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By

Enrique Lightsey Guerrero

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Cultural Trade within the Sino-Hollywood Landscape:

Culture Creation and the Expansion of Empire

SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Joseph Straubhaar, Supervisor

Wenhong Chen

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Enrique Lightsey Guerrero

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Abstract

Cultural Trade within the Sino-Hollywood Landscape:

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by

Enrique Lightsey Guerrero, MA

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Supervisor: Joseph Straubhaar

China and Hollywood have been on collision course for several years now, with the rise of the Chinese economy impacting the rest of the world and driving the Chinese film industry. The Chinese film industry is slowly growing in size and coming to rival Hollywood on a global scale. Through studying the effects the Chinese film industry has on Hollywood and Hollywood's imprint on China and the Chinese film industry, I expand on the idea that Hollywood has created a cultural and media "empire" that spreads into China. Through the global flows of media, the creation of a media "empire", and the dissection of the "global" brand of Hollywood, I posit that Hollywood has not only come to construct a new "empire" across the world, but that the Chinese film industry has aided in this process, and that through the blending of cultures creates a new "third" space.

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Introduction:

Media has come to be a cultural liaison between nations within modern society. Social media, television, film, and print are all being tied to nations, cultures, and political and personal beliefs. The influence of film is right in the heart of it, dictating and coercing entire cultures, nations, and societies. This medium contains the power of persuasion and inducement. Political, industrial, and economic coercion encompassed between cultural, ideological, and nationalistic beliefs. All with an aspect ratio or 1.85:1¹ in mind, set on a physical screen, geared to infiltrate populations and entice larger audiences to the big screen (Miller et al., 2001).

China has come to be the new global power, with other countries and nations using China as a measuring stick for which to measure their global advancement. The role of nationalism, imperialism, nation building, and culture all come to play when dealing with the media, and film in particular. Hollywood's reach has been a global factor, influencing and impacting cultures worldwide. However, other countries and regimes create policy directly in contrast to Hollywood ideals and the "Hollywood"² culture.

It is in this context that China's film industry has come to grow, burgeoning into one of the largest film industries in the world, second only to Hollywood and its vast imperial reach (TML Staff, 2020). China has set itself in motion, geared to become the next global powerhouse and overtake Hollywood as the world's largest film industry (Bond, 2019). All of this sets the tone for Hollywood's relationship to China, China's interactions with Hollywood, and the corollaries between Hollywood and China's global and cultural maneuvers. The two parties are constantly

¹ 1.85:1 is the aspect ratio used in U.S. movie theaters, most common in Hollywood films (Red Digital Cinema, n.d.).

² "Hollywood" culture used as representation of American culture and ideals (Miller et al., 2001).

entangled in cultural, political, and economic contention. They are rivaling for the number one seed, global dominance, and influence over the international film industry and global value.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss China's relationship to Hollywood, to dissect the impact the two parties have on each other, and in doing so to come to a firmer understanding of the two film industries as they pertain to each other. Unpacking China's rise to economic and global power, Hollywood's cultural effects, as seen in the recent rise of Hollywood-China "co-productions" and their interaction both on screen and off (Kokas, 2017). Media has always had a strong relationship to the state, with the advent of the radio and television playing large roles in the election of officials, the tides of society, and the culture on which nations are built. With the power of film comes the rise of cultural gatekeeping and the regulation of the flow of information. How things are perceived? What is disseminated? How are ideals held in place? This is where the line gets drawn between culture and state, and where China and Hollywood truly come to interlock. Where do the sides intertwine, creating and producing film, each with their own agendas at heart?

What counts as a propagandistic film and how are these ideologies upheld and identified on screen? What role does the state have in creating these visions? What are the economic implications? What are the bigger factors at play and how do these all evolve? This is the nature of international film, the nature of the interaction between China and Hollywood and the "co-productions" they produce (Kokas, 2017). The relationship between two of the most powerful states come head to head on screen and off, vying to influence political outlook, infiltrate cultural boundaries, and impact entire economies. In researching the interactions between the two parties, there comes to light evidence of how China's rise to power over the last decade has come to define how the other is involved and navigating the changing waters of the global film industry. The communication of two cultures sets the tone for how these phenomena come into play and will, in

the end, set the tone for their economic ties, political prowess, and the eventual leadership of the global tide of culture and statehood (Kokas, 2017).

China is a contentious subject as of late, with everything from economics, politics, media, manufacturing, and agriculture in a number of countries, seemingly all centered around China. It has truly become the Middle Kingdom³. It is because of this, that China has come to have such a lasting impact on industries such as Hollywood. With Hollywood, it is literally being in the business of constructing worlds, generating culture, and propagating ideals. It is no wonder that China has fixed its’ “two billion eyes” on Hollywood and the process of producing films and manufacturing culture (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1991; Gertler, 2004; Zhu, 2012). Over the course of the last decade or so, China has slowly been playing catch up to Hollywood’s global production style and international market (Su, 2016). China has quietly been gaining a footing in Hollywood’s industrial market, leading to a cultural *mêlée* between the two, with “co-productions” at the core (Kokas, 2017). It is due to these international exchanges that the two have locked eyes, pointing to longer lasting cultural and economic effects.

³ In Mandarin Chinese, this translates to *zhongguo* (中国), or the central kingdom.

China and Hollywood, A Conceptual Analysis:

The concept of culture and culture as trade applies directly to Hollywood and China. Hollywood and China's recent co-productions have created a cultural dialogue between the two countries and parties at play. The importation and exportation of culture through media, specifically blockbuster films created between Hollywood and China globally. A blockbuster being a tent-pole for Hollywood's production studios, made to be distributed worldwide for multiple cultures. This is a theme set up through the relationship between the Chinese government, Chinese production companies, and Hollywood. Sino-U.S. co-productions have vast cultural impacts, both on each other and the rest of the globe, both geared toward understanding how the other works (Kokas, 2017).

The effects come to impact these "empire's" peoples, race, religion, and culture. How one "empire" affects another, and what are the consequences on both a local and global scale (Hardt and Negri, 2000)? Through the study of empires and imperialism, scholars and theorists, such as Immanuel Wallerstein, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson have come to understand the construct of the modern world and how the current system we have today came to be (Wallerstein, 2011; Hobsbawm, 1992; Anderson, 2006). Studying the rise of the new Chinese "empire" we come to identify what factors come into play when constructing the current regime in China and the effects it has on the rest of the world, as well as Chinese society itself. How much power does this "empire" actually hold, and how can this be seen in modern affairs with Hollywood (Hardt and Negri, 2000)? Study of Chinese culture and society, China's power as a nation-state, as well as its role as a global empire, lead to a more sturdy understanding of the current "empire" of China, its effects on other nations, the economy, as well as China itself (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

China's rise to global prominence has strengthened their film industry. With rise of economic capacity comes a heightened international brand and global awareness. The Chinese economy now able to support more broad transactions and enterprises, investing in the future of China and the image they create for themselves. China now claiming multiple "local" production companies involved in both domestic and foreign production. Companies such as China Film Group, DMG Entertainment, Bona Film Group, and Huayi Brothers Media Group all producing some of China most successful films of the last decade (China Hollywood Society; Brzeski, 2018). An increasing global brand and bolstered economic boom, have set led to Chinese media companies claiming stake in many Hollywood films and production companies. Yet Hollywood has been no stranger to China's recent economic and political rise and has slowly been sowing the seeds of "cultural imperialism" and "empire" within China (Schiller, 1976; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Through "co-productions" and business transactions, Hollywood has been penetrating into Chinese society, culture, and economy (Kokas, 2017).

While at the same time, it is through their increasing reach of media and its interaction and connection to the economic, financial, and ideological values, that China and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have come to grow further. Through cinema, China is aiming to become ingrained in what Emmanuel Wallerstein terms the "World System" or global system of economics (Wallerstein, 2011). The Chinese Communist Party, as well as its global tech conglomerates have come to realize the power of media and film, and the use of "cultural imperialism" and "media imperialism" to build, create, and shape the modern Chinese "Empire" both within China and abroad (Schiller, 1976; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Through producing local films with local ideologies and beliefs, the CCP bolsters its own "cultural imperialism" (Schiller, 1976) within China. Producing films aimed at larger audiences and increased global appeal China advances its

tenets, values, and Chinese brands worldwide. Resulting in stimulated “cultural imperialism” disseminating from within the Chinese borders, Chinese owned conglomerates, and Chinese based media companies (Schiller, 1976). Placing value in “co-productions” with Hollywood and adding cultural and economic value to the films created between the two administrators “cultural imperialism”, as now Chinese “culture” is placed on Hollywood and Hollywood ideals (Kokas, 2017; Schiller, 1976).

By dispersing film globally, as well as working with other large film industries such as Hollywood, the CCP can spread Chinese ideals, and create new versions of “propaganda”. Now being able to have a hand in how it is viewed globally, both from a domestic standpoint and through the Hollywood lens. They create the image they want for themselves on screen and can then propagate these effects both on global audiences and the vast Chinese diaspora, inputting certain cultural and political values within Chinese films and Hollywood “co-production” films (Kokas, 2017). Leading to ideas of race, gender, sovereignty, and nationalism under the umbrella of empires and imperialism. Redefining what it means to be Chinese, the nation of China, and reshaping the Chinese “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006). This situation impacts not only the two nations at play but the entire world, the world economy, and global politics. By understanding the international power Hollywood holds, the economic and political power of China, and the relationship between Hollywood and China, we can unpack this further.

China and Hollywood have been a collision course for the past decade or so. With the growth of China’s economic market and Hollywood’s continuous global expansion, it was only a matter of time before the two crossed paths. With two global and cultural power houses aiming to spread their economic and political dominance. As with much of the dealings between China and the U.S., it has become an economic, political, and cultural tug of war (Su, 2016). This can be

seen in the media created as well. From Hollywood films trying to enter the Chinese market, to Chinese films aiming at larger global market, and the China-Hollywood films being “co-produced” in the middle. Each side trying to gain an upper hand in the game of global imperialism. With China’s vast history and ever-changing media landscape on the one side and Hollywood’s extensive grip on global film distribution and the global film industry on the other. Each action one side makes influences and effects the other. Media, culture, and politics all falling directly into the middle of this two-sided global debate.

Hollywood and U.S. production companies are vying to gain access to the world’s largest audience (Curtin, 2007). Sitting at roughly 1.3 billion people, China maintains one third of the entire population of the globe (Worldometer). Hollywood is using its global and cultural reach to try and impact not only the Chinese government, but the Chinese populace, as well as international Chinese corporations. On the other side, China is trying to spread its global dominance and assert itself as the new global power. Aiming to take over the United States as the world largest economic and political superpower. Both sides acknowledging the power and importance of film and media, in both asserting global domination and spreading cultural and political beliefs. While they are also expanding market reach, accessing more consumers, and influencing entire populations.

Hollywood films portray Hollywood and American ideals, culture, views, and societal values. That creates considerable soft power for the US, in the estimation of Nye (2009) and others. Chinese films have a big hand in maintaining and controlling the Chinese population, displaying Chinese traditions, and enforcing political ideals (Su, 2016). Creating a film between these two, that will ultimately come to be what the rest of the world sees and how they come perceive these nations. China and the Chinese government have come to understand what is truly at stake, how these two parties interacting may affect the future. Not only of China and Hollywood, but the

world itself and the global media system. Two vastly different cultures engaged in a cultural, political, and economic exchange both on screen and off, creating ripple effects not only for the two entities, but and the world as a whole.

As these two “empires” interact, the cultural static created emits beyond Hollywood and China and comes to affect the relationship between the U.S. and China, and the reshaping of these modern “empires”. Examining the effects that the Chinese film industry has on Hollywood and Hollywood’s imprint on China and the Chinese film industry, rests the idea that Hollywood has created a cultural and media “empire” that spreads in to China. Through the global flows of media, the creation of a media “empire”, and the dissection of the “global” brand of Hollywood, Hollywood has not only come to construct a new “empire” across the world, but that the Chinese film industry has aided in this process, and that through the blending of culture there is a new “hybrid” effect (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Straubhaar, 2014).

Film and media have long been cultural purveyors of society, preserving cultural and historical moments on film, print, and television. The diffusion of these mediums across the globe has come to have various impacts on different cultures. Some mixing and infusing to create new hybrid cultures, taking aspects from various parts these new “global” “cultures” (Straubhaar, 2014). Other places pushing back, implementing their own cultures and beliefs in contrast to the spread of these global media. Through the flow of media and film in particular, there is an expansion of culture across media, these flows come to effect certain locations and societies. Film has long been discussed and inspected throughout the scholarly works of media and media studies. It is a cultural relic of the times, showcasing what was important not only for these filmmakers, but the societies in which they come from. What political views, economic forces, commercial gains, capital success, and cultural traditions they enforce. It is within these mediums, that many cultures

and societies place and display their ideas, views, and societal functions. Illustrating what it means to come from this culture and showing others the beliefs they hold to be true.

Hollywood and the production companies within, have come to be the staple of this movement. Displaying on a global scale what it means to be “American”, the “American Dream”⁴, enforcing their cultural values across the globe, and expanding their market to greater audiences. Through their expansive reach, Hollywood has come to signify what a global commercial film can accomplish. Exhibiting their commercial and cultural strength through products, location, actors, producers, directors, and the medium of film itself. It is here where we find notions of media and “cultural imperialism” (Schiller, 1976).

The concept of “Empire” as it is applied to media and film, applies also to Hollywood’s creation of a “global Hollywood” (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Miller et al., 2001), implanting “empire” within borders, cultures, and societies worldwide (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Hollywood takes its long history of studios, systemic production, culture creation, and propagation of ideals and embeds them within viewership around the world (Schatz, 1988; Adorno and Horkheimer, 1991; Miller et al., 2001). Local and global production and the impact of the cultures involved in the films and production companies behind the films aid in placing “empire” deep within societal values, and altering traditional approaches and ways of life (Hardt and Negri, 2000). New forms of dress, communication, technology, and consumer products come with both the intake of Hollywood films, through new media, the necessity of advent technologies, as well as the content within the films themselves. Leading to questions of how Hollywood’s reach effects the Chinese market, Chinese peoples, culture, economy, and media systems set in place in China? How are

⁴ The American dream as defined by Truslow Adams (Adams, 1931).

these films global? How are these films local? Do they effect the larger film market, and if so how? How does Hollywood work with China effect Sino-U.S. relations?

Through inspecting the flow of media, film, people, products, ideas, and capital in Qingdao, this study aims to solidify what is at stake between the U.S. and China, and how these two interact. How is one's culture coming to influence another and what objects are involved when the two work together toward a common goal? Cultural flow, "cultural imperialism", "media imperialism", and the idea of a "global Hollywood", cultural globalization, and Hardt and Negri's definition of "Empire" expound further the current state in Qingdao, and how it may apply to a more broad approach from a world scale (Schiller, 1976; Miller et al., 2001; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Applying them in real terms to the idea of cultural imperialism and media imperialism being done in Qingdao, and the flow of culture both on screen and off, expands on how Qingdao has become a cultural playground. The flow of culture has come to be inherent not only through film, but also through the flow of people, media, beliefs, product, as well as politics.

China's rise to prominence on a global scale, rapid industrialization, open-door policy, and urbanization have affected the Hollywood film industry. The relationship between China and Hollywood is a complicated one, with many changes happening often. Much of the relationship between the two depends on the state of the economy, global policies, trade, and investment policies, as well as tariffs and tax incentives. In order for the two parties to have a working relationship, as with any relationship, political, personal, economical, or otherwise, there must be a mutual understanding, respect and open communication. One of the problems that arise when examining this particular relationship, is that fact that when it comes to the relationship between China and Hollywood, all of these factors converge and intersect. One cannot have a purely economic relationship without having personal relations, cultural tendencies, and the state of the

nation all coming into play. These companies engage in business with Chinese companies and the Chinese government, both to gain a broader reach, expand their culture power, and for financial gain. The larger the audience, bigger the base, the more revenue to be brought in.

This is the beginning of what Homi Bhaba (2004) describes as a new “third space”, where in order for things to progress each side had to understand each other, but also make sacrifices. This understanding being a very important role, as within the Chinese concept of *guanxi*⁵, an understanding of what is being done and what is expected plays a very large role. Where in traditional Chinese transactions it is implicitly understood what is expected of both parties (Bhaba, 2004). It is also important for both parties to have a deeper understanding of each other’s motives. What each member is bringing to the table, what they can get out of it, and how it is mutually beneficial. Bhaba’s (2004) theory of “third space” is the concept of a space existing between cultures, where the blending of multiple cultures creates a “third space”. A place where both cultural influences exist, not quite one, yet not quite the other. Through examining the relationship between Hollywood and China, and the films created we can see a new “third space” being formed between two cultures. “Co-productions” or films are sponsored or created by both parties existing in this “third” domain (Kokas, 2017; Bhaba, 2004). Taking traditional values and concepts from both “cultures” to produce something new that appeals to both and can occupy both spaces. Both “local” and “global”, Hollywood and Chinese (Straubhaar, 2007). Films such as Marvel’s Cinematic Universe (MCU)⁶ installment *Captain America: Civil War* and *Now You See Me 2* land in this “third” space, borrowing actors, technology, and cultural icons from both sides of the pond (Robinson, 2016). This leads to an expanded “third space”, produced for both audiences (Bhaba,

⁵ 关系 (*guanxi*), the Chinese concept of building a connection or working relationship, an old tradition on which much of business is based (Enrique Guerrero, personal communication, Liu Jun, Beijing, 2017).

⁶ The collection of films belonging under Marvel Studios, connected through various plotlines (Marvel).

2004). Two global powers create a new “third” culture aimed at a global market, yet produced not for one but, each country’s audiences respectively. China’s strict censorship policies⁷ tie directly into the creation and expansion of this newly adapted “third” space. Hollywood and the Hollywood production companies need to conform, create, and recreate new media and images with China in mind (Kokas, 2017), to be able to get past the CCP guidelines to be allowed not only to screen and be distributed within China’s borders, but be able to access the greater Chinese audience and acclimate culturally. Necessitating the need for Chinese interaction, intervention with Chinese production companies, and exposition to Chinese counterparts. Laying the foundation for deeper guanxi and an expansion of “empire within China and Chinese film (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Containing both Chinese and Western influences, these new Hollywood-China blockbusters add to an already expanding relationship between the U.S. and China, and aid in the cultural blending of the two nations on a global scale and the expansion of an “empire” (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

⁷ Policy in place by the CCP to censor certain material for Chinese audiences (Grimm, 2015).

China, A Brief Introduction:

The Chinese film industry is a complex target. Consisting of multiple moving parts all convening together to form a larger entity contributing to the Chinese economy as a whole. To understand the Chinese film industry⁸, its relationship pertaining to Hollywood and the way these two affect the rest of the world, we must first understand China, Chinese politics, and some of their very basic economic practices. In order to understand exactly how Hollywood and China come together, we must first take a step back and look at the big picture. By doing this we can see all of the moving parts, where we can then zone in on different aspects, and start to understand this new relationship being built.

China refers to the country as whole, as well as the Chinese culture, their daily interactions, economic perspectives, and habits. Reference to China-Hollywood relationships denotes the economies of both countries, the politics involved in creating new ventures, how the businesses and governments interact, and how the Chinese film industry approaches filmmaking, and international film making⁹. In order to understand the Chinese film industry and its global progress, we must come to understand the dynamics behind Chinese culture, politics, and economics. This due to the fact that CCP has strict oversight of films produced within China's borders (Kokas, 2017, p. 19-39). The Chinese Communist Party and its leaders are very aware of the fact that media is one of the best ways to spread cultural power and create "soft-power" and that film is one of the most powerful media tools to date (Nye, 2009; Wilson Center, n.d.). What better way to spread Chinese culture, ideologies, and show the rest of the world the power the nation of China

⁸ Refers to films being made in China for the Chinese audience.

⁹ As described in Aynne Koka's *Hollywood Made in China*, and Wendy Su's *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood* (Kokas, 2017; Su, 2016).

has amassed than through film? Who better to partner with to create the most far-reaching films, then Hollywood, the world's foremost film industry?

In 2020 China is the world's most populous country with a population of 1.39 billion people, nearly a third of the world's total population (The World Bank, 2020). Their economy has become the world's second largest economy, surpassing global economic powers such as Japan and Germany, and trailing only the United States (Bajpai, 2020). The growth of China's population and economy are closely related. As China's economy continues to grow, so does its population. As with any modernizing society, the more people become economically independent, the more money they have to spend and to save. This leads to being able to financially support larger families, resulting in a steady economy. A stable economy leads to the state being able to better support its populous and cultivate its global brand. More resources become available for health care, more opportunities for employment, food becomes more readily available, and infrastructure more secure (Wallerstein, 2011). These changes over the past 40 years lead to a higher quality of life for China's citizens. They now can afford to purchase more monetarily, maintain larger housing, have more than one child¹⁰, and travel more. In 2001 China became part of the World Trade Organization (WTO)¹¹, increasing its international status, gaining access to other markets on better terms, strengthening its global brand, and further committing to the world of "globalization"¹² (Huang, 2017). As of 2020, China now boasts five of the "global 2000"¹³, and has two of the top ten global brands in Alibaba Group and Tencent Holdings Limited (Murphy

¹⁰ The Chinese government introduced the "one child policy" in 1979, and ended its implementation in 2015 (Sotamayor, 2020).

¹¹ The world's leading economic organization for trade and global value, centered around the orientations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2020).

¹² As used defined by Theodore Levitt (Levitt, 1983).

¹³ The ranking system used by Forbes (Murphy et al., 2020).

et al., 2020; Ventura, 2019). China has become paramount to the “world market system” and is now integral in the global flow¹⁴ (Wallerstein, 2011).

With China’s recent rise to global prominence and seat at the global table of economic power houses, China has come to stand for so much more than just a 5,000-year-old country, shrouded in both culture and tradition. They have come to exemplify a unique approach to becoming a modern nation-state, as well as a global empire with military and political might. It has become hard to view China without involving politics, international trade, and the current governmental regime. It is through all of these, that I approach China, as well as what China brings to the table culturally. The use of China signifies the cultural background, economic status, political regime, as well as China’s current global reach. When it comes to the current state of China, one cannot examine one aspect, without considering the others, this ties into its interactions with Hollywood as well.

¹⁴ As used in *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (Wallerstein, 2011).

What is Hollywood?

Hollywood is a multi-billion-dollar industry, with films reaching every corner of the globe. From small African nations and newly formed republics, to much more economically important nations such as Germany, Japan, and China. Hollywood's films can be found within each location, with each place playing up, relating to, and censoring¹⁵ different cultural and economic aspects of said films. Each country culturally attaches themselves to the films of Hollywood for different reasons. For some it may just be an escape, for others hope or an economic investment (Chung, 2020). Each culture has different values and appreciates various cultural nuances found within Hollywood films, implicit or otherwise. For Americans the use of location and product placement¹⁶ builds a sense of pride, patriotism, and expands on a capitalist ideology. For much of Europe there engenders a sense of belonging, a glimpse into "American" idealism, as well a way to see new technologies and an "escape" into a 2-hour genre story (Powers, 1996; Teo, 2017).

Hollywood, both as a location and an ideal, a culture and system, has paved the way for commercial filmmaking across the globe (Schatz, 1988). Pushing the advancement of film technology, practice, techniques used, as well as the content on screen (Powers, 1996). Hollywood comes to define what a true globally successful film is, and as such, creates the formula for which other film industries aim to produce (Sutton and Wogan, 2020). The epitome of what an international film could be happens when multiple parties come together to create a large production, aiming to do it the "Hollywood" way, set in the terms of the Hollywood production companies (Miller et al., 2001). Hollywood has come to mean so much more than a sign on a

¹⁵ Hollywood films have a long history of being edited and re-edited for global distribution (Black, 1989).

¹⁶ Placing sponsored products within a film to boost revenue, aids in production cost (Powers, 1996).

hill¹⁷, or a street in Northern Los Angeles¹⁸, yet at the same time, it is the very ideas these images conjure that has come to be “Hollywood.” I demarcate both the idea of Hollywood, the location, as well as the genres it has created, the global production companies involved and the producers, directors, and filmmakers at play. It is the very culture created here that is disseminating across the globe (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1991; Kraidy, 2005). It is through this framework I refer to Hollywood, both as a system, a location, and a cultural production hub able to expand its “cultural imperialism”, “empire”, and produce new “third spaces” worldwide (Schiller, 1976; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Bhaba, 2004).

Take a franchise like the Marvel Cinematic Universe, a fairly recent development, yet already one of the most profitable franchises of all time, with each of its films outdoing the last. In order for it to be culturally relevant on a global scale, the filmmakers must be very conscious of what can and cannot be done in order to attract a truly global audience. What should be in or left out to be culturally significant on a worldwide scale? From a film like 2008’s *Iron Man*, up to 2018’s *Black Panther*, ten years apart, yet these films are still culturally relevant to many on multiple levels. I intend to expand on Hollywood’s blockbusters, the tent pole films used to hold up the American film industry and bring in large amounts of revenue. Films geared toward a global audience meant to disseminate across the globe.¹⁹ How Hollywood’s uses its “blockbuster” appeal to gain access to China, the world’s largest population and second largest economy. Blockbuster films made specifically with these audiences in mind, and the co-production that goes into making them. From small scale “local” Chinese workers, to large multi-billion-dollar companies driving the process forward, to the nations behind them, and their cultural impacts.

¹⁷ Refers to Hollywood sign located on Mount Lee, Los Angeles (Hollywoodsign.org).

¹⁸ Hollywood Blvd.

¹⁹ Hollywood claims top ten all time films worldwide (Box Office Mojo, 2020).

As Hollywood continues to gain access to China, they now work with newly created Chinese companies, business transactions began to take place, shaping the future of the China-Hollywood film industry. Hollywood production companies have had access to previously restricted areas, team up with Chinese brands for product placement in their films, have large Chinese backers for big budget films, and even hire Chinese actors or allow American actors to be in Chinese films (Kokas, 2017). Lighting the way for the “third” space existing between China and Hollywood (Bhaba, 2004). Hollywood production companies continue building relationships with Chinese businessmen and the CCP, and the vast web of interactions in-between.

New Buddies or Old News?

China and Hollywood have come to produce films that relates to the theme of cultural trade in Sino-U.S. blockbusters. Some of the factors that are involved with Hollywood and China “co-productions” are how the two cultures export their global power, advance cultural implications, and shape the future of China-Hollywood filmmaking. At the center of discussion is the review of how the United States and China interact on a global scale, and in specific the interaction of media and film. Hollywood production companies come into contact with multiple moving parts during their encounters with China, the CCP, and Chinese conglomerate production companies. These moving pieces all intersect and entwine producing the final product of a China-Hollywood “co-production” (Kokas, 2017). Each facet counteracting another, creating a ripple effect, influencing other aspects of the filmmaking process. There are interactions such as the actors involved, on-screen location, set location, and even local product placement (Kokas, 2017; Xi, 2016). Hollywood’s use of a well-known Chinese actors may have other effects, other than just audience attraction. These actors now become “Hollywood” actors, established within Hollywood’s global “empire”, familiarizing themselves with the “Hollywood” formula, and gain attention from a global audience (Miller et al., 2001; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Advancing China’s “soft power” plays, and cultural ties worldwide (Nye, 2009).

Policy, trade, culture, economics, and the idea of global “soft power”, all connect and intervene when discussing Sino-Hollywood relations (Nye, 2009). Hollywood negotiating with Chinese business conglomerates, dealing with the Chinese government themselves, shooting in China, and dealing with China’s various business conglomerates sets the dialogue for cultural imperialism, and a new emergent “culture” (Kokas, 2017; Schiller, 1976). As long as the two

interact, both parties trade in cultural value and negotiate to build Hollywood's "Empire" and China's co-production proficiency (Hardt and Negri, 2000). All while mixing in the "third" space generates with expansion and *mélange* of "culture" (Bhaba, 2004).

When dealing with China and the import and export of films, there will always be some sort of government influence²⁰. The CCP's use of censorship, and controls on the importation and exportation of both foreign and domestic film sets the tone for much of Sino-U.S. interaction, and how many Hollywood films will be allowed to screen in China. These quotas along with the CCP's strict censorship policies create an environment where many Hollywood films aim to satisfy the CCP's strict regulations in order to be screened in China (Kokas, 2017). China censors films for "distorting, Chinese civilization and history", disparage "the image of the people's army", "obscene and vulgar content", "contents of murder, violence, terror, ghosts, and the supernatural", "advertise religious extremism" and/or "oppose the spirit of the law", must be "cut or altered" (Grimm, 2015, p. 165).

Outside of their given home geographic locations, Hollywood and China maintain cultural value, economic influence and global prowess. Warner Brothers Pictures, Universal Pictures, 20th Century Fox, and the Walt Disney Corporation, all have physical locations with offices and studios located in Hollywood, California (Warner Bros.; Universalpicturesinternational.com; Busch, 2015; Qin, 2019). But they also have multiple subsidiaries located around the globe and have created brands that reach far beyond their physical locations. These production studios do business and create culture as a commodity (Kelly, 1987). Discussing Hollywood in this context we must understand it as a cultural exporter, where through film and branding of these films, these studios are able to manufacture and export culture (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1991).

²⁰ CCP has strict regulations on media produced, imported, and exported within mainland China (Cook, 2020; Grimm, 2015).

The relationship between Hollywood and China has been unconvincing at best. With one side always trying to outplay and out maneuver the other. China is trying to get the upper hand in its ever-expanding quest for global power, Hollywood is aiming to crack into the world's largest and most marketable market. One with their eye on the spot for the next global superpower, the other with focus set on the world's largest population and one third of the total populace of the planet. Hollywood began to crack into China in the early 2010s, with films such as *Transformers: The Last Knight*, *Independence Day: Resurgence*, *Iron Man 3*, and *The Great Wall* (IMDb). While not all these films went on to be box office successes internationally, it marked the beginning of a new relationship. The beginning of a new political, economic, and cultural interface, an arrangement set on the boundaries of how to grow territory and expand markets. Hollywood permeating through the cultural pores of Sino-Hollywood interaction, China vacillating through Hollywood's imperial waters, to gain global influence, expand global brand and cultural recognition. Who would expand their global impact and spread cultural, economic, and global power? It was through this association and films such as these that the relationship was built, and global companies such as Dalian Wanda Group²¹ and Alibaba Group²² came to be involved. Global production companies based in Hollywood, began to focus more attention on the rise of China and its valuable market. This is where places such as Qingdao and the concepts of cultural and media imperialism come into play.

The relationship between Hollywood and China has become tenuous in recent years thanks to the current economic and political trade wars between the United States and China, as well as their stance on the current situations within Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the South China Sea. Due to recent events, and the political and economic turbulence between the U.S. and China, these

²¹ Dalian Wanda Group is China's largest real estate company (Hatton, 2020).

²² Alibaba Group ranks as China's most profitable brand (Kantar, 2019).

interactions have started to decline. It is only through a detailed and attentive approach that you may find these relations still budding toward a cultural hegemony. There are interactions such as the construction and implementation of Qingdao's "Oriental Movie Metropolis", the expansion of recent "co-productions" such as *Pacific Rim: Uprising*, *Abominable*, *The Meg*, and even 2018 and 2019 Oscar winners *Green Book*²³ and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*²⁴ (IMDb). All reinforce and manifest Hollywood's formulaic output and "cultural imperialism" (Schiller, 1976). Expanding "empire" and play into the Hollywood-China "co-production" playbook (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Kokas, 2017).

China entered the world of cinema late in the game, with Hollywood having already gained a foothold. The history of cinema is such, that Hollywood and the rest of the West were shaping and redefining film and the cinematic world through new outlets and various mediums, new takes on storytelling, the technology used, and filmmaking techniques involved. During the early stages of film and the nascent world of cinematic storytelling, China was a newcomer to the Western theory of "moving pictures", seldom involved in the process of filmmaking or distribution. With the local rise of communism, the birth the CCP, and the rise to power of Chairman Mao Zedong, film began to take life in China, and take about a new meaning²⁵.

No longer was film used solely as an entertainment form, but like many nation building campaigns before them, "motion picture" began to be used as a form of propaganda. A way to disseminate news, cultural beliefs, political views, and the CCP's newly defined version of China. Film was used to create and distill long standing cultural beliefs in China and resituate China's history, national status, and global view, and status from a more worldly view (Pickowicz, 2011).

²³ *Green Book* won best picture in 2018, back by Alibaba Pictures (IMDb).

²⁴ *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, won multiple Oscar in 2019 (IMDb).

²⁵ 1949 is the official birth of the Chinese Communist Party and founding of the People's Republic of China (Jowett, 1984).

China situates itself among the world powers, using film as one of the central ways to keep tabs on the Western world, monitor newly discovered technologies, and measure China's statute with the rest of the world. Through distributions rights, the construction of new malls, town centers, megaplexes, and movie theaters Hollywood now has its introduction to the Chinese masses. China's rise to global prominence, reconstructed metropolitans, and entrance to a seat at the modern table, China spawned its relationship with Hollywood. Guidance and regulation through the Chinese government grow Hollywood's international audience, expand their transnational influence, and ultimately bring in more revenue.

China's Historical Context:

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s China's economy slowly started to grow, under Mao Zedong, China gradually curated a steady economy. Through Mao's collective system²⁶ China's agricultural production started to increase and become stable. It wasn't until the era of Deng Xiaoping²⁷ and Zhu Rongji²⁸ that the Chinese economy really started to grow and modernize. Deng Xiaoping's reforms and the "opening"²⁹ of China's doors to the West, brought China into the 20th century, and sparked the process of China becoming a modern nation-state (Huang, 2017).

In 1978 Deng Xiaoping enacted sweeping economic reforms, connecting China's economy to the rest of the world (Ho, 1995). By relaxing China's trade policies, setting up special economic zones (SEZ), creating township villages enterprises (TVE), and state-owned enterprises (SOE), Deng paved the way for foreign companies to be able work in and with Chinese companies, both private and state-owned (Huang, 2017). Foreign companies were now allowed to make business deals with Chinese companies, leading to a new economic understanding, and more importantly, a mixing of cultures, an expansion Western "cultural imperialism", and a newly positioned "empire" (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Schiller, 1976). Deng's reforms allowed for foreign companies to begin to invest in Chinese products and use China as a means for exportation. Foreign investment companies were now investing in building new locations and products in China and using the newly mobilized Chinese work force to do this. This was done mainly in the South coastal towns such and Shanghai, Guangdong, and Fujian. Where Deng used the newly created SEZs to expand

²⁶ The Collective System was a system set in place Mao Zedong's "Great Leap Forward". Used to collectivize "township", "commune", and "cadre" work and resources (Li, 2009 p. 23-81).

²⁷ Deng Xiaoping is largely credited for creating and implementing China's "Great Reform and Opening Up", (Ho, 1995).

²⁸ Served as China's Primer post Deng Xiaoping (Huang, 2017).

²⁹ China's "Great Reform and Opening Up", opening trade to the West (Oi, 1995).

trade and brought in new investors. In addition to “opening” its doors to the West, these “policy entrepreneurs” encouraged the privatization of China, and for private non-state entities to lead the growth of China’s economy (Huang, 2017, p.30). Many private companies started to grow and lead the way in China’s newly found income. Companies such as Alibaba, Sina Weibo, Tencent, and Xiaomi have led the way for Chinese companies and have grown into not only Chinese conglomerates, but world leaders in innovation and technology (Kantar, 2019). It is because of companies such as these and the growth of China’s urban centers that Hollywood has now become more invested in the China and the Chinese culture. These three ingredients, of China’s “open door” reforms, vast urbanization, and a new interest in Chinese culture are what have driven the Chinese-Hollywood craze of the last few years. Leading to an increase in “co-productions”, cross-cultural pollenization, an expansion of cultural influence, and augmentation of “empire”.

China and the U.S have a long historical relationship, where each country has a push and pull, leading to the current state of affairs in the global arena. From the rise of the Chinese Communist Party to Deng Xiaoping’s reform and opening up in the 1980’s, through the current regimes fostering relationships with Hollywood and Hollywood executives (Cauffman). Economics, trade policy, business ventures, branding, sharing of media, and politics all converge together to shape cultures and expand a vast network of imperialism of a Chinese-American brand through the guise of Hollywood internationalization. All in the name of future development and a strengthening of a relationship, reinforcing Hollywood’s global brand and cultural influence. Through the dissection of relationship building and the liaison between Hollywood and China, the use of media building, branding, and business, all exemplify the modern notion of hybridity and imperialism (Bhaba, 2004; Schiller, 1976). China’s rapid industrialization, urbanization and modernization, are what drive the relationship with many of China’s counterparts. Once China

opened its' doors to the West, many companies started to invest in local Chinese economies, and intervene with local Chinese politics. Cities such as Shanghai and other special free trade zones³⁰ began to clash with SOEs as the movement of capital began to open up, allowing for a more free-market, laissez-faire approach to Chinese economics (Huang, 2017, p. 156). Migration began to open up and increase as move rural workers moved to city centers, playing a key role in the development of China's urbanization and industrialization. Many migrant workers moved to urban centers to find work, follow, and contribute to the construction of newly developed buildings, high rises, metroplexes, shopping centers, and apartments (Huang, 2017, p.102). Urban centers started to grow, due the growing industries and production jobs available. Along with industrialization came modernization. As Phillip Huang sees it, along with Westernization, the two to go hand in hand. Introduction of capitalization and development while decreased the impact of the agricultural proletariat³¹ and brought about the rise of "capitalization" (Huang et al., 2012). Through this, many Chinese people started to grow their wealth, which enabled them to save money, and eventually invest in new ventures and companies (Huang, 2017).

³⁰ Zones dedicated to free trade agreements (Huang, 2017, p. 97).

³¹ "full-time wage-workers employed by (capitalistic) agricultural enterprises" (Huang et al., 2012, p. 13).

New “Hollywood”?

In 2017 Wang Jianlin CEO of Dalian Wanda Group, one of China’s largest real estate conglomerates established Qingdao as China’s “Oriental Movie Metropolis” (Hoad, 2017). They created a complex neighborhood of film studios, sound stages, hotels, and a mall, dedicated purely to China’s filmmaking industry and its’ connection the rest of the global media community. The facility consists of 44 sound stages, 6 hotels, a mall, multiple movie theaters, and even a sign on the hill reading 东方影都 (dongfang yingdu) or “Hollywood of the East”; mimicking the famous “Hollywood” sign in North Los Angeles. Wang Jianlin and Dalian Wanda Group set out to complete a studio system similar to that of their competitors across the Pacific Ocean (Feng, 2018). Wanda is not only taking the system set in place by Hollywood, but galvanizing it, taking the structure set in place and intensifying it aiming to break into the international film market, completing the largest studio system in the world (Hoad, 2017). Hollywood style “cultural imperialism” is also on full display (Schiller, 1976). Dalian Wanda taking a system already set in place and using it to become the largest film market in the world, hoping to replicate it inch for inch (Kokas, 2017; Feng, 2018). Something that had worked for China in the past with its replication of Western style media, technology, and real estate conglomerates during Deng Xiaoping’s “Great Reform and Opening Up” (Huang, 2017).

Having been one of the coastal cities in which Deng Xiaoping declared a SEZ, Qingdao quickly became one of China’s largest ports, importing and exporting various goods across the world, and housing offices for some of China’s and the world’s largest conglomerates. Wang Jianlin along with others Chinese entrepreneurs such as Alibaba’s Jack Ma, became the beneficiaries of Deng Xiaoping and Zhu Rongji’s economic reforms. Through the creation of

SEZs in Coastal China and the encouragement of private enterprises³² Wang Jianlin, developed Dalian Wanda Group into what it is today. Wang is now one of the wealthiest businessmen in China and runs one of China's largest conglomerate companies. Leading to his decision on Qingdao as the location for his soon to be “Hollywood of the East.”

A further exhibition of China's display of Hollywood's cultural and media imperialism is the completion of Wanda Mall (Wanda Mao) or “Wanda Movie Park”. Where under the supervision of Sunac Culture Group, Wanda and Sunac created an entertainment complex dedicated completely to the entertainment industry, promoting of the Chinese film industry, commercial world, capitalist society, and fully showing China and Qingdao's commercial allure and economic influence (Davis, 2019). At the same time showcasing the cultural hybridity within the Qingdao Oriental Movie Metropolis. The cultural and media imperialism of Hollywood contributing to the global flow of media, the construction of new entertainment complexes, completion of production studios for international access, adding new incentives for both Hollywood and China (Straubhaar, 2014; Schiller, 1976; Thussu, 2010; Hoad, 2019). Within this massive industrial complex, Sunac Culture Group has put China's rise to modernity and placement within the world economic system, as well as their media and political might on full display (Wallerstein, 2011). The “Wanda Mall” complex itself is a 5-story structure spanning half a mile, built directly across from the “Oriental Movie Metropolis” and adjacent to the massive hotel area. The “Wanda Movie Park” houses a multi-screen, multi-story AMC movie theater compete with an IMAX screen, two arcades, a water park, an ice-skating rink, a supermarket, and a subway stop, in addition to the multiple international stores and an ESPN³³ sports bar housed within the complex. The outside of the mall even has multiple iconic Hollywood actors such as Charlie Chaplin,

³² 私营企业, *siying qiye*, private companies non-state owned (Huang, 2017).

³³ Valued as the world's most valuable sports network (Badenhausen, 2012).

Marilyn Monroe, and Bruce Lee (Enrique Guerrero, personal communication with Zhao Yanbo, Qingdao, 2019).

In 2012 Dalian Wanda Group, led by chairman and CEO Wang Jianlin, purchased AMC Theatres, a move to try to exhibit China's rising power on the global market (Frater, 2018). With theaters across the U.S. and throughout the globe, Wang and Dalian Wanda Group, were aiming to crack into the U.S. market and gain some influence on the U.S. audience and U.S. investors. AMC Theatres is the U.S.'s largest theater chain, maintaining and investing in theaters across the Europe and Asia. China and its global companies had indeed begun to impact the global media system, and the current regime setup by Hollywood (Sawe, 2017). Yet even with its cultural and economic might, these relationships still being mediated through the pretext of Hollywood, the U.S. the U.S. media system. Such as AMC Theatres being an American brand, distributing Hollywood films throughout China, and owned by a large Chinese conglomerate in Dalian Wanda Group, owning and displaying Chinese power under the Hollywood guise. Displaying Hollywood's influence on China and the Chinese film industry in Qingdao. As well as reinforcing the cultural and media imperialism of Hollywood ideals and cultures. The mall showcasing that Hollywood's implicit impact the Chinese economy and the Chinese film industry, by displaying capitalist driven ecosystem within the mall. Disney, owning ESPN and ESPN franchises, also has a stake in Qingdao, both through culture and media, as well as physical sports bar inside the mall. It is staking claim to territory within Qingdao's Oriental Movie Metropolis and displaying the reach of the Hollywood "Empire" (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Sports bars also is an inherent Western and Hollywood driven concept, dedicated to boosting media consumption and television intake. The AMC theater screening both Chinese and Hollywood films dispersing Hollywood cultural ideal to the audience, as well as Chinese values and beliefs.

Dalian Wanda Group purchased Legendary Entertainment in 2016, the production company behind global blockbusters such as *Pacific Rim*, *Interstellar*, and *The Dark Knight* (Legendary, Frater, 2018). Again, it displayed to the world China's burgeoning might, and its vying for a seat at the table of world superpowers. With a production company such as this, and global box office hits such as these, Dalian Wanda Group was sure to crack the Hollywood conundrum, and start to create its' own global hits. But even still all of this was being negotiated through the subterfuge of Hollywood, Hollywood films, and Hollywood production companies. China had championed a global blockbuster powerhouse, yet these transactions and negotiations still all run through Hollywood. Headed by a global Chinese conglomerate, run by Chinese businessmen, and swayed by the Chinese government. But all under the name of Hollywood, through Hollywood production studios, and under Hollywood's cultural influences.

Wanda Group is an example of how Chinese private enterprises became a major investor in the Chinese film industry and Hollywood films. China's urbanization led to a growth of movies theaters. With a rising urban population, an increasing income, and vast construction through the coastal cities, many new movie theater complexes began to be developed throughout China's urban cities. Chinese investment and construction companies saw an opportunity to expand on new market. With the film exhibition deregulation in 2003, a new "frenzy" was created to fill a gap that previously had been unfilled. Movies theaters and "multiplexes" began to pop-up all-over China's urban centers (Lu, 2016, pp.205-206). With China's economic reforms and recently acquired wealth, many privately owned companies began to grow very quickly, and capitalize on these developing investment opportunities.

In 2017 Dalian Wanda Group sold the majority of its holdings to Sunac Reality Group, and with it many of Dalian Wanda Group's real estate holdings such as the newly completed

Qingdao Oriental Movie Metropolis. Sunac Reality Group quickly established Sunac Culture Group, a subsidiary of Sunac Reality Group. Sunac Culture Group was put in charge of managing and maintaining Sunac properties, including the growing Qingdao Oriental Movie Metropolis. Sunac Reality Group, spear headed by Sunac Culture Group, alongside the enormous production studio, also built a massive hotel complex, shopping mall, movie theater, auditorium, and a soon to be completed Qingdao West train station (Davis, 2019; Enrique Guerrero, personal communication, Zhao Yanbo, 2019). This all done with the foresight of the Qingdao Oriental Movie Metropolis truly becoming the “Hollywood of the East.” Knowing that they would need a place to screen their movies, debut premieres, house employees, filmmakers, as well as visiting guests, and have quick access from other parts of China and the world. Under the guidance of Sunac Culture Group, Qingdao Oriental Movies Metropolis, is being transformed into a “metropolis”. A city within in a city, where the filmmakers, employees, and creators involved in these large big budget films will, have everything need at their disposal.

This points to a reversal of cultural imperialism, where Chinese ways and customs come to blend with the Hollywood ideas of producing big budget films for a global audience. China and Sunac Culture Group taking aspects from their 1.4 billion population, streamlined production style, and insular working system of having the workers separated from other parts of the country to be more productive. Yet still having access to everything they may need. This borrows the similar cadre production styles enforced during the Mao Zedong era, or lending from a more socialist, work based society. Where employees work multiple weeks on end, to ensure a more streamlined approach, and more efficient completion time. A Chinese aspect of working to completion, based on time and space, rather than a more Westernized view of working based stability and accessibility. The “Metropolis” itself provides everything from internet, food, and lodging, as well

as work and entertainment. Virtually every aspect of life within the “Movie Metropolis” is set up to run through Sunac Culture Group.

This is much more of a Chinese style production. Large manpower run campaigns, long hours, little safety, creating an industrial like approach to filmmaking. Streamlining film production for the quickest possible outcome, often casting other necessities such as safety, work hours, and breaks aside. Creating a Chinese approach to a “global” brand, yet still under the pretense of the Hollywood ideal. Chinese production companies mimic a system already set in place, a formula already established, aiming re-create the Hollywood’s global blockbuster. They produce large scale films for a global audience, with economic gain and cultural expansion as the end game. This is contingent through a mix of “traditional” Chinese culture, implication of Hollywood ideals, products, production techniques, and formulaic approach. Generating media existing in the ghostly realm of “cross-culture” (Castells, 1983). Imbuing the concept of “third space” and a clash of “cultural” “empires” (Bhaba,2004; Schiller, 1976; Hardt and Negri, 2000).

Wanda and Sunac are completing a multi-building hotel system directly across from the large studio complex and adjacent to Wanda Mall. Composing of 6 different hotels all run by Sunac Culture Group, all for the purpose of housing employees, filmmakers, and foreign visitors. Housing both local Chinese filmmakers and producers, as well as Hollywood producers and businessmen (Enrique Guerrero, personal communication with Zhao Yanbo, Qingdao, 2019). Sunac Culture Group setting the tone on what a China-Hollywood “co-production” will entail and contributing to its global brand (Kokas, 2017). Inhibiting its cultural, economic, and political power, positioning Sunac Culture Group, the “Qingdao Oriental Movie Metropolis”, and other private Chinese conglomerates’ status in the China-Hollywood relationship.

Amid the current Covid-19³⁴ crisis of 2020, Dalian Wanda Group and Sunac Culture Group are still at the forefront of Chinese media, impacting the relationship with Hollywood and its counterparts, and acting gatekeepers of the new “Chinese” “Hollywood”³⁵. As of 2020 Wanda Group is still the majority shareholder for both Legendary Entertainment and AMC Theatres worldwide, along with its release of Wanda Film Holdings³⁶ and acquisition of Wanda Media³⁷. Wanda has begun to restructure to make a bigger impact globally and enter the fry of Hollywood’s massive “cultural imperial” empire (Davis, 2019). Sparking rumors that Dalian Wanda Group may be behind a massive bailout to save AMC Theaters from bankruptcy (Brzeski and Szalai, 2020). With Wanda and Sunac holding major shares in both Chinese and U.S. media, along with Alibaba Pictures³⁸ and Tencent Pictures³⁹ there is a shift in cultural influence leading to an overlap of Hollywood’s “empire” (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Adding to the mélange of culture, media, and influence within the China-Hollywood “third space” (Bhaba, 2004).

³⁴ Novel Coronavirus Disease 2019 (CDC, 2020).

³⁵ As stated in the introduction.

³⁶ Wanda Group’s film and entertainment subsidiary (Davis, 2019).

³⁷ Wanda Group’s restructuring to “consolidate production, distribution, and exhibition” (Davis, 2019).

³⁸ See Conglomerate Connection.

³⁹ See Conglomerate Connection.

Conglomerate Connection:

Other ways in which China's industrial and economic progression can be seen on screen is through the use of QQ⁴⁰ and Mengniu⁴¹. Tencent Holdings Limited, the company behind QQ has become the largest technology company in China, a leading investor in the tech field, and ranks fifth globally (Petroff, 2018). 2016's *Independence Day: Resurgence* exclusively used QQ messaging as a way to communicate globally (IMDb). Through the use of QQ as a way to communicate across the globe and outer space, the film demonstrates value in both China's technology, as well as allows China's technology to reach a global audience. Tencent, using the film as a way to invest in a global market and reach a broader audience, and Hollywood showing China and companies like Tencent, the value it can play on global scale. In 2015 Tencent Holdings Ltd. launched Tencent Pictures, displaying their commitment to the blockbuster franchise and China's interactions with Hollywood (China Film Insider, 2018).

Mengniu Dairy, another product of China's recent industrialization boom, has also played a role in Hollywood cinema, co-productions, and the expansion of "culture". The dairy products were once again, used throughout *Independence Day: Resurgence*, this time as "Moon Milk", the product used to give the astronauts their daily protein intake (Robinson, 2016). Elevating the Chinese dairy company to international, even interstellar levels. With the use of a known products such as Mengniu, it seems like yet another way for Hollywood studios to entice Chinese audiences and apply existing formulas such as product placement⁴² to a more broadly. Aiming to appeal culturally and locally to entice viewership, generate revenue, advance cultural ideologies, and

⁴⁰ China's 3rd most used website, communications, and messaging system (DeGennaro, 2019).

⁴¹ One of China largest dairy and tobacco producers, it is valued at \$14 billion (Forbes).

⁴² Powers, 1996

embrace “empire” (Straubhaar, 2007; Hardt and Negri, 2000). While Hollywood production companies are still looking for way to appeal to the vast Chinese audiences culturally and economically, there is more to be seen here. Emphasizing and underlining Hollywood’s cultural presence and use of “cultural imperialism”. Already retaining a strong hold on its vast “empire”, and existing within a “third” space. Through the use of the Hollywood formula, product placement, and the blockbuster genre, China has begun to interplay within the global field and display Hollywood and China’s cultural dexterity.

Jack Ma, another of one of China’s influential businessmen, created the company Alibaba Group⁴³. Founded in the late 1990s during the height of China’s economic boom, Jack Ma produced what would become one of China largest technology companies, and in turn media companies. With the acquisition of China Vision Media, Alibaba Pictures holds stock in every major film company in China (China Film Insider, 2018). Ma’s economic influence is growing so far over the Chinese film industry he branched out to invest in Hollywood films. This can be seen through his deal with Steven Spielberg’s Amblin Partners to produce and distribute films throughout China. Aiming to enhance Hollywood’s reach in China, this allows for Amblin to have access to Alibaba’s “restricted” data on the Chinese population. Foreign companies have long been restricted by the CCP from accessing certain data on the Chinese public (Grimm, 2015). As a local company and one of China’s biggest technology providers, Alibaba is allowed access to this information. Able to manipulate and maneuver data as need to grow its entertainment impact, which through the use of Alibaba’s local resources and data gathering⁴⁴, Amblin Partners can now gain access, too (Business Insider Intelligence, 2016).

⁴³ China’s 2nd largest tech company, ranks 9th globally (Petroff, 2018).

⁴⁴ Alibaba has been gathering data on its consumers since its inception in 1999 (Ming, 2018).

Business transactions and partnerships such as this, are a perfect example of the way in which policy and economic trade continue to influence China and Hollywood's relationship. With both sides adding large contributors, they are increasing their investment in each other and in their future, solidifying further their cross-cultural guanxi, leading to a vast expansion of the "third" space they are creating, and a breadth of "imperial" wealth. Another example of "cultural" influence, redistribution of global flows, and "empire" building (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

Recently constructed movie megaplexes and an increased impact from movie theater chains such as Wanda's AMC Theatres give an already increasing urban population access to more films, which they otherwise would not have had access to. Movie multiplexes have begun to spring-up all over Chinese urban centers, and these movies theaters need films to play in them. The film deregulation policy⁴⁵ of 2003 allowed for more foreign films to be screened in China and increased the need for multi-screen movie theaters and megaplexes. Many large construction and industrial companies such Dalian Wanda Group⁴⁶ and Sunac Reality Group⁴⁷ saw an opportunity. Now that more films would be allowed to be screened and produced in China, they would need somewhere to be shown. Companies began to build movie theaters all across China. The plan worked, as the attendance in movie theaters increased dramatically. In 2005 movies theater attendance was marked around 73 million, while in 2012 the attendance increased to 472 million (Lu, 2016, p. 211). The success and opportunity leading to construction of megaplexes and malls such as Qingdao's "Oriental Movie Metropolis". People now have easy and relatively cheap access to movies across China, to Hollywood films, a cultural substructure, American ideals, and

⁴⁵ China's deregulation of cinemas (Lu, 2016, p.1).

⁴⁶ See New "Hollywood".

⁴⁷ See New "Hollywood".

a new “Chinese dream”⁴⁸. Through the construction of Western complexes such as malls and movies theaters there enhances Hollywood’s “imperial” reach and leads to the placement of stronger Hollywood style cultural ideals and further engenders Hollywood’s “cultural imperialism” (Schiller, 1976).

⁴⁸ 中国梦(zhongguo meng), China’s official slogan of the Xi Jinping era, geared to unify the people into a single belief of empowering the country (BBC, 2013).

Not so “Soft” Power:

Many economists have used the term “soft power” to describe China’s approach to its foreign policy. The term “soft power” is a phrase coined by Joseph Nye (2009) to describe a nation’s ability to co-opt, attract and work with, rather than coerce or incentivize in economic terms (p.5). Nye (2009) defines the idea of “soft power” as arising from “the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies” (p.x). Culture is a key factor within media and film industries at hand, and as with most things relating to China and its interactions with the rest of the world, policy, economics, and political ideals all become intertwined within China’s larger picture of “culture” and “soft power”, interacting with theirs’, as well as Hollywood’s cultural imperialism, “empire” and expansion and creation of culture. This last being very important in the burgeoning connection between China and Hollywood. With China being such a vast and densely populated country, the nation uses its extensive history of tradition and culture to lure other economies to come to China. Filmmakers such as Zhang Yimou and Jia Zhangke have long used China’s rich history and political affiliations to tell deeply embedded stories of struggle and despair, capture the daily life within China, counteract political outlooks. Set against backdrops of China’s abundant culture and deep-rooted tradition, the filmmakers display not only beautiful images, but stories of transformation and the ebbing tides of history. Zhang Yimou, once out-cast for being too critical of the current regime through his early films, was even touted to direct Beijing’s famous 2008 Beijing Olympics open ceremony (Zhou, 2017). In doing so, China and the CCP pose it as a way for foreign media such as Hollywood to gain access China’s expanding global reach, wide range of population, as well as continue to build their nationalistic brand (Chung, 2020). Hu Jintao stating, “we will further publicize the fine traditions of Chinese culture and

strengthen international cultural exchanges to enhance the influence of Chinese culture worldwide” (Wilson Center, n.d.). Seemingly implying, if you come understand our ways and learn our values and culture, you will have access to innumerable opportunities to work with new start-ups, local companies, wealthy investors, and growing financial market. At the same time, China is becoming modernized, taking on many Western ways of thinking. Approaches to the global economy, foreign investment, marketing, production, and industrialization, have all become part of the Chinese norm in modern China.

Many argue that China has lost some of its cultural value, in the swift industrialization and modernization of the 1980s and 1990s (Greenhalgh, 2003). President Xi Jinping, however, has come to use this idea of “soft power” to restore China’s cultural values and traditions. China’s use of “soft power” dates back to the mid 2000s when President Hu Jintao commented that China would “rejuvenate the Chinese nation” through a “thriving Chinese culture” and will “publicize the fine traditions of Chinese culture” to “enhance” the “soft power of our country” (Wilson Center, n.d.). In other words, in order for China to appeal and stand out among its global counterparts, it must use what makes China, China, to appeal to the rest of the world.

Hollywood's Brief Flirtation with China:

China's brief flirtation with Hollywood, and the short but impactful era of China-Hollywood co-productions. In the mid to late 2010s, Hollywood and China, were on a path to discover greener pastures. In a time of economic and political stability, each entity looked to boost its global impact and generate more revenue. Still playing into each other's quest for cultural power and imperial domination, yet at the same time, each vied for something new and different. A "co-production"⁴⁹ being a way to express both cultures simultaneously on screen and off. Feeding into each other's notions of "global culture" and "cultural imperialism" (Schiller, 1976 Straubhaar, 2007). "Co-productions" borrow from both cultures but are dictated through the veneer of the Hollywood formula, Hollywood ideologies, and placing deep-seeded Hollywood culture within Chinese cinema. Creating something that is both "Chinese" and Western, holding to traditional and cultural "Chinese" value, while being created the guise and leadership of Hollywood experience. A cultural, economic, political, and propagandistic mélange for supremacy.

Aynne Kokas' (2017) defines a "co-production" as a production between Hollywood and China that falls into one of four distinct groups "faux-productions", "assisted productions", "commissioned productions" and "talent exchange" (pp.74-80). This brief era of the early 2000s to the late 2010s, supersedes the current state of China-Hollywood filmmaking and their global interactions. Understanding these four "co-production" styles helps lead us to the deeper issue of "cultural imperialism", Hollywood's expansion of "empire", and the ethereal existence of the "third" space. Through the use of various tactics, economic and political maneuvers, the

⁴⁹ As described in *Hollywood Made in China* (Kokas, 2017).

implication of formulaic film production, and the use of Hollywood's "global" production style (Straubhaar, 2014). This lends to a firmer realization of seeded concepts within, the cultural intricacies involved, and Hollywood's immense global system.

Kokas' definition of "faux-productions" are films in which the negotiations are done behind closed doors. Where there are multiple steps to create an official Sino-U.S. co-production, but somewhere along the way things fell short, whether it be on the business end or the political end. These are what Kokas defines as "faux-productions", films that are in theory China-Hollywood co-productions, but on paper are not officially a recognized Sino-U.S. co-production due to the film failing one of the CCP's strict co-production regulations⁵⁰. Film import regulations and the way in which the film portrays China are examples of some of the CCP's involvement in the co-production process. These "faux-production" films allow Hollywood to test the Chinese market and research potential collaborations with Chinese ventures (Kokas, 2017, p.74). Many of Hollywood's films of the last decade fall into this category, films such as *Iron Man 3* and *Looper*. The CCP's rigid censorship rules about "distorting Chinese civilization" and a long list of "co-production" quotas led to certain scenes be added or cut to be directly to be screened and distributed in China (Grimm, 2015, p. 165; Kokas, 2017, p.75). This direct policy intervention of Sino-U.S. media dictated the domestic outcome of these films which lead to direct box-office effects. Both films have Chinese aspects, such as Chinese actors and locations and are China-Hollywood "co-productions" from a cultural standpoint, but fail to meet the CCP's policy guidelines.

⁵⁰An expansive list of criteria needed to be passed to carry the official Chinese seal of approval, must pass the CCP censorship guidelines, and have the official seal of approval from the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and TV (SAPPRFT) (MPAA, 2014).

“Assisted productions”, Kokas defines as films which are shot in China, be it for location or tax incentives, but do not reveal the location in the film. Films such as *Ultraviolet* and *Her*, are “assisted productions” (Kokas, 2017, p.77). Another prominent example is the James Bond film *Skyfall*, where the film is famously set in Shanghai, China, but is not endorsed by the Chinese government (IMDb). Shanghai was used only for its aesthetic value and visual appeal, contributing to China’s “soft power” globally. At the same time, expanding Hollywood’s “cultural imperialism” reach, enlarging both China and Hollywood’s “empire”, and parts of the film existing in Bhaba’s (2004) “third space” (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Schiller, 1976). Films like these are shot in China, with the help of local talent, but are not shown as co-productions on-screen, generally leaving the settings ambiguous. These types of films also fall under the broad umbrella of Sino-U.S. “co-productions”, as there is a mixing of cultures on set, and both China and Hollywood contribute to the end product (Kokas, 2017). Yet this acts as formulaic guidelines for laying the foundation of Hollywood “cultural imperialism” (Schiller, 1976). Setting up the dialogue through the Hollywood lens, displaying “Hollywood” ideals, exoticification of Chinese locations, and a lack of Chinese dialogue emplace Western cultural power shifts and lay the framework for the Hollywood desire of “empire” (Miller et al., 2001; Hardt and Negri, 2000)

“Talent exchange” is another large part of the recent Sino-U.S. co-production frenzy, with both Hollywood and China contributing actors to each other’s films (Kokas, 2017, p.78). This is both an on-screen cultural trade, as well as off screen. Hollywood casts Chinese talent in order to gain a more intimate rapport with the Chinese audience. China casts Western talent aiming to become more culturally relevant on an international scale and compete with Hollywood internationally. These types of exchanges can be seen in films such as Zhang Yimou’s *The Great*

*Wall*⁵¹, *Independence Day: Resurgence*, and *Pacific Rim: Uprising*⁵². Where Hollywood cast well-known Chinese actors in prominent roles on-screen to attract the Chinese audience. Chinese production companies cast actors such as Matt Damon in *The Great Wall*, to create more international appeal (Zhou, 2017). This making the film appear more similar to Hollywood productions and show its production proficiency. While still set in the realm of Hollywood “culture” and based on the blockbuster format intended to maximize profit and global exposure. *The Great Wall* intended to show that Chinese films now rival Hollywood and are big enough to attract Hollywood talent. Ultimately, the film failed to grasp the audience’s attention, falling short of cultural relevancy. The film floundered at the box office both domestically and worldwide, and was viewed as blatant pandering to the Chinese audience (Tartaglione, 2017).

Kokas’ (2017) last co-production style in relation to the theme of Hollywood and China’s cultural trade, is “Commissioned Productions” a very specific part of Hollywood and China’s co-production dialogue, but still important. “Commissioned productions” are co-productions endorsed by “a Chinese firm, for the Chinese market” (p.80). These are films that are commissioned by local companies but are marketed as a foreign product. Framed in the “shell” of an international company such as Disney, these films are actually locally made films, marketed with an international brand. Films such as *The Secret of the Magic Gourd* and *Trail of the Panda*, are branded under the label of Disney China⁵³, and encompass local production with a Hollywood moniker (Kokas, 2017, p.80). Productions like these play an important role in China and Hollywood’s co-production interactions. Using the “shell” of an already established Hollywood brand such as Disney, the two are trading culture for profit. Using Hollywood’s culture and

⁵¹ The first Hollywood financed Chinese film, Matt Damon cast as the lead actor (IMDb).

⁵² Casts John Boyega and Tian Jing (IMDb).

⁵³ Disney’s local branch of production in China, located in Shang Hai (Brzeski, 2014).

branding, mixing it with local production partners, and marketing it is as an international brand, while being inherently “Chinese”. Underlining Hollywood’s stake on “cultural imperialism” within China and broadening their “empire” in China and Chinese culture. Hollywood is slowly expanding the Disney brand and laying claim to not only physical locations within China, but paving the pathway for future endeavors, and creating a pipeline from China to Hollywood within a “cultural” and physical empire.

Another instance where the China’s censorship and strict import regulations can be seen is in 2013’s *Iron Man 3*. Already an outdated film, yet it was still timely for its global success and installment in one of Hollywood’s most profitable franchises⁵⁴. Largely created for Western audiences, there are multiple examples within the film of Hollywood production studios involved in trading cultural values with China. These cultural exchanges are a way to be accessible to mainland China, be accepted by the “Chinese” audience, as well as exist in the “third space” (Bhaba, 2004). Spreading Hollywood’s cultural imperialism throughout China and the globe, permeating into society, Chinese culture, and Chinese media (Schiller, 1976). Instances such as four extra minutes of “Chinese” footage, created by Hollywood for the Chinese audience. Product placement of well-known Chinese national brands such as Gu Li Duo, a popular dairy drink from Inner Mongolia (Tsui, 2013). Chinese actors being placed on screen for short periods of time, to add cultural significance to the Chinese film goes, and added shots of Chinese school children cheering for “Iron Man”, a clear mark targeting the population of China (Grimm, 2015). Signifying the importance of school for children, as well as the relation between the U.S. and China, and the idea of Hollywood and the West as an important global phenomena.

⁵⁴ Part Disney’s “Marvel Cinematic Universe”, ranks first all-time box office (Lynch, 2018).

Iron Man 3 stars Robert Downey Jr. as “Iron Man”⁵⁵, where he must once again save the world from a potential threat (IMDb). Hollywood and China’s cultural intermingling can be seen right away from the casting and back drop of the film. Where an evil terrorist named “The Mandarin” is plotting to destroy the world (Marvel, 2013). The role of “The Mandarin” in the film is played by Sir Ben Kingsley. Traditionally portrayed as a Chinese villain⁵⁶, the role was re-cast as a Western actor in order to comply to China’s policy regarding showing China in a negative light (Kokas, 2017). Here Hollywood allows China and the Chinese audience to dictate what they put on screen and how it is portrayed, yet it is still done through the lens of a Hollywood film. The film also cast prominent Chinese actresses Fan Bingbing and Wang Xueqi alongside Robert Downey Jr. These actresses’ roles were cut short for the Western edit of the film, but were re-edited to display China having a more impactful role in Iron Man’s future in the Chinese version of the film (Grimm, 2015). Examples such as this illustrate the cultural relationship built between Hollywood and China. The CCP, Chinese audience, and large Chinese enterprises all effect these Sino-U.S. blockbuster co-productions.

Another fairly recent example in the Sino-Hollywood “co-production” dialogue is *Pacific Rim: Uprising*⁵⁷, another big budget Hollywood blockbuster sequel starring Western and Chinese actors. The film was produced by the Hollywood production company Universal Studios and a Hollywood shell corporation⁵⁸ Legendary Entertainment. Headquartered in Hollywood, California, and run by Hollywood producers, the company is now owned by Chinese investors, and has played a large role in the overseas “co-production” of films such as this. Shot in Qingdao, China, and produced by Hollywood productions companies, *Pacific Rim: Uprising* is a clear example of the

⁵⁵ A superhero created by Marvel, wearing a robotic suit of armor (Marvel).

⁵⁶ “The Mandarin” is portrayed as Chinese in comic book variations (Marvel).

⁵⁷ The second installment in the *Pacific Rim* franchise (IMDb).

⁵⁸ As used by Kokas in *Hollywood Made in China* (Kokas, 2017, p.80).

current state of Sino-U.S. blockbuster co-productions, and exhibit the cultural liaisons between Hollywood and China.

Pacific Rim: Uprising, cast both John Boyega, an English actor of *Star Wars* fame, and Jing Tian, a famous model/actress in China (IMDb). Exemplifying Kokas' (2017) theory of "talent exchange" (p.78). Hollywood and China exchange famous actors, both vying for a larger global impact to enlarge their "empires", Hollywood slowly saturating the Chinese market through global film, as well as production influence (Hardt and Negri, 2000). The film also uses prominent Chinese landmarks such as Shanghai's Oriental Pearl and Beijing's CCTV tower to create a more culturally relevant back drop for the Chinese audience (Chiu, 2018). Playing up the cultural importance of the Chinese audience in recent Hollywood films and showing Hollywood and China's on-screen cultural trade dynamics. Portraying the "global-local dialectic", exploring the relationships between "international landscape" and "local" society (Su, 2016, p.2) Chinese media and films such as *Pacific Rim: Uprising* exemplify Hu Jintao's ambition of enhancing "the Chinese influence worldwide", which in turn increases China's "soft power", and intensifies China's quest for "empire" (Wilson Center, n.d.; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Setting the foundation on which to expand cultural relevance and "international cultural exchanges" (Wilson Center, n.d.; Nye, 2009). The film allows for the CCP and Chinese production companies to "better communicate China's messages to the world", yet still set through the backdrop of the Hollywood system (Wilson Center; Miller et al., 2001).

Jeffery Katzenburg, CEO of Walt Disney Studios from 1984-1994 and co-founder of DreamWorks Animation, teamed up with Chinese investors to create Oriental DreamWorks. A new joint venture between China and Hollywood geared toward producing content within this "third" space. Creating content in China for Chinese audiences, backed by Hollywood producers.

During President Xi Jinping's visit to the U.S. in 2012, Katzenburg was seated next to Xi at the State Department Luncheon (Kokas, 2017, p.29). This expressed the value, not only of the deal done between Katzenburg and the Chinese investors, but the importance the deal had on the relationship between the two global powers, the presence of "soft power", and cultural expansion by both parties (Nye, 2009). Being seated at the right hand next to Xi Jinping is a place regarded with high honor among the Chinese culture. Demonstrating the involvement of politics, economic policy, cultural power, and the important role Hollywood plays in the implanting "cultural" value and implementing "empire". Through the creation of the new brand, the two sides are also contributing to the future of the relationship or "guanxi" between China and Hollywood, the trust and value placed in each other, and the expansion of the "third" space (Bhaba, 2004). In 2018 Oriental DreamWorks studio was purchased by Shanghai based CMC Capital Partners and rebranded as Pearl Studio. Already eight years in established, the studio has gone on to produce some of the biggest animated features of past half decade, features such as *Kung Fu Panda 3* and *Abominable* (Tartaglione, 2018). The recent change in ownership has now modified the nature of the relationship, culminating and existing in Bhaba's (2004) "third space". A Hollywood backed studio, owned by Chinese investors, ran by Chinese media conglomerates, and established through the Hollywood media system. Exhibiting both "Chinese" and Hollywood cultural ideologies and practices, set in the theme of Hollywood's formulaic and production "empire" (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

One example of this so called "third space" or building of "guanxi", is through looking at the actual on-screen relationship that China and Hollywood have built over the past decade. Through extensive product placement, initiated by Hollywood and their production companies. Hollywood has strategically placed Chinese products and brands throughout its recent "co-

production” films to try and gain an edge in appeal to the Chinese audience (Kokas, 2017). A way to use their “imperial” status and “cultural” approach to generate a larger audience and slowly permeate Hollywood “culture” into Chinese ideology. In doing so, Hollywood cut down one of the most important parts of building a relationship and laying foundation. The importance of a “guanxi” type connection. Hollywood companies, such as Paramount Studios and Twentieth Century Fox⁵⁹ blatantly placing Chinese products in their films to appeal to their audience. Both Western and Chinese audiences have seen through this, many Chinese film goers deeming it “lazy” and “clumsy”. Viewing it just as a way to pander to Chinese conglomerates (Further, 2018). Hollywood companies cut out the cultural aspect, to gain direct ties to income, and in doing so lose the cultural connection all together, but lay foundations for deeper Hollywood cultures to penetrate.

No longer creating attempts at building guanxi or establishing a longer lasting “cultural” relationship and impact, but instead using the Chinese audience as a means to greater revenue and to expand Hollywood’s “cultural imperialism” (Schiller, 1976). Bestowing Hollywood functions, production techniques, and Hollywood “culture” in China, Chinese cinema, and the Chinese audience. Instead of building a rapport with China, the Chinese audience, and the “Chinese” culture, understanding cultural complexities and views on global film. Hollywood has glossed over relationship building to gain access to their newly discovered wealth. Leaving many Chinese film goers with a sour taste in their mouth, potentially turning them off to these certain franchises all together. An overt example of Hollywood’s imperialistic approach that was shot down by both China and the Chinese audience. Hollywood still leaving its cultural residue within the Chinese market, penetrating and amalgamating with Chinese values, politics, and economics. Hybridizing

⁵⁹ 21st Century Fox was purchased by Disney in 2018 (Schwartz, 2019).

and synthesizing in the genesis of the Sino-Hollywood “third” space (Bhaba, 2004). Advancing Hollywood media and “empire” further into China and Chinese culture (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Through formulaic product placement, use of “Hollywood” production companies, and the blockbuster format (Kokas, 2017).

In *Independence Day: Resurgence*, Hollywood production companies hired out to local Chinese companies for cultural product placement. Mengniu, China’s biggest dairy supplier, teamed up with Hollywood filmmakers to have their product placed prominently on screen throughout the film (Ka-sing, 2017). But the Chinese audience saw through this shallow ploy as “only being concerned about extracting more money from the Chinese market” through box office revenue (Xi, 2016). Overshadowing China and Hollywood’s growing guanxi and simplifying it to just a monetary transaction. In doing so, the film lost some of its cultural relevance, making it a less attractive film for the Chinese market. Effecting Hollywood’s advances within Chinese society, Chinese production companies, Chinese culture, and its relationship with burgeoning conglomerates. Acts such as these cutting off ties to the Chinese market and obfuscating access to their lucrative market.

Twentieth Century Fox’s *Independence Day: Resurgence*, set in 2016, twenty years after the original film takes place, is a film largely geared toward nostalgia, technological prowess, and a military might. A perfect example of Hollywood’s cultural expansion and “empire”, yet still tying into politics and policy with China, the Chinese government, and China’s use of “soft power” to influence and impact worldwide. Films such as this, existing in Bhaba’s (2004) “third” space, inseminating “cultural imperialism” and an expansion of “empire” into Chinese film and media (Schiller, 1976; Hardt and Negri, 2000). Establishing direct connections to Hollywood’s vast production system and constructing networks within China for which Hollywood to operate.

Already four years later, the film is reminiscent of predicting the future of Hollywood-Chinese cinema, and is candidly marketed as cross-cultural, having both Chinese and Western actors, and Chinese and American technology. In *Independence Day: Resurgence*, Twentieth Century Fox cast big stars like Liam Hemsworth and Jeff Goldblum alongside Chinese actor/model Angelababy. In casting Chinese actors, Hollywood has begun to willingly make an effort to engage Chinese audiences. They have begun to generate a positive “guanxi” with the culture that is based on more than just revenue. Casting Chinese actors alongside Western ones, plays into a cultural power play. It displays both equal political power, cultural prominence, as well as valuing both cultures equally. When audiences, especially Chinese ones, view these films, they see a powerful China, rivaling America in both technology, economics, and politics and might. It gives the mainstream audience, albeit a very nuanced one, a country to believe in. This is the power cultural guanxi, the power of these third space films. Generating content for both sides to create a new hybrid blend of culture (Bhaba, 2004).

This can also be seen in franchises like Universal Picture’s *Pacific Rim: Uprising*. Another film set in the near future, centered around a joint China-U.S. operation to save the world from aliens. Set in the year 2035 on a joint military base operated by the world’s superpowers, China and the United States. Shot in Qingdao’s “Oriental Movie Metropolis”, *Pacific Rim: Uprising* sets the tone for American and Chinese governments working together for the future of planet earth. With a budget of \$180 million, the film went on to gross \$290 million globally, a third of the total revenue coming China alone⁶⁰ (Box Office Mojo). In watching these films, it is easy to see the cultural relationship building taking place in the form of international policy, economics, and military. In addition to the on screen and co-production of Chinese-Western co-stars, production

⁶⁰ China box office grossed \$99,488,362 (Box Office Mojo).

companies, and locations. While behind the scenes Hollywood continues to build its global “empire”, enhancing cultural relevancy. Hollywood once again showing value in China, Chinese technology, and production. Acknowledging China’s economic and political might both on-screen and through production of the film. Hollywood invests in “cultural guanxi”, maintains “cultural imperialism” through the format and production of the film, all while existing in the “third” space the two have created.

The film highlights China’s economic might, showcasing China’s urban centers, having China rival the United States technologically, even going so far as to have Tian Jing save the day. China’s fictional “Shao Industries” is highlighted throughout the film, with the Jaegers headquartered in China (Yoshida, 2018). The film is largely backed by the China-Hollywood production company Legendary Pictures Entertainment, originally a subsidiary of Warner Brothers and Universal Pictures (IMDb). Financing the film and allowing access to American studios and post-production studios, infiltrating Hollywood culture globally and disseminating Hollywood’s “cultural imperialism” within China (Schiller, 1976).

With *Independence Day: Resurgence*, the sequel had long been awaited. Both Chinese and American production companies had been involved in the production process of this film. *Independence Day: Resurgence* cast actors from both sides of the pond casting an up and coming Liam Hemsworth and a prominent Chinese model in Angelababy. These [not-so] subtle cues as casting popular Chinese actors in American blockbusters, stem from the selling of Legendary Pictures to Wanda Group⁶¹. Although 20th Century Fox was the main studio behind the film, it allowed for and hoped, that by casting a well-known Chinese actress in Angelababy, the film might better attract a Chinese audience overseas. Another interesting plot point in the building of this global

⁶¹ See New “Hollywood”.

franchise, is that 20th Century Fox had the Chinese military and U.S. military working together to defend the earth (Pressberg, 2016). This displays on a much larger scale the U.S.'s investment in China and China's future, as well as China's value to the U.S. By presenting the two militaries side by side, this demonstrates that Hollywood companies have come to view China as its equal. Creating equal military might and having the two countries work together to save the world, also contains political implications, as it is showing that both governments should be able to work together. Existing in a celestial "third" space, non-existent in the world, yet still having cultural ties to the realities involved.

In the end, *Independence Day: Resurgence* didn't outperform its global counterparts in the U.S., bringing in a steady \$75 million in box office revenue, roughly a quarter of its \$272 million total (Box Office Mojo). To examine why the film did not perform as well as hoped in China, we can go trace it back to a few factors. First, being that the original film *Independence Day* released in 1996, did not screen in China (IMDb, Pressberg, 2016). This leading to the sequel being an unfamiliar name in comparison to the other blockbuster names being release in the summer of 2016. With films such as *Captain America: Civil War*⁶², *Warcraft*⁶³, and *Now You See Me 2*⁶⁴, all being released in the same summer, this left *Independence Day: Resurgence* in a tough situation, competing with other popular household names. Secondly, the use of QQ and Mengniu was viewed by many Chinese film goers as a weak attempt to exploit their interests and culture. Feeling that these products were only placed in the film as a way to pander to their culture and bring in more income (Robinson, 2016). Although this does play into China's long game of developing their "soft power" and growing a larger brand globally. It also aids in augmenting

⁶² Part of Disney's vast "Marvel Cinematic Universe", grossed \$1,153,296,293 worldwide, \$180,794,517 Chinese box office (Box Office Mojo).

⁶³ \$439,048,914 worldwide, \$225,547,500 China box office (Box Office Mojo).

⁶⁴ \$334,897,606 worldwide, \$97,115,220 China box office (Box Office Mojo).

Hollywood's global footprint and brings Hollywood to a more established cultural role in China, through familiarity and connections through the Chinese film industry. Advancing Hollywood's cultural imperialistic footprint in China through capitalism and traditional Hollywood formulaic approaches. Solidifying the establishment of Hollywood's "empire" in China (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

This can be seen in Hollywood's recent approach to modern China. Apart from the economic transactions done between China and Hollywood, Hollywood has also started to use China's "soft power" to entice the population to continue to invest in Hollywood blockbusters (Nye, 2009). Casting well known, young, attractive Chinese men and women, in films as a way to try and charm the large Chinese population and enhance cultural "guanxi". Tian Jing, Donnie Yen, Angelababy, and Kris Wu have all been cast in recent Hollywood blockbusters, such as Donnie Yen in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, Tian Jing in *Pacific Rim: Uprising*, and both Kris Wu and Donnie Yen in *xXx: Return of Xander Cage* (IMDb). All of these are large franchises in Hollywood, where the studios rely on these films to bring in sizable profits for the year. The fact that Hollywood production companies cast Chinese actors shows they are trying to broaden their cultural reach and bring in more revenue. Films like these were meant to reach large audiences, where many people all over the world would go see these films, most likely on a large movie theater screen. While Hollywood was aware that these films would reach large audiences worldwide, they were more interested in what they could get from China as an economy and a nation. Cracking into a new audience and a new culture to create new ventures. China is interested in increasing "soft power" and cultural influence globally, while establishing "empire" and cultural "guanxi" with Hollywood and Hollywood studios (Nye, 2009, Hardt and Negri, 2000).

Overlapping with Hollywood's "cultural imperialistic" roots and slowly permeating into to cultural relevancy and strengthening economic and political influence worldwide (Schiller, 1976).

*xXx*⁶⁵, a franchise long thought to be dead, was re-booted with China specifically in mind. The film was produced mainly by Chinese film companies such as Shanghai based HuaHua Media⁶⁶ and Shanghai Film Group in conjunction with Hollywood based Revolution Studios (huahuamedia; IMDb; Revolution Studios). This allowing these Chinese companies to have a larger role in the production of the film and guiding the film to toward the Chinese public. The film has the budget of a Hollywood blockbuster, the guidance of Hollywood producers, but the insight and access from Chinese production companies. Allowing for the story to play out in the Hollywood formula, as more American style blockbuster, but still access the mainland "Chinese" culture. In *xXx: The Return of Xander Cage*, Donnie Yen is cast alongside Vin Diesel⁶⁷, a worldwide celebrity, showing Chinese media companies their investment in the Chinese culture and the value of their interactions. Vin Diesel, already the leading actor in the Fast and the Furious franchise, is one of the biggest names in Hollywood. With casting Donnie Yen alongside Vin Diesel, the franchise essentially invests their future with an entire culture, while swelling their culture into the Chinese market, Chinese media, and embarking on a larger quest to ascertain "empire". Showing they value more than just their money but want to be partners in the future and exchange culturally as well as economically (Hardt and Negri, 2000). The film also stars Kris Wu, or as he is known in China, Wu Yifan⁶⁸, one of the biggest stars in China (IMDb). Appearing on billboards, magazines, television ads, and even in McDonald's ads. Wu has been the star of many Chinese films, as well as being a well-known hip-hop artist in China's music industry

⁶⁵ The original released in 2002 (IMDb).

⁶⁶ One of China's recent film investment firms (huahuamedia).

⁶⁷ The star of the original film (IMDb).

⁶⁸ 吴亦凡

(Young, 2020). Exemplifying Hollywood “culture” through a “Chinese” lens. Taking an existing Hollywood blockbuster franchise, established Hollywood box office stars, and a preexisting formula to maximize box office revenue and cultural effects. Channeled through the Chinese producers and the lens of cultural “guanxi”. An embodiment of Hollywood’s “cultural imperialism”, augmented through the pretext of Chinese pop-culture, and encompassing the “third” space (Bhaba, 2004). Laying a pathway for which Hollywood to divulge and engender larger cultural ramifications and actualizations. *xXx: The Return of Xander Cage*, went on to be a major hit in China, grossing \$164 million in the Chinese box office, compared to only \$44 million domestic (Mendelson, 2017). Doubling the film’s budget of \$85 million in China alone (Box Office Mojo).

Conclusion:

Through examining the theories further that we have come to understand Hollywood's global presence, revenue approach, and basis for cultural expansion. By understanding further Hollywood's approach to China, China's cultural liaisons with Hollywood production companies, and the underlying issues involved we can start to fully understand the current state of Hollywood-China co-productions, the paths they are taking, and where they may lead. Through developing theory and examining existing concepts therein lays the blueprint for which China and Hollywood can work further and one in which we must grasp to fully understand, the political, economic, and cultural impacts. Herbert Schiller's (1976) theory "cultural imperialism", Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2000) concept of "empire", and Homi Bhaba's (2004) idea of "third space" ultimately all tie into Hollywood's relationship with China, their burgeoning interactions, and economic and political interactions. Film will always exist in an intangible form, and through the creation with various enterprises and parties it's inevitable they all intertwine, manifesting in something new. Due to the current state of the world, the future of film is precarious and the reactions between China and Hollywood prove now different. China already pulling out to try and manifest its own cultural creations, global blockbusters, and worldwide phenomena. But in doing so, it has prescribed itself to Hollywood, Hollywood ideals, and the production of "Hollywood" style movies (Miller et al., 2001). The concept of global blockbuster invariably is a Western ideal and has a Hollywood precursor.

Through China expanding its "soft power" and cultural influences, it indelibly broadens and strengthens Hollywood's grasp on "cultural imperialism" and pioneers Hollywood's expansive "empire" (Schiller, 1976; Hardt and Negri, 2000). The use of formulas and ideals

already set in place enact the infrastructure for which Hollywood to build. The recent rise in Sino-Hollywood “co-productions” is here to stay with the deep-seated effects yet to be realized (Kokas, 2017). The long-lasting effect of Hollywood’s Sino implications, although already in flux, won’t be fully felt for years to come. Until China’s film industry has become fully established, integrated, and able to generate global content within its own right. Only then will the seams of Hollywood’s residual “imperialism” be realized and altered, enhancing China’s global box office stake, and realigning the “empire” powers and cultural “third space” (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Bhaba, 2004). Only through time and space, the interactions within the “third” realm, the “imperial” distinctions attached, and ossification and appropriation of “empire” will we come to fully grasp what may come of either industry (Bhaba, 2004; Hardt and Negri, 2000).

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