The Expendables 3	Lionsgate	453.27
2015			
	Furious 7	Universal Pictures	2,426.35
	Avengers: Age of Ultron	Walt Disney	1,465.89
	Jurassic World	Universal Pictures	1,422.00
	Mission: Impossible – Rouge Nation	Paramount	869.53
	The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies	Warner Bros	765.87
	Terminator: Genisys	Paramount	727.50
	Ant-man	Walt Disney	671.71
	San Andreas	Warner Bros	629.67
	The Martian	20 th Century Fox	586.90
	Spectre	Sony / Columbia	542.09
2016			
	Zootopia	Walt Disney	1,530.33
	Warcraft	Universal Pictures	1,472.14
	Captain America: Civil War	Walt Disney	1,246.25
	Kung Fu Panda 3	20 th Century Fox	1,002.00
	The Great Wall	Universal Pictures/ CFGC	979.37
	The Jungle Book	Walt Disney	979.33
	Star Wars: The Force Awakens	Walt Disney	825.57
	X-men: Apocalypse	20 th Century Fox	802.84
	Doctor Strange	Walt Disney	751.65
	Now You See Me 2	Summit	638.90
2017			
	The Fate of the Furious	Universal Pictures	2,670.96

	Transformers: The Last Knight	Paramount	1,551.24
	<i>Dangal (India)</i>	<i>UTV Motion Pictures</i>	<i>1,299.12</i>
	Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales	Walt Disney	1,179.91
	Kong: Skull Island	Warner Bros.	1,160.50
	Coco	Pixar / Walt Disney	1,152.51
	XXX: Return of Xander Cage	Paramount	1,127.41
	Resident Evil: The Final Chapter	Screen	1,111.82
	Despicable Me 3	Universal Pictures	1,037.80
	Spider-Man: Homecoming	Sony	774.14
2018			
	Avengers: Infinity War	Walt Disney	2,390.53
	Venom	Sony	1,870.13
	Auqaman	Warner Bros.	1,852.18
	Jurassic World: The Fallen Kingdom	Universal Pictures	1,695.88
	Ready Player One	Warner Bros.	1,396.66
	Mission: Impossible - Fallout	Paramount	1,245.22
	The Meg	Warner Bros. / CFGC	1,051.78
	Rampage	Warner Bros.	1,003.95
	Ant-Man and the Wasp	Walt Disney	831.56
	<i>Secret Superstar (India)</i>	<i>Zee Studios</i>	<i>747.07</i>

Data Source: *China Film Yearbook*, *entgroup.cn*, *SARFT*, and *SAPPRFT*

Appendix VII: Preliminary Questionnaire Survey

I. DETAILS ABOUT YOU

1. Age
2. Gender
 - A. Female
 - B. Male
 - C. Other
3. Ethnicity
4. Profession
5. Income Range (Monthly, in Chinese Yuan)
 - A. Under 7k
 - B. 7k~15k
 - C. 15k~35k
 - D. Above 35k
6. Highest Education Achieved
 - A. Doctoral
 - B. Master (including MBA)
 - C. Bachelor
 - D. High School Diploma
7. Marital Status
 - A. Single
 - B. In a relationship
 - C. Married
 - D. Would prefer not to specify
8. In which city were you born?
9. In which city are you currently living?
10. Do you have any overseas experience (longer than 6 months)?
11. If yes, in which country and how long have you been living there?

II. YOUR MOVIE-VIEWING BACKGROUND

12. Generally, do you like watching films?
 - A. Extremely Like
 - B. Like
 - C. Neither like nor dislike
 - D. Dislike
 - E. Extremely dislike
13. Do you consider yourself as a movie buff?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. I don't know
14. Besides watching film, what other leisure activities do you usually do?
15. Do you enjoy watching films more than other leisure activities?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No

- C. I can't tell
16. Do you often watch films in theaters?
- A. Frequently
 - B. Occasionally
 - C. Rarely
17. Do you often watch films in art-house cinemas?
- A. Frequently
 - B. Occasionally
 - C. Rarely
18. How often do you watch films alone (in theaters and beyond)?
- A. Frequently
 - B. Occasionally
 - C. Rarely
19. How often do you watch films not alone (in theaters and beyond)?
- A. I always watch with others
 - B. I occasionally watch with others
 - C. I rarely watch with others
20. Do you go to film festivals? Why or why not?
21. After you watch a film, do you share any kinds of feedback? (may choose more than one)
- A. I talk with families, friends, and/or colleagues
 - B. I rate films and/or write comments on social media
 - C. I write blogs and/or reviews (including for media outlets)
 - D. I discuss with people in other ways
 - E. No, I rarely talk about films
22. What do you usually talk about? (may choose more than one)
- A. Narratives
 - B. Performances
 - C. Visual and audio effects
 - D. Meanings and inspirations
 - E. Other
23. How often do you rate or review films online?
- A. Almost all the films I've watched
 - B. Most of the films I've watched
 - C. Some of the films I've watched
 - D. Few of the films I've watched
 - E. None of the films I've watched
24. Do you watch the same film on more than one occasion (in theaters and/or not)?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. I don't know
25. Please tell me about your first movie-viewing experience (regardless of in theater, on TV, DVD, or online). Please indicate where (in cinema, at home, at a friend's place, etc.), at what age, with whom (if any), under what circumstances (birthday, holidays, etc.), and in what format (DVD, TV broadcasting, online streaming, etc.) did you see it, and what is the title of the film?

26. Please describe your favorite movie-viewing experience. Please indicate film title and where, when, with whom, under what circumstances, and in what format you watched it. This does not have to be your favorite film, but rather your favorite experience.
27. What are the main reasons for your choice of a certain film? (may choose more than one)
- A. Trailer
 - B. Celebrities, including actors, actresses, directors, producers
 - C. Certain types/genres of films
 - D. Films from certain countries
 - E. Advertising and publicities
 - F. Professional critic reviews
 - G. General audience reviews
 - H. Other
28. What types of films do you enjoy the most? (may choose more than one)
- A. Action
 - B. Adventure
 - C. Comedy
 - D. Crime & Gangster
 - E. Drama
 - F. Epics / Historical
 - G. Horror
 - H. Musicals
 - I. Science Fiction
 - J. War
 - K. Westerns
29. Please tell me your favorite film, and briefly explain what you particularly like about it.

III. CHINESE AUDIENCE AND HOLLYWOOD

30. Generally, do you enjoy Hollywood films more than films from other countries?
- A. Yes, I prefer Hollywood films
 - B. No, I don't like Hollywood films
 - C. I don't have a preference
31. Overall, what proportion of Hollywood films do you think you've watched?
- A. More than 50% of all the films I've watched
 - B. 30%~50% of all the films I've watched
 - C. Less than 30% of all the films I've watched
 - D. I don't watch Hollywood films
32. Generally, do you agree that Hollywood equals to American cinema?
- A. Yes, Hollywood refers to American cinema
 - B. No, Hollywood only represents mainstream American blockbusters
 - C. No, Hollywood is now more international than before
 - D. I don't know
33. Please briefly define Hollywood in your own words. What do you think is Hollywood and what kind of film would you consider a Hollywood production?
34. What types of Hollywood films do you enjoy the most? (may choose more than one)

- A. Action
 - B. Adventure
 - C. Comedy
 - D. Crime & Gangster
 - E. Drama
 - F. Epics / Historical
 - G. Horror
 - H. Musicals
 - I. Science Fiction
 - J. War
 - K. Westerns
35. Do you remember the first Hollywood film you've ever watched (regardless of in theaters or not)? If you do, please tell me the film title and where, when, with whom, under what circumstances, and in what format you watched it.
36. Please tell me your favorite Hollywood film, and briefly explain what you particularly like about it.
37. Have you ever been to Shanghai Disneyland? If not, are you planning to?
- A. I've already been
 - B. I haven't been, but I plan to
 - C. I haven't been, and I don't plan to
38. Are you looking forward to Beijing Universal Studio?
- A. Yes, and I plan to go when it opens
 - B. I don't have a preference
 - C. No, and I don't plan to go
39. Do you have a favorite Hollywood star (actor, actress, director, etc.)? Who is he/she, and what do you particularly like about him/her?
40. Do you know the Golden Globe Awards and the Academy Awards?
- A. I'm aware and I always follow
 - B. I'm aware but I don't follow
 - C. I don't know what they are
41. What do you feel about Chinese actors/actresses in Hollywood movies? (may choose more than one)
- A. I support it, because they have proved that there are talented performers in China
 - B. I support it, because they bring Asian characters and oriental culture to the world
 - C. I feel disappointed, because most of them have played unnecessary roles
 - D. I feel disappointed: they were in it only because Hollywood wants to sell tickets in China
 - E. Other
42. If you choose "Other" for the above question, please briefly tell me what you feel about it.
43. What do you feel about product placements of Chinese brands in Hollywood movies? (may choose more than one)
- A. Positive: Chinese brands are building their international images
 - B. Positive: Chinese brands are investing in Hollywood productions
 - C. Negative: it feels uncomfortable and weird
 - D. Negative: they failed to deliver a positive image of "Made in China"
 - E. Other

44. If you choose “Other” for the above question, please briefly tell me what you feel about it.
45. What do you feel about Hollywood’s appropriation of Chinese cultural legacies? (may choose more than one)
- A. I enjoy it: it is interesting to see the convergence between the East and the West
 - B. I enjoy it: Hollywood is being inspired by the East
 - C. I don’t like it: Hollywood’s representation of the East is a western imagination
 - D. I don’t like it: it feels like that Hollywood are using cultural convergence to homogenize world entertainment
 - E. Other
46. If you choose “Other” for the above question, please briefly tell me what you feel about it.
47. Please rate the following movies (with 8 as the most enjoyable and 1 as the least enjoyable).
- A. Mulan (1998)
 - B. Kung Fu Panda (2008)
 - C. The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor (2008)
 - D. The Karate Kid (2010)
 - E. Looper (2012)
 - F. Iron Man 3 (2013)
 - G. Transformers: Age of Extinction (2014)
 - H. The Great Wall (2016)

(In original language, Chinese)

题目：当代中国观众的观影经历与好莱坞

您好！本问卷调查员是正在日本早稻田大学攻读文化传播专业的博士研究生。这是一份以学术研究为目的的调查问卷，旨在了解当代中国观众的观影行为习惯，以及对好莱坞电影的感受与评价。问卷以匿名的方式进行，问卷结果仅供论文写作和学术研究使用，一切信息予以保密。该问卷包含一定数目的问答题，问卷答题没有对错之分，填写您的实际情况和真实想法即可。感谢您抽出宝贵的时间参与答卷！

第一部分：个人信息调查

1. 您的年龄
2. 您的性别
 - A. 男
 - B. 女
 - C. 其他
3. 您的民族
4. 您目前工作的行业
 - 农业，林业，渔业
 - 采矿和采石选
 - 制造业
 - 电，煤气等的供应
 - 供水；污水处理，废物管理等
 - 建筑业
 - 批发和零售业
 - 运出和储存
 - 食宿服务
 - 信息和通讯
 - 金融和保险
 - 房地产
 - 专业，科学和技术活动
 - 行政和辅助
 - 公共管理与国防；强制性社会保障
 - 教育
 - 人体健康和社会工作
 - 艺术娱乐和文娱
 - 其他服务活动
 - 家庭主妇 / 主夫
 - 国际组织和机构

- 其他
- 5. 您的月收入
 - A. ¥7000 以下
 - B. ¥7000 ~ ¥15000
 - C. ¥15000 ~ ¥35000
 - D. ¥35000 以上
- 6. 您的学历
 - A. 博士毕业
 - B. 硕士毕业 (含专业硕士及 MBA)
 - C. 本科毕业
 - D. 本科学历以下
- 7. 您现在
 - A. 单身
 - B. 有交往的对象
 - C. 已婚
 - D. 不愿说明
- 8. 您出生的城市
- 9. 您目前居住的城市
- 10. 您是否有过 6 个月或以上的海外生活经历 (如留学, 工作派遣等)?
 - A. 是
 - B. 否
- 11. 如果 Q10 回答为“是”, 请问您在哪个国家, 生活了多久? 如果有多次海外生活经历, 请全部填写。(例: 美国, 大学本科留学, 4 年; 澳大利亚, 工作派遣, 2 年……)

第二部分: 观影行为及习惯调查

(注: 如无特殊说明, 此部分中所提到的“看电影”并不限制观影场所或是方式, 它包括去电影院、博物馆, 在家观看 DVD、在线播放等一切观影行为。)

- 12. 您喜欢看电影吗?
 - A. 非常喜欢
 - B. 喜欢
 - C. 一般
 - D. 不喜欢
 - E. 非常不喜欢
- 13. 您认为自己是电影发烧友吗?
 - A. 是
 - B. 不是
 - C. 不知道

14. 除了看电影，您还有什么其他的休闲娱乐或兴趣爱好？（若没有，请写“无”）
15. 相比其他休闲娱乐或兴趣爱好，您是否更享受更喜欢看电影？（若 Q14 填“无”，请跳过此题）
- A. 是
 - B. 不是
 - C. 说不好
16. 您经常去电影院看电影吗？
- A. 经常去
 - B. 偶尔去
 - C. 几乎不去
17. 您经常去非院线类公映场所看电影吗（如中国电影资料馆、中国电影博物馆、当代 MoMA 百老汇电影中心、上海电影节、大学图书馆放映室等）？
- 经常去
 - 偶尔去
 - 几乎不去
18. 您多久会选择一次独自观影（包括去影院或在家等任何观影形式）？
- A. 经常一个人看电影
 - B. 偶尔一个人看电影
 - C. 很少一个人看电影
19. 您多久会选择一次非独自观影（包括去影院或在家等任何观影形式）？
- A. 经常结伴看电影
 - B. 偶尔结伴看电影
 - C. 很少结伴看电影
20. 您去过或有兴趣去电影节吗（比如去看电影，参与电影市场交易，或参加论坛讲座等）？为什么？
21. 您观看一部电影之后，会与他人分享观影感受吗？（可多选）
- A. 会和家人、朋友、同事等聊一聊
 - B. 会通过社交媒体参与大众评分，分享感受或写短评
 - C. 会写博客或是长篇影评（包括作为自由撰稿人或签约撰稿人为特定媒介撰写宣传类或评论类稿件）
 - D. 通过其他方式与人分享
 - E. 几乎不会与人讨论电影或分享感受
22. 在看完一部电影后，您通常会就电影的什么与人分享？（可多选）
- A. 电影的剧情或故事的逻辑
 - B. 演员的表演
 - C. 电影的视听效果
 - D. 影片的意义和启发
 - E. 其他
23. 您有多频繁的通过社交媒体对观看过的影片进行打分或点评？
- A. 几乎所有看过的影片都会打分或点评

- B. 大部分看过的影片会打分或点评
 - C. 一部分看过的影片会打分或点评
 - D. 一小部分看过的影片会打分或点评
 - E. 几乎不会给看过的影片打分或点评
24. 您是否会重复看同一部电影（不管是在电影院还是在电视或网络上）？
- A. 会
 - B. 不会
 - C. 不知道
25. 请简单描述您第一次看电影的经历：什么时间（几岁），在哪儿（如影院或家里等），和谁一起，在什么样的情况下（如学校组织活动、节假日父母带去电影院等），以何种方式（如在家观看的话，是 DVD、电视转播，还是网络下载或在线等），看的什么电影（如果您记得，请务必写下影片的名字）？
26. 请效仿 Q25，简单描述您最喜爱的一次观影经历，以及原因。（注：这不一定要是您最喜欢的一部影片，而是您最喜爱最享受的一次观影经历）
27. 什么因素促使您选择观看一部电影？（多选）
- A. 预告片
 - B. 明星演员、导演、制片等
 - C. 偏好某一类型片
 - D. 偏好某一国家的电影
 - E. 一般大众媒体宣传
 - F. 专业影评口碑
 - G. 大众评价口碑
 - H. 其他
28. 您最喜欢什么类型片？（多选）
- A. 动作片
 - B. 冒险片
 - C. 喜剧片
 - D. 犯罪 / 警匪片
 - E. 剧情片
 - F. 传记 / 史诗片
 - G. 恐怖片
 - H. 音乐 / 歌舞片
 - I. 科幻片
 - J. 战争片
 - K. 西部片
29. 您最喜欢的一部电影是什么？为什么？

第三部分：中国观众与好莱坞

30. 总的来说，比起其他国家的电影（包括中国），您是否更喜欢好莱坞的影片？
- A. 是，我更喜欢好莱坞电影
 - B. 不，我更喜欢其他国家电影
 - C. 我没有特殊偏好
31. 在您看过的全部影片中，好莱坞电影占了多少？
- A. 超过 50%
 - B. 约 30 ~ 50%
 - C. 少于 30%
 - D. 不清楚
32. 您是否同意这样的说法：好莱坞就是美国电影
- A. 同意，好莱坞就代表了美国电影
 - B. 不同意，好莱坞仅仅是美国商业大片的代表
 - C. 不同意，好莱坞现在已经变的更加国际化，并不单单代表美国电影文化
 - D. 不清楚
33. 请用自己的话定义“好莱坞”。您认为，什么样的影片可以称之为“好莱坞电影”？
34. 您最喜欢什么类型的好莱坞电影？（多选）
- A. 动作片
 - B. 冒险片
 - C. 喜剧片
 - D. 犯罪 / 警匪片
 - E. 剧情片
 - F. 传记 / 史诗片
 - G. 恐怖片
 - H. 音乐 / 歌舞片
 - I. 科幻片
 - J. 战争片
 - K. 西部片
35. 您是否还记得您看过的第一部好莱坞电影？请简单描述当时的观影经历：什么时间、什么地点、和谁一起、在什么样的情况下、以什么样的方式、观看了哪部影片？
36. 您最喜欢的一部好莱坞电影是什么？为什么？
37. 您去过或有计划去上海迪斯尼乐园吗？
- A. 已经去过
 - B. 还没去过，但计划去
 - C. 没去过，没有计划要去
38. 您期待北京环球影城主题公园的开幕吗？
- A. 期待，计划去
 - B. 没感觉

- C. 不期待，没有计划要去
39. 您有特别喜爱的好莱坞明星（包括导演、演员、摄影等）吗？请简单说一下您喜欢他 / 她的理由。
40. 您知道且关注金球奖和奥斯卡奖吗？
- A. 知道，会关注
 - B. 知道，但不会关注
 - C. 不知道，不关注
41. 您如何看待华语演员进军好莱坞？（可同时选“支持”与“失望”，Q43 和 Q45 同理）
- A. 支持，向世界证明中国也有出色的表演人才
 - B. 支持，将亚洲面孔和东方文化推广到全球
 - C. 失望，反正去了也是打酱油
 - D. 失望，感觉是好莱坞为了中国的票房硬塞进去的
 - E. 其他
42. 若 Q41 有勾选“其他”，请简要说明。
43. 您如何看待好莱坞大片中的国产品牌植入（如：《变形金刚 4》中的周黑鸭和优格乳，《独立日 2 卷土重来》中的 QQ 等）？
- A. 支持，国产品牌为发展而建立国际形象
 - B. 支持，国产品牌为发展而投资好莱坞电影是正常现象
 - C. 失望，因为感觉植入生硬且违和
 - D. 失望，因为感觉植入并没有起到宣传 made in China 的作用
 - E. 其他
44. 若 Q43 有勾选“其他”，请简要说明。
45. 您如何看待好莱坞电影中的其他中国文化元素植入（如《功夫熊猫》系列中的武侠世界，《火星救援》中的中国国家航天局等）？
- A. 喜欢，中西结合很有趣
 - B. 喜欢，好莱坞开始借鉴东方文化从而得到启发
 - C. 不喜欢，影片中的东方形象都是西方人臆想的
 - D. 不喜欢，感觉好莱坞在利用文化融合同化世界电影娱乐
 - E. 其他
46. 若 Q45 有勾选“其他”，请简要说明。
47. 请按照您的喜爱程度给下列好莱坞影片打分（8 分为最喜欢，1 分最不喜欢）。
- A. 花木兰（1998，迪斯尼动画片）
 - B. 功夫熊猫（2008，梦工厂动画片）
 - C. 木乃伊 3:龙帝之墓（2008，李连杰主演）
 - D. 功夫梦（2010，成龙主演）
 - E. 环形使者（2012，布鲁斯·威利斯主演）
 - F. 钢铁侠 3（2013，漫威系列作品）
 - G. 变形金刚 4:绝迹重生（2014）

- 长城 (2016, 张艺谋导演)

Appendix VIII: Summary of Survey Results

Millennial Respondents: 103

A. Demographic Information

<i>Age Range</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Post-80s</i>	42	41%
<i>Post-90s</i>	61	59%

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Female</i>	80	78%
<i>Male</i>	22	21%
<i>Other</i>	1	1%

<i>Ethnic</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Han-Chinese</i>	92	89%
<i>Minority Chinese</i>	11	11%

<i>Education</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Doctoral</i>	2	2%
<i>Master</i>	42	41%
<i>Bachelor</i>	47	45%
<i>High School Diploma</i>	12	12%

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Single</i>	50	49%
<i>In a Relationship</i>	27	26%
<i>Married</i>	20	19%
<i>Would Prefer not to Say</i>	6	6%

<i>Overseas Experience</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Yes</i>	24	23%
<i>No</i>	79	77%

B. First Time Film Experience (Q25)

Forms of Consumption

Cinema	Domestic	Other	No Memory
51	34	8	10
<i>School-outing 22</i>	<i>Broadcasting 13</i>		
	<i>VCD/DVD 13</i>		
	<i>Download 4</i>		

Movie Type

Hollywood	Hong Kong	Main-melody	Other	No Memory
22	11	15	12	43

C. Movie-viewing Habit

	Extremely like	Like	Neither like nor dislike	Dislike	Extremely dislike
<i>Q12. Movie-viewing enjoyment</i>	38	53	12	0	0
	37%	51%	12%	0%	0%

	Yes	No	I don't know
<i>Q13. Self-identify as a movie buff?</i>	22	74	7
	21%	72%	7%

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely
<i>Q16. Movie theater</i>	48	53	2
	47%	51%	2%
<i>Q17. Art-house cinema</i>	1	32	70
	1%	31%	68%

<i>Q21. After you watch a film, do you share feedback?</i>	Frequency	Percent
<i>I talk with families, friends, and/or colleagues</i>	79	77%
<i>I rate films and/or write comments on social media</i>	39	38%
<i>I write blogs and/or reviews (including for media outlets)</i>	11	11%
<i>I discuss with people in other ways</i>	9	9%
<i>No, I barely talk about films</i>	9	9%

<i>Q22. What do you usually talk about?</i>	Frequency	Percent
<i>Narratives</i>	92	89%
<i>Performances</i>	66	64%
<i>Visual and audio effects</i>	48	47%
<i>Meanings and Inspirations</i>	67	65%
<i>Other</i>	8	8%

	Yes	No	I don't know
<i>Q24. Do you watch the same film on more than one occasion?</i>	83	17	3
	81%	17%	3%

<i>Q27. What are the main reasons for your choice of a film?</i>	Frequency	Percent
<i>Trailers</i>	39	38%
<i>Celebrities, including actors, actresses, directors, producers</i>	65	63%
<i>Certain types/genres of films</i>	63	61%
<i>Films from certain countries</i>	12	12%
<i>Advertising and publicities</i>	19	18%
<i>Professional critic reviews</i>	45	44%
<i>General audience reviews</i>	36	35%
<i>Other</i>	4	4%

<i>Q28. What types of films do you enjoy the most?</i>	Frequency	Percent
<i>Action</i>	30	29%
<i>Adventure</i>	15	15%
<i>Comedy</i>	54	52%
<i>Crimes & Gangster</i>	40	39%
<i>Drama</i>	68	66%
<i>Epics & Historical</i>	19	18%
<i>Horror</i>	13	13%
<i>Musicals</i>	22	21%
<i>Science Fiction</i>	38	37%
<i>War</i>	9	9%
<i>Westerns</i>	4	4%

D. Hollywood

	Yes	No	No Preference
<i>Q30. Do you enjoy Hollywood films more than those from other countries?</i>	31	5	67
	30%	5%	65%

	>50%	30%~50%	<30%	None
<i>Q31. How many Hollywood films have you watched?</i>	33	50	15	5
	32%	49%	15%	5%

	Agree	H=mainstream American blockbusters	H is international	I don't know
	29	34	31	9

<i>Q32. Do you agree Hollywood equals to American cinema?</i>	28%	33%	30%	9%
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	Aware, follow	Aware, don't follow	Not Aware
<i>Q40. Do you know the Golden Globe and Academy Awards?</i>	45 43.69%	52 50.49%	6 5.83%

<i>Q34. What types of Hollywood films do you enjoy the most?</i>	Frequency	Percent
Action	58	56%
Adventure	21	20%
Comedy	37	36%
Crimes & Gangster	25	24%
Drama	35	34%
Epics & Historical	15	15%
Horror	7	7%
Musicals	13	13%
Science Fiction	54	52%
War	15	15%
Westerns	3	3%

<i>Q41. What do you feel about Chinese actors/actress played in Hollywood movies?</i>	Frequency	Percent
I support it, because they have proved that there are talented performers in China	41	40%
I support it, because they bring Asian characters and oriental culture to the world	44	43%
I feel disappointed, because most of them have played unnecessary roles	11	11%
I feel disappointed. They were in it only because Hollywood wants to sell tickets in China	27	26%
Other	8	8%

<i>Q43. What do you feel about product placements of Chinese brands in Hollywood movies?</i>	Frequency	Percent
Positive: Chinese brands are building their international images	18	17%
Positive: Chinese brands are investing in Hollywood productions	46	45%
Negative: it feels uncomfortable and weird	37	36%
Negative: they failed to deliver a positive image of "Made in China"	10	10%
Other	10	10%

Q45. What do you feel about Hollywood's appropriation of Chinese cultural legacies?

	Frequency	Percent
<i>I enjoy it: it is interesting to see the convergence between the East and the West</i>	39	38%
<i>I enjoy it: Hollywood is being inspired by the East</i>	53	51%
<i>I don't like it: Hollywood's representation of the East is a western imagination</i>	14	14%
<i>I don't like it: it feels like that Hollywood are using cultural convergence to homogenize world entertainment</i>	12	12%
<i>Other</i>	7	7%

Q47. Films rated from most enjoyable to least:

Fung Fu Panda (2008)

Mulan (1998)

Iron Man 3 (2013)

Transformers: Age of Extinction (2014)

Looper (2012)

The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor (2008)

The Karate Kid (2010)

The Great Wall (2016)

Appendix IX: Focus Group Agenda

❖ Characteristics

- Focus Group #1:
 - Saturday, Jun 17th, 2017, 14:00~16:30 (GMT+8)
 - Shanghai, commercial tea house, private room
 - 6 participants (4 female, 2 male), 1 moderator
 - field notes and audio recording
- Focus Group #2:
 - Saturday, Sep 9th, 2017, 13:30~15:50 (GMT+8)
 - Beijing, Cinker Pictures, private room
 - 4 participants (2 female, 2 male), 1 moderator
 - field notes and audio recording
- Focus Groups #3:
 - Saturday, Sep 9th, 2017, 16:20~18:50 (GMT+8)
 - Beijing, Cinker Pictures, private room
 - 5 participants (3 female, 2 male), 1 moderator
 - field notes and audio recording

❖ Guided Questions

- Please briefly introduce yourself to the group, and let us know your general attitude toward movies and your overall movie experience.
- Overall, how much do you enjoy watching films? (1~5 scale)
 - Would you please describe your first movie experience?
 - Do you have any special memories about watching films when you were young?
 - What do you think of watching films with bullet-screens?
- What do you think of the Hollywood movies released in China? How often do you watch them? How much do you enjoy watching them?
 - *What types of films do you like the most? Why?*
 - *Do you watch old films? Why, or why not?*
 - *Do you think Hollywood cinema embodies universal values?*
 - *What do you think of censorship regarding edited foreign films released in China?*

Appendix X: Interviewee Demographics

Pseudonym/ Coding	Gender	Year	Born	Education	Overseas exp (>3 m)
YJ01-M8WMY	Male	1981	80s	MBA	Y (UK, US)
XC02-F8SDN	Female	1989	80s	Doctoral	N
TM03-F8WMY	Female	1989	80s	Master	Y (UK)
HL04-F9WBY	Female	1991	90s	Bachelor	Y (US)
YH05-M8WMY	Male	1988	80s	Master	Y (US)
WW06-F8WMY	Female	1988	80s	MBA	Y (US)
WY07-M8WBY	Male	1986	80s	Bachelor	Y (US)
JC08-F8WMY	Female	1988	80s	Master	Y (Italy)
XZ09-M9WMN	Male	1992	90s	Master	N
LZ10-F9WMN	Female	1990	90s	Master	N
WT11-M8WMY	Male	1988	80s	Master	Y (US)
XJ12-M8WMN	Male	1990	90s	Master	N
MQ13-F8WMY	Female	1987	80s	Master	Y (US)
SQ14-M8WMY	Male	1986	80s	Master	Y (AUS)
DJ15-F8WMN	Female	1988	80s	Master	N
ZR16-F9SBY	Female	1995	90s	Bachelor	Y (CA)
MB17-F9WMY	Female	1992	90s	Master	N(TW)
SX18-M9WBN	Male	1993	90s	Bachelor	N
LX19-F8WMY	Female	1985	80s	MBA	Y (US)
ZX20-F9SMY	Female	1993	90s	Master	Y (US)

*As of 2018

5-digit coding instruction:

The numbers 1 to 20 preceding each 5-digit code indicate the 20 Chinese millennials who had been very kind in sharing with me their experiences and thoughts regarding various popular Hollywood films. The first letter in the 5-digit code indicates the gender of the interviewee, where **F** stands for female and **M** stands for male; the second is a number, **8** or **9**, indicating whether the interviewee was born in the 1980s or 1990s; in the third place, the letter **W** or **S** means whether the interviewee is currently working or a full-time student in college respectively; the fourth character indicates the highest level of education the interviewee has achieved or is currently working on, in which **B** stands for bachelor degree, **M** stands for master (including MBA and EMBA), and **D** stands for doctoral; the last character, with **Y** for yes and **N** for no, indicates whether the interviewee has long-term experience living outside mainland China (in this case, long-term is defined as 3 months or longer because some of the interviewees have done exchange programs in college and universities may employ quarter or trimester academic calendars).

Interviewee Biographies

YJ01-M8WMY was born and grew up in Beijing, the capital city of China. As the oldest participant in this research, he is in his late 30s. He had been studying and working in both the UK and the US, majoring in marketing and business administration. A few years ago, he moved back to Beijing and is currently working as a freelance travel agent designing private or group packages for customers who plan to visit Europe or the US. Self-identified as a “film enthusiast (in Simplified Chinese: 电影发烧友)”, he prefers English-language films considerably to Chinese ones. He speaks highly of Hollywood as “the best cinematic industry”.

XC02-F8SDN is in her late 20s and was born in the northeast part of China. Currently living in Beijing, she is a doctoral student researching on Chinese traditional opera. She considers herself as an “ordinary movie-goer (in Simplified Chinese: 普通观众)” who does not have a strong preference for a particular type of film. Among all the interviewees, she showed the least interest in American superhero movies while paying close attention to the representation of women in popular culture.

TM03-F8WMY is in her late 20s. She was born in Eastern China and now lives in Shanghai. She got her master’s degree in translation from the UK and while a student there, she volunteered for a few Asian/Chinese film festivals. She believes she was highly influenced by her parents who, while she was young, used to watch many films by renting videotapes and disk copies. Her first-time cinematic experience was a school-organized event during which they watched Jackie Chan’s *Who Am I?* (Chan B. & Chan J., 1998). In general, narrative is the most important element in her film experience.

HL04-F9WBY is in her late 20s and was born in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the northwest part of China. When she was young, her family moved to Wuhan in Central China. Later in her teenage year, they settled in Beijing. She obtained her bachelor’s degree in communication from the US. After graduation, she moved back to Beijing and started working in advertising and public relations. It was her uncle who took her to the cinema for the first time when she was about four years old and they watched *Shaolin Popey* (Chu, 1994), a Taiwanese kung-fu comedy which was regularly broadcasted on TV during the late 1990s and early 2000s. During the focus group discussion, she joked about describing herself as a “superficial audience (in Simplified Chinese: 肤浅的观众)” because she greatly enjoys high-concept action/adventure blockbusters.

YH05-M8WMY is in his late 20s and was born in Eastern China. After receiving his master’s degree in digital art from the US, he moved to Shanghai and now works as an art curator there. He recalls quite a few memories of school-organized cinematic experiences where the children watched several main-melody films, but he cannot recall the titles. It was during the high-school years when he innumerably consumed various types of films and became aware of the concept of *film* (differentiating from mini-series

or television film). For him, watching films, is “full of senses of ritual (in Simplified Chinese: 充满仪式感)”.

WW06-F8WMY is in her late 20s and was also born in Eastern China. After graduating from college in China, she went to the US for her MBA study. Having been living in California for four years, she relocated to Shanghai and now works for a French consulting firm. She also recalls memories of many school-organized events relating to main-melody films which are “very *Red* (in Simplified Chinese: 很红)”. Nowadays she prefers blockbusters to art-house movies and she is highly celebrity-driven. According to herself, she is more likely to be influenced by friends and colleagues in her choice of film-watching.

WY07-M8WBY is in his early 30s and was born in Eastern China. According to himself, he was “forced to learn playing drums since a child”. He received his degree from a community college in the US and now lives abroad. He is very concerned with the material quality of a movie. For example, even for those illegally downloaded from the Internet, he would prefer high-definition in 1080p. He enjoys repeatedly watching the films that he can be inspired or empathize with. For him, film art “comes from life and goes beyond”.

JC08-F8WMY is in her late 20s and was born and grew up in the northeast part of China. She is the only interviewee in this research who’s had long-term overseas experience in a non-English speaking country, Italy. She was an art student and she can play Guzheng, a musical instrument known as Chinese zither with a more than 2500-year history. She enjoys films from the 20th century more.

XZ09-M9WMN is in his mid 20s and was born in Northeast China. After graduation, he went to Shanghai to pursue a master’s degree. He’s never lived outside China but has consumed a great deal of foreign films. Using *Her* (Jonze, 2013) as an example, he believes that Hollywood films are more mindful of humanities and human future. Overall, he looks forward to many upcoming US blockbusters.

LZ10-F9WMN is in her late 20s and was born in the southeast part of China. Her parents took her to the theater for the first time when she was only four and they watched *The Bridge of Madison County* (Eastwood, 1995). She has no long-terms oversea experience but has traveled to the US several times. She once worked with the Chinese producers of *The Meg* (Turteltaub, 2018) and her favorite director is Ang Lee. She now works as a government affair analyst and lives in Beijing.

WT11-M8WMY is in his late 20s. Born in the northeast of China, he also went to college there. Upon graduation, he went to the US for a master’s degree in accounting and had lived in New York city for two years. He now works in finance and lives in Beijing. The “poor seats” in the old theater in his home city where the school used to take students to watch main-melody films left him with an impression. His first Hollywood film was *True Lies* (Cameron, 1994).

XJ12-M9WMN is in his late 20s and was born in the southeast part of China. He has neither lived nor traveled abroad, yet he highly enjoys watching old Hollywood films such as *12 Angry Men* (Lumet, 1957). It was during the college years when he started to massively watch foreign films, mainly online. As an architect, he pays close attention to the production designs in movies. He now works and lives in Shanghai.

MQ13-F8WMY is in her early 30s and was born and grew up in Beijing. When she was young, there was an auditorium at her parents' workplace and it used to play movies regularly. According to her, kids living nearby used to try to sneak in and watch for free. When she was a teenager, she visited a video store on her way home after school almost daily, shopping for DVDs, and became friends with the store owner. Nowadays, going to the cinema is more like a social activity for her.

SQ14-M8WMY is in his early 30s and was also born in Beijing. After receiving his master's degree from Australia, he moved back to Beijing and works in finance. He believes the first film he watched at a movie theater was a main-melody about the Sino-Japanese War during WWII, which was a school-organized event. He did not go to the cinema to watch typical Hollywood blockbusters, such as *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997) and *Spider-Man* (Raimi, 2002), when they were first released in China.

DJ15-F8WMN is in her late 20s and was born in Northeast China. She went to college in Beijing and works there now. Similar to **MQ13-F8WMY**'s childhood experience, she always went to the "activity hall (in Simplified Chinese: 活动厅)" in the community center where her family lived to watch movies. She claimed that she used to be a "film enthusiast", watching with senses of ritual, but now she becomes tired of "serious films" and she prefers watching films without "full concentration".

ZR16-F9SBY, the youngest interviewee in this study, is in her early 20s. She was born in Northeast China but is currently living in Canada to pursue her BSc degree. Although a grown-up, she still enjoys going to the theater with her parents. She believes that the Hollywood films imported to China are simply "popcorn flicks (in Simplified Chinese: 爆米花电影)" but there are many other American films that are able to incorporate more series social issues.

MB17-F9WMN is in her mid 20s and was born in the northeast part of China. She went to Taiwan as an exchange student for one semester and graduated with a master's degree. When she was young, she watched many classic Hollywood films with her parents at home, for example, *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939) and *Waterloo Bridge* (LeRoy, 1940). She highly enjoys Hollywood romance before the 1960s. She believes that, through movies, the audiences are able to get access to history.

SX18-M9WBN is in his mid 20s. He was born in Northeast China and still lives there now. His early film experience was mainly on television. The first movie he saw at the theater was Pixar's *Finding Nemo* (Stanton & Unkrich, 2003). He spoke poorly of the current cinema culture in China in that too much attention has been paid to the business success of a movie and too little to the actual quality of it.

LX19-F8WMY is in her mid 30s and was born in Shanghai. She got her MBA from the US and then moved back to Shanghai, working in finance. She is another one who used to live near an “activity hall” where she went to watch films in her early childhood days. The first time her parents took her to the cinema, they watched a martial art movie, but she left early as she found it not enjoyable at all. For her, watching-film is just a leisure activity for relaxation and entertainment.

ZY20-F9SMY is in her mid 20s and was born in Central China. She is currently a student pursuing her master’s degree in the US. She belongs to the typical kind of audiences who grow up watching movies on television (mainly through CCTV-6). She also spoke poorly of the imported Hollywood films in China, arguing that they have a negative impact on Chinese cinema as too much attention has been paid only to the commercial success of a movie.

Appendix XI: In-depth Interview Schedule

Part One. How is the idea of Hollywood cinema located and understood by Chinese millennials?

1. When the term “Hollywood cinema” is brought up, what are the first couple of films that come into your mind that you believe best represent the concept? Why them?
2. What do you think of the contextual environment (in China) in shaping your understanding of Hollywood cinema?
3. In coming up with your own understanding of Hollywood cinema, what characteristics (of a certain film) do you think are necessary in classifying one under the category?
4. To what extent do you think that Hollywood cinema (re)presents “Americanness” in its productions?

Part Two. What “Viewing Strategy” do Chinese millennials apply when watching Hollywood movies?

I. Superhero Movies

1. Have you ever read Marvel or DC comics?
2. What do you think are important factors in your appreciation of a superhero movie? For example: narrative, loyalty to comics, actors/actresses, visual effects, Easter eggs, etc.
3. Which superhero do you like the most? Why?
4. How would you evaluate the franchise construction of your favorite superhero?
5. With whom do you usually go to watch superhero movies? Why?
6. Where do you usually go to watch superhero movies? Why?
7. Are there any *formulaic substances* in superhero movies? What do you think of them?

II. The Oscar Classic

1. Considering the term “Oscar Classic”, what films come into your mind, and why do you think they best represent the concept?
2. What do you think are important factors in your appreciation of an “Oscar classic” movie?
3. What is your favorite “Oscar Classic movie”? Why?
4. How many times, till now, have you watched it? And where, under what circumstances, with whom did you watch it?
5. What/which parts in the film particularly moved you?
6. Did the film leave any inspirations for you? If yes, what are they? How long do you think these inspirations will last? Why?
7. Are there any *formulaic substances* in Oscar Classic movies? What do you think of them?

III. Brain-Burning Films (Shao-nao pian)

1. Overall, what do you think of Hollywood brain-burning films in recent years?
2. What specifically attracts you to watch brain-burning films?
3. What do you think are important factors in your appreciation of a brain-burning film?
4. What is your favorite brain-burning film? Why do you like it?
5. How many times have you watched it? Why?
6. What do you think is necessary to understand this particular film?
7. Are there any *formulaic substances* in brain-burning films? What do you think of them?

Part Three. How do Chinese millennials interpret Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood movies?

1. Have you ever watched *The Mysterious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1929), *Dragon Seed* (1944), or *The Last Emperor* (1987)? What do you think of these films?
2. Are you familiar with ‘yellow face’? What do you think of the Asian characters performed by white actors/actresses, e.g. Katharine Hepburn as Tan in *Dragon Seed* (1944), Nicholas Cage as Fu Manchu in *Grindhouse* (2007), multiple actors in *Cloud Atlas* (2012)?



3. Recently, there have been quite a few Chinese actors and actresses performing in Hollywood movies, mostly high-concept blockbusters. What do you think of their characters and appearance/performances?
4. There are also increasing product placements of Chinese brands in these Hollywood movies. What do you think of them?

5. Have you ever watched Disney's *Mulan* (1998), DreamWork's *Kungfu Panda* (2008), or Universal's *Great Wall* (2016)?

- 1) Overall, what do you think of these films?
- 2) How would you evaluate the culturally specific elements in these films?
- 3) Do you think they tell a story about the West or the East?