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**Mainstream cinema as a tool for  
China's soft power**

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*To the two stars that have guided me from above*

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## 引言

本毕业论文主要研究主流电影作为中国软实力的工具。软实力的概念是九十年代初由美国政治学家哈佛大学教授约瑟夫·奈提出的。最近几十年中国经历了空前的经济发展，如今它是世界第二大经济体。并且，中国电影产业和市场也经历了非常重要的发展。现在中国是全球第二大电影市场。

这篇论文分为三个部分。

第一个部分注重关于软实力这个概念的定义和中国软实力时代的开端。

软实力这个概念取决于塑造人的喜好。所以，它体现在吸引力与影响力上。软实力建立在无形力量的基础上，实际上一个国家的软实力包括三个方面：文化、政治价值观和外交政策。文化软实力是这三个方面中最重要的一個。根据约瑟夫·奈的说法，除了软实力以外，还有硬实力。软实力与硬实力是力量的两个方面，硬实力跟软实力是不一样的。硬实力主要是指武装和经济力量。由于它们指的是不同的手段，所以软实力和硬实力的结果当然不同。硬实力注重威胁，是一个你看得见的力量。所以当个国家使用硬实力的时候，其结果是威胁，而不是因为它吸引人。换句话说，软实力像一块磁铁一样，因为它有影响人的行动、喜好、意见等等的能力。

随着最近几年不断的变化，中国开始感觉到树立国家形像的重要性，特别是在天安门事件之后。这是因为，关于“中国威胁论”这个说法，中国不希望别的国家从它们的角度来看中国，中国不是一个有威胁的国家，它希望被认为是一个和平、诚实、有文化底蕴的国家。考虑到这一点，中国领导人认识到树立国家积极形象在国际上的重要性。对中国领导人来说，现在软实力越来越重要，中国通过软实力这个工具可以促进自己的形象。

如前所述，文化是软实力最重要的方面也是中国最强的价值体现。为此，中国传统文化和流行文化（特别是电影）都是中国政府最强有力的工具。

为了实现这个目标，中国应该以好莱坞电影为例。这么多年，好莱坞在塑造美国的软实力方面发挥着枢纽的作用。好莱坞电影在世界各国出口了美国文化、价值观、生活方式和美国梦。这样做，美国境外的人们就开始对美国感兴趣了，同时也开始被它吸引。

中国软实力的概念大概是 2000 年中期开始受政府与领导人重视的。首先，2007 年在中国共产党第十七次全国代表大会上，中国前国家主席胡锦涛倡议提高国家软实力的重要性。然后，同样的概念也是由当前国家主席习近平提出来的。那时候，他不仅提出了文化软实力的重要性，他也提出了中国梦的意义。

因此，中国开始走向了国家软实力的提升。比如，2004年在首尔中国建立了第一个孔子学院。几年后，在2008年和2010年中国成功的主办了奥运会和上海世博会。

第二个部分讨论关于文化软实力和中国电影产业。

这篇论文的第二个部分涉及到很多方面。首先讨论了关于中国在国家影业与美国影业上的投资。最近几年，中国影业和市场也发生了很大的变化。很多人认为在2020年内中国会成为世界上最大的电影市场。目前，最重要的投资和收购都是由万达集团进行的。这些投资对中国非常重要，因为它们一边促进了国家经济的发展，一边在国外宣传了中国的形象。

中国影业有了很大的进步。从2012年到2015年中国的电影市场增长了百分之三十三，并且2016年，中国拍摄了772部影片。电影票房的收入也越来越高。

在这个方面，中国在国际舞台上受到越来越多的关注。电影节的作用也十分重要，因为中国电影从业人员可以趁这个机会跟更多的国家的电影人建立联系，也可以多一个机会展示主办电影节的城市。虽然现在形势改变了，但是一些年前中国电影业曾面临一场严重的危机。在八十和九十年代中国经历的改革也影响到了电影行业。这个危机的主要原因是电影制片厂的资金危机与观影人数不足。所以，为了解决这个复杂的形势，中国政府决定把好莱坞电影从新引进中国市场。可是，起初这个决定说起来容易做起来难，因为在中国政府内有人同意这个提议，有人反对这个提议。最后，1994年他们进口了第一部美国大片。从1994年开始，中国建立了电影进口配额。通过这个进口配额中国每年进口十部外国电影。然后，2001年中国加入世贸组织之后，电影进口配额的数目增加到了20部。几年后，2012年在中国和美国之间谅解备忘录的签署之后，电影进口配额的数目增加到了34部。

那时，虽然中国观众、市场与票房对好莱坞电影的反应十分积极，但是中国政府非常担心。这些担心主要在于好莱坞会占领国家的电影市场与票房的可能性。并且，政府也担心这些电影会影响中国观众的认识与中国的文化。所以，为了最小化好莱坞在中国电影市场的影响，以及为了保护国家影业中国想出来的办法就是主旋律电影的上映。这些主旋律电影体现中国的核心价值观。从1994年到2000年，中国采取的措施就是使用好莱坞电影进口的收入以资助国家的主旋律电影。不过，看来中国政府采取的措施没有成功，因为那时由于国家的历史形势中国的观众对国内的电影不感兴趣。毫无疑问，那时候好莱坞电影对中国电影业的帮助非常大，现在它们仍然是中国影业十分重要的组成部分。

然后，第二个部分重视主旋律电影与中国梦的关系。以两部电影《厉害了，我的国》和《中国合伙人》为例。中国梦是国家主席习近平的特色，总之它体现国家和中华民族的梦想。

《厉害了，我的国》是一部2018年的纪录片，并打破了票房纪录。这部电影注重中国在国内

家主席习近平的领导下最后五年的成功，它也说明国家在很多不同的领域的改变。再说，这部表现出别人能做的事，中国人也能做。也许做得更好。这部电影体现主旋律电影与中国梦，因为观众可以了解到中国共产党领导的价值，同时实现中国梦的重要性。

电影《中国合伙人》对于中国梦十分重要。这部电影是 2013 年上映的。它以八十年代初为背景，是一个中国人梦想改变自己的命运。首先，电影中的三个角色努力地学习以实现他们的梦想，当然还有他们的美国梦。最后，这三个朋友实现的梦想是中国梦。鉴于美国梦的期望不符合现实，中国梦成为一个具体的、最能成功的现实。此外，关于成东青这个角色的人生旅程、抉择、梦想与希望这些方面，这一点跟 1925 年由美国作家弗朗西斯·斯科特·菲茨杰拉德写的小说《了不起的盖茨比》的绿灯有关系。电影的另外一个非常重要的部分是电影的最后几分钟，展示中国企业家成功的照片。这样做就强调中国梦的价值。

这篇论文分析的第三部电影是《战狼 II》。这部着重电影作为软实力的提升的重要工具。

《战狼 II》是一部 2017 年的电影，在中国观众中获得了空前的成功，同时它的票房收入也很高。这部电影的重要性不仅在于软实力这个方面，而且有一些变化。这些变化主要包括好莱坞叙事与商业结合的特色。非常幸运，它遇到了习近平主席与中国政府提升国家软实力的目标及在国际舞台上促进中国的积极形象。此外，《战狼 II》以非洲为背景，所以为中国和非洲这两个地区建立了非常重要的关系。因为这样观众可以看出中国在非洲的影响是良好的。这部电影的软实力提升十分重要，通过这种电影中国观众不仅可以了解现在中国的形势与不断的变化，也可以影响国际观众对中国的感觉。这样做，人们就可以从新认识中国。

最后，这篇论文的第三个部分讨论关于中美电影合作制作。

最近几年，中国电影事业也发生了很大的变化，并且经历了空前的发展。所以，这些原因引起了好莱坞的关注。一边，了解到中国影业的潜力，并为了扩大它的市场和收入，好莱坞开始对中国电影业越来越感兴趣。一边，中国由于学习与扩大它的影响的原因也对好莱坞感兴趣。虽然这两个国家的目的不同，但是它们需要彼此来实现它们的目标。

这样，中国与美国的关系越来越密切，中美电影合作越来越频繁。此外，这篇论文也提到了这些电影合作带来的好处和坏处。中国的电影审查制度很严格。这些规定对好莱坞的影响很大。

然后，最后一个部分注重中国电影中存在的问题和文化区别这两个方面。为了影响国际观众，并让他们对中国电影越来越感兴趣，中国电影人应该注意文化体现在电影中的重要性。



## Introduction

This thesis focuses on the description and on the analysis of China's soft power, and takes into consideration cinema as a tool to promote it. China has experienced an unprecedented economic growth in the last thirty years, and along with it, in the last few years, the Chinese film industry and market have reached important achievements becoming the world's second largest film industry after Hollywood.

This dissertation is structured in three chapters.

The first chapter gives an overview on the definition of the concept of soft power proposed by the political analyst and professor Joseph S. Nye Jr, and on the introduction of this concept in the People's Republic of China. The concept of soft power is based on three main pillars, namely culture, political values and foreign policies. For the purpose of this final dissertation, I will focus my attention on the cultural aspect of soft power.

The concept of soft power has started to become increasingly more intertwined with the country's need to change its international image, and it has become one of the most important aspects and goals of the Chinese government and of its leaders. In fact, the importance to focus on the country's soft power was first stressed by the former President Hu Jintao, and it was further emphasized by the current President Xi Jinping. The chapter then focuses on culture as one of the most important soft power tools, underlining the country's first steps towards it.

The second chapter of this thesis focuses on cultural soft power and on the Chinese film industry. As previously stated, the Chinese film market and industry now play an important international role, therefore, it concentrates on giving an overview regarding the Chinese investments both in the domestic and in the United States film market. As we will see, Hollywood and China have a long relationship behind them. This chapter is then followed by the analysis of three films, *Amazing China* (《厉害了, 我的国》), *American Dreams in China* (《中国合伙人》) and *Wolf Warrior II* (《战狼 II》). The first two films are taken into consideration with the aim to find a correlation between main melody films and Xi Jinping's Chinese dream. Whereas, the third film analysed sets an important example regarding the application of soft power in films and the success of its outcomes.

The third and last chapter focuses its attention on the collaborations between China and the United States (Hollywood). It describes the different types of collaborations between the two, the hurdles and the challenges that Hollywood filmmakers have to face when they decide to establish a collaboration or when they simply try to enter the Chinese market through film imports. Ultimately, the issues and the cultural discount that international audiences might find in Chinese films are taken into consideration. As the Chinese film market and industry keep growing, in order to fulfil the

country's goal, to enhance its soft power through cinema and to have more of an impact on international audiences, Chinese filmmakers should try to find the right key ingredients and balance as a way to meet the viewing tastes and expectations of international spectators as well.

## Chapter one

### Soft power: a general overview and the beginning of China's soft power era

#### 1.1 Joseph Nye's definition of soft power

The concept of soft power was first proposed and defined by the political analyst and the Harvard University professor Joseph S. Nye Jr. at the beginning of the 1990s. When he first coined this concept, Nye was solely referring to the United States. But, it eventually gained momentum and other countries started to focus on their soft power as well. In recent years, the concept of soft power caught the attention of many political leaders as they have begun to give increasingly more importance to their countries' soft power, and to mention it in their public speeches.

According to Joseph Nye, power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants.<sup>1</sup> In relation to this, Nye outlines two different types of power: hard power and soft power. Countries are more familiar with the concept of hard power rather than soft power as the recognition of the latter is quite recent in international politics. I will give the definition of both hard power and soft power, focusing more on the definition of soft power.

They both are the two sides of power; however, the two shouldn't be confused or understood as the same side of power. This is because, most of the time, these two concepts are intertwined with one another, hence, they might be perceived as one. By doing so, the important differences that characterise these two terms and powers are not taken into great consideration.

Both hard power and soft power have the ability to achieve one's purpose by influencing the behaviour of others. But, the results of their competences and the means through which they can exercise their influence are completely different.

As mentioned above, everyone is more familiar with the concept of hard power. Given the term hard power, and focusing on the words it is made up of, the means through which it can exercise its influence are quite strong. In fact, hard power focuses on the military and on the economic force in order to influence the behaviour of others. Joseph Nye in his book *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics* (2004), gave a clear definition about hard power: it can rest on inducements ("carrots") and threats ("sticks").<sup>2 3</sup> Therefore, considering the tools used by hard power, it focuses its attention on tangible means. A country or a leader may prefer the use of inducements and threats against other countries in order to obtain the outcomes one wants.

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<sup>1</sup> NYE, Joseph S. Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2004, chapter 1, position 159-160.

<sup>2</sup> NYE, Joseph S. Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> NYE, *Soft Power*..., cit., paragraph 2, position 213-214.

Hence, the outcomes are based on threats and obligations, and not because one wants to do it or feels attracted to it.

On the other hand, the concept of soft power focuses on different tools in order to exercise its influence on others. These tools, indeed, are not the ones used by hard power.

When one thinks about soft power, attraction and culture are the two things that should immediately come to mind. As Joseph Nye argued, soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it is closer to the power of attraction and seduction.

Nye further argued that a country's soft power is based on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad) and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority).<sup>5</sup> Taking into consideration these three resources, culture is considered as the most important and effective manifestation of soft power. Therefore, bearing in mind what characterises soft power, we can see that, unlike hard power, soft power focuses on intangible means.

If a country has an attractive culture, true political values and good policies, other countries are more likely to admire its values, to be inspired by it and to imitate its example.<sup>6</sup> When a country manages to achieve the outcomes it wants through its appeal and attraction, without threatening or forcing others, this means that a country's soft power is working.

Moreover, soft power rests on co-optive power (the ability to shape what others want), meanwhile hard power rests on command power (the ability to change what others want through inducement).<sup>7</sup>

|                       | Hard                            | Soft                                 |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Spectrum of Behaviors | Command ← coercion inducement → | agenda setting attraction → Co-opt   |
| Most Likely Resources | force sanctions payments bribes | institutions values culture policies |

(Figure 1. Hard power and soft power matrix. Source: Joseph S. Jr. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, position 255).

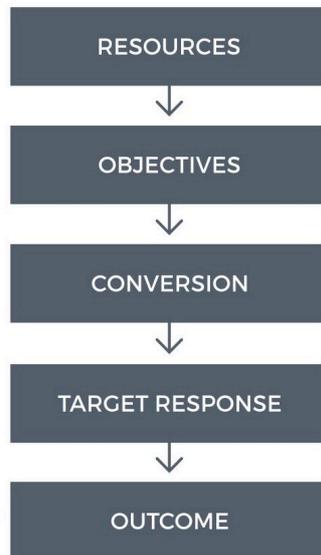
<sup>4</sup> NYE, *Soft Power*..., cit., par. 2, position 219-220.

<sup>5</sup> NYE, *Soft Power*..., cit., par. 3, position 307-309.

<sup>6</sup> NYE, Joseph S. Jr., *The Benefits of Soft Power*, in “HSB Working Knowledge”, 2004, available at: <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/the-benefits-of-soft-power>, (accessed on July 10, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> NYE, *Soft Power*..., cit., par. 2, position 250-251.

Joseph Nye also developed a five steps model that shows the adaptation process of soft power starting from its resources to its desired outcomes.



(Figure 2. Soft power conversion process. *Source:* The Soft power 30, 2017, p. 29)

For a country, it is fundamental to understand what are the resources available (that can be used as soft power resources), what are the channels or the tools through which they can be more efficient, identify the target and see if their response led to the outcomes one was expecting.<sup>8</sup>

In the last few years, global debates and the attention on soft power have increased. Many countries have soft power resources, and each one of them might focus on different aspects of its resources in order to be attractive to others. Furthermore, it is important to outline that the concept of soft power may depend on the country and on the government, because a country's soft power strategy can be more or less planned out by its government.

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<sup>8</sup> THE SOFT POWER 30, *A Global Ranking of Soft Power*, 2017, available at: <https://softpower30.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2017-Web-1.pdf>, p. 29, (accessed on July 16, 2018).

## 1.2 Culture: the core of soft power

As previously mentioned, culture is one of the most important soft power tools and one of China's latest assets.<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, Chinese leaders acknowledged the increasingly important international role that the country has achieved in the last few years, becoming a major power. Therefore, they decided to adopt a soft power strategy and to focus more on creating a more positive international image of the country. This is because the Chinese government wants the rest of the world to perceive China under a new light, as they should start seeing it as a culturally powerful, as well as a good and trustworthy country.

Consequently, in order to achieve the goal that the government and its leaders have in mind, they have started to take small steps towards it. In the last ten years China has been engaged in many investments in different fields as a way to boost its soft power. On the one hand, the country has started to benefit from these investments, and they managed to help China's position on the international stage; on the other hand, China's cultural soft power still lags behind the one of its western rivals, especially the United States.<sup>10</sup>

As it will be explained in the next chapters, this sudden need to promote China's cultural soft power was, in the first place, stressed by the former Chinese President Hu Jintao 胡锦涛. A few years later, this concept was further emphasized by the current Chinese President Xi Jinping 习近平. The Chinese government considers culture and values as the two most important factors of its soft power strategy. In 2014, President Xi Jinping stressed the importance to promote China's cultural soft power and to better communicate China's soft power message to the rest of the world.<sup>11</sup>

As already mentioned in the first paragraph, the concept of soft power may depend on the country, and its strategy may be (more or less) planned out by the country's government. As far as China is concerned, its soft power strategy is not independent of the government, but rather, its strategy and the necessity to foster it is planned out by the State. Therefore, taking this into consideration, many may see the Chinese government as too controlling, that pulls the strings from behind the curtains. The role of culture as the core of soft power is still mainly understood as being dominated, directed, and controlled by the government; and as we will see in the case of film writers, filmmakers, artists and so forth, they may be more or less willing to offer their support.<sup>12</sup> However,

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<sup>9</sup> THE SOFT POWER 30, 2018, available at: <https://softpower30.com/country/china/>, (accessed on July 16, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> THE SOFT POWER 30, *A Global Ranking...*, cit., pp. 70-71.

<sup>11</sup> More information about President Xi Jinping's speech available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-01/01/content\\_17208354.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-01/01/content_17208354.htm), (accessed on July 25, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> VOICI, Paola, LUO Hui (edited by), *Screening China's Soft Power*, London, Routledge, 2017, p. 6.

China has many aces in the hole; meaning that, it has many cultural tools that can be used to promote and screen its soft power.

Knowing that China has a rich, unique, attractive culture and national heritage, all of this can be exploited to the benefit of the country's image, as a way to export its culture around the world and to show China's positive features that can appeal to other countries.

In fact, Chinese traditional culture has always had the power to attract. Joseph Nye further argued that in the West people have always had an interest in Chinese traditional culture, and that in a few years from now the influence and spread of modern culture might further boost this interest.<sup>13</sup> He also refers to when, in 2012, the Chinese novelist Mo Yan 莫言 won the Nobel prize for literature, emphasizing the fact that this not only can be seen as a positive impact, but also as an additional development of modern culture and the value of soft power.<sup>14</sup>

Culture can be characterised by many different aspects, and it can be divided into two categories: high culture and popular culture.

High culture is characterised by the fact that it only offers entertainment for the elites; metaphorically speaking, it can be seen as a closed circle. While, popular culture can provide entertainment for the masses as well as for the elites.

Popular culture includes television, films and pop music. It is important to outline that Beijing shouldn't only focus on its historical culture as a way to appeal to and to influence others; but rather, it should focus on the promotion of its pop-culture as well. This is because, unlike high culture, pop-culture has the advantage of being more accessible and understandable to audiences around the world. For instance, South Korea and the United States enjoy an important international role thanks to the export and the success of their popular culture around the world.

The United States has always been the leading country in this particular field thanks to its music, TV shows, and especially, thanks to its film industry. In fact, Hollywood films have always had a pivotal role in the promotion of the American culture, economy, lifestyle, and of the American dream around the world for years.

Consequently, exporting pop culture can be a vehicle through which the rest of the world comes to know and can be attracted to the United States.<sup>15</sup> By doing so, Hollywood plays an important role in the promotion of the American soft power as it also helped to increase the country's power.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://csef.ru/en/politica-i-geopolitica/416/dzhozef-naj-myagkaya-sila-kitaya-v-kitajskoj-mechte-4982>, 2013, (accessed on June 6, 2018)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> CHUA Beng Huat, *Structure, audience and soft power in East Asian pop culture*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2012, p. 7.

Films can be considered as an essential part of a country's culture. Pop-culture in general, but more importantly, films are a tool that can have an influence on spectators, because they can shape and affect their opinions and mind-sets.

### 1.3 The entry of the concept of soft power in China and its translations

China's rapid economic growth surprised many countries around the world. Since the reform and opening up (*kaifang gaige* 开放改革) that was put into practice by the former Chinese President Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 in the early 1980s, China has experienced an unprecedented economic growth that was further endorsed when the country officially joined the World Trade Organization (hereafter WTO) in 2001. Now, China has become the second world economy and it hopes to become the first world economy by 2050. Although China has reached important achievements, not all the countries see China under the same light. On the one hand, many countries look upon China as a development model, an example to follow and are willing to collaborate with it; on the other hand, there are some countries that are still reluctant.<sup>16</sup>

Around the middle of the 1990s, the Chinese government felt the need to change China's world image and the way it was perceived by other countries around the world. Many countries saw China under a bad light. In fact, this is the main reason that led China to start working on its international image by changing its facade and going from the China-threat theory to a country that wants a peaceful rise, and where there can be opportunities for others.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the Tian'anmen incident in 1989 and the aftermath, were a troublesome period for China and a substantial part of its image and appeal definitely didn't benefit from it. A few years after the Tian'anmen incident, China started rolling up its sleeves and decided that the time to do something about its world image had finally come. Therefore, Beijing began to focus on its peaceful rise, and strove to be accepted by other countries. China wanted to show and to reassure other countries that it is a peaceful and harmonious country, and its development shouldn't be seen as a threat.

In the first chapter of his book, Joseph Nye quoted Niccolò Machiavelli when more than four centuries ago advised princes in Italy that it was more important to be feared than to be loved, but in today's world, it is best to be both.<sup>18</sup> He argued: "winning hearts and minds has always been important, but it is even more so in a global information age".<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, this is what China has been struggling

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<sup>16</sup> KURLANTZICK, Joshua, *Charm offensive: how China's soft power is transforming the world*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 135-136.

<sup>17</sup> KURLANTZICK, *Charm offensive: how China's...*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> NYE, *Soft Power...*, cit., ch.1, position 151.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

to do. In the long run, China has understood that a country not only has to be feared (hence the china-threat theory) by others, but it also has to be loved and respected. Acknowledging that a country's image on the international stage matters, China is trying to find the right balance between fear and love.

Furthermore, the Chinese government realized that western media don't portray a real and objective image of China. In fact, their representation is usually inaccurate and depict China under a bad light.<sup>20</sup> Thus, China has been investing many energies and money in promoting its image through its soft power tools, but also has started to develop projects that involve cooperation in the country's foreign policy, began to help other countries when they were in need without interfering with their domestic affairs.<sup>21</sup> This demonstrates that China wants to be more and more involved internationally, and shows that it is a country you can count on.

Accordingly, soft power has become a critical factor and one of the main priorities of China's rise and its development is fundamental in order to realise the dream of becoming a great and influential power, and to accomplish the Chinese dream (*zhongguomeng* 中国梦) as well. Currently, the concept of soft power in China is largely debated among political leaders, scholars, intellectuals and it has become the central focus of many academic research. In fact, if we search for the term soft power on CNKI (China National Knowledge and Infrastructure), the largest Chinese online platform that provides academic journals, we can find 15,393 articles.

The concept of soft power was introduced in China in the 1990s after the publication of Joseph Nye's first book that was eventually officially published in China in 1992.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, in China discussions about this highly debated concept became popular around the mid-2000s.<sup>23</sup>

As long as the Chinese translation of soft power is concerned, there are still some ongoing debates about the right translation of this term, and sometimes, the translation depends on the scholar. So far, there are three different words used for soft power: *ruan shili* 软实力, *ruan quanli* 软权力 and *ruan lilian* 软力量.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> VOICI, LUO, *Screening China's...*, cit., p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, when the Asian financial crisis broke out in 1997, Thailand was hoping for assistance from the United States. Eventually, China stepped in and it is the country that revived Thailand from the financial crisis. (KURLANTZICK, *Charm offensive: how China's...*, cit., pp. 34-35).

<sup>22</sup> The first book on soft power published by Joseph Nye is *Bound To Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990).

<sup>23</sup> GLASER, Bonnie S., MURPHY, Melissa E., *Soft power with Chinese characteristics the ongoing debate*, 2009, p. 12, available at: [http://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/media/csis/pubs/090310\\_chinesesoftware\\_chap2.pdf](http://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/090310_chinesesoftware_chap2.pdf), (accessed on June 28, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> COURMONT, Barthélémy, *Cina, la grande seduttrice "saggio sulla strategia cinese di conquista del Mondo"*, Fuoco Edizioni, 2011 (original edition *Chine, la grande séduction*, 2009), p. 51.

## 1.4 Hu Jintao's speech at the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China and China's first steps towards its soft power strategy

In the long run, Chinese political leaders embraced the importance of culture and tradition as important aspects for its soft power strategy, and as a way to get the People's Republic of China (*zhonghua renmin gongheguo* 中华人民共和国, hereafter PRC) back on track again. At the same time, this is pivotal for China's going out strategy (*zou chuqu* 走出去).<sup>25</sup> People shouldn't imply that, just because the concept of soft power has the word "soft" in it might not measure up to the outcomes achieved by hard power. But rather, since that soft power implies attraction, seduction, they eventually lead to acquiescence. As the ancient Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu said: "To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill".<sup>26</sup>

Thus, if its tools are used properly and wisely its outcomes can be mind-blowing and can determine the success on the international stage as well.

In fact, in the 1990s, Wang Huning already understood the importance of soft power and culture. He argued: "if a country has an admirable culture and ideological system, other countries will tend to follow it....It does not have to use its hard power which is expensive and less efficient".<sup>27</sup>

In order to be successful, this strategy shouldn't be limited to China's neighbouring countries, but it also has to be extended to the countries all over the world. Therefore, by focusing more on its soft power rather than hard power, by adopting the right development, environmental and economic initiatives, by showing the world that China has a positive aura and wants the same outcomes as other countries, this can be a turning point for the PRC, and an additional reason for other countries to see the latter in a different, and perhaps, more positive light.

Ever since the Hu Jintao era, discussions and debates about soft power have increased. Even top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have started to become increasingly more interested in the subject and in strengthening the country's soft power. They soon became aware of the fact that they don't have to focus only on the economic or military aspect to become a global power and to achieve the outcomes they want, but that a country's image is just as important. The

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<sup>25</sup> China's go-out policy was announced at the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Chinese Communist Party. The Chinese government started to encourage firms to invest in strategic industries. By doing so, Chinese companies were encouraged to invest abroad, and to go out or go global. (KURLANTZICK, *Charm offensive: how China's...*, cit., p. 88).

<sup>26</sup> HOLDEN, John, *Influence and Attraction. Culture and the race for soft power in the 21st century*, 2012, p. 23, available at: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/influence-and-attraction-report.pdf>, (accessed on June 19, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> GLASER, MURPHY, *Soft power with Chinese characteristics...*, cit., p. 12.

former Chinese President Hu Jintao acknowledged this importance. In fact, in this regard, in October 2007, he gave a powerful speech at the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, where he further argued the importance to enhance China's cultural soft power (*wenhua ruanshili* 文化软实力); and that the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will be linked with a prosperous Chinese culture. He stated:

In the present era, culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength, and the Chinese people have an increasingly ardent desire for a richer cultural life [...]. Enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests [...]. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accompanied by the thriving of Chinese culture. We will give full scope to the principal position of the people in cultural development, arouse the enthusiasm of cultural workers, promote vigorous development and prosperity of culture more conscientiously and actively [...].<sup>28</sup>

Hereof, Hu further outlined some arrangements in order to achieve this goal. He proposed to increase the development of the press, publishing, radio, film, television, literature and art, to develop the cultural industry, launch major projects to lead the industry as a whole, and to foster its international competitiveness.<sup>29</sup>

In order to achieve these goals, China decided to start off gradually and to develop more sophisticated cultural and entertainment tools in order to increasingly spread its international presence, and to show the country's latest achievements.

To begin with, in 2004, the PRC made its first move by establishing Confucius Institutes (*kongzi xueyuan* 孔子学院) abroad. They are cultural centres aimed at promoting the curiosity towards the Chinese language and culture around the world. Confucius Institutes can be considered as the first cultural bridge between China and other foreign countries; they provide knowledge and cultural enrichment of the Chinese culture and language. By doing so, not only the knowledge of those interested can benefit from them, but they can spark the curiosity of other people as well. The establishment of these institutes meets China's soft power strategy.

The first one was established in Seoul, South Korea in 2004. Ever since then, more than 500 Confucius Institutes have been established globally.<sup>30</sup> They are essential means in China's hands

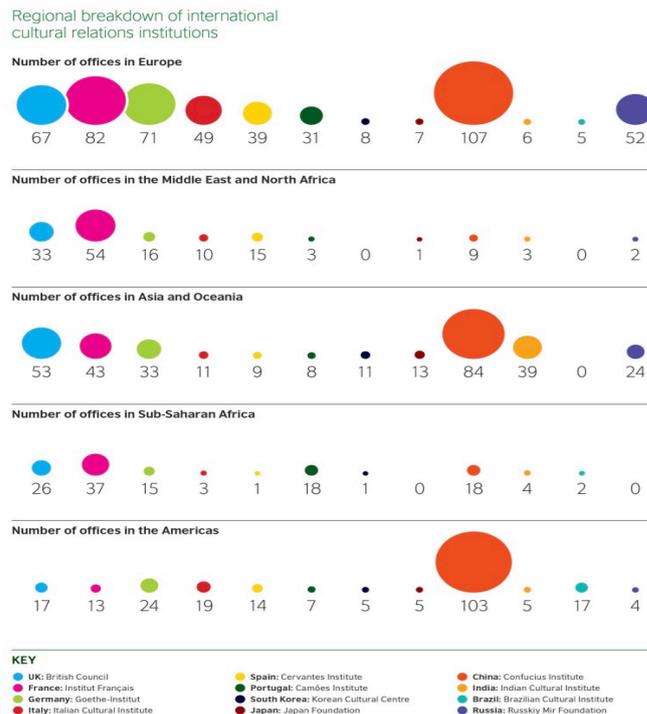
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<sup>28</sup> Full text of Hu Jintao's report at 17th Party Congress, in "Xinhua", October 24, 2007, available at :[https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/24/content\\_6204564\\_8.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/24/content_6204564_8.htm), (accessed on May 5, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> CHINADAILY, *Over 500 Confucius Institutes founded in 142 countries, regions*, in "Chinadaily", 2017, available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/07/content\\_32950016.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-10/07/content_32950016.htm), (accessed on July 18, 2018).

because their promotion of the Chinese language and culture, can give a substantial contribution in order to spread the Chinese culture, and can increase China's global influence as well. Joshua Kurlantzick in his book quoted Hu Youqing, a deputy of the National People's Congress, where, referring to Chinese language institutes, he told the *China Daily*: "it can help build up our national strength and should be taken as a way to develop our country's soft power".<sup>31</sup>



(Figure 3. The presence of Confucius Institutes (orange) around the world in 2010. Source: The British Council)

On the other hand, the PRC has tried to attract more foreign students to study in China. The Ministry of Education has started to advertise Chinese universities abroad in order to encourage student exchanges.<sup>32</sup>

Then, a few years later, respectively in 2008 and 2010, China managed to successfully host the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai World Expo 2010. Both these two extraordinary events put China on a pedestal, creating cultural appeal and showing to the rest of the world its new image and developments. The hosting of the Olympics has been pivotal as it showed what China can do and what it can offer. Furthermore, the opening ceremony of the Olympics was held by one of the most famous Chinese film directors, Zhang Yimou 张艺谋.

<sup>31</sup> KURLANTZICK, *Charm offensive: how China's...*, cit., p. 67.

<sup>32</sup> KURLANTZICK, *Charm offensive: how China's...*, cit., p. 69.

Meanwhile, two years later, in 2010 China hosted the Shanghai World Expo 2010. The World Expo was just as successful, and more importantly, it has been another opportunity to display the country and the city of Shanghai.

China has also invested in the international expansion of its media. The country felt the need to give the Chinese perspective on current events, trying to give an objective, accurate image of China and to generate soft power. The organizations tasked with this going global or going out project include the People's Daily, China Daily, China Central Television (*zhongyang dianshitai* 中央电视台, hereafter CCTV), China Radio International (*zhongguo guoji guangbo diantai* 中国国际广播电台, hereafter CRI), Xinhua News Agency, China News, and the Foreign Language Press.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, even though the Chinese government's soft power strategy to help its media was a significant investment, the majority of the world still sees the content of Chinese media as dull and centred on propaganda.<sup>34</sup> This is mainly due to the fact that when it comes to media and cultural industries, China adopts a top-down approach.<sup>35</sup>

However, the PRC is not giving up. As I will argue in the following chapters, China has decided to give more importance to its cultural industries, especially films, as a tool to enhance its soft power, to produce a more positive image of the country, and to become a part of the realisation of the China dream.



(Figure 4. China's soft power ranking respectively in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Source: The soft power 30).

<sup>33</sup> VOICI, LUO, *Screening China's...*, cit., p. 197.

<sup>34</sup> VOICI, LUO, *Screening China's...*, cit., p. 203.

<sup>35</sup> Definition of top-down approach by Cambridge dictionary, available at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/top-down>, (accessed on September 10, 2018).



(Figure 5. China's soft power ranking in 2018. Source: The soft power 30).

If we analyse figure 4 and 5, and compare China's soft power ranking in 2015 and in 2018, we can see that China has made significant improvements by climbing five places and ten points in 2017; while, stepping back two places in 2018, but, nonetheless, its points increased up to 51.85. Focusing on its cultural position, China ranked the ninth place in 2015, 2016 and 2018 with an exception in 2017 where it ranked the eighth place.

China is paying increasingly more attention to culture and to the promotion of its soft power through cultural tools, as it understands how powerful and important cultural influence and cultural appeal are.

## Chapter two

### China's focus on cultural soft power and the Chinese film industry

#### 2.1 China's investments in the film industry and films as a soft power resource

In the last few years, the Chinese film industry has reached important achievements, becoming a fast growing market and the second largest film industry in the world. Many believe that China will become the world's largest film market by 2020 with the consequence of taking over Hollywood. This very rapid growth, considering that in the 1990s the Chinese film industry and market suffered from a profound crisis, is due to China's recent economic growth and development, rise of the middle class, and entrance of foreign and domestic private capital and government policies that support and protect the domestic film industry.<sup>36</sup> In fact, during the last decade, the main priority of Chinese companies was to expand and encourage the investments in the Chinese film industry.

As I will explain in more detail in the third chapter, since China's accession to the WTO in 2001, which turned out to be an important transition for the PRC, China and the United States media corporations have started to become increasingly more interested and involved in joint investments. Also, driven by the incentive of the Chinese government and the need to expand China's cultural soft power, Chinese media industry leaders have started to take into consideration the possibility to expand both their relationship with and investments in Hollywood.

The most important investments and acquisitions, both in China and overseas, are being carried out by the CEO of the Chinese company Wanda Group (*wanda jituan* 万达集团), Wang Jianlin. In 2012, he invested \$2.6 billions of dollars to buy AMC Entertainment Holdings Inc, becoming the biggest purchase of an American company by a Chinese one, and the year after, he announced the intention to build the world's biggest film studio in the east coast of China.<sup>37</sup> In relation to this, Wang Jianlin said that "in ten years, the Chinese economy will be on way to dethrone [the] US as dominant economic power. But in terms of cultural power, China is still far behind (...) this project is an opportunity to implement a national policy in order to promote cultural power".<sup>38</sup> As a matter of fact, Wang Jianlin's investments, besides the economic interest, are aimed at promoting China's image abroad and can help to promote its soft power as well. These acquisitions and investments are a pivotal evidence to showcase that China has changed and it is getting stronger every

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<sup>36</sup> *A snapshot of China's creative industries*, 2017, available at: [https://ampia.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/EN\\_SNAPSHOT\\_20171005-1.pdf](https://ampia.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/EN_SNAPSHOT_20171005-1.pdf), p. 37, (accessed on July 19, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> VLASSIS, Antonios, "Soft power, global governance of cultural industries and rising powers: the case of China, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 22, 4, 2015, pp. 481-496, p. 484.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

day, and that people around the world should change their perception about the country, and not stick to an old image of the PRC.

Furthermore, the boost of the film industry and the rapid increase of moviegoers, especially audiences aged between 19 and 30 accounted for more than 50% and became the major film audiences, led to the construction of more movie theatres, becoming the country that has more screens than any other.<sup>39</sup>

In fact, according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (*guojia tongjiju* 国家统计局), in 2016, the country had 41,129 movie screens.<sup>40</sup>

China's box office experienced a rapid growth as well, and it is expected to become the world's largest in just a few years. As a matter of fact, the Chinese box office distribution market totalled \$6.8 billion in 2015, and from 2012 to 2015, the Chinese film market grew 33% from \$2.7 billion to \$6.8 billion.<sup>41</sup>

Another important factor worth mentioning is that the Chinese film production has increased, and reached 772 movies in 2016.<sup>42</sup>

|               | 2010   | 2015   | 2016   |
|---------------|--------|--------|--------|
| 全国电影票房收入 (亿元) | 157.21 | 440.69 | 492.83 |
| #国产电影票房收入     |        | 271.36 | 287.47 |
| 进口电影票房收入      |        | 169.33 | 205.36 |

(Figure 6. Basic statics on the movie industry, respectively in 2010, 2015 and 2016. Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China).

|   |        |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|--------|
| National box office revenue (billion RMB) | 157.21 | 440.69 | 492.83 |
| Domestic films box office revenue         |        | 271.36 | 287.47 |
| Imported films box office revenue         |        | 169.33 | 205.36 |

(Translation of the figure 6).

<sup>39</sup> Entgroup 艺恩, 2014-2015 *nian zhongguo dianying chanye yanjiu baogao (jianban)*, 2014-2015 年中国电影产业研究报告 (简版), China film industry report 2014-2015 (brief), 2015, p.10.

<sup>40</sup> National Bureau of Statistics of China, 23-13 Basic Statistics on Radio, Television and Movies Industry, available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2017/indexeh.htm>, (accessed on July 19, 2018).

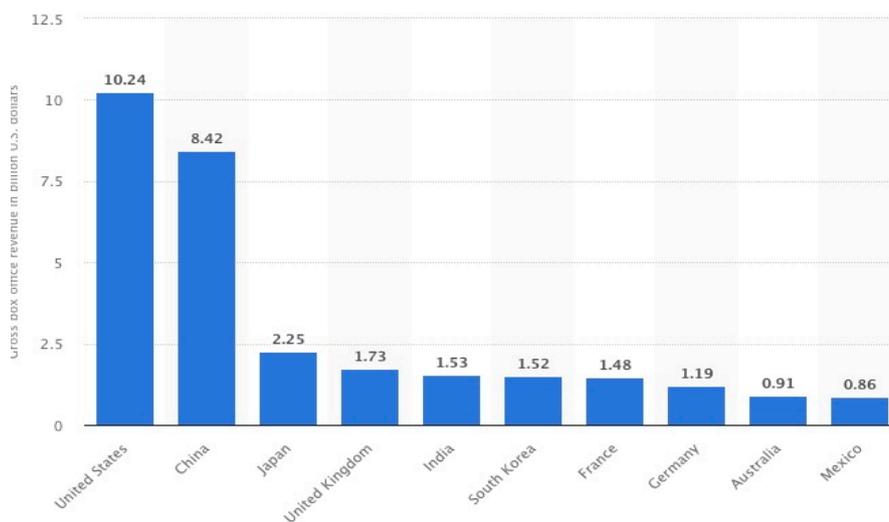
<sup>41</sup> KOKAS, Aynne, *Hollywood made in China*, Oakland, California, University of California Press, 2017, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> National Bureau of Statistics of China, 23-20 Basic Statistics on Film Production, available at: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2017/indexeh.htm>, (accessed on August 2, 2018).

Figure 6 gives a brief revenue statistic regarding the domestic box office revenue in 2010, 2015 and 2016. The first entry refers to China’s domestic box office revenue, and then, it is divided into the single revenues; respectively, the revenue of domestic films and the revenue of imported films. I will focus my attention on 2015 and 2016. The first entry (national box office revenue) accounts for the total of the two following box office revenues (domestic and imported); in 2016, the total box office increased and shifted from RMB 440.69 billion in 2015 to RMB 492.83 billion in 2016.

On the one hand, the increase of the domestic box office can benefit China’s film industry and market, but on the other hand, it can also give a significant boost to the economic activity, giving an important contribution to the Chinese economy.

According to the Xinhua news agency, China is expected to increase its production up to 800 movies each year.<sup>43</sup> This is a huge step forward considering that in 1998 China only produced 82 films.<sup>44</sup>



(Figure 7. Leading film markets worldwide in 2017, ranked by box office revenue. Source: Statista.com)

In the middle of the 2000s, China was dealing with a serious cultural deficit that included films, TV programs, books and so forth. In fact, in 2006, the vice-minister of the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (SARFT), stated that China imported 1,970 movies in 2005, meanwhile the same year China produced 260 films.<sup>45</sup> The PRC definitely felt the need to do something about it, as it didn’t want foreign imports to take over its media and film industry. A 2002 survey on imported programs shows what are the main countries that export to China, we can find Hong Kong (40.7%),

<sup>43</sup> YAMEI, *China to have over 60,000 film screens by 2020: SAPPRFT*, in “Xinhuanet”, 2017, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-11/27/c\\_136782445.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-11/27/c_136782445.htm), (accessed on July 20, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> National Bureau of Statistics of China, 23-20 Basic Statistics on Film Production, cit.

<sup>45</sup> “Cultural Deficit” is widening, in “China.org.cn”, 2006, available at: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/BAT/181191.htm>, (accessed on July 23, 2018).

South Korea (20.5%), Taiwan (12.9%), Japan (7%) and Singapore (2.1%), and the only other foreign country with significant exports to China is the United States (11.9%).<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, in order to make up for this international cultural deficit, China started to increase the export of its media.

At first, China started to shape its soft power taking into consideration the successful soft power strategy carried out by the United States, and the one of two of its neighbouring countries, namely South Korea and Japan.

For instance, Japan's strength and international success mainly lies on *manga* (graphic novels) and *anime* (animated films). In relation to this, in 2006, the former Japanese foreign minister Taro Aso argued:

“Japan is proud of having a highly attractive and up-to-date culture, this is Japanese popular culture and includes cartoons, films, music, fashion and so forth [...]. He further added: when people hear the word “Japan”, the impression that immediately has to come to mind is sprightly, warm, beautiful, cool etc [...]”.<sup>47</sup>

Whereas, South Korea has a prosperous film sector, music industry (K-pop) and well-known television dramas. For instance, the TV drama *Dae Jang-geum* (Jewel in the palace) not only became very popular in South Korea, but in other countries as well. Thanks to its popularity and success, this TV drama gave a huge boost to tourism in South Korea as well as to the consumption of South Korean beverages.<sup>48</sup>

These two examples mentioned above, reflect the success of their soft power strategy and how mind-blowing its outcomes can be when fruitful. China is aware of the accomplishments of these two countries and of their powerful resources; that's why the PRC is taking them into great consideration.

The promotion of China's cultural soft power is one of the main policies and goals of President Xi Jinping. In fact, ever since his election, he has been trying to boost the promotion of soft power, the use of its cultural resources, and more modern and technological means. In 2014, President Xi Jinping gave an important speech regarding the promotion of the country's soft power. Besides introducing the concept of the China dream, that, as we will see, has an important correlation with

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<sup>46</sup> CHUA, *Structure, audience and soft power...*, cit., p. 137.

<sup>47</sup> NI Zhen 倪震, “ruanshili he zhongguo dianying” 软实力和 中国电影 (Soft Power and Chinese films), 2012, available at: <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/48b19b28af45b307e87197e6.html>, p. 4, [translation from Chinese] (accessed on July 24, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> SHAO Xiao Ya 邵晓亚, “dianying dui ruanshili de tisheng – yi zhongguo dianying weili” 电影对软实力的提升 – 以中国电影为例 (The promotion of films through soft power, taking Chinese films as an example), *Dazhong wenyi*, 11, 2016, pp. 184-264, p. 184.

the concept of soft power, he stated the importance to “promote China’s cultural soft power by disseminating modern values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world”.<sup>49</sup>

He further argued the importance to deepen the reform in its cultural system, and push forward the cultural industry; the country also needs to build its capacity in international communication, better use of the new media and increase the creativity, appeal and credibility of China’s publicity.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Xi Jinping further argued: “The stories of China should be well told, voices of China well spread, and characteristics of China well explained”.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, it is important to tell Chinese stories, show Chinese values and communicate China’s message to the world.

What better tool than an international and worldwide loved, widespread and appreciated medium, such as films, to tell a Chinese story?

Films and media can be considered as the tools that can exploit soft power at its best. In fact, they are the perfect means to employ in order to foster a more positive image of the country.

The application of soft power in films helps to publicise, to carry and to spread culture, ideas (or even policies); it helps to disseminate values and cultural concepts with a more open, innovative attitude and cultural entertainment as well. However, films, and this is something the Chinese government is well aware of, can be a double-edged sword. Because besides creating appeal and positive outcomes, they can also portray a country under a bad light, jeopardize its status or reveal a country’s “skeletons”. This is one of the main reasons why Chinese films lack of freedom, and, consequently, this factor has repercussions on creativity. The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (*guojia xinwen chubanshang yanbian zongju* 国家新闻出版广电总局, hereafter SAPPRT),<sup>52</sup> controls films and makes sure that these productions don’t damage the country’s image and are in line with all the regulations outlined. In fact, the SAPPRT usually applies a rigorous censorship that ends up being a significant limit to the creativity and the freedom of Chinese filmmakers. As I will further explain in the third chapter, these two issues above-mentioned are one of the reasons why the PRC has to increase its efforts in trying to produce films that can go beyond its borders and trigger the interest, the attraction and the charm on the international stage. Nonetheless, at the same time, China needs to be seen as more credible and truthful.

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<sup>49</sup> CHINADAILY, *China to promote cultural soft power*, in “Chinadaily”, 2014, available at: [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-01/01/content\\_17208354.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-01/01/content_17208354.htm), (accessed on September 8, 2018).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup> In March 2018, China announced the forthcoming abolition of the SAPPRT and that it will be replaced by a new agency that will be under the control of the State Council. More information available at: <http://chinafilm insider.com/headlines-from-china-china-to-eliminate-sapprft-as-part-of-government-restructure/>, (accessed on June 26, 2018).

Anyhow, in order to wholly fulfil this, Chinese films and soft power need to include two important factors: credibility and appeal.<sup>53</sup> These two factors were emphasized by President Xi Jinping in his speech, where he stated the importance to increase the creativity, the appeal and the credibility of China's publicity. Hence, he recognizes that these are essential ingredients and are the keys for the accomplishment of soft power. As previously mentioned, Chinese soft power has a strong bond with the government as its strategy is promoted and carried out by it. When it comes to the United States' soft power strategy, this country doesn't have a strategy like China has, and it doesn't give much importance to it. However, regardless of this situation, the United States' soft power is very strong; its success is probably related to the fact that it is separated from the American government.<sup>54</sup>

A successful soft power strategy should try to help foreign audiences to get closer to and attracted to China, its culture and its way of life (just the way Hollywood did with its films).

More importantly, foreigners should stop seeing the PRC through an international lens, but rather, through China's lens. In relation to this, besides enhancing its soft power, the promotion of its media platforms is also aimed at giving audiences a different perspective and point of view. This attitude is very important in order to slowly understand the Chinese standpoint, as a way to eventually build a different behaviour towards it.

Whether it is culture, history, cuisine, and so on, the seventh art not only can give the spectator a closer approach to the factors already mentioned, as a matter of fact, films can also be considered as an interactive, amusing and entertaining tool that can introduce and trigger the interest of the Chinese language.

Therefore, if the spectator feels attracted to the content of the film, this appeal can give a huge contribution to the promotion of soft power and trigger the interest of foreign audiences towards it.

By following this logic, films can export a country's culture and language through the big screen. Hence, spectators can learn and even get attached to a culture or a language that are perceived as distant.

This is the light that sparks curiosity among spectators, as they might feel the need to break the language, the cultural barrier and get closer to China. Because, sometimes, what spectators want is to be a part of a good story.

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<sup>53</sup> VOICI, LUO, *Screening China's...*, cit., p. 50.

<sup>54</sup> CSIS (Podcast), *Soft Power through Chinese Cinema: A Conversation with Stan Rosen*, in "Soundcloud", 2017, available at: <https://soundcloud.com/csis-57169780/soft-power-through-chinese-cinema-a-conversation-with-stan-rosen>, (accessed on September 7, 2018).

Also, the showcase of China's wonders and cultural heritage can also be a further attraction to foreigners, to the extent that they can boost the country's tourism, just as what happened with the success of the South Korean TV drama.

The power of films shouldn't be underestimated because they can create new modes of thinking, doing and learning. They have the capacity to seduce, induce and lead to approval, praise and acquiescence, but, above all, they can influence or shape people's opinions and behaviours as well. Thus, considering the power and the kind of influence films can have on audiences, great attention has to be paid to the way the story is told. Otherwise, the content projected doesn't really match the one that the government or Chinese filmmakers had in mind, with the content eventually perceived by spectators.

Although the application of soft power is not as immediate as it seems, China is moving in the right direction and its focus on and investments in the film industry are increasing. It demonstrates that Chinese leaders have found the right tools to introduce Chinese culture to the outside world. Moreover, the industry is becoming more and more important economically, hence, it proves China's increasingly significant international role.

Films can help the Chinese government to achieve its soft power strategy and to put into effect its objective to improve China's global image, and to outline the increasingly important role of the country as a cultural, political and economic power.

Furthermore, in close relation with films, film festivals, for instance the Beijing International Film Festival (*Beijing guoji dianyingjie* 北京国际电影节, hereafter BJIFF) and the Shanghai International Film Festival (*Shanghai guoji dianyingjie* 上海国际电影节, hereafter SIFF), can be considered as another powerful channel that can boost the country's soft power. In 2016, the BJIFF hosted 2,329 exhibitions from 105 countries, while the SIFF hosted 2,403 exhibitions from 114 countries.<sup>55</sup>

It is a great opportunity and advantage to host film festivals because in that moment China is standing in front of millions of people from different countries. This is a moment that can create new opportunities of improvement for the Chinese domestic film market, and a further occasion to establish new relations with other countries. In fact, thanks to this opportunity, Chinese filmmakers might be able to establish and to develop new collaborations with other countries and filmmakers. Therefore, film festivals can be considered as a further promotion of the country, and can increase the appreciation of the latter.

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<sup>55</sup> *The economic contribution of film and television in China in 2016*, in "Mpaa", 2017, available at: [https://www.mpaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MPAA\\_China\\_2016\\_WEB-2.pdf](https://www.mpaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/MPAA_China_2016_WEB-2.pdf), (accessed on July 31, 2018).

## 2.2 The situation of the Chinese film industry in the 1980s and 1990s: is Hollywood China's lifeline?

In the middle of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, the Chinese film industry was suffering from a profound financial crisis. I will focus on the causes that led to this problematic situation and the solutions adopted by the Chinese government and leaders in order to deal with the decline of the film industry.

This was a moment of transition and of important changes for China. Hence, the changes that the country went through during this period had repercussions on the domestic film industry as well. The causes of this crisis were mainly due to economic factors and attendance crisis.

With the beginning of the economic reforms in the 1980s, the film industry was also subject to some alterations. Hence, these reforms ended up being a challenge for the film industry. This is because, after years of support, film studios were on their own. They had the responsibility to provide for their own economic stability, funds and received very limited financial support from the government. In fact, before this important economic shift, the state-controlled China Film Corporation (CFC), now China Film Group Corporation (*zhongguo dianying jituan gongsi* 中国电影集团公司), was the actor responsible for the well-being of the film industry.<sup>56</sup>

However, this situation led to a significant drop in the attendance of moviegoers, lack of interest in the films screened, and the revenues weren't enough to provide support on all fronts; so, for these reasons, many studios ended up debt-ridden. By the end of the 1980s, more than one-third of studios, about 39% out of 2300 distribution companies at county level, and 32.3% out of 3100 urban theatres were debt-ridden.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, the situation in China after the Tian'anmen incident definitely wasn't of any help. People were still feeling resentful about what had happened, hence, this somehow had a consequence and a negative response within the film industry.<sup>58</sup> As moviegoers' behaviours changed, the film

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<sup>56</sup> Before the economic shift, the main task of the China Film Corporation was to act as the central distributor. But, it was also responsible for the distribution of films in cinemas, payed fees for the studios and for the promotion and extra film prints. (ZHU Ying, "Chinese Cinema's Economic Reform From the Mid-1980s to the Mid-1990s", *International Communication Association*, 2002, pp. 905- 921, p. 907).

<sup>57</sup> SU, Wendy, "Cultural Policy and Film Industry as Negotiation of Power: The Chinese State's Role and Strategies in its Engagement with Global Hollywood 1994-2012", *Pacific Affairs*, 87, 1, 2014, pp. 93-114, p. 100.

<sup>58</sup> The aftermath of the Tian'anmen incident had negative consequences. This was a period where the Chinese government, in order to make up for the terrible situation and to reinforce its position showed a considerable amount of films centred on a more propagandistic thread. In the end, this behaviour didn't reach the expected outcome. (SU, Wendy, "To Be or Not To Be? – China's Cultural Policy and Counterhegemony Strategy Toward Global Hollywood from 2004 to 2000", *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 3, 1, 2010, pp. 38-58, p. 46).

industry and market were largely affected by it. In fact, the interest, the zeal to go to the cinema started to fade away. For this reason, the lack of attendance translated into a radical reduction in the number of spectators in cinemas. Without a doubt, this situation inevitably had a strong impact on the country's box office revenues.

It was a very complicated situation for film studios. Metaphorically speaking, it can be compared to as if they were stuck and slowly sinking in quicksand with no hope or possibility for them to come back up.

Under this circumstance, seeing that the situation wasn't going to improve any time soon, the Chinese government stepped in and decided to do something about it. It grabbed the film studios by their "hands" and tried to pull them back up and get them back on track. Although it was the government that finally made the move, it was actually Hollywood that somehow stepped in and rescued the Chinese film industry from permanently sinking in quicksand.

The decision to reintroduce Hollywood films in the Chinese film market was finally embraced by the Chinese government in 1994.<sup>59</sup> This was a pivotal, and maybe suffered decision, in order to meet Beijing's intricate situation, to look out for the country's safety and try not to worsen the situation. When Hollywood films were introduced in China in the 1990s, that actually wasn't the first time that they stepped on the Chinese ground. In fact, in the 1930s and 1940s, Hollywood had already made its way through the silk country, meeting the spectators' tastes and gaining a lot of success. As a matter of fact, during those years, American films had an unprecedented popularity as they prevailed on the Chinese film market, and they were highly appreciated by Chinese audiences.<sup>60</sup> But, a few years later, with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Hollywood films were completely banned from the country.

Therefore, after many years of separation, the PRC finally broke the ice wall that separated it from the United States. The Chinese government decided to import foreign films (mostly American films) again. Anyhow, the import of Hollywood films and the relation between the two countries froze again for six months in 1999, due to NATO's bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade. Taking into account this brief separation, the Chinese film market was, again, facing new hurdles as its domestic box office dropped to 850 million yuan.<sup>61</sup>

As already stated, the government's decision to reintroduce foreign films in the country turned out to be extremely important. However, it inevitably led to some dissatisfaction among Chinese leaders, as this decision didn't meet everyone's approval. The choice to show American films in Chinese

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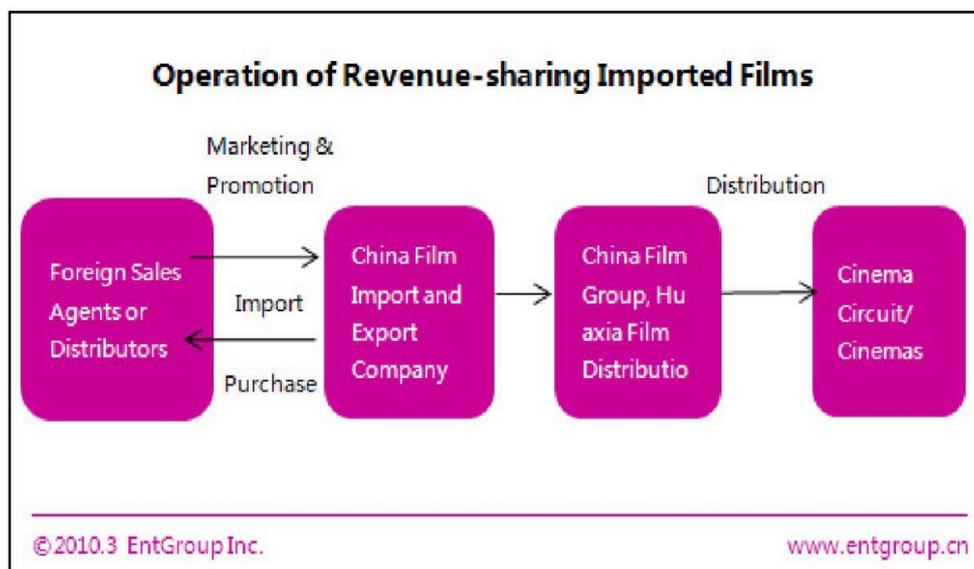
<sup>59</sup> In 1994, the first Hollywood blockbuster imported to China was *The Fugitive* (Davis, 1993), starring Harrison Ford. (SU, *To Be or Not To Be...*, cit., p. 44).

<sup>60</sup> SU, *To Be or Not To Be...*, cit., p. 41

<sup>61</sup> SU, *To Be or Not To Be...*, cit., p. 44

cinemas again was a strategy adopted in order to help the economic and market crisis that the domestic film industry was facing. The government was aware of the important role and influence that the world's largest film industry had on its audiences. The expectations of the government were very high, and it was hoping that this decision would help revive China's film market. In fact, the principle used by the leaders in this strategy was the following: “以我为主，为我所用” (*yi wo wei zhu, wei wo suo yong*),<sup>62</sup> which could be translated as to give priority to myself, for my own use. In a way, this sentence really embodies and gives a clear visual of the government's objective, meaning that Hollywood imports were tools in China's hands in order to achieve its own purposes.

In 1994, China started its long journey towards the establishment of a fixed film import quota. Initially, Beijing adopted a revenue-sharing system to import 10 foreign productions per year. Now, it has become the most common distribution model in China. As its name suggests, the revenue-sharing system consists of the share of the revenue among the partners involved. In this case, the China Film Import and Export Company (hereafter CFIEC), gets 33% of the earnings, foreign companies 13%, domestic film distributors would obtain from 8% to 10% and theatres from 44% to 46%.<sup>63</sup>



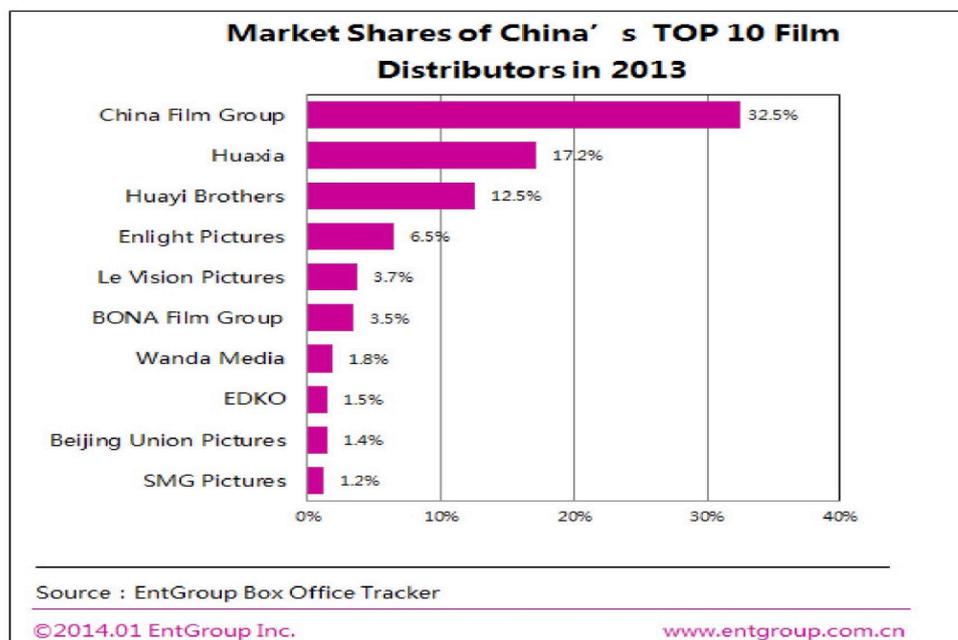
(Figure 8. Operation of revenue-sharing imported films. Source: EntGroup 艺恩).

As we can see from figure 8, the CFIEC purchases foreign films from foreign distributors; then, these films are imported to China, completing the first transaction. Later, the CFIEC, entrusts the China Film Group Corporation, and the Huaxia Film Distribution (*huaxia dianying faxing youxian zeren*

<sup>62</sup> SU, *To Be or Not To Be...*, cit., p. 45.

<sup>63</sup> SU, *To Be or Not To Be...*, cit., p. 44.

*gongsi* 华夏电影发行有限责任公司) with the official distribution of foreign films to Chinese cinemas.<sup>64</sup>



(Figure 9. Market shares of China's top ten film distributors in 2013. Source: Entgroup 艺恩)

From figure 9, we can see that China Film Group Corporation was the top Chinese film distributor in 2013, followed by Huaxia Film Distribution.

Film distributors, exhibitors and moviegoers definitely didn't oppose to the imports of Hollywood movies, because they understood the benefits and the potential they might bring to their domestic film industry and market as well.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, they were the supporters of these film imports, and considering the popularity they had among Chinese moviegoers in the early years of the 1900s, they were quite sure about their renewed success. They saw this inflow as an important opportunity for Beijing to help the domestic film industry on all fronts. At the same time, as I will explain in more detail in the third chapter, this was a favourable circumstance to actually learn from the master. In fact, metaphorically speaking, this was a to kill two birds with one stone kind of situation. China could learn a good amount of knowledge from Hollywood going from its technology, advanced

<sup>64</sup> Besides the revenue-sharing import quota, there is another category for foreign film imports in the Chinese market, namely buy-out films (also known as flat fee films). Buy-out films are purchased by a Chinese company from a foreign distributor for a flat fee. Since that buy-out films, unlike revenue-sharing films, don't imply the share of the revenue among the partners involved, it is less fruitful for foreign distributors. (KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 81).

<sup>65</sup> SU, Wendy, "Resisting cultural imperialism, or welcoming cultural globalization? China's extensive debate on Hollywood cinema from 1994 to 2007", *Asian Journal of Communication*, 21, 2, 2011, pp. 186-201, p. 190.

instruments, techniques and skills. Additionally, this was also an opportunity to encourage Chinese filmmakers to improve their abilities and expertise.

On the other hand, China's filmmakers, film critics and left-wing intellectuals didn't see all the advantages and positive aspects that Hollywood films could bring to the domestic market and industry.<sup>66</sup> As a matter of fact, they were against these imports as they feared the potential (negative) consequences, and the impact that these motion pictures could have had on the national industry and on spectators as well.

They were very critical about the content featured in Hollywood films.<sup>67</sup> Their belief was that these movies are a full promotion of American values, ideals and lifestyle. Therefore, taking this into consideration, this was one of their main concerns as they feared that these films might jeopardize China's traditions as well as influence Chinese people.

This belief shows and outlines the power and how influential screen cultures can be.

Regardless of the fact that people held different positions about these imports, it can't be denied that Hollywood films were, again, very successful. They helped the Chinese film industry and market to get back on track once again. By 1994, Hollywood imports had brought China 60% of its U.S. \$12 million film revenue, and the theatre attendance in Beijing during the summer increased by 70%.<sup>68</sup> The establishment of the annual import quota, that will eventually increase to 20 films in 2001 and to 34 films in 2012, revealed to be a very wise decision since that foreign productions have become an important component of China's box office.

This situation became a matter of concern for the Chinese government since its goal wasn't to let American blockbusters take over the domestic market. Consequently, Chinese leaders decided to take some measures in order to protect the domestic film industry without giving up showing Hollywood films.

Therefore, in order to deal with this important challenge, the strategy adopted by the government was the employment of main melody films (*zhuxuanlü dianying* 主旋律电影). The duel was between Hollywood and domestic films; by adopting this strategy, the government was hoping to reduce the impact and the influence that American productions had on Chinese audiences and on the Chinese market. As I will explain in more detail in the following paragraph, main melody films are cultural products that embody the core elements of China and of the Chinese government. In a way, they can be seen as messengers and promoters of socialism, patriotism and collectivism. They glorify the Chinese values and show the positive outcomes carried out by the government and the people's well-

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<sup>66</sup> SU, *Resisting cultural imperialism...*, cit., p. 191.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>68</sup> SU, *To Be or Not To Be...*, cit., p. 44.

being. These films reached their distribution peak after the Tian'anmen Square incident in 1989. In fact, after what had happened, the government began to give increasingly more importance to the promotion and to the distribution of these films, as it was hoping to reaffirm its position after that event.

Nevertheless, the expectations of the leaders failed since that they didn't turn out as they hoped they would. This was one of the problems that led to the country's attendance crisis, as people were not that willing and thrilled to watch these types of productions.

From 1994 to 2000, the strategy adopted by the PRC was to use the revenues from Hollywood imports for the domestic film industry. Moreover, theatres had to turn 5% of their annual box office revenue in order to be able to finance main melody films, and two thirds of the showing times in cinemas were reserved for domestic films.<sup>69</sup>

Anyhow, regardless of the many efforts carried out by the Chinese government to stand up to the overwhelming impact and influence of Hollywood productions, this strategy turned out to be quite unproductive. The reason why this probably happened is related to the fact that domestic and main melody films were not that effective in attracting the domestic audience, and to spark their curiosity in watching those productions. Another cause might be linked to the habit of Chinese spectators and to the fact that they may have gotten used to watch Hollywood films. They slowly shaped their plot and viewing tastes. That being so, they can perceive the difference between the two productions, preferring one over the other.

Nonetheless, it can't be denied that Hollywood didn't have a significant impact on the Chinese film market. In fact, metaphorically speaking, Hollywood is the one that pulled and prevented Beijing from eventually sinking.

This situation didn't only save and revive the film industry and market. At the same time, equally important, it restored the willingness and the enthusiasm of spectators to go to the cinema again, and it also lighted up the spark of competition among Chinese filmmakers as they were eager to acquire new knowledge.

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<sup>69</sup> FORNS ESCUNDE', Marta, *Hollywood films in the non-western world: What Are the Criteria Followed by the Chinese Government When Choosing Hollywood Film Imports?*, 2013, Master's thesis, p. 10.

## 2.3 Main melody films and the correlation with the China dream (中国梦): taking the documentary *Amazing China* (《厉害了，我的国》) and the film *American Dreams in China* (《中国合伙人》) as an example

The current Chinese President Xi Jinping's China dream has become the core and the key of the President's policy and of the PRC as well. It goes hand in hand with the concept of soft power, the country's promotion of it, and it can be seen as the representation of the dreams of the Chinese people and of the country itself.

In this paragraph I will focus on giving a general overview of the so-called main melody films and how they can be correlated with the China dream. Then, I will focus my work on the interrelation between the documentary *Amazing China* (*lihai le, wo de guo* 厉害了，我的国) as an example of main melody film and as the potential exhibition of the China dream. Eventually, my attention will focus on the film *American Dreams in China* (*zhongguo hehuoren* 中国合伙人) as the embodiment of the Chinese dream.

Main melody films started to gain momentum shortly after the Tian'anmen incident in 1989, as a way from the Chinese government to respond to the chaos and upheaval that unsettled China during that period. The name *zhuxuanlü* comes from the term *leitmotif*, which refers to a musical recurring theme that can be associated with a character, a feeling, a place and so forth.<sup>70</sup>

However, even though these productions received a significant boost and became an official category only at the end of 1989, they were first proposed in 1987 by the vice-minister of the Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (*guangbo dianying dianshi bu* 广播电影电视部, hereafter MRFT), which in 1998 formed the SARFT, Ding Qiao and by the vice-director of the Shanghai Film Studio, Shi Fangyu.<sup>71</sup>

The government believed that the adoption, the spread and the influence of Western culture in China were the main causes that led to this upheaval. As a consequence, films became a source of criticism and began to be seen under a more negative light; hence, this was the moment when the government and Chinese film authorities turned the tables regarding this matter. In fact, this was the moment when, somehow, films began to lose their entertainment feature and slowly started to be more politically and historically centred. As a matter of fact, as previously mentioned, main melody films were a significant tool in the government's hands since that, through the projection of these film

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<sup>70</sup> VOGLI, LUO, *Screening China's...*, cit., p. 60.

<sup>71</sup> ZHANG Rui, *The Cinema of Feng Xiaogang: Commercialization and Censorship in Chinese Cinema after 1989*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2008, p. 35.

productions, their goal was to reinforce the position and the positive image of the Chinese Communist Party (*zhongguo gongchandang* 中国共产党, hereafter CCP), of its leaders, and last but not least, the validity of the Chinese government.<sup>72</sup> These films were (and still are) carefully chosen since that their content had to follow some crucial regulations, such as having a positive content. Indeed, main melody films emphasize Chinese values and the loyalty of the Chinese people towards the government. At the same time, these films might be focused on telling the story and the actions of present and past leaders, and they also highlight the country's important historical moments.

Therefore, due to their stress on historical and political themes, these movies started to become more rigid and more of an educational tool rather than an entertainment and artistic tool. In fact, in a way, the last two disappeared.

Given this situation, spectators began to perceive films under a different light; in fact, this situation had a significant backlash on the appreciation of the medium for what it actually is. Also, in order to make sure that these films fulfilled their objective, they had the whole support of the State on all fronts.

Anyhow, these films were not very successful among Chinese audiences as they didn't find them very attractive or interesting to watch. As already mentioned, the viewing tastes of moviegoers were influenced by Hollywood films, hence, they were not thrilled for this domestic film genre.

Despite the lack of enthusiasm, the government managed to find a solution in order to guarantee film attendance and revenues. For instance, although these films were not very successful among moviegoers, film studios could still have a revenue basis as film tickets were bought in large quantities. The solution adopted involved the promotion on a largescale of these productions by the government through official documents requiring that government-owned institutions, such as work units, schools, universities and so on, buy film tickets for their workers and members.<sup>73</sup> By following this logic, people felt compelled to go to the cinema. It should also be considered that the feelings of joy and amusement to go to the cinema were replaced with a feeling of bitterness and commitment. In a way, the government's concern to create or display a cinematic content that the spectator could actually enjoy wasn't really a priority anymore. The entertainment feature slipped in second place and the sentence “以中国观众的需要为第一需要”,<sup>74</sup> (*yi zhongguo guanzhong de xuyao wei di yi xuyao*)

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>73</sup> ZHANG, *The Cinema...*, cit., p. 38.

<sup>74</sup> LIANG Yuefang 梁月芳, “Qian lun 20 shiji 90 niandai yilai renwu zhuanjishi zhuxuanlü yingpian de juzuo tezheng” 浅论 20 世纪 90 年代以来任务传记式主旋律影片的巨作特征 (A brief discussion on the dramatic features of biographic main Melody Films since the 1990s), in *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 6, 2007, pp. 18-25, p.18.

which can be translated as to take the needs of the Chinese audience as a priority, in reality wasn't much applied or taken into great consideration.

These productions not only had the task to be commercially successful, but also had to be able to promulgate the core values of the government through the big screen. In fact, films in order to attract spectators, they also need to win the market and have a return. “电影不能赢得市场，就不能赢得观众，就谈不上发挥社会、经济效益”，<sup>75</sup> (*dianying buneng yingde shichang, jiu buneng yingde guanzhong, jiu tanbushang fahui shehui, jingji xiaoyi*) meaning that if films cannot win the market, they won't win the audience, therefore it's out of the question to exhibit social and economic benefits. Nonetheless, although main melody films were highly promoted and supported by the government, it didn't result in high movie attendance and popularity. Even the collective purchase of the tickets didn't turn out to be as effective as the government thought it would.

However, regardless of the encouragement of the government, some main melody films might have been successful thanks to the blackout period. As I will explain in more detail in the third chapter, the blackout period (*guochan dianying baohu yue* 国产电影保护月) is a strategy implemented by the SAPPRT usually during the summer (generally in July) or during Chinese festivities where foreign films, especially Hollywood productions, are not released nor screened. In this case, the PRC gives the absolute priority to the promotion and to the showcase of domestic film productions, thus, they are more likely to be successful and to increase the box office revenue.

At the beginning of 2018, the Chinese film bureau announced that Chinese cinemas will be financially rewarded if they schedule the exhibition of more domestic films and reach outstanding results.<sup>76</sup> These rewards account for the cinema's total box office receipts for the year; if the movie theatre manages to reach at least 55% of those Chinese film receipts, the chances of receiving the reward will increase. Anyhow, the achievement of 55% of local films receipts is the minimum percentage that movie theatres have to reach in order to receive the award. In fact, the recompense can be even more meaningful if the percentages reached by cinemas exceed 60% and 66%.

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>76</sup> DRESDEN, Matthew, *China to movie theaters: we'll pay you to show more Chinese films*, in “ChinaFilmInsider”, 2017, available at: <http://chinafilmsinsider.com/china-to-movie-theaters-well-pay-you-to-show-more-chinese-films/>, (accessed on June 23, 2018).

| 档次 | 年放映国产影片票房收入占总票房收入比例 | 按国产影片票房收入上缴到中央的电影专项资金的奖励比例 |
|----|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 一档 | 66% (含) 以上          | 100%                       |
| 二档 | 60% (含) -66%        | 75%                        |
| 三档 | 55% (含) -60%        | 50%                        |

(Figure 10. Reference chart for the financial reward of movie theatres. Source: Entgroup 艺恩)

| Levels | Proportion between the box office revenue of the annual screening of domestic films and the total box office revenue. | Proportion of the reward of special central government film funds for the domestic box office revenue. |
|--------|---|--|
| First  | More than 66%   | 100%   |
| Second | (Contain) 60%   | 75%  |
| Third  | (Contain) 55%   | 50%  |

(Translation of figure 10).

The chart above refers to the financial rewards that Chinese cinemas can receive if successful, and they are divided into three levels. They have to be able to, respectively, reach 66% (or more than this amount), 60% or 55% of their total domestic box office receipts. For those cinemas that manage to reach 66% (or more than this amount), they will be given a full reward; whereas, those that reach 60% and 55% of the domestic box office revenue will, respectively, be given 75% and 50% out of the total prize.

As a consequence, knowing that most of the time foreign films dominate the Chinese box office, if Chinese cinemas want to see more domestic films reach the top of the country's box office, then they have to screen more Chinese films rather than foreign films. In spite of this, cinemas could either benefit or have a loss from this kind of situation. This is because the exhibition of more domestic productions might lead to lower film attendance rather than higher attendance, therefore, if Chinese movie theatres result in facing a financial loss due to the lack of moviegoers, they will be more likely to restore the equal exhibition of foreign films as well.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem.*

This is another measure established by the government to protect, to promote the wealth and the development of the domestic film industry. At the same time, trying to give a further incentive to Chinese movie theatres.

As previously mentioned, the China dream has become the key ingredient of the current Chinese President Xi Jinping, and of its policy. Ever since the introduction of the concept of the Chinese dream in 2012, it has been largely debated among the international media regarding what's the meaning behind this dream.

In November 2012, Xi Jinping officially took office becoming the new President of the PRC. He put forward this new dream, and since then, he has been promoting this concept stressing its importance and mentioning it in the majority of its public speeches. For years, many people have tried to achieve the famous American dream, and now with the introduction of the Chinese dream, perhaps more and more people will be willing to achieve the latter. Therefore, can the China dream become a potential rival of the famous and almost indestructible American dream?

The Chinese dream is the dream of the country and of its people. Its meaning can have different shapes and nuances according to different people. For instance, people in mainland China when talking about their dreams, or what the China dream means to them, they talked about getting their dream house, or becoming an entrepreneur, dreaming of a good life, entering the university of their dreams and so forth.<sup>78</sup>

Xi Jinping stated that his China dream is the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, meaning that “achieving a rich and powerful country, the revitalisation of the nation, and the people’s happiness”.<sup>79</sup> In 2017, at the nineteenth National Congress of the CCP, President Xi Jinping stated: “[...] the China dream is history, is the reality and is the future as well; it is the dream of this generation, and even more [it is the dream] of the younger generation [...]”.<sup>80</sup>

President Xi’s dream embodies the hope to raise the bar for China’s future. In fact, he wants the PRC to become a prosperous and strong country, but also a civilised, harmonious, beautiful, and a culturally, economically and militarily strong China. At the same time, other than for the country itself, the Chinese dream includes improvements for its people, such as lifting up its citizens from poverty (as we will see when introducing the documentary *Amazing China*), and environmental

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<sup>78</sup> “What is the Chinese Dream?”. Youtube Video. Posted by “CNNMoney”. 10-06-2014. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEXYMY0k1W8>, (accessed on August 7, 2018).

<sup>79</sup> CALLAHAN, William A., “Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream”, *Political Studies Association*, 35, 3-4, pp. 216-229, p. 221.

<sup>80</sup> JIN Jiaxu 金佳绪, “Xi Jinping zhe shi duan hua dingyi zhongguo meng neihan” 习近平这十段话定义中国梦内涵 (Xi Jinping’s ten paragraphs define the content of the China dream), *Xinhua*, 2017, available at: [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-11/29/c\\_1122031311.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-11/29/c_1122031311.htm), (accessed on July 20, 2018).

protection. In addition, this dream not only can provide the improvements above mentioned, but it can also result in improved education, public health, employment, housing and so on.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, there is another important message that the Chinese government wants to outline. It is referred to the fact that only through the help and the guidelines of the CCP, the Chinese dream will eventually become a reality.<sup>82</sup>

President Xi Jinping also stressed the importance of the relation between achieving the dream of the nation and the dreams that every individual has. Consequently, this is aimed at giving an overview about a concept that has already been introduced, therefore, it is not new in the Chinese policy. In other words, under this circumstance, the Chinese government believes that individual dreams are important, but they should act as a support for the country's dream as well.<sup>83</sup> This is because, according to Xi Jinping "[...] only when the country does well, and the nation does well, can every person do well".<sup>84</sup> For this reason, Chinese people carry a heavy burden on their backs since they know they can give a significant contribution to the achievement of the China dream.

Thus, the people who live in this age will definitely have more opportunities to enjoy and to live a successful life, to realise their dreams and to increasingly grow along with the country.

One can do whatever it takes to achieve his/her dreams. Dreams can be very powerful, and if one starts working towards it, his/her achievements can be outstanding. For this reason, the promotion on a large scale of the China dream is a further encouragement for Chinese people to make improvements, and to share this journey with the entire nation.

Furthermore, the dream of the Chinese nation can also be linked to the intense will of the PRC to foster the country's international image. Metaphorically speaking, the China dream can go beyond the country's borders, meaning that, it can appeal to foreigners as well. In fact, these solutions and improvements for the country and for its citizens, can expand and increase the country's appreciation among other nations. Thus, accomplishing one of China's most desired goals, that is to showcase the country's positive image.

Besides, there is a connection between the concept of soft power and the concept of the Chinese dream. In a way, these two concepts can be intertwined with one another as they both are pivotal components of the government's goals. As a matter of fact, soft power is a key factor for the realisation of the China dream.

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<sup>81</sup> ZHENG Wang, "The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context", *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 19, 1, 2013, pp. 1-13, p. 7.

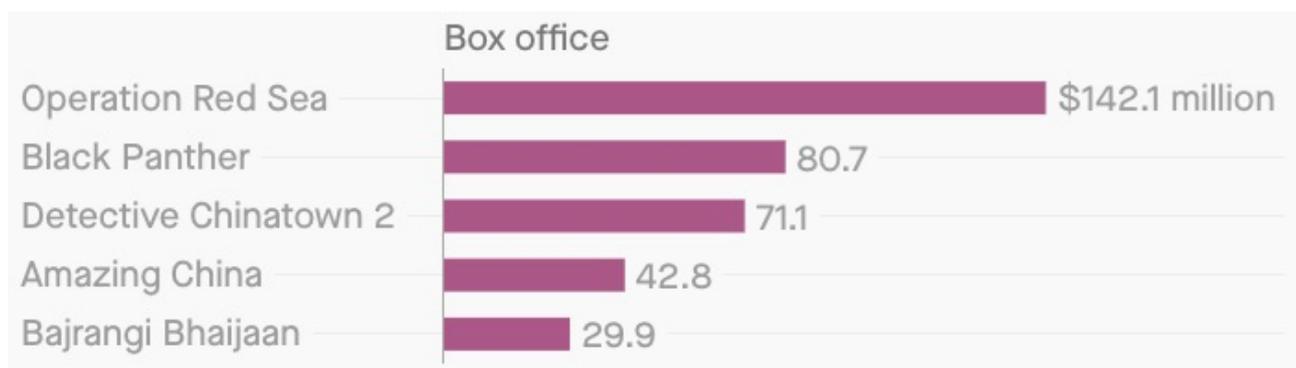
<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>83</sup> CALLAHAN, *Identity and Security in China*, *cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*.

They both are important aspects that shape the policy of the current Chinese President and the future of the nation as well. In addition, as already argued, the promotion of the country's soft power not only can lead to a better understanding of Chinese culture around the world, at the same time, it can provide major (external) support for the development and the accomplishment of the China dream. Without a doubt, they are both promoted on a largescale through official speeches and media platforms as well.

In relation to this, I wanted to take into consideration the 2018 documentary *Amazing China*. I wanted to focus my attention on this documentary as an important example of main melody film. At the same time, it shows to the audience a significant factor regarding all the efforts carried out by the Chinese government and the CCP, and its achievements in the last few years under the leadership of President Xi Jinping.<sup>85</sup> In addition, it also matches and embodies the promises made for the accomplishment of the China dream.



(Figure 11. Top-grossing films in China in March 2018. Source: Quartz)

Figure 11 shows us the top-grossing films in China in March 2018. *Lihai le, wo de guo* ranked the fourth position with a box office revenue worth \$42.8 million, preceded by two Chinese films (that, respectively, ranked the first and third position) and by a Hollywood film (that ranked the second position).

<sup>85</sup> ZHENG, Sarah, *Xi Jinping takes leading role in hit propaganda film extolling 'amazing' China*, in "South China Morning Post", 2018, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2137168/xi-jinping-takes-leading-role-hit-propaganda-film-extolling>, (accessed on September 18, 2018).



(Figure 12. China film ranking based on box office revenue, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018. Source: Entgroup 艺恩)

| Daily box office<br>March 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2018 | Daily online broadcast list<br>Box office [revenue] on a single day |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Operation Red Sea</i>                    | 140.31 million RMB  |
| 2. <i>Detective Chinatown 2</i>                | 73.86 million RMB   |
| 3. <i>Peter Rabbit</i>                         | 28.64 million RMB   |
| 4. <i>Amazing China</i>                        | 26.79 million RMB   |
| 5. <i>Monster Hunt 2</i>                       | 18 million 210 thousand RMB   |

(Translation of figure 12).

The day after its release (March 3<sup>rd</sup>), the film grossed RMB 26.79 million ranking the fourth position. *Amazing China* on Maoyan (*maoyan dianying* 猫眼电影) (the Chinese internet website that also provides film rating) was rated 9.6 out of 10.<sup>86</sup>

Released in 2018, *Amazing China* is a 90 minute documentary (*jilu pian* 纪录片) that has had an unprecedented success among Chinese moviegoers, and just a few days after its official release in Chinese cinemas, it has become the top-grossing documentary of all time. The official release date was set on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018, and since then, the documentary's total box office reached \$42 million.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*.

In fact, according to statistics, only three hours after the first day of its release, it broke the box office record, also becoming the first successful documentary based on the attendance rate.<sup>87</sup>

The documentary has had the support and the contribution of important institutions. As a matter of fact, it was produced by CCTV and by China Film Co., Ltd.; additionally, it was distributed by CCTV, China Film Co., Ltd., and by Alibaba Pictures (*ali yingye* 阿里影业) as well.

*Amazing China*, directed by Wei Tie 卫铁, focuses its attention on the figure of President Xi Jinping at the opening of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China (*zhongguo gongchandang dishijiu ci quanguo dabiao dahui* 中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会, hereafter CPC). It also reflects on the historical, educational, technological, environmental progress and developments that China has gone through, and has successfully achieved since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC. Therefore, this film shows the latest achievements of the PRC through the big screen, giving importance to its people by proving that they are an essential part of these achievements as well, creating a feeling of national pride. Furthermore, through the exhibition of this documentary, and, indeed, belonging to the category of main melody films, the Chinese government wants to give to the Chinese people a demonstration that all of this is possible thanks to the leadership of the CCP. Moreover, the poster of the film is quite peculiar. In fact, both the red band in the middle of it, and the golden writing of the title remind of the country's flag. Another peculiarity is that, in a way, the poster acts as a preview, giving a sort of sneak peek about the contents that will be mentioned later in the documentary.

Meanwhile, although the English title of the film is quite simple, namely "Amazing China", the story behind the Chinese title is a little bit more complex and quite interesting too. In fact, the title could also be translated as "Bravo, my country", but, in reality, the original structure comes from "厉害了, 我的哥" (*lihai le, wo de ge*), which can be translated as "Bravo, my brother".<sup>88</sup> This way of saying started to gain popularity thanks to a mobile game developed by Tencent as a way from a player to compliment the other for its outstanding results.<sup>89</sup> Ever since then, it has been used as online slang, and a good amount of official social media accounts of several state-owned media companies developed and started to use the sentence "厉害了, 我的国" as a way to refer to their own country.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> YUE Xiaoling 岳小玲, "Jilu pian 'lihai le, wo de guo' de xushi cel ü e tanxi" 纪录片《厉害了, 我的国》的叙事策略探析 (Analysis of the narrative strategies in the documentary "Amazing China"), in *Acute Viewpoint of New Film*, 6, 2018, pp. 19-21, p.19.

<sup>88</sup> FANG, Tianyu M., "Amazing China", *A Documentary Extolling Xi Jinping, Is The Movie That Officials Want People To Love*, in "Supchina", 2018, available at <https://supchina.com/2018/03/16/amazing-china-a-documentary-extolling-xi-jinping/>, (accessed on June 17, 2018).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*.

The first minutes of the film start with the opening speech by President Xi Jinping at the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC. He said:

“The five years since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC have been five marvellous years in the process of development of the Party and of the country. The achievements of the last five years are comprehensive and open. These changes are deep-seated, fundamental and went through long-term efforts. Socialism with Chinese characteristics entered a new era. This is a new historical direction for the development of China”.<sup>91</sup>

Always at the beginning, besides giving a general and brief overview of high-speed trains and railways, the Blu Whale 2 oil drilling platform, the voice-over narration also informs the spectators that the annual rate of the country’s GDP increased, and eventually ranked first among the world’s major economies. It further argues that the Chinese contribution rate to the world economy exceeded 30% (00:02:12). In a way, it said that all of these achievements gave the Chinese people a greater feeling of acquisition, happiness and safety (00:02:21). Ultimately, it restates that a happy and glorious life is in the hands of every Chinese, and that will lead to the creation of this amazing country. This last sentence, as mentioned earlier in this paragraph, is a further encouragement for its people to achieve the Chinese dream. They are a keystone for the realisation of this goal. In fact, as I will explain later in this paragraph, the documentary undoubtedly introduces and shows the incredible achievements and success of the PRC, but it also tells the brilliant and inspiring stories of ordinary people.<sup>92</sup>

The documentary doesn’t simply describe all the changes and the developments that China has gone through, and has successfully accomplished since Xi Jinping took office; but it also focuses on giving a quite broad overview regarding the developments achieved in different fields. In fact, it mainly touches upon and concentrates the narration on five main topics, namely innovation (*chuangxin* 创新), harmonization (*xietiao* 协调), environment-friendly (*lüse* 绿色), open-up (*kaifang* 开放) and sharing (*gongxiang* 共享).<sup>93</sup>

For this reason, the structure of the film is divided into five chapters and each one of them is concentrated on showing and giving an overview of the accomplishments in that particular field.

To begin with, the first chapter shows the audience all the projects that China has carried out in the last few years. Equally important, it shows the success of these projects. In the last five years, many important projects, from hopes and ideas, finally became a reality. In the first twenty minutes, the documentary presents the projects mentioned, such as the construction of bridges (*zhongguo qiao*

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<sup>91</sup> Film *Amazing China*, CCTV, 2018, (timecode: 00:01:08).

<sup>92</sup> YUE, *Jilu pian...*, *cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*.

中国桥), highways (*zhongguo lu* 中国路), trains (*zhongguo che* 中国车), ports (*zhongguo gang* 中国港) and networks (*zhongguo wang* 中国网).

Moreover, audiences can see all the hard work needed in order to achieve these projects, and what happens behind their realisation. In fact, the engineers or those who are in charge of these projects are interviewed and tell their experiences.

In his interview, the chief engineer responsible for the construction of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge said that China has made rapid progress and it has developed like a dream. Besides, both him and the chief engineer responsible for the telecommunications system of the China Railway High-speed, emphasized the fact that what they have done and built was all fulfilled and created only by Chinese people (timecode: 00:10:35).

The implementation of these projects has brought many changes among the Chinese and in the society. Therefore, thanks to all the improvements that China wants to achieve and to carry out, not only are pivotal for the realisation of the Chinese dream, but also for the happiness of its citizens as well.

The second chapter gives an overview regarding the technological developments that the PRC has gone through and has achieved in the past few years. It emphasises the fact that the country's developments have a strong bond with innovation. For instance, it shows that China is trying to do more things on its own, without the need to rely on other countries. In fact, it has invested in several areas as a way to create new products and to establish new projects (for example, it shows the growth of China's aircraft market).

Furthermore, a lot of attention is given to China's space dream, mentioning Tiangong 2 (*tiangong er hao* 天宫二号). In fact, moviegoers can also learn that, in 2024, China will probably be the only country in the world to have a space station (timecode: 00:28:51).<sup>94</sup>

When moviegoers learn all the developments and the progress that their country has gone through, this definitely helps to increase the feeling of national pride. Also, emphasising the fact that China is getting closer to other countries, and it is becoming an innovative and technologically advanced country.

The third chapter touches upon China's coordinated and harmonized development.

As previously mentioned, one of the goals of the China dream is to lift up as many people as possible from poverty. This chapter essentially gives the spectator an overview regarding the measures that the CCP and the Chinese government are carrying out in order to help people out of poverty. In China, there is a clear disparity between rich and poor, city and countryside; therefore, the country's goal is

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<sup>94</sup> Film *Amazing China*, CCTV, 2018.

to thoroughly eliminate poverty in China by 2020. It shows that one of Xi Jinping's main priorities was to visit these regions, to provide new households for its people and so forth.

This is an important starting point for China, and the narrowing of the gap between rural and urban areas will provide prosperity and well-being for these people. But, also it will give the possibility to create a coordinated development for the country and to fully fulfil the Chinese dream.

The fourth chapter is centred on the green development of the country, showing the measures implemented by the government to achieve this. On the one hand, the film shows enormous and magnificent valleys, mountains, extraordinary views and so forth; on the other hand, it also showcases that the protection of animal species is just as important. Additionally, in the last five years, the PRC has striven to reactivate the habitat of seas and oceans.

Thus, the concept of green development has already become an important pillar of China's development; in fact, this is another brick added towards the realisation of a green Chinese dream.

More importantly, there's a part regarding one of Xi's speeches, saying that he hopes the entire country can always be blue and green, and the creation of a good environment for the children is also an essential part of the China dream (timecode: 00:58:59).<sup>95</sup>

Ultimately, the fifth chapter is based on the creation of a well-off life and society, and sharing it. This implies the need to provide a good education but also healthcare, assistance and housing for elderly people.

*Lihai le, wo de guo* is the embodiment of the China dream. It reflects the combination of both main melody films and the China dream. As previously stated, main melody films glorify Chinese values, thus, in this case, it brought to the big screen the praise and the great achievements of this new dream.

This film, through the way it is told and also thanks to the people interviewed who have shared their experiences and emotions in creating and in being a part of this dream, established a deep connection with the audience.

Furthermore, it doesn't only show that China has changed and that is still changing every day, but also shows an innovative, dynamic, environment-friendly and technologically advanced country (the enthusiasm to show to its citizens as well as to the rest of the world that China has changed, is a feature that can also be found in the two films *American Dreams in China* and *Wolf Warrior II*). A lot of efforts are needed to accomplish the Chinese dream. In fact, the audience can see with their own eyes all the energy and the determination that is needed, and that Chinese workers have in pursuing this goal. The feeling that the documentary creates among spectators is of national enthusiasm and pride.

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*.

However, all the measures above mentioned to fulfil the China dream can be pivotal for the enhancement of the country’s soft power, and to give a brand new light to China’s international image as well. Indeed, this is why the Chinese dream and soft power are intertwined with one another.

Anyhow, the documentary *Amazing China* is not the only production taken into consideration, that represents on a large scale and on the big screen the renowned Chinese dream. In fact, the 2013 film *American Dreams in China* shows and emphasizes the importance to accomplish the Chinese dream. The film, directed by the Hong Kong director Peter Chan (*Chen Kexin* 陈可辛), was released on May 17<sup>th</sup> 2013 and it was a huge success in mainland China. It was highly appreciated by the audience and its box office revenue grossed 539 million RMB (around \$81 million),<sup>96</sup> while it gained 24 million 660 thousand RMB on its first day of exhibition.



(Figure 13. *American Dreams in China* box office revenue. Source: Baidu [糯米票房 app nuoming piaofang]).

<sup>96</sup> FANG, Tianyu M, *Film Friday: ‘American Dreams In China’ Perfectly Captures The Chinese Dream*, in “Supchina”, 2018, available at: <https://supchina.com/2018/07/13/film-friday-american-dreams-in-china-perfectly-captures-the-chinese-dream/>, (accessed on July 13, 2018).

| Real time box office                |   | Film information  |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Total box office<br>539 million RMB | Box office of the first<br>weekend<br>108 million RMB | Box office of the first day<br>24 million 660 thousand<br>RMB |

(Translation of figure 13).

The film tells the inspiring story of three university friends that from nothing became successful entrepreneurs thanks to the establishment of a fruitful business by teaching English, and to the use of U.S. exam materials protected by copyright. The film not only embodies the China dream, but it also portrays the ups and downs, the sacrifices, the joy and the disappointment that the three main characters had to deal with in pursuing their dreams.

The English-language title is simply translated as “American Dreams in China” since that the pursuit and the achievement of the American dream is a fundamental part of the story. Undoubtedly, the American dream rotates around, almost taking over the lives of the protagonists looking as if it was the only solution and beacon of light for having a successful life. Nonetheless, the English title of the film doesn’t really match the actual translation of the Chinese title, which is “Chinese partners”.

The story begins in the 1980s, a time when China started its reform and opening-up policy, thus, a period when the country began to be more open to the world. Therefore, this feeling of openness and dynamism, in a way, reflected the behaviour of the majority of university students during that time, such as the willingness to study in the United States. The story is set in Beijing but several amounts of scenes are set in the United States as well.

The movie tells the story and the long journey to success of three university friends Cheng Dongqing 成冬青 played by Huang Xiaoming 黄晓明, Meng Xiaojun 孟晓骏 played by Deng Chao 邓超 and Wang Yang 王阳 played by Tong Dawei 佟大为; eventually, they will later become business partners. Before the establishment, and consequently, the huge success of their English school called New Dream (*xin mengxiang* 新梦想) (that is roughly based on the story of the Chinese education company called New Oriental),<sup>97</sup> their goal was to achieve the American dream. They all aspired to get their visa accepted, go to the United States with the intention to stay there and have a brilliant career. They met at university in Beijing, and besides studying for their exams, they were also preparing for their American visa interviews. Unfortunately, things didn’t go as planned for everyone. In fact, only Meng Xiaojun managed to get his visa accepted, stepping right into his dream and walking out of the United

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibidem*.

States embassy saying “U.S.A, here I come” (timecode: 00:23:55). Certainly, getting the visa meant not going back to China.

Meanwhile, Cheng Dongqing and Wang Yang were not as lucky as Meng Xiaojun as their visas got rejected again (actually, Wang Yang once got his visa accepted but turned it down to stay in China with his American girlfriend).

Therefore, Cheng Dongqing, Wang Yang and later Meng Xiaojun as well, had to give up on their American dream as they stumbled on the harsh reality. As a consequence, they settled in China and Cheng Dongqing had no choice but to become an English teacher at his school. Later on, he was fired from his job at university for working as a private teacher. Although at first it seemed as a terrible event, it was this layoff that put Cheng Dongqing (and eventually the two others as well) on the right road to success. In fact, he started giving private English lessons to students inside China’s first Kentucky Fried Chicken (hereafter KFC). As Cheng Dongqing’s private tutoring business started to catch on, he couldn’t keep on teaching at KFC, hence, he moved and started the business in an abandoned factory teaming up with his friend Wang Yang. They started tutoring Chinese students to pass the TOEFL and the GRE exams, and also prepared them for their visa application interview. Whereas, Meng Xiaojun’s American dream started to crumble right under his feet as it didn’t turn out as he thought it would. Thus, a few years later, in 1994, Meng Xiaojun returned crushed, disillusioned and broken from the United States; and seeing the huge success that his friends were having he decided to join them.

As the school gained more and more success they not only began to face professional problems, but also personal ones. As a matter of fact, an American testing agency sued them blaming they had plagiarized their materials. On the other hand, the business started to jeopardize their partnership and friendship too. Especially because Meng and Cheng had different ideas for the future of the company. Meng wanted the company to be publicly listed, and it didn’t meet Cheng’s approval.

However, despite all the challenges they had to face, they walked out of the building in the streets of New York with their heads up after giving an intense speech about their country.

The film is characterised by time leaps that go back and forth from the beginning of their university career to the moment when they are being sued by the American company. Moreover, in the movie the audience can also find references to historical events and important moments for China; for instance, the opening of Beijing’s first KFC in 1992, and the United States bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> In the film, the scene features an angry mob of students right outside of the New Dream school, calling them traitors just for running an English school. Cheng Dongqing steps outside, surrounded by the crowd saying that they are hitting Chinese people not Americans, and that they are not traitors just because they teach English (timecode: 01:19:18).

Furthermore, the dialogues of the film are not entirely in Chinese, as a matter of fact, this factor represents an important part of the story. De facto, a good amount of the dialogues is in English. Other than one of the final dialogues between the three Chinese partners and the Americans who sued them, where they only speak in English, or in other circumstances where it is required, there is also a switch between the Chinese language and the English language in the dialogues among the three friends.

The three main characters Cheng Dongqing, Meng Xiaojun and Wang Yang have three different characters, personalities and skills that also reflect the way they collaborate with each other and deal with different challenges.

At the beginning of the film there is a brief introduction of the life story of Cheng Dongqing before his university admission and the one of Meng Xiaojun, meanwhile nothing is really told about Wang Yang's life background before entering university. I would like to analyse the three main characters, their fears, the feeling of failure, disillusionment and so forth.

Cheng Dongqing, played by Huang Xiaoming, is the character whose personal growth and change is the most apparent in the film. In fact, in the first part of the film he is quite idle and naïve, and he deeply admires the determination of his friend Meng Xiaojun. Whereas, in the second part of the movie, not only he has become the founder and the leader of the New Dream school, becoming a sort of hero, giving public speeches in front of millions of students, but he has also become more dynamic and stands up for his ideas.

Nevertheless, before the success and before becoming a wealthy man, Cheng Dongqing didn't have an easy life and because of it, the fear of failure tormented him. He comes from a humble countryside family, and he had to take the university entrance test (*gaokao* 高考) three times until he was finally admitted to Yanjing University. Somehow, his role in the first part of the film could be described as a “土鳖” (*tubie*),<sup>99</sup> he even describes himself as one when talking to the American plaintiffs in the last twenty minutes of the film. A “土鳖” is a soft shell turtle, as a reference to someone who is afraid to go out and to take risks (timecode: 01:43:18). Furthermore, it is also a saying in Chinese used to describe a professional or an entrepreneur who has never studied overseas,<sup>100</sup> thus, it can fit this description as well.<sup>101</sup> He is the one whose visa never gets accepted. Regardless of this fact, the New

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<sup>99</sup> FENG Hua 冯华, “Pingfan chuanqi qingchun feiyang — dianying ‘zhongguo hehuoren’ de yishu” 平凡传奇 青春飞扬 — 电影《中国合伙人》的艺术 (Ordinary legend of the rise of youth — the art of the film *American Dreams in China*), *Zhongguo dianying pinglun*, 15, 2013, pp. 50-51, p. 50.

<sup>100</sup> “土鳖” (*tubie*) the definition is provided by Pleco dictionary.

<sup>101</sup> Sometimes, in the film, the word “土鳖” is also used in a negative way. Because besides the two meanings mentioned above, it can also be used in a pejorative way as a reference to the people from the countryside. For instance, it is used by Meng Xiaojun (time 01:22:16) as an insult to Cheng Dongqing during a meeting because the latter, again, decided to postpone the listing of the school.

Dream school he established became a huge success, helping many Chinese students to achieve their dreams and to go to the United States. In fact, the majority of the students going to the United States were from the New Dream school.

However, before this success, Cheng Dongqing was considered as someone who didn't have much initiative, and a failure. He struggled to improve his English, wasn't very ambitious and had a very strong admiration for his friend Meng Xiaojun, so much that he wanted to be like him; he was also inspired by the speeches that Meng gave about changing the world. The only place to go to change the world was the United States. As a matter of fact, Meng's speeches motivated Cheng Dongqing to go to the United States.

For Cheng Dongqing, the American dream was his possibility to change his future, to lead a better life and to leave behind all the failure and the humiliation. In a way, Cheng Dongqing was looking for the green light;<sup>102</sup> in order to make a comparison, somehow, that is the same green light that we find in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. The novel was first published in 1925, and it set during the Jazz Age. In the novel the green light is one of the most important symbols, as it embodies Gatsby's hopes and dreams for his future, and it also symbolises the American dream.<sup>103</sup> Gatsby's dream was to be finally reunited with the love of his life, Daisy, and this desire of his became the only beacon of light. In fact, all the things he did in life were for her or to get closer to her again (for instance, all the parties he throws are for Daisy). Unfortunately, Gatsby's dream turned out to be unrealisable and collapsed under his feet, creating a feeling of disillusionment.

Cheng Dongqing's green light stopped lighting up his path as well. The American dream was his beacon of light, but Cheng's dream ended up being unreachable and far to grab leaving a bittersweet and disillusioned feeling.

Failure is another important component in Cheng Dongqing's character. His fear of failure is almost overwhelming for several amounts of reasons, even for the possibility to go back home to the countryside after losing his first job as a teacher. In fact, he compared himself to the man who was left behind. Nonetheless, thanks to his perseverance and determination, to the way he taught English to his students, he managed to find his path and to be successful.

Moreover, it is quite interesting to see that Cheng himself didn't really like English and neither did his students. The reason why they decided to study English was just out of necessity, and it was seen as the key to go to the United States. Consequently, the English language not only was considered as

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<sup>102</sup> COURTEMANCHE, Eleanor, *American Dreams in China: Challenges of the Transnational University*, in "Arcade", available at: <https://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/american-dreams-china-challenges-transnational-university>, (accessed on July 13, 2018).

<sup>103</sup> SPARKNOTES, *The Great Gatsby main ideas*, in "Sparknotes", available at: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/gatsby/symbols/>, (accessed on August 16, 2018).

the key ingredient to achieve the American dream, but it was also exploited to achieve the success of the New Dream school.

Cheng Dongqing is the character through which spectators are more likely to identify themselves with. He went from a rough start, being an introverted, insecure person whose English was compared to Japanese, to being a successful leader talking to thousands of students and helped them to achieve their dreams. Hence, maybe Cheng Dongqing is the one who changed the world and tried not to be changed by it.

Meng Xiaojun, played by Deng Chao, is the one who managed to get his visa accepted and to go to the United States. He was influenced by the long family tradition of going to the United States, because both his grandfather and father had studied there. Thus, the pursuit of the American dream became his only goal and destiny. But, his intention was to break the family tradition. In fact, he didn't want to go back to China after finishing his studies in the United States, but rather, he wanted to stay there and live the life of his dreams. Meng Xiaojun's dream was clearly well-defined, he worked and studied a lot to achieve it.

His character changes during the film as well, especially before and after his departure for the United States. In the first part of the film he is the opposite of Cheng Dongqing. Very ambitious, successful and focused on his own path, giving speeches to other students and he was also hoping to change their generation and the world. As the opposite of Cheng Dongqing, Meng Xiaojun could be considered as a “海归” (*haigui*),<sup>104</sup> a phrase in Chinese used to describe a person who has come back to China after gaining overseas experience, which, as stated above, is the complete opposite of a “土鳖”.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, Meng Xiaojun is very confident, ambitious, but sometimes selfish and arrogant. In fact, during a lecture regarding the United States, Meng was annoyed by what the professor was saying, he stood up in front of the entire class asking the professor if he had ever gone to America, and that all he knew about it was from a book. Meng Xiaojun further argued that the American dream is the dream where everyone has equal opportunities and only the United States could do that in the world (timecode: 00:18:32). Right after saying that he stepped out of the classroom. Anyhow, before leaving the professor told him that he was “too young, too naïve”, and this is a reality he stumbled on a few years later.

The American dream he had desired for so long, eventually collapsed and dissolved into thin air. In fact, Meng Xiaojun's great expectations turned out to be a huge disappointment. At first, he was fired from his job in a lab and then had to find another one. However, in 1994, he returned to China and

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<sup>104</sup> FENG, *Pingfan chuanqi qingchun...*, *cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>105</sup> “海归” (*haigui*) the definition is provided by Pleco dictionary.

seeing the success that his two friends were having he decided to join them. Because of his stage fright, and because of his broad knowledge and experience regarding American culture, Meng Xiaojun decided to interview the New Dream school students individually. He did mock interviews preparing the students for their visa interview. He put a lot of efforts and worked hard in order to strengthen the school and its prestige.

During the film the sentence referred to the willingness to change the world appears many times. But, referring to Meng Xiaojun, he was one of those who wanted to change the world, but, in the end, the world changed him.

Wang Yang, played by Tong Dawei, is the most westernized and charismatic character of all three.<sup>106</sup> There is a subtle change in his character as well, especially after his American girlfriend broke up with him; the same girl he gave up his American visa for. Unlike Cheng Dongqing and Meng Xiaojun, whose life stories are briefly mentioned in the first minutes of the film, nothing is mentioned about Wang Yang's past.

In the first part of the film he has long hair and writes poems; he is very keen on watching Hollywood films, and they will be one of his tools for teaching English at the New Dream school. He can be considered as a “愤青” (*fenqing*),<sup>107</sup> a Chinese phrase used to describe, in a positive way, a young Chinese with extreme nationalistic tendencies.<sup>108</sup>

He managed to develop an interesting method for teaching English to his students, namely through the viewing of Hollywood films and through the exploitation of his experience with American girls. Because, as Meng Xiaojun told him, he knows the core of the English language, thus, he knows their logic and how they think. That is why he also started to teach the way Americans think, and to use his experience in his lectures.

In a way, Wang Yang is probably the most moderate character of the three, and we can see that he is not really involved in critical situations regarding the future of the school, but he has an important role in giving a balance between Cheng Dongqing and Meng Xiaojun. Especially during the period when the two were fighting for the future of the school, Wang Yang acted as a mediator.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps he is the only one whose nature didn't change much after the success of the school. In fact, he doesn't get himself too much involved when Cheng Dongqing and Meng Xiaojun talk about the

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<sup>106</sup> FANG, *Film Friday: 'American Dreams in China' Perfectly Captures...*, cit.

<sup>107</sup> FENG, *Pingfan chuanqi qingchun...*, cit., p. 50.

<sup>108</sup> “愤青” (*fenqing*) the definition is provided by Pleco dictionary.

<sup>109</sup> ZHANG Zuqun 张祖群, “dianying ‘zhongguo meng’ de lizhi xing shuxie: yi ‘zhongguo hehuoren’ weili 电影“中国梦”的励志性书写：以《中国合伙人》为例” (Inspirational film on the “Chinese dream”: taking “zhongguo hehuoren” as an example), *Mingjia laigao*, 17, 2013, pp. 1-4, p. 3.

future of the school or the possibility to publicly list it. Moreover, during the meetings he is not really concerned, but rather he plays videogames on his phone.

At his wedding, he gave a speech saying that one should never start a business with his or her best friends. Although he may be indifferent in many situations, he gave a balance to their friendship.

Nevertheless, even though they had their personal challenges and the business almost got in the way of their friendship, in the end, they managed to be successful and to re-establish what they had.

The 1980s were a time where almost every Chinese student had its own American dream to fulfil, and, undoubtedly, the enthusiasm and the willingness to study English reached its peak. Everyone was holding onto the idea that studying the English language was the key to unlock their American dream, and to unchain many other opportunities as well.<sup>110</sup> However, the majority of those dreams faced the bitterness of reality.

Nonetheless, another important factor to point out is that not everyone gets to do what they really want in life.<sup>111</sup> For instance, this is the case of Cheng Dongqing before the success of the New Dream school; in fact, he frankly tells his students that he doesn't like English. But, Cheng Dongqing had a photographic memory, he had memorized all the English dictionaries he could. However, he mainly did it for his students, and that's the reason why his English was good.

Furthermore, in the film, there is always a transition between the love and the aversion towards the United States. As a matter of fact, the love and the praise for this long desired country was transformed into a feeling of disappointment. When teaching, the three partners exploited their personal experiences as a means to help their students. Consequently, the English language, and the United States as well, from a tool used to achieve their dreams when they were young, have become the tools that eventually led them to success.

One of the most intense scenes happens to be in the last thirty minutes of the film. Cheng Dongqing finally has the chance to go to the United States, and he goes there, along with Meng and Yang, to meet the American plaintiffs. They are depicted as arrogant, prejudiced and have a stereotyped view of China.<sup>112</sup> Besides, they not only blame the New Dream school for giving an unfair advantage to Chinese students in their exams and an unauthorized use of EES material, but

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<sup>110</sup> LEE, Maggie, *Film Review: "American Dreams in China"*, in "Variety", 2013, available at: <https://variety.com/2013/film/global/film-review-american-dreams-in-china-1200483632/>, (accessed on July 12, 2018).

<sup>111</sup> " 'zhongguo hehuoren' dianying pingxi" 《中国合伙人》电影评析 (Analysis and comment on the film "American Dreams in China"), *Baidu Wenku*, available at: <https://wenku.baidu.com/view/76eee67784254b35effd3483.html?from=search>, (accessed on July 6, 2018).

<sup>112</sup> LEE, *Film Review...*, cit.

also they accuse them to be thieves and that cheating has a long tradition in China. That is the moment when Cheng Dongqing shows that he memorized the entire legal book on the flight from Beijing to New York, and he can remember and quote the clauses mentioned. He makes an important statement saying that Chinese students are very good at taking tests, they are willing to do whatever it takes to succeed. He also outlines the plaintiffs' lack of knowledge regarding the Chinese culture. Furthermore, Meng Xiaojun stated that the main reason of that meeting was to educate them about China and to gain respect from them, saying that China has changed; however, they are still stuck in the past and have an old and stereotyped image of the PRC (timecode: 01:40:57).

In addition, he said that now Chinese students don't aspire to stay in the United States anymore, but rather, they want to go back home.

Indeed, the powerful words pronounced both by Cheng and Meng made the spectators proud.



**(Figure 14.** Scene where Meng Xiaojun talks about what Chinese students want now. He says that now Chinese students don't aspire to stay in America, but they want to go home (timecode: 01:40:57). *Source:* Film *American Dreams in China*, 2013).

Their journey started with the eagerness to pursue and to accomplish the American dream, but, eventually, what they did was to achieve the Chinese dream. While the American dream remained just a dream and an illusion, the Chinese dream became true and a practical reality.<sup>113</sup> In fact, it was the latter that eventually led them to success. In a way, the name of the school founded by Cheng Dongqing, New Dream, might also embody the fact that the English school was effectively Cheng's new dream and possibility to start over.

This film and the story told, besides being an inspiration for many Chinese people and for the younger generations, is a big encouragement as well. It is an encouragement to not to stop in front of

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<sup>113</sup> ZHANG Zuqun, "Dianying "zhongguo meng" de zhengzhixing shuxie: yi 'zhongguo hehuoren' weili" 电影“中国梦”的政治性写书：以《中国合伙人》为例 (Writing on the political nature of the “Chinese dream” taking “American dreams in China” as an example), *Mingjia laigao*, 19, 2013, pp. 7-10, p. 10.

failure and despair, because as Cheng Dongqing said those shouldn't be our limits, but rather, we should seek victory in defeat and hope in despair (timecode: 01:04:24). Moreover, it is a way to glorify the fact that for a dream to be accomplished the United States is not the only outlet, but the same dream and success can be achieved in China, and the final result might even be greater than the one expected.

The film was released shortly after President Xi Jinping's Chinese dream started to gain momentum,<sup>114</sup> and the timing couldn't have been more perfect. The distribution of the film in conjunction with Xi Jinping's slogan further reinforced the meaning and the worth of the Chinese dream.

In addition, the ending itself is another essential part of the film. As a matter of fact, the film is also a celebration of Chinese entrepreneurs who have become famous leaders around the world, especially in fields already influenced and prevailed by American companies.<sup>115</sup> For instance, there are the photos of Jack Ma (*Ma Yun* 马云) the founder of Alibaba Group, Robin Li (*Li Yanhong* 李彦宏) the co-founder of Baidu, Liu Chuanzhi 柳传志 the founder of Lenovo Group and others. The sentence that says: 他们的故事或许也是你们的故事 (*tamen de gushi huoxu ye shi nimen de gushi*), it means that their story perhaps is also your story. This sentence definitely has an important impact on the audience. Hence, it is a story that can take different shapes and can happen to anyone. It can be possible thanks to the Chinese dream.

The film is also a praise and a push to go against the tide, in trying to differentiate your own path from the others. The glorification to make different choices in life, and the feeling of uncertainty could be linked to a poem by the American poet Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken* (1916).<sup>116</sup> In a way, the poem reflects and represents what the three partners, especially Cheng Dongqing, went through and still managed to accomplish. In the poem the traveller finds himself in front of a diverged road in the woods, there are two roads but he can't travel both. Consequently, the traveller has to make a choice. No one knows where the two roads lead and the fork in the road represents the choice that the traveller has to make in his life, also showing how much of an impact the choices that one makes can have on one's life.<sup>117</sup>

During the 1980s and the 1990s, the majority of Chinese students wanted to achieve the American dream. During that period, their lives were based on working to achieve that dream (for

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<sup>114</sup> ELLEY, Derek, *Review: American Dreams in China (2013)*, in "Sino-Cinema", 2013, available at: <http://sino-cinema.com/2016/05/10/review-american-dreams-in-china/>, (accessed on July 2, 2018).

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>116</sup> Although he doesn't mention a specific poem, Meng Xiaojun mentions Robert Frost in the first twenty minutes of the film (timecode: 00:20:16).

<sup>117</sup> ENOTES, *The Road Not Taken Analysis*, in "Enotes", available at: <https://www.enotes.com/topics/road-not-taken/in-depth>, (accessed on August 17, 2018).

instance they all studied English in order to go to the United States, studied for their English exams and the visa interviews), thus everything was going round the American dream. In their eyes, the United States was the land of success, prosperity and opportunities, where everyone was equal in front of them. Therefore, if one wanted to be successful and have a brilliant career, the United States was the only country where this was possible, and where people could change the world. Meanwhile, during that period, Chinese students didn't have the same perception about their own country, meaning that, in their eyes, China wasn't a land where one could be successful (especially during a time when the country had just started to open its doors to the outside world). However, as we can see for the three main characters, and also for the successful Chinese entrepreneurs showed in the last minutes of the film, the American dream became a reality in China. Also, taking into consideration that the achievements that the Chinese entrepreneurs have achieved in fields where there is a strong American influence (for instance Alibaba and Amazon, Google and Baidu and so forth). These outcomes demonstrate that the Chinese dream can be an important equivalent of the American dream, and along with the fact that now the PRC is getting stronger and more important on all fronts, this helps the validity and the worth of the Chinese dream. Hence, one shouldn't have the belief that the American dream is the only solution to become successful, and as the film shows, it doesn't guarantee the success one was hoping for. Therefore, people can realise their dreams in their own country, and they can be more fruitful than the ones achieved in other one. Moreover, the China dream can also be very important for the country's image and the rapid growth and development that the country is facing.<sup>118</sup> In fact, the Chinese dream not only is a land of opportunities for its own citizens, but for foreign people too. More and more foreign people are going to China to achieve their Chinese dream, by starting their business, creating new relationships between China and other countries, and so on.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, according to Xi Jinping's speech on soft power and on the Chinese dream, he argued that this dream also means that every Chinese will be able to realise his own dream in fulfilling the Chinese dream.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, in a way, the Chinese dream (both to Chinese people and foreigners) is now slowly becoming the new American dream. The same American dream that not only Chinese students were eager to achieve in the 1980s and 1990s, but other people around the world as well. However, this situation is also beneficial for the country's international appeal.

Nevertheless, it should be made a comparison regarding the situation between the English language and the Chinese language nowadays. As a matter of fact, the study of the Chinese language

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<sup>118</sup> PENA, David S., "Comparing the Chinese Dream with the American Dream", *International Critical Thought*, 5, 3, 2015, pp. 277-295, p. 293.

<sup>119</sup> "Chinese Dream, My Dream: We are in China to pursue our dreams". Youtube video. Posted by "New China TV". 23-10-2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJU0u4HhOlg>, (accessed on July 9, 2018).

<sup>120</sup> CHINADAILY, *China to promote...*, cit.

has gained a lot of popularity in the last few years, and somehow, there has been an overturn of the situation. In a way, it could be compared to the situation that Cheng Dongqing, Wang Yang and Meng Xiaojun were facing back in the 1980s and 1990s. In the past few years, thanks to the growth and the development of the Chinese economy, the prosperity of the country and the increasing presence and participation on the world stage, Beijing has started to become the focus of many countries and foreign companies. In fact, more and more companies and entrepreneurs are willing to start their business in the PRC, and increasingly more students are focusing their studies on the Chinese language and culture. Thus, the belief Chinese students had in the film, namely that the English language was the key to unlock their future and new opportunities, now, this hope can be found in the Chinese language. As a matter of fact, in the movie, many of the students didn't like English but they studied it anyway to have a future. Now, many students may don't like studying Chinese, but, they probably decided to embrace it in order to unlock future opportunities.

Nonetheless, more and more foreign students are seeking an opportunity to study in Chinese universities, to start their business, hoping their career takes off, and to eventually fulfil their Chinese dream.

Both films, namely *Amazing China* and *American Dreams in China*, are a tribute to the Chinese dream. They show the audience that China is a worthy country that can do what other countries can do, or even better. It is a boost to pursue the Chinese dream showing that the outcomes can be more fruitful.

## 2.4 Focus on the film *Wolf Warrior II* (战狼 II): a successful soft power strategy

Another production that was taken into consideration is the 2017 film *Wolf Warrior II* (*zhanlang II* 战狼 II). This film was a huge success in mainland China, it broke the box office record and ranked first in China's box office. This highly appreciated film was taken into consideration because, besides being a movie that tends to be more commercially-oriented than others,<sup>121</sup> it also tries to adopt a Hollywood style narration and,<sup>122</sup> more importantly, it is focused on and embodies the promotion of China's soft power as well.

Indeed, the film carries a patriotic core value, but at same time, it tries to be a source of entertainment for its audiences as well. This is an important change for Chinese films, because since that the Chinese film market has been developing and growing rapidly in the past few years, Chinese directors and filmmakers have started to be more competitive, to create more appealing and high quality films that can compete with Hollywood productions. As previously stated, films should be used more as a platform to expand China's image and Chinese culture abroad, as a way to be perfectly intertwined with the enhancement of China's soft power. For this reason, the film *Wolf Warrior II* was wisely used to improve China's image, and to boost its soft power.

The film production *Wolf Warrior II* was released on July 27<sup>th</sup> 2017, and since its release in Chinese cinemas, it really caught the attention of moviegoers, and it turned out to be a very successful film with a meaningful box office revenue. Furthermore, it is important to point out that *Wolf Warrior II* is the first Chinese production to enter the top 100 films in the global box office, and the first non-Hollywood production to be in the top 100.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, it was officially selected as the film for the foreign-language category of the Academy Awards.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> TAN Meiling 谭美玲, “‘zhanlang 2’ tisheng zhongguo wenhua ruanshili de celue yanjiu” 《战狼 2》提升中国文化软实力的策略研究 (A research on the strategy of improving China's cultural soft power by the film “Wolf Warrior II”), *Yinshan academic journal*, 31, 2, 2018, pp. 9-12, p. 10.

<sup>122</sup> XIE Zhoupu 谢周浦, “‘zhanlang 2’ de haolaiwu xushi yu zhongguo meng neihe” 《战狼 2》的好莱坞叙事与中国梦内核 (The Hollywood narration of “Wolf Warrior 2” and the core of the Chinese dream), *Mudan*, 2017, pp. 30-32, p. 30.

<sup>123</sup> TAN, ‘zhanlang 2’ tisheng zhongguo wenhua..., *cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>124</sup> OSNOS, Evan, *Making China Great Again*, in “The New Yorker”, 2018, available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/01/08/making-china-great-again>, (accessed on August 19, 2018).



(Figure 15. Wolf warrior II total box office revenue [the first on the left] and the box office on the first day of screening [on the right]. Source: Baidu [糯米票房 app nuoming piaofang]).

| Real time box office | User portrait     | Marketing index       | Competitiveness      |
|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Total box office     | Shared box office | First week box office | First day box office |
| 5.67 billion RMB     | 5.30 billion RMB  | 997 million RMB       | 102 million RMB      |

(Translation of figure 15).

Its total box office revenue accounted for 5.67 billion RMB, earning 102 million RMB on its first day of exhibition. Then, it ranked first in China’s box office and it was in the lead for four weeks in a row, becoming the Chinese movie with the highest box office revenue and top-grossing film of all time.

## China Box Office

July 28–30, 2017

(US \$1 = 6.7369 Chinese Yuan Renminbi)

| < Prev Wk |    | Currency: Chinese Yuan Renminbi | Go                     | Next Wk >      |                 |      |
|-----------|----|---------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|------|
| TW        | LW | Movie                           | Weekend Gross          | Change         | Gross-to-Date   | Week |
| 1         | N  | <b>Wolf Warrior 2</b>           | <b>887,742,999 RMB</b> | -              | 989,940,202 RMB | 1    |
| 2         | N  | <b>The Founding of an Army</b>  | <b>163,499,699 RMB</b> | -              | 201,484,699 RMB | 1    |
| 3         | 4  | <b>Despicable Me 3</b>          | <b>22,248,700 RMB</b>  | <b>-66.2%</b>  | 985,290,899 RMB | 4    |
| 4         | 9  | <b>Dear Tutu</b>                | <b>17,230,801 RMB</b>  | <b>+335.9%</b> | 21,302,799 RMB  | 1    |

## China Box Office

August 18–20, 2017

(US \$1 = 6.6704 Chinese Yuan Renminbi)

| < Prev Wk |    | Currency: Chinese Yuan Renminbi         | Go                     | Next Wk >            |                   |      |
|-----------|----|---|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------|
| TW        | LW | Movie                                   | Weekend Gross          | Change               | Gross-to-Date     | Week |
| 1         | 1  | <b>Wolf Warrior 2</b>                   | <b>239,934,001 RMB</b> | <b>-57.1%</b>        | 5,125,677,399 RMB | 4    |
| 2         | 32 | <b>Paradox</b>                          | <b>212,476,100 RMB</b> | <b>+1,026,772.2%</b> | 277,158,402 RMB   | 1    |
| 3         | 16 | <b>Twenty Two</b>                       | <b>60,562,303 RMB</b>  | <b>+15,539.9%</b>    | 124,112,798 RMB   | 1    |
| 4         | 12 | <b>One Hundred Thousand Bad Jokes 2</b> | <b>54,622,398 RMB</b>  | <b>+2,477.6%</b>     | 57,557,301 RMB    | 1    |
| 5         | 7  | <b>Seer Movie 6: Invincible Puni</b>    | <b>49,595,498 RMB</b>  | <b>+534.5%</b>       | 62,609,302 RMB    | 1    |
| 6         | 18 | <b>Peace Breaker</b>                    | <b>27,704,799 RMB</b>  | <b>+9,655.9%</b>     | 44,535,499 RMB    | 1    |

(Figure 16. *Wolf warrior II* maintained the leading position for four weeks in a row. Source: Box office mojo).

The film is directed by Wu Jing 吴京, who is also the main character of the film. Wu Jing has also directed and was the leading role in the first *Wolf Warrior* film that was released in 2015. However, the first one wasn't as successful as the second chapter.

The second chapter not only was released a few days before the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Chinese army,<sup>125</sup> but it also premiered the day before the release of the film *The Founding of an Army* (*jianjun daye* 建军大业), a main melody film, which was commissioned by the Chinese government to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People's Liberation Army. Regardless of this fact, Wu Jing's film still managed to be more successful than *The Founding of an army* (which ranked the second position in the domestic box office).

*Wolf warrior II* is an action film that, indeed, has managed to find its way through the cinematic taste of Chinese moviegoers, and to be successful by bringing a filmic genre that is typical of Hollywood films. As mentioned above, the movie definitely presents some patriotic features in it, but at the same time, it focuses on being more entertaining and on being a commercial film. On the other hand, it also proves that Chinese filmmakers and films have raised the bar showing that China is capable of creating good products (and blockbusters as well), which can also be competitive, and can keep up with foreign productions.

<sup>125</sup> XIE, 'zhanlang 2' de haolaiwu xushi..., cit., p. 31.

Besides being an important film for the factors above-mentioned, it is just as important for the fact that it portrays a good and positive image of China, showing that it shouldn't be seen as a threat but rather as a country that helps others when they are in difficult situations. Furthermore, this production embodies the message that the Chinese government wants to spread, and President Xi Jinping's intention to enhance the country's soft power.

The protagonist and hero of the film is Leng Feng 冷锋 played by Wu Jing. He is a soldier and a veteran of the so-called "wolf warriors" (the name that also gives the title to the movie); they are special forces of the People's Liberation Army. However, due to a fight, Leng Feng was expelled from the army and had to give up the title of being a wolf warrior. In fact, in the first ten minutes of the film there is a scene that shows what happened three years earlier, and then the plot focuses on the protagonist's present. In fact, an important feature of Leng Feng's character is that he usually tends to do things on his terms and not to follow orders; as a matter of fact, this is something that led him to lose the position he had in the army.

The film is set in Africa (it doesn't say where exactly). Nevertheless, Leng Feng is mourning his girlfriend's death who was killed during a military operation, and he is not giving up until he finds those who killed her.

Shortly after, a rebel army, which was supported by Western soldiers, tries to take over the country and the situation ends up in a terrible and bloody civil war. Leng Feng tries his best to protect and to take as many people as possible to the Chinese Embassy to seek shelter. This is an important part because the Ambassador steps out of the Embassy saying: We are Chinese! China and Africa are friends (timecode: 00:26:55). Thus, the Chinese Embassy not only opened the doors to its citizens but to the Africans as well.

Hearing that there are other Chinese and Africans scattered, including Doctor Chen who is targeted by the rebels and the mercenaries, and no one could save them, Leng Feng steps forward and decides to go rescue them. At the same time, a deadly virus breaks out, and Dr. Chen seems to be the one who has the vaccination for it. Eventually, Leng Feng reaches the hospital and rescues an American doctor who speaks Chinese, Rachel Smith (played by the American-Hong Kong actress Celina Jade) and Dr. Chen's daughter (Dr. Chen was then killed by the rebels). Then, they are headed to the Hanbound Chinese factory to save his friend's mom (he is Tundu's godfather) and other people in danger. Rachel suggests to go to the American Consulate as it might be the best and safest choice for them. Anyhow, Leng Feng points out that they are nowhere to be found, and that the Chinese marines are the ones who are actually helping them (timecode: 00:49:49).

Afterwards, the factory workers are being rescued by a helicopter sent by the United Nations (which eventually gets shot down by the mercenaries). Leng Feng decides to stay and to save the country

from the chaos. The story continues with a series of fights, explosions, gunshots and action scenes.<sup>126</sup> But then, seeing that the situation got worse, the Chinese fleet decides to fire its missiles to help them from the mercenaries.

In the last twenty minutes of the film there is the last fight between Leng Feng and Big Daddy (played by the American actor Frank Grillo), one of the mercenaries who killed the leader of the rebellion, took over, and wanted to kill Leng Feng. The latter understands that Big Daddy is the one who killed his girlfriend. Eventually, Leng Feng kills Big daddy, avenging his girlfriend's death. But, before it all ends, Big Daddy said to Leng Feng that people like you [referring to the Chinese] will always be inferior to people like me, get used to it (timecode: 110:45).

In the last few minutes of the film, there is a very important and powerful scene. Leng Feng and the others are heading to the camp of the United Nations where the Chinese are waiting for them. But, they are blocked by the rebels; therefore, Leng Feng decides to wave the Chinese flag (wrapped around his arm) and when the rebels saw that they were Chinese, they let the convoy pass, finally leading everyone to safety.

*Wolf Warrior II* has definitely taken the Chinese audience and the director Wu Jing by surprise. The film was highly appreciated by Chinese spectators as they even stood up and applauded the film. The director and actor Wu Jing was just as surprised when he learned about the huge success the film was having, considering that the first *Wolf Warrior* film didn't have the same response.

Generally speaking, the way the plot of the film is structured is not new in the eyes of the spectators. However, in a way, it might be new the fact that the hero of the story is Chinese who is fighting against Western villains, and that such a film with a lot of action and special effects is a Chinese production. In fact, the film distinguishes itself from the classical storylines of Chinese films, showing the domestic audience (but foreign as well) what the PRC is capable of creating on its own, and regarding the domestic film production, it hopes that Chinese moviegoers will be expecting more successful films like this one, increasing their films expectations.

Leng Feng, the hero of the film, is a soldier and he protects the Chinese and the Africans against foreign villains who are killing innocent people.

In relation to this, Stanley Rosen, a professor at the University of Southern California involved in the studies of Chinese society and cinema, in an article of *The New York Times* stated: "There are a number of things that don't really fit into what you would expect from a straight patriotic film. [referring to Leng Feng] it's a very individualist personal quest, which is much more of a Hollywood

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<sup>126</sup> BUCKLEY, Chris, *In China, an Action Hero Beats Box Office Records (and Arrogant Westerners)*, in "The New York Times", 2017, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/world/asia/china-wolf-warrior-2-film.html>, (accessed on July 13, 2018).

thing [...]”.<sup>127</sup> As a matter of fact, as briefly mentioned earlier, individualism is a feature that characterizes the Chinese hero, and it is a characteristic that can hardly be found in Chinese films and in China.<sup>128</sup> However, despite this, at the same time, he is extremely loyal to the Chinese army and to his country, as he knows that he can count on them. Anyhow, it might start off as a personal quest in trying to find his fiancée’s killers, but Leng Feng ends up saving many lives.

Without a doubt, the film was influenced by Hollywood films (in a way, it might seem as one), and the approach to the storyline and the way the film is structured can be compared to a Hollywood production.<sup>129</sup> In addition, another peculiarity of the film is that it has an international cast (for instance, the American actor Frank Grillo and the actress Celina Jade), and around 30% of it is in English.<sup>130</sup>

In an interview for *The New Yorker*, Wu Jing was asked what are the films that have influenced and that have had an important impact on him speaking in terms of not only being an actor but being a film director as well. He said “[...] Hollywood films influenced so many Chinese audiences, even for generations [...]”.<sup>131</sup> He also makes some examples, such as *Die Hard*, *Top Gun*, *True Lies* and many others.

Consequently, Wu Jing has tried to bring something new to the Chinese big screen, at the same time focusing on a type of film that had already been metabolized by Chinese audiences. He has definitely found the formula to connect the right dots between action, international actors, the right message to convey, and being able to create something that could meet the audiences’ tastes and entertain them. Also, many even compared Leng Feng’s character to Rambo, since that he resembles the typical (American) hero that we have already seen multiple times in Hollywood films of the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>132</sup>

*Wolf Warrior II*, a two-hour film, sets an important example that, embodies the results of all the things learned from Hollywood’s experience of being a giant in the cinematic field and being almost impossible to dethrone. Metaphorically speaking, (anyhow, this is a topic that will be further

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>128</sup> HASKI, Pierre, *Il film che sbanca i botteghini cinesi esaltando il nazionalismo*, in “Star politics”, 2017, available at: <http://www.starpolitics.it/il-film-che-sbanca-i-botteghini-cinesi-esaltando-il-nazionalismo/#>, (accessed on July 10, 2018).

<sup>129</sup> XIE, ‘zhanlang 2’ de haolaiwu xushi..., cit., p. 30.

<sup>130</sup> FRATER, Patrick, ‘*Wolf Warrior II*’s Massive Success Forces Studios to Rethink China Approach, in “Variety”, 2017, available at: <https://variety.com/2017/biz/news/china-wolf-warrior-ii-1202543266/>, (accessed on July 24, 2018).

<sup>131</sup> “Wu Jing on “*Wolf Warrior II*”’s box-office success and China’s emerging identity”. Youtube video. Posted by “The New Yorker”. 1-1-2018. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e65FK1xfcl4>, (accessed on August 21, 2018).

<sup>132</sup> FRATER, ‘*Wolf Warrior II*’s Massive Success Forces Studios..., cit.

explained in the third chapter), it is as if China was standing on the giant's shoulders (Hollywood), looking as far as possible.

Therefore, in relation to the things mentioned above, there are a series of elements that were included in the film, and that have also made an essential contribution in order to create such a successful film. The production, the narrative, the special effects and the action scenes are all an integration and adaptation of Hollywood's productions, and Wu Jing's film resembles and features some similarities with the 2003 American action film *Tears of the Sun*.<sup>133</sup>

However, besides the new approach that *Wolf Warrior II* has embraced and brought to the big screen, is not the only reason why it has had a very positive outcome and was taken into consideration. In point of fact, the driving force linked to the positive response of the film is the perfect timing of its release, and the important message that it carries and wants to convey.

The film has been able to master the combination and to intertwine two fundamental aspects, in other words, Chinese values and soft power. In fact, this film is an important example to take into consideration because it demonstrates the capability that films have to contribute in a positive way to a country's image. At the same time, thanks to the topics it deals with, it creates a bond with the audience. By doing so, it increases its appeal and attraction.

First of all, the film is set in Africa. This is a decisive factor both for the country itself, and at the same time, for its soft power. This factor is important because it shows the connection that Africa and China have.

In the last fifteen years the PRC has become an important partner for Africa, and the latter has increasingly gained importance in China's foreign policy. In fact, many Western countries have expressed their scepticism and doubted the truthfulness behind China's real intentions regarding this matter, as they see the PRC's economic presence in Africa closer to neo-colonialism. Consequently, Beijing decided to focus on its soft power in order to create a more positive image of the country in Africa.<sup>134</sup>

Therefore, the film shows the good relationship and friendship that there is between China and Africa; in relation to this, in the film, the spectators can clearly see that Leng Feng is well integrated in the environment. More importantly, it is also a chance to show to others as well that China's intentions are good, that it has no plan to take over or to interfere. Indeed, Africa can actually benefit from China's help (as the audience can see in the film) as it provides jobs, medical assistance and boosts

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<sup>133</sup> XIE, 'zhanlang 2' de haolaiwu xushi..., cit., p. 30.

<sup>134</sup> China has tried to differentiate its approach to Africa, in fact, it is trying to make a difference. Consequently, China wants to show that it is not as other previous colonial powers and that it probably is the most appropriate country to be Africa's partner. (GRAZIANI, Sofia, "La Cina in Africa: aiuti, retorica e soft power", *Nuova Secondaria*, 2017, pp. 44-46).

the economy (for example the establishment of factories). For instance, in the film, after the civil war breaks out, and Leng Feng is on his way to the Chinese factory to save Tundu's mom and the others, when she learns her son is safe she said that he was safe because he was on a Chinese ship (timecode: 00:54:13). Thus, to restate that China shouldn't be seen as a threat.

Furthermore, besides focusing on China's relationship with Africa, the importance of this film is also related to the core message and image it wants to convey. As previously stated, *Wolf Warrior II* indeed carries a patriotic message, but at the same time it is used as a platform that gives a significant promotion to the growth of China's soft power.

Undoubtedly, it shows the country under a brand new light. China is portrayed as a positive, modern, strong and advanced country. It emphasizes the importance to portray a real and current image of the country and of its status, showing its strengths and how far it has come. It celebrates and gives great importance to the Chinese military power (the People's Liberation Army) highlighting its duty to help other people, meaning that its power is used for good. There are several hints referring to the lack of help and assistance provided by the United States forces (or Western in general) for the people in danger; while the Chinese forces provide immediate help and step in as soon as they have the approval.

In one of the last scenes where there is the fight between Leng Feng and the villain, Big Daddy, who before being killed by the Chinese hero, said that people like you [referring to the Chinese] will always be inferior to people like me. Leng Feng replies that that's history (timecode: 110:45). In a way, that response (Leng Feng's) symbolizes the shift that characterizes China's present, and it definitely is not the same country the villain was referring to.

*Wolf Warrior II* reflects China's global (and harmonious) rise under the leadership and in the Xi Jinping era, showing its growth as an increasingly more powerful and strong country. It demonstrates its confidence in trying to have a say on the international stage, and to stabilize its global status.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, the film embodies President Xi Jinping's desire and encouragement to increase the country's soft power initiatives and to further foster the use of films and media to promote it.

In relation to this, in the interview for *The New Yorker*, Wu Jing expressed the importance regarding the fact that films should finally be used as a platform or tool to showcase the PRC's new image. He said: "[...] it's about time that China uses movies – a cultural expression – to tell the world about our development and our values and our desire for peace. We want to show others [that] through movies, otherwise people would always think of us as an underdeveloped country [...]"<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> BUCKLEY, *In China, an Action Hero...*, cit.

<sup>136</sup> "Wolf Warrior II" 's box-office success and China's..., Youtube video, cit.

Many people applauded after the vision of the film as it makes people proud of their country, showing that it is good and benevolent, that helps others, has a strong background, and more importantly it will always have its people's backs. Regarding this matter, Wu Jing stated that in the past the vast majority of Chinese films were about the Opium Wars or how other countries were at war against China; consequently, Chinese people wanted to see their country to have the power to protect its people and be a part of world peace.<sup>137</sup> That's one of the keys to the positive response of the film.

Therefore, this production is a win-win model because it managed to be both a success and to be used as a tool to spread Chinese values and culture. As a matter of fact, once Chinese directors and filmmakers are able to master such techniques, and to create high quality films with engaging plots and stories worth telling, films can be a pivotal instrument that can highly contribute to the improvement of the country's image and expansion of its cultural influence. *Wolf Warrior II* sets a good example. As Hollywood, and the American pop culture in general, has used films as vehicles to promote the United States, to convey American values and the American dream abroad, China has started to invest more and to recognise the worth and the power of these platforms to promote its image outside of the country's borders and to be more attractive.

According to Wu Jing, in a few years from now, Chinese films will have a worldwide success; he also said that some of his Hollywood friends, after watching *Wolf Warrior II* remained amazed as they didn't know that China could make such films.<sup>138</sup>

As previously mentioned, *Wolf Warrior II* sets an important example. This is because, on the one hand, it has used the film as a vehicle to positively contribute to China's image and to the growth of its soft power. On the other hand, it shows that Beijing has the skills, the creativity and the technology to make films that can compete with Hollywood.

It demonstrates that due to the relentless economic development, China has taken giant steps and has improved its position, showing that it is going forward and doesn't want to be stuck in the past. Thus, with the development of its film industry, the creation of more films that can reflect the actual image of the country, and the creation of films that audiences can find appealing, all these factors can contribute to the creation of relationships between China and other countries, enhancing its soft power.

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem.*

## Chapter three

### Sino-US collaborations

#### 3.1 Hollywood and China: same bed, different dreams

The Chinese film industry has experienced an unprecedented rapid growth and development in the last few years. This rapid growth was followed by the construction of an increasing number of cinemas, screens (now China has more screens than the United States),<sup>139</sup> and every year the domestic box office revenue experiences a significant upsurge. In order to make a comparison, in 2003 China's domestic box office revenue reached RMB 900 million, whereas in 2010 it reached more than RMB 10 billion, and in 2013 the domestic box office reached RMB 21.7 billion.<sup>140</sup> Thanks to this rapid expansion on all fronts, also due to the country's rapid economic growth, in 2013 China's box office accounted for 10% of the global film market, and at same time, it has become the world's second largest film industry.<sup>141</sup>

| Year | Number of Feature Films | Box Office (billion yuan) | Cinema Number | Screen Number |
|------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| 2000 | 91                      | 0.8                       | -             | -             |
| 2001 | 88                      | 0.87                      | -             | -             |
| 2002 | 100                     | 1.0                       | 875           | 1581          |
| 2003 | 140                     | 0.9                       | 1108          | 2296          |
| 2004 | 212                     | 1.5                       | 1188          | 2396          |
| 2005 | 260                     | 2.046                     | 1243          | 2668          |
| 2006 | 330                     | 2.62                      | 1325          | 3034          |
| 2007 | 402                     | 3.327                     | 1427          | 3527          |
| 2008 | 406                     | 4.341                     | 1545          | 4097          |
| 2009 | 456                     | 6.206                     | 1687          | 4723          |
| 2010 | 526                     | 10.172                    | 2000          | 6256          |
| 2011 | 558                     | 12.7                      | 2803          | 9286          |
| 2012 | 745                     | 17.073                    | 3000          | 13118         |
| 2013 | 638                     | 21.769                    | 3903          | 18195         |

(Figure 17. Chinese film industry overview (2000-2013). Source: China-International Film Co-Production Handbook, p.43).

<sup>139</sup> For more information regarding the number of movie screens in the United States, available at: <https://www.marketing-interactive.com/chinas-total-number-of-cinema-screens-now-exceeds-the-us/>, (accessed on September 19, 2018).

<sup>140</sup> Motion Picture Association, China Film Co-Production Corporation, *China-International Film Co-Production Handbook*, 2014, available at: [https://www.mpa-i.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Co-Production\\_Handbook\\_English.pdf](https://www.mpa-i.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Co-Production_Handbook_English.pdf), pp. 42-43, (accessed on June 20, 2018).

<sup>141</sup> *Ibidem*.

Therefore, considering the PRC's developments and improvements in the last couple of years, also in conjunction with the country's willingness to be more open to the outside world and competitive as well, this situation has definitely caught the attention of the largest film industry in the world, Hollywood. Moreover, as previously mentioned in the second chapter, China's film industry has come a long way, thus, it has the potential, the possibility and the financial opportunity to take over Hollywood and to become the world's largest film industry by 2020.

Hollywood's interest and eagerness to enter the Chinese film industry and market have always been an important challenge. In fact, there are many hurdles that foreign films in general, especially American films, have to deal with when they approach the Chinese market. As a matter of fact, China's protectionist and import policies (for instance, the annual import quota) and censorship are very strict. For a foreign film to be screened in Chinese cinemas, it has to go through all the regulations and adhere to the State's and the SAPPRT's requirements.

In the past few years, the two countries have started to get closer and to collaborate with one another. However, regardless of the collaborations between China and the United States (which will be explained in more detail in the following paragraph), the two actually have different goals. In relation to this, the Chinese idiom "same bed, different dreams" (*tongchuang yimeng* 同床异梦) embodies the meaning of the collaboration between the two countries.<sup>142</sup> This idiom refers to when two partners have different agendas.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, even though China and Hollywood are embarked on the same journey, in reality, they are headed for two different directions. Thus, they have different goals.

On the one hand, Hollywood feels the need to further expand its presence around the world (especially in the Chinese film market), to explore new horizons, and to increase its revenues. Therefore, for Hollywood, the possibility to show its films to Chinese spectators definitely meets the needs of the American film industry to help further grow its global market.

Consequently, the chance to enter the Chinese market translates into the possibility of an additional development and improvement for its own market. In fact, other than trying to gain more ground in Chinese cinemas, Hollywood is also attempting to facilitate the imports and the distribution of its films in China.

On the other hand, the PRC's goals don't really converge with Hollywood's. There are a few reasons why, in the past few years, China has become increasingly more interested in trying to establish a more solid relationship with the American giant. One of the main intentions behind this is to meet the needs of the country's film industry and market. In fact, as previously argued in the second

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<sup>142</sup> FORNS ESCUNDE', *Hollywood films in the non-western world...*, cit., p.12.

<sup>143</sup> "Same bed, different dreams" definition provided by Pleco dictionary.

chapter, one of the reasons that pushed those in favour to import Hollywood films in the PRC again in 1994, besides the need to help the domestic industry, was also the possibility to actually learn from it. For this reason, knowing that American productions are extremely important for its market (and for the country's box office too), China has started to look at it from a different perspective and has begun to consider it as more of a source of knowledge. The fact that Chinese filmmakers and directors have started to see this is an important step forward, and an important opportunity for them in order to work close to the expert. In this sense, they started to have a more open view of the world and to learn from Hollywood, as they began to learn new skills, techniques, expertise, and a better use of technological instruments.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, thanks to this opportunity, Chinese filmmakers and directors not only are on their way to achieve that, but, simultaneously, they are yearning to improve their expertise and know-how.

Also, they felt the need to raise the bar and to produce films that can be more successful, and that can attract both domestic and international audiences. Metaphorically speaking, foreign filmmakers can be considered as a gold mine. In fact, according to Michael Keane, foreign filmmakers “bring ideas, investment, technology and know-how into China. Policy-makers are allowing these film players to generate ideas, to offer solutions to revitalise stagnant Chinese productions”.<sup>145</sup> Without a doubt, Beijing can benefit from this kind of situation as it is moving increasingly faster towards a more competitive market, and the technological tools involved indeed are more modern. By doing so, China manages to keep up with other countries. In a way, Hollywood can be seen as a motivating force and an inspiration to increase the prestige of the Chinese film industry, and, at the same time, a push that triggers China's willingness to be more competitive.

Furthermore, the PRC's goal to establish a collaboration and relationship with Hollywood is not only limited to earn expertise or to economic reasons. As already stated, given that especially in the last ten years, and further encouraged by President Xi Jinping, Chinese policymakers and filmmakers have started to focus more on China's media industries as a launch pad to foster the country's cultural influence and soft power, these collaborations between China and Hollywood are pivotal for this reason as well. In fact, the products created thanks to these co-productions are a channel through which the PRC can expand its soft power, but also a channel to showcase and promote the country's film industry, to export China's culture, and to spread its contemporary image and status around the world.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> SU, Wendy, “A brave new world? – Understanding U.S.-China coproductions: collaboration, conflicts, and obstacles”, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34, 5, 2017, pp. 480-494, p. 484.

<sup>145</sup> SU, *A brave new world? ...*, *cit.*, p. 483.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibidem.*

Another important factor to point out is that, through these collaborations, Beijing hopes to establish more connections with foreign film distributors in order to distribute their productions in the future. In addition, China's investments in Hollywood have expanded. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Wanda Group is the one whose acquisitions have had more of an impact in the American film industry, and who knows what might happen in a few years from now.

China's official accession to the WTO in 2001 marked an important moment for the country and for its film industry as well. This has also changed the way the PRC and the United States collaborate with each other. This admission forced China to gradually and increasingly open up its doors to foreign countries. Whether it is foreign products, services, investments, and, consequently, it also agreed to open its film market. Nonetheless, China was (and of course still is) obliged to follow all of its WTO commitments.

Although the admission meant an important step forward for China, at the same time, it was worried about this situation. Aware of the fact that American films are greatly appreciated by its spectators, it feared that this could be a further incentive for Hollywood to enter the Chinese film industry, increase its presence and take over. Shortly after its admittance, China started to make some changes and adjusted the number of the foreign import quota. As previously mentioned, in 1994, it established that only ten foreign films per year could be imported to China, meanwhile in 2001, the PRC increased the number of imports to twenty foreign films per year.

However, in 2007, China failed to comply with some aspects of the WTO agreement. For this reason, the United States issued a complaint (supported by other countries as well) where it stated that China didn't adhere to its commitment to open its audio-visual market as promised, and as it was specified in the country's WTO agreement.<sup>147</sup> Then, in 2012, after years of negotiations, this conundrum was resolved with the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding, in other words "Memorandum Of Understanding between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America Regarding Films for Theatrical Release".<sup>148</sup> As a consequence, due to the creation of this Memorandum Of Understanding, China had to make some important changes regarding the foreign film import policy. It increased the number of the import quota to thirty-four films per year and these additional fourteen films are special format films (3D and IMAX).<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, in the same year, the profit for foreign film companies based on the shared-revenue system increased from 13% to 25% of the total revenue.<sup>150</sup> These decisions involve the United States as much as other foreign countries. On the one hand, it increased the possibility for Hollywood to gain more access to the Chinese film

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<sup>147</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., pp. 21-22.

<sup>149</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 22.

<sup>150</sup> FORNS ESCUNDE', *Hollywood films in the non-western world...*, cit., p. 10

market, but, on the other hand, in order to be included in the quota and have a revenue, having the same goal in mind, it increased the competition between Hollywood and other countries.

These important shifts lighted up the spark of competition among international filmmakers as they are more and more willing to try to win the hearts of Chinese regulators, and hope that their films make it through the Chinese market. As Chinese regulators want to increasingly expand the country's influence as well as its cultural products, this is a huge opportunity for the PRC to be involved in more projects, and to promote its soft power.

As far as the relationship between China and Hollywood is concerned, the collaborations between the two countries are more and more frequent. Hollywood's main priority is to increase its profits, and its desire to find a way to gain more ground and to increase its earnings in other nations, besides the films released and the revenues of American movie theatres, is quite strong. In contrast, China wants to broaden its experience in the film industry and market, to decrease its cultural deficit by making more films, and at the same time, it wants to use this opportunity to enhance the country's soft power.

Although the two have different dreams, their partnership is becoming more and more intertwined, and through this they are meeting their own goals.

### **3.2 The different types of collaborations between China and Hollywood**

In this paragraph I will focus my attention on giving an overview regarding the collaborations between China and Hollywood, the restrictions and the regulations applied by Chinese regulators that eventually lead American partners to collaborate with their Chinese partners, and the advantages and disadvantages of these collaborations.

Film collaborations between China and Hollywood are becoming an important factor and are increasingly more common, especially after the PRC's accession to the WTO in 2001. The establishment of these co-productions is a necessity in order to meet the needs of both parts. As previously mentioned, these collaborations are not just a one-way type. In fact, there is not only China's eagerness to learn from the world's largest film industry and become a cultural power; but Hollywood wants to take this opportunity to expand its market and revenues as well. Moreover, as I will explain in this paragraph, the challenges and the difficulties that foreign producers face when they try to import foreign productions to China (besides the import quota), are a further encouragement for them to take co-productions into consideration. Metaphorically speaking, Sino-US collaborations can be seen as a key that opens the doors of the Chinese market, as foreign filmmakers hope to display their films without facing further hurdles. Anyhow, the situation is not as easy as it may seem, because this process is quite complicated both in the agreement and in the several

steps required to fully accomplish it.<sup>151</sup> As a matter of fact, even when it comes to co-productions, Chinese film regulators set some boundaries that American filmmakers have to adhere to.

Co-productions are administered by some Chinese government agencies, such as the SAPPRT (which is the main regulator charged with the duty to make sure that all the films screened in China are suitable for the audiences and respect the rules), by the China Film Co-Production Corporation (*zhongguo dianying hezuo zhipian gongsi* 中国电影合作制片公司, hereafter CFCC),<sup>152</sup> and by SAPPRT provincial departments.<sup>153</sup>

Before giving a more detailed explanation and description of the different types of collaborations between the two countries, it is important to outline a series of limits and difficulties that foreign filmmakers have to deal with when they try to import their productions in the Chinese film market. These policies eventually limit Hollywood's intentions to import films, and it feels compelled to establish a partnership with local film directors.

As already mentioned, the import quota presents quite a challenge in the eyes of foreign producers, especially after the WTO negotiation between China and the United States, where it was decided to increase the import quota to 34 films and to increase the profit for foreign companies to 25% based on the shared-revenue system.

However, the import quota is not the only hurdle. In fact, even the films that make it through the PRC's annual import quota don't have the guarantee of being officially distributed in the Chinese market.

First, this uncertainty is linked to censorship restrictions. The foreign films imported are subject to a strict analysis regarding their content. Therefore, if the content of the film is not considered suitable for Chinese audiences or there are some elements that go against China's censorship rules, against the Chinese government or if they feature or mention sensitive issues, the film will definitely be censored and not screened in cinemas.<sup>154</sup> But, if there only are some scenes that go against these rules, they will be cut from the movie, and then it will ultimately be released in cinemas. Nevertheless, most of the time, foreign producers find themselves in a situation of uncertainty. They have the Chinese market in mind, but they don't know exactly what the best

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<sup>151</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 63.

<sup>152</sup> More information about the China Film Co-Production Corporation available at: <http://www.cfcc-film.com.cn/introeg/intro.html>, (accessed on August 31, 2018).

<sup>153</sup> MPA and CFCC, *China-International Film...*, cit., p.10.

<sup>154</sup> O'CONNOR, Sean, ARMSTRONG, Nicholas, *Directed by Hollywood, Edited by China: How China's Censorship and Influence Affect Films Worldwide*, "U.S.- China Economic and security review commission", 2015, p.8, available at: <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/Directed%20by%20Hollywood%20Edited%20by%20China.pdf>, (accessed on August 1, 2018).

solution might be in order to display their films without being entirely or partially censored. This feeling of uncertainty is related to the fact that censorship regulations can be quite unclear and unpredictable, thus, the criteria used by the SAPPRT are not always well-defined.<sup>155</sup> Consequently, foreign filmmakers for their films to be included in the import quota and to be exempt from being entirely or partially censored, they have started to include more Chinese elements or even started to censor their own films, as they know that there are some elements that are not welcomed by Chinese film regulators, for instance, certain scenes, contents, and sensitive issues, that can put at risk their chance to be included in the import quota.<sup>156</sup>

As Hollywood filmmakers try to find a way to get closer to the Chinese market and expand their presence, there is another aspect to take into great consideration.

Second, the so-called blackout periods can be seen as an additional hurdle for them. These blackout periods, as the Chinese name says,<sup>157</sup> are adopted in order to protect domestic productions. This is established every year by the SAPPRT and it means that during this time of the year, Chinese cinemas don't screen Hollywood blockbusters (or foreign films in general), as a way to encourage the viewing of domestic productions and give a major support to the domestic market. Therefore, Chinese cinemas take a break from displaying Hollywood films, and through this method they try to save domestic films from (foreign) competition.

The blackout period is usually established during the summer, and sometimes it is set during Chinese festivities as well. The challenge that foreign filmmakers have to deal with is that these blackout periods can be unpredictable, and it is up to Chinese regulators to decide when to establish them. Thus, foreign producers can't be sure that the duration and the time will be the same as the ones of the previous year, as every year may be different in length and time.<sup>158</sup>

Third, an additional issue is related to the unreliability of film distribution. As a matter of fact, the import of foreign films under the annual quota doesn't immediately translate into the certainty of film distribution and exhibition.<sup>159</sup>

Therefore, foreign film producers can't be sure about the actual release and exhibition of their films in Chinese cinemas. This issue is due to the fact that imported films don't have the status of local films, consequently, they are treated differently than local films. For instance, this is what happened to Quentin Tarantino's 2012 film *Django Unchained*, because due to its content, the regulators decided to remove the film from Chinese cinemas only a few hours after its official release in the

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<sup>155</sup> O'CONNOR, ARMSTRONG, *Directed by Hollywood, Edited by China...*, cit., p. 9.

<sup>156</sup> O'CONNOR, ARMSTRONG, *Directed by Hollywood, Edited by China...*, cit., p. 12.

<sup>157</sup> The Chinese name of blackout periods was first mentioned on page 34 of this thesis.

<sup>158</sup> KOKAS, Aynne, "Predicting volatility between China and Hollywood: Using network management to understand Sino-US film collaboration", *Global Media and Communication*, 2018, pp. 1-16, p. 5.

<sup>159</sup> KOKAS, *Predicting volatility...*, cit., p. 4.

PRC.<sup>160</sup> Although shortly after they decided to release it again, the sudden decision to block its distribution in the first place, definitely had important consequences in the revenue of the film's Chinese box office. In fact, the country's box office grossed \$2.65 million dollars, while its international revenue reached \$423 million dollars.<sup>161</sup>

Fourth, the fact that imported films are subject to substantial changes as they are not considered local films, might even have consequences regarding the release dates. Even though the film distribution is confirmed, there might be some unexpected implications. In some cases, Chinese film regulators decide to schedule the same date for the release of foreign films. Consequently, this decision can lead to deep, unpleasant consequences for foreign producers. Screening two or more foreign films at the same time or within the difference of just a few days, the result is that foreign productions fall into the cannibalisation trap, therefore, they end up competing against one another and cannibalise each other's box offices.<sup>162</sup> Hence, by following this logic, and the rise of competition between the films displayed, their box office revenues will have a different, less fruitful outcome.

Considering all the difficulties and instabilities that Hollywood filmmakers have to deal with, they can be considered as a further encouragement to establish a collaboration with Chinese partners. Films made under a Chinese co-production agreement are treated as local films, hence, they are exempt from the annual import quota, and their distribution and exhibition in cinemas is guaranteed. There are mainly three types of film co-productions, namely: co-productions (or joint production), assisted productions and entrusted productions.<sup>163</sup>

- The first type is co-produced films (or joint production). A joint production is produced by a Chinese film producer (based in mainland China) and a foreign film producer. In this agreement the two parties are involved in a joint investment. Meaning that, it requires the share of the resources, and in this case, the two parties also share the copyright of the film. The products created, have to adhere to the regulations and the policies that are usually applied to domestic Chinese productions that are shot and produced within the Chinese market.<sup>164</sup> Therefore, co-produced films enjoy all the benefits and all the treatments that domestically made films receive. In addition, other than the advantages mentioned above and the fact that they can avoid the import quota, the profit that co-produced films earn can be quite fruitful. In fact, as previously mentioned, they receive 43% of the total revenue, whereas through foreign imports they can only earn 25% of the total revenue. Thus, all these benefits are a

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<sup>160</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 69.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>162</sup> KOKAS, *Predicting volatility...*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>163</sup> MPA and CFCC, *China-International Film...*, cit., p. 2.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibidem*.

further push for Hollywood producers to seek out and to adopt these collaborations between the two countries.

- The second type of cooperation is the assisted film production. An assisted film (*xiepai dianying* 协拍电影), consists of a foreign invested film that is produced in China. In other words, the film is shot in the PRC and the foreign producer is assisted by a Chinese partner that helps him/her to provide the filming locations, the facilities, the equipment and so forth.<sup>165</sup> However, the film is owned by the foreign party, unlike a joint production, the Chinese partner doesn't own the copyright of the film. Nevertheless, an assisted film doesn't enjoy the same benefits of co-produced films. This collaboration doesn't guarantee the distribution in the Chinese market and cinemas. For this reason, they still have to be approved by the SAPPRFT and CFCC and face distribution regulations and restrictions.<sup>166</sup> As a result, they are subject to the same import rules as imported films. Although they are subject to the import restriction, regarding certain aspects, assisted films enjoy more flexibility than joint productions.<sup>167</sup> For instance, unlike co-productions, foreign filmmakers have more control on the final product regarding both the content and the members of the cast. In fact, they are not obliged to hire Chinese actors and members, they don't have to adhere to the Chinese regulators' rules regarding the content of the film, and the Chinese elements that should be included in it. Consequently, under an assisted film agreement, foreign filmmakers are allowed to film in the PRC, but don't have the certainty of film distribution. The regulations and the requirements needed for this second type of production, in a way, can be more beneficial for foreign producers since that Chinese regulators have less control on the production, on the final product, and filmmakers can give voice to their creativity.
- The third type is the entrusted production (also known as commissioned film). An entrusted film consists of a foreign party that entrusts a Chinese party to produce a film according to the content and requirements of the foreign one.<sup>168</sup> Anyhow, even this type of collaboration is subject to the import rules and restrictions, as films are not treated as local productions.

After giving a general overview about the three different types of film co-productions, joint productions seem the only solution that foreign filmmakers can adopt in order to have the certainty that their films will be distributed and screened in mainland cinemas. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the other two types of collaborations (assisted and entrusted) have their own advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, they can increase the collaborations between the two countries; on

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>166</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 76.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>168</sup> MPA and CFCC, *China-International Film...*, cit., p. 2.

the other hand, the films made are considered as imports, thus, they don't enjoy the same benefits of an official co-production.

Nonetheless, co-productions have their advantages and disadvantages as well.

The disadvantages of co-productions are mainly related to the central government's control and regulations. In fact, for several reasons, film co-productions are not an easy agreement and process to carry out; sometimes some projects fail to comply with all the conditions required, and don't make it through the different steps under which they are exposed. For this reason, there are a series of steps and regulations that a co-produced film has to handle in order to be accepted by Chinese regulators, and to eventually receive the distribution approval.

Co-productions are subject to the control of both the SAPPRT and the CFCC. In reality, the SAPPRT acts as if it was following the whole process from backstage. In fact, the CFCC is the organization responsible for the administration of Chinese-foreign film co-productions. The CFCC is a special organization authorized by the SAPPRT that has the task and the responsibility to manage the business related to film co-productions between China and foreign countries. In other words, the CFCC is a branch of the SAPPRT. According to the regulations put in writing by the CFCC, its main responsibilities are related to the approval of international co-production application, the review and the approval of the completed film, the supervision of the performance between the two parties as established in the agreement, it can provide services and so forth.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, for a co-produced film to be screened in cinemas and to obtain the official approval, foreign filmmakers have to adhere to the approval procedures. Therefore, the official approval procedures can be divided into three different stages, in other words: the application for project establishment, production and the last one is the review and approval of the completed film.<sup>170</sup>

For a Chinese and foreign co-production to start, it has to be approved by the CFCC, otherwise, filmmakers can't start shooting the film. Another important aspect to point out is that if the completed film doesn't abide by the regulations outlined by Chinese regulators including the type of content, the film won't be distributed nor screened. A film can be legally distributed once it receives the final approval, namely "Film Public Exhibition Permit".<sup>171</sup>

Besides all the legal requirements needed in order to establish the partnership, co-produced films are not exempt from censorship regulations and content guidelines, but rather, they are more subject to them. As a matter of fact, this is another disadvantage that foreign filmmakers have to deal with. Meaning that, even under a co-production agreement, American filmmakers (or foreign filmmakers

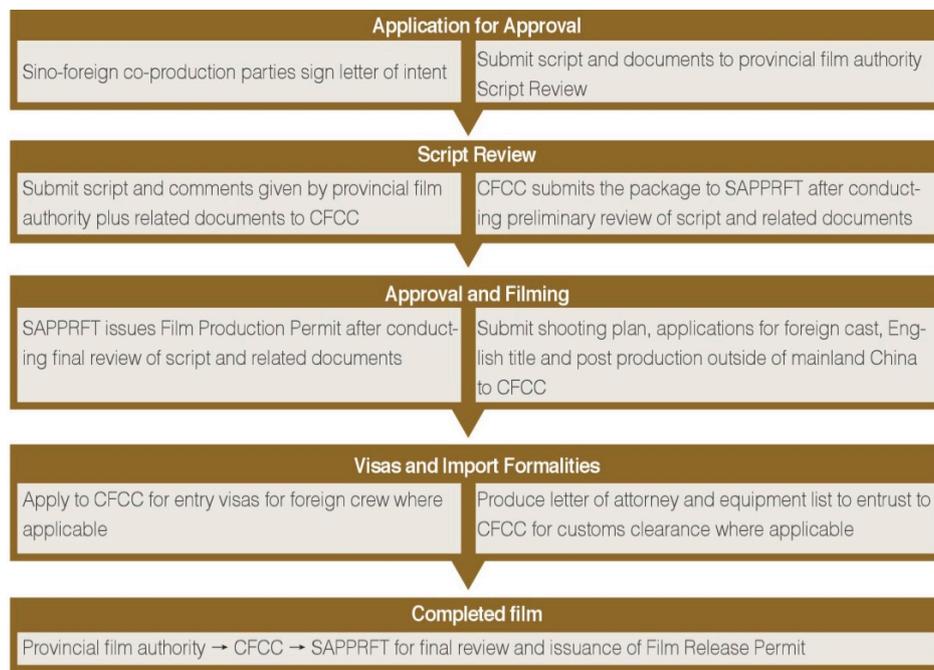
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<sup>169</sup> *China Film Co-Production Corporation...*, cit.

<sup>170</sup> MPA and CFCC, *China-International Film...*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>171</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 71.

in general) are not completely free regarding the content and the themes that they can feature in the production. Thus, they have to face regulatory restrictions as well, and have to commit to the guidelines pointed out by Chinese regulators. These guidelines are both related to the cast of the film as well as to its content. For instance, at least one third of the main cast has to be Chinese from mainland China, Chinese themes or positive elements should be included, and as outlined by the previous president of the CFCC Zhang Xun, the content that Sino-US co-productions have to avoid, besides nudity and violence, is also religious issues, political issues and bad depictions of China that don't reflect the reality and the country's economic growth over the past thirty years.<sup>172</sup> Given the conditions that foreign filmmakers have to adhere to if they want to co-produce a film with Chinese partners, it is quite obvious that the content of the film should be focused on portraying China in a good and positive light. This is also related to the possibility (by the PRC) to consider co-productions as a further tool to expose the country on the international stage and to promote its soft power. Nevertheless, the requirements for co-productions are not always well-defined. In fact, most of the time, American filmmakers don't really know how to move in the right direction. Therefore, in order to receive the official approval, if the way the co-produced film is planned out lacks some of the requirements needed or doesn't suit the conditions, the parties involved have to make some alterations. They might involve the scenes, the cast, some elements featured and so forth; otherwise, the film can't receive the SAPPRT's approval.



<sup>172</sup> KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., p. 70.

(**Figure 18.** Procedure for approval for co-produced films. *Source:* China-International Film Co-Production Handbook, p. 17).

Establishing co-productions with Chinese companies is not simple, even because co-produced films don't receive special treatments nor are less vulnerable to the restrictions and regulations applied by Chinese regulators.<sup>173</sup> In fact, the censorship and other constraints have an important impact on the entire process and they can be a limit for the creativity of American filmmakers, and in a way, they might have to compromise the original idea they had for the film as well; by doing so, the result is that foreign filmmakers, most of the time, don't have a say on the various components and elements that are part of the film.<sup>174</sup> Therefore, they find themselves in a position where, even though they are partners, the Chinese party and the regulators have more of an active role in the entire process of co-productions. As a result, Chinese regulators can influence, change and have the final say on the film created.

On the other hand, co-productions between China and the United States have their advantages as well for both parts.

Under a co-production agreement, American co-producers can benefit from this partnership. First of all, film collaborations can be an important opportunity for American filmmakers to access the Chinese market. Co-produced films are a channel through which Hollywood can broaden its presence and market in China, gain more spectators and earn 43% of the total revenue (while producers of imported films only receive 25% of the total revenue). Another important aspect to outline is the fact that co-produced films are treated as local films; as a result, they are not subject to the annual import quota of 34 films.

Film co-productions can be an advantage for Chinese filmmakers as well. Through co-productions, Chinese filmmakers have the chance to work with Hollywood producers, and more importantly, it can be an important learning experience. In fact, as previously stated, this is one of China's goals and possibility to improve and to learn new skills, techniques, technological know-how and so on.

A co-produced film should appeal to both Chinese and American audiences, as well as to international audiences. Consequently, this can be a further reason to learn how to make films that can meet the expectations and the tastes of international spectators.

These collaborations can also be seen as a way for China to reduce its cultural deficit and a further opportunity to gain access to the American film market. In addition, this is a good chance for Chinese

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<sup>173</sup> KOKAS, *Predicting volatility...*, *cit.*, p. 6

<sup>174</sup> *Ibidem.*

filmmakers to understand the way Hollywood works after the film production is completed, the techniques and strategies used to promote films.

As a result, Sino-U.S. co-productions are another tool in China's hands that can be used to promote the country's soft power. As already argued, soft power depends on attraction, therefore, co-produced films have to be a platform where positive images of the country are projected. For this reason, Chinese regulators stress the importance to include Chinese elements, positive representations of the country and so forth. Through this, foreign audiences have the opportunity to see the country under a new light and not how it may be badly depicted by western films. Furthermore, co-produced films can promote and export Chinese culture around the world, and that, consequently, can be intertwined with the enhancement of the country's soft power.

An example of Sino-U.S. co-production is the 2016 film *The Great Wall*, directed by the famous Chinese director Zhang Yimou. The film features important Hollywood and Chinese actors and it was the biggest co-production between the two countries.<sup>175</sup> The film was quite successful in China, but didn't have the same international success; in the PRC the film gained \$170.9 million dollars, whereas the box office revenue in Canada and in the United States only grossed \$45.1 million dollars.<sup>176</sup> Although the film wasn't as successful as other blockbusters, it marked a pivotal step for the cooperation between China and Hollywood. Furthermore, this film was the first co-production directed by a Chinese film director, and an important way to create films that not only appeal to Chinese moviegoers but to international audiences as well.<sup>177</sup>

Regardless of the fact that the film didn't turn out to be as successful as they thought it would, it is very important to take it into consideration. This importance doesn't only rely on the fact that, as previously stated, it marks an important step for co-productions between the two countries, but it is just as important for the fact that the director and the producers were able to meet the PRC's desire to showcase Chinese culture and to be capable of converging it with Hollywood's filmmaking process. Consequently, the film embodies and fits into China's goals to learn from Hollywood's production model, technology and distribution system, the importance to raise the bar for Chinese films, to create high-quality films and to export Chinese culture and soft power.

As previously argued, Sino-US co-productions are not a simple process and collaboration. The difficulties that both partners may face are not only related to the differences that the two parties might stumble on when they start a co-production. It should be considered that American filmmakers have a different attitude concerning the entire process of filmmaking. At first, Hollywood producers

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<sup>175</sup> ZHANG Xiaoqun, "Business, soft power, and whitewashing: Three themes in the US media coverage of "The Great Wall" film", *Global Media and China*, 2, 3-4, pp. 317-322, p. 317.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>177</sup> ZHANG, *Business, soft power..., cit.*, p. 322.

perhaps found themselves in difficulty in dealing with and adapting to all the regulations, and the laws carried out by Chinese film regulators. As previously argued, all the regulations eventually end up influencing the collaborations as well as the films created. Regardless of that, co-productions also require a reciprocal cultural understanding. In fact, both parties involved are linguistically, culturally and politically different, thus, these differences could be major obstacles in order to create a peaceful relationship; but, for co-productions to work for both parties, they should focus on how to overcome these differences.<sup>178</sup>

Sino-US co-productions are increasingly more common, are becoming more and more intertwined, and Hollywood's interest to gain more access in the constantly growing Chinese market meets China's needs. Co-productions meet the goals of both parties and it is an opportunity to meet each other's goals.

Whether distributed or filmed in China, all the films have to be approved by the SAPPRFT for the official release and distribution. As mentioned above, the approval depends on a series of different elements; for instance, the type of agreement that was established between the two countries (joint production, assisted production or entrusted production), and the type of content featured in the film. Moreover, co-productions also have the benefit to reduce the risks, the costs of the production (as they are shared by both partners), and to create more profit.<sup>179</sup>

These co-productions show China's willingness to have an increasingly important role on the international stage, to increase its influence and cultural appeal and to boost its soft power.

### **3.3 Is China changing Hollywood?**

Sino-US co-productions are becoming increasingly important and frequent. The importance of these collaborations is not only referred to the relationship they establish between the two countries, but it can also be referred to the changes required in order to create a successful and harmonious co-production.

As already argued in the previous paragraph, the unprecedented growth of the Chinese film market has caught Hollywood's attention, and its willingness to gain access to the Chinese market is getting stronger and stronger. Hollywood's plan to show its films to Chinese moviegoers, translates into the opportunity to increase its revenues and to enlarge its viewing base.

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<sup>178</sup> SU, *A brave new world?* ..., *cit.*, p. 488.

<sup>179</sup> SU, *A brave new world?* ..., *cit.*, p. 484.

However, is not easy to enter the Chinese market, and when it happens, as already stated, Hollywood producers have to adhere to all the rules outlined by Chinese regulators. All these laws and regulations mark China's increasing influence on Hollywood's actions.

In fact, when it comes to both imports and joint productions, American filmmakers are not one hundred percent free, and for the majority of it their hands are tied. Regardless of that, since that China meets Hollywood's market goals, they have started to adapt to these regulations. Adhering to the PRC's film rules means that American filmmakers might have to compromise the original idea they had for the plot of a co-produced film, and the possibility that the imported film might be subject to major variations. Consequently, the fact that, according to Professor Ying Zhu, "Chinese censors can act as world film police on how China can be depicted, how China's government can be depicted...in Hollywood films",<sup>180</sup> this is an important factor that shows China's influence on Hollywood. Also, whether it is a co-production or an imported film, American producers, whose aim is to be part of a production that can easily unlock the doors of the Chinese market, also have to limit their creativity. For instance, in the film *Pixels* (2015), the content and some scenes of the film that, undoubtedly, would have gone against the rules of Chinese censors, were removed before showing it to the censors.<sup>181</sup>

At the same time, it is quite interesting to see that, albeit these restrictions, the United States still wants to be a substantial part of and collaborate within the Chinese market.

Therefore, Hollywood in order to increase its opportunity to enter China's market and to have an advantage over other foreign films, they have started to include more elements that might appease Chinese film regulators and censors. In addition, as previously mentioned, considering that censorship rules are not always perfectly outlined, American filmmakers began to focus their attention on how to possibly alter their films, as a way to meet the regulators' requirements. Having this goal in mind, American producers began to modify various elements featured in their films, that they know, perhaps can limit their acceptance. For instance, scenes, dialogues, no bad representations of Chinese people nor sensitive issues that go against the Chinese government and so forth. This attitude even led to the extent of shooting some scenes exclusively for Chinese moviegoers (as for the film *Iron man 3*).<sup>182</sup>

A further example that shows Hollywood's willingness to appeal to Chinese regulators and market is represented by the integration of Chinese products. For instance, the blockbuster *Transformers 4* is

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<sup>180</sup> O'CONNOR, ARMSTRONG, *Directed by Hollywood, Edited by China...*, cit. p. 12.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>182</sup> PENG Weiyang, "Sino-US film coproduction: A global media primer", *Global Media and China*, 1, 4, 2017, pp. 295-311, p. 301.

characterized by the placement of Chinese products during the vision of the film.<sup>183</sup> This strategy can be useful to get closer to and to further appeal to Chinese spectators; in fact, without a doubt, these products catch the attention of Chinese audiences, but are less likely to be understood or noticed by international spectators, as they are not familiar with the products.<sup>184</sup> In the film, we can see Stanley Tucci's character who is drinking a famous Chinese brand of milk (*yili* 伊利), while Mark Wahlberg's character got some money from an ATM that belonged to the China Construction Bank.<sup>185</sup>

All the factors mentioned above, give us a perspective on the different approaches that Hollywood is taking into consideration in order to please the Chinese market.

Nevertheless, Hollywood filmmakers are not obliged to adhere to the regulations outlined by Chinese regulators, and have the free will to not consider them. However, this wouldn't be a smart move as it would go against Hollywood's goals. This move would translate into the inability and the struggle to enter the Chinese film market, Hollywood would lose a great number of viewers, and its revenues would be affected by it.

Considering all the challenges that Hollywood filmmakers have to deal with when they want to import a film in the Chinese market, or to establish and to successfully accomplish a co-production is astounding. In the long run, seeing that American filmmakers are censoring their own films, they are trying to please Chinese censors or trying to adhere to all the requirements needed for an official co-production, all of this shows how much influence the country's censorship rules and regulations in general have on the world's largest film industry. Also, even considering that these regulations affect both the entire filmmaking process and the final product. In relation with the growth and the importance that the Chinese film market and industry are facing, Hollywood doesn't want to miss the opportunity to further expand its market, its revenues, and to be an important part of this journey.

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<sup>183</sup> Both films, *Iron man 3* and *Transformers 4*, began as co-productions but eventually lost their co-production title, and then were released as imported films. This type of unofficial co-production is called faux-production. A faux-production can be considered as a fake co-production. In fact, this category refers to those films that start out as official co-productions, but are eventually imported to the Chinese market under the revenue-sharing import quota. This is mainly due to the fact that they were not able to fully fulfil the regulators' requirements, namely the partnership, financing or the percentage of Chinese content. For this reason, both films didn't reach the right amount of Chinese elements that should be featured in an official co-production. (KOKAS, *Hollywood...*, cit., pp. 74-75).

<sup>184</sup> ROSEN, Stanley, *Hollywood in China: Selling Out or Cashing In?*, in "The diplomat", 2015, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/hollywood-in-china-selling-out-or-cashing-in/>, (accessed on July 9, 2018).

<sup>185</sup> PENG, *Sino-US film coproduction...*, cit., p. 302.

### 3.4 Issues in Chinese films: discrepancies and cultural discount

Xi Jinping has acknowledged the importance that films have as a tool to promote the country's soft power, and how they can contribute to foster a positive image of the latter. Unlike many other countries, in the past few years, China has invested in many resources in order to achieve this goal. In fact, every year China spends more or less ten billion dollars to promote its soft power.<sup>186</sup> For years, the United States' soft power has been largely shaped by Hollywood films that, as previously mentioned, have been a pivotal instrument in order to spread American values and culture around the globe. At the same time, they have managed to shape the spectators' viewing tastes. However, even though China has become the world's second largest film industry, and in just a few years from now it will take over Hollywood, the Chinese film industry still has to improve some aspects that can help it grow even more and make it more attractive.

An important factor to point out is that Hollywood is separated from the American government, whereas, the Chinese film industry is not separated from the Chinese government, as well as the promotion of the country's soft power.<sup>187</sup> In fact, there are Hollywood films that criticise the American government, while this is something that couldn't possibly happen in China.

Therefore, there might be some discrepancies regarding what the Chinese government wants and the real outcomes.

The Chinese film industry gives a lot of importance to domestic films, and this is quite clear by seeing all the regulations and strategies that the government has established in order to protect the domestic market from foreign films. Regardless of that, the Chinese film industry wants their films to be successful both on the domestic and on the international market. However, the important, almost overwhelming role and controlling behaviour that the Chinese government has on its film market, might have repercussions on the way it is perceived by international audiences. The fact that China wants international films to feature socialist core values, it definitely wouldn't help China's attraction.<sup>188</sup>

Furthermore, the Chinese government's active and controlling role might not help to attract foreign moviegoers, and because of this, Chinese films might lack credibility and appeal. These two elements not only are important to charm international moviegoers, at the same time, they are pivotal factors that help increase the country's soft power. Hence, if the messages conveyed in the film are not perceived as truthful, they are more likely to fail, and in order to appeal to foreign audiences, these

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<sup>186</sup> CSIS (Podcast), *Soft Power through Chinese Cinema...*, cit.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>188</sup> FUNNELL, Anthony, *China pushes to expand its soft power through cultural exports*, in "Abc", 2015, available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/futuretense/soft-power-with-chinese-characteristics/6446990>, (accessed on June 19, 2018).

should be high quality films.<sup>189</sup> A further factor to take into consideration to generate appeal and attraction is that Chinese films should portray a real image of the country; there shouldn't be differences between the real PRC and the one projected on the big screen.

In fact, according to Stan Rosen: “[...] [Referred to China] they'd love to have success overseas. It hasn't happened. I lecture in China on how to internationalise the film industry and increase soft power, [...] partly because the films are in Chinese, they have Chinese cultural and historical components – they don't resonate with the outside world”.<sup>190</sup>

In relation to this, cultural differences can be a further hurdle for the international success of Chinese films. Thus, when they are screened outside of China's borders, films are more likely to suffer from cultural discount. Cultural discount refers to the fact that

Part of the appeal of the products will be lost because the audience in the other market is not likely to have the same background knowledge, linguistic competence, and other forms of cultural capital to fully appreciate them. Differences in cultural values and social norms may also lower the appeal of foreign media products to a local audience.<sup>191</sup>

Cultural discount is a disadvantage and obstacle for foreign audiences when they watch Chinese films. But, this is a hurdle even for Chinese films, as their appeal and attraction might be jeopardized by this factor.

This is an issue that shouldn't be ignored, and it can be considered as one of the main problems related to the lack of interest and appeal in Chinese films. Therefore, the cultural, the background knowledge and/or linguistic barriers can create a wall between the spectator and the movie.

Moviegoers might lack the knowledge or, for instance, the historical background of certain events featured in the film. When, and if this happens, it becomes difficult for them to follow and to understand the film in general. Accordingly, they are more likely to find the film dull and to lose interest in watching it.

This barrier can also be triggered by the language. Nowadays, audiences in general are used to watch films spoken in English, hence, foreign audiences may not have the right linguistic competences to understand a film in Chinese. Nevertheless, if the film is dubbed in another language, the original one already fades a little, and the translation might also not do justice to the different nuances, peculiarities and idioms of the Chinese language, weakening the original meaning.

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<sup>189</sup> VOICI, LUO, *Screening China's...*, cit., p. 50.

<sup>190</sup> FUNNELL, *China pushes to expand its soft power...*, cit.

<sup>191</sup> LEE, Francis L.F., “Hollywood movies in East Asia: examining cultural discount and performance predictability at the box office”, *Asian Journal of Communication*, 18, 2, 2008, pp. 117-136, p. 119.

These are elements that Chinese filmmakers in general should take into consideration when they think about the international film market. Now that the Chinese film market is increasingly growing, expanding its influence and wants to have more success on the international stage, in order to achieve all of this, they shouldn't apply the same logic they usually use when they make films for the domestic market, and apply it for international films as well (for instance, the application of socialist core values). For this reason, if the PRC wants its films to gain ground both domestically and internationally, when making films, Chinese filmmakers should have the international market in mind,<sup>192</sup> try to understand what the audience would like to see, try to meet their expectations and tastes. At the same time, Chinese filmmakers should try to find the right balance in order to create a production that can attract and appeal to both worlds, without falling into the cultural discount trap.

There are many Chinese films that had a huge success in China (for instance the blockbuster *Wolf Warrior II*), that unfortunately didn't have the same international success.

Maybe, co-productions with foreign countries, especially with the United States, may be the ideal (temporary) solution for the PRC to gain popularity, new skills, expertise, the best way to appeal to international audiences, gain more ground in international film markets and to increase its soft power. In the near future, China will be able to spread its wings and make films whose stories will find a way through the international audiences' hearts, and will go beyond the country's great wall.

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<sup>192</sup> CSIS (Podcast), *Soft Power through Chinese Cinema...*, cit.

## Conclusion

The concept of soft power was first proposed by the Harvard University professor Joseph S. Nye Jr at the beginning of the 1990s. It was eventually in the mid-2000s that this concept started to be discussed on a large scale, and to be increasingly involved and intertwined in political leaders' speeches, goals and strategies.

For many years now, China has been trying to change its quite negative international image into a positive one. Consequently, for a country to increase its soft power it has to be perceived as a positive influence by others, otherwise, if perceived the contrary it would damage and decrease it, thus, its outcomes wouldn't be as successful.

The development and the economic growth that China has experienced in the last thirty years not only have had an important impact on the status of the country as a major economic power, but also on the way China wants to be seen and perceived by other countries. Especially emphasizing the fact that they should stop seeing the PRC from an old perspective, but rather as a good, positive and as a culturally, economically strong country.

Along with it, in the last few years, the Chinese film market and industry have experienced an unprecedented growth as well, becoming increasingly more competitive as it gained the status of the world's second largest film industry.

The Chinese government and President Xi Jinping have been focusing on the promotion of the country's soft power, giving importance to films and media as privileged tools to promote it.

It is important to understand the steps that China has started to take in order to achieve its goals.

First of all, China has commenced to be more open internationally, trying to get the country closer to others and take part in international events where the country's image could benefit from.

Second, China has been engaged in many investments and acquisitions both in the domestic and in the international film market. On the one hand, these investments are important in order to boost the country's economy; while, on the other hand, they can increase the country's soft power showing that now China is an economically strong country and can keep up with others.

The third aspect is related to the willingness to collaborate with foreign countries through film collaborations. In this case, Sino-US collaborations are analysed showing the way the work between the two is developed, how both of them need these collaborations to meet their own goals, and how much influence they have on each other's film markets. Given that Hollywood filmmakers are not taking a step back considering that these co-productions require them to compromise their creativity and many other aspects, marks the significance that the Chinese film industry is achieving day by day. Furthermore, if co-productions between China and the United States can improve and bring new

skills and expertise, they also meet the Chinese government's goals to enhance its soft power and to export Chinese culture, values and stories in other countries.

The analysis of the first two films, namely *Amazing China* and *American Dreams in China*, was aimed at finding a correlation between main melody films and President Xi Jinping's Chinese dream. In different ways, both productions touch upon and embody the realisation of this dream. They show that China has the strength and the capabilities to do what other countries can do, and the accomplishment of the Chinese dream can be even better than the American dream.

The third film analysed is *Wolf Warrior II*. This film has been an important example for the purpose of this thesis, as it shows how the concept of soft power can be applied in films. Consequently, this production was able to meet the viewing tastes of moviegoers and to bring on the big screen one of the goals that Xi Jinping has intended to achieve since he took office. Therefore, the importance of this film is related both to the fact that the film director was able to create a film that, for the factors described, can be compared to a Hollywood production, and also because it portrays a positive and peaceful image of China. It shows that, unlike other countries, China uses the power of its army for good reasons.

Also, there is a common aspect, albeit related to different circumstances, that can be found in both films *Wolf Warrior II* and *American Dreams in China*. In both films the Westerners are depicted as arrogant, stereotyped and superior to China, stressing on the detail regarding that they still have an old image of the PRC. Therefore, given this view of China, the protagonists restate that the Westerners are still stuck in the past.

All these changes and the growth that China has been experiencing in the last few years, show that it has the potential to compete with Hollywood and have an increasingly important role on the world stage both as a major film market and as an economic power.

China is moving towards the right direction as its film market, industry and box office are increasingly growing. With the aim in mind to become the world's largest film industry and to enlarge its international presence and influence, the PRC can benefit from co-produced films. Thus, it should behave like a sponge; draw as many lessons as possible from these collaborations as a way to learn how to understand the viewing tastes of international audiences, what they expect from films, how to attract their attention and to charm them. Without the support of co-productions, China should adopt these criteria and think with a more international mind-set. Avoid the logic and the principles they usually apply to domestic films, otherwise they would fall into the cultural discount trap.

In spite of this, audiences around the world should start seeing China under a new light. Understand that the country has changed, has grown and the quality of their films has improved.

Nevertheless, China still hasn't reached the finish line. There are still some aspects that require improvements before officially dethroning Hollywood. Metaphorically speaking, we can say that it is still a work in progress. However, given that the country has made progress by leaps and bounds on the economic and on cinematographic front, and many predict that the Chinese film industry will take the reins by 2020, it shouldn't be excluded that in just a few years from now it will make the final giant step.

The power of films shouldn't be underestimated as they can be powerful and persuasive tools, and at the same time, the influence and the effects that soft power can lead to when successful and working can be mind-blowing. For this reason, the combination of these two elements results in a win-win and favourable situation. Also, if applied correctly, the concept of soft power can be more fruitful and effective than the concept of hard power.

The fact that the Chinese government has prioritised films as vehicles to encourage the promotion of China's soft power underlines this significance.

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## Glossary

### Chinese - English

| <b>Chinese</b> | <b>Pinyin</b>                          | <b>English</b>   |
|----------------|--|--|
| 阿里影业           | <i>Ali yingye</i>                      | Alibaba Pictures   |
| 北京国际电影节        | <i>Beijing guoji dianyingjie</i>       | Beijing International Film Festival (BJIFF)                    |
| 陈可辛            | <i>Chen Kexin</i>                      | Peter Chan   |
| 成冬青            | <i>Cheng Dongqing</i>                  | Cheng Dongqing   |
| 创新             | <i>Chuangxin</i>                       | Innovation   |
| 邓超             | <i>Deng Chao</i>                       | Deng Chao  |
| 邓小平            | <i>Deng Xiaoping</i>                   | Deng Xiaoping  |
| 愤青             | <i>Fenqing</i>                         | (Saying) a young Chinese with extreme nationalistic tendencies |
| 高考             | <i>Gaokao</i>                          | Entrance test  |
| 共享             | <i>Gongxiang</i>                       | Sharing  |
| 广播电影电视部        | <i>Guangbo dianying<br/>dianshi bu</i> | Ministry of Radio, Film, and Television (MRFT)                 |
| 国产电影保护月        | <i>Guochan dianying<br/>baohu yue</i>  | Blackout period  |
| 国家统计局          | <i>Guojia tongjiju</i>                 | National bureau of statistics of China                         |

|              |  |  |
|--------------|--|--|
| 国家新闻出版广电总局   | <i>Guojia xinwen chubanguangdian zongju</i>        | State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT) |
| 海归           | <i>Haigui</i>                                      | (Saying) A person who has come back to China after gaining overseas experience   |
| 胡锦涛          | <i>Hu Jintao</i>                                   | Hu Jintao  |
| 黄晓明          | <i>Huang Xiaoming</i>                              | Huang Xiaoming   |
| 华夏电影发行有限责任公司 | <i>Huaxia dianying faxing youxian zeren gongsi</i> | Huaxia Film Distribution   |
| 建军大业         | <i>Jianjun daye</i>                                | Founding of an army  |
| 纪录片          | <i>Jilu pian</i>                                   | Documentary  |
| 开放           | <i>Kaifang</i>                                     | Open-up  |
| 开放改革         | <i>Kaifang gaige</i>                               | Reform and opening up  |
| 孔子学院         | <i>Kongzi xueyuan</i>                              | Confucius Institutes   |
| 冷锋           | <i>Leng Feng</i>                                   | Leng Feng  |
| 李彦宏          | <i>Li Yanhong</i>                                  | Robin Li   |
| 厉害了，我的国      | <i>Lihai le, wo de guo</i>                         | Amazing China (Film)   |
| 柳传志          | <i>Liu Chuanzhi</i>                                | Liu Chuanzhi   |
| 绿色           | <i>lǜse</i>  | Environment-friendly   |
| 马云           | <i>Ma Yun</i>                                      | Jack Ma  |

|         |                                   |   |
|---------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 猫眼电影    | <i>Maoyan dianying</i>            | Maoyan                                      |
| 孟晓骏     | <i>Meng Xiaojun</i>               | Meng Xiaojun                                |
| 莫言      | <i>Mo Yan</i>                     | Mo Yan                                      |
| 软力量     | <i>Ruan lilang</i>                | Soft power                                  |
| 软权力     | <i>Ruan quanli</i>                | Soft power                                  |
| 软实力     | <i>Ruan shili</i>                 | Soft power                                  |
| 上海国际电影节 | <i>Shanghai guoji dianyingjie</i> | Shanghai International Film Festival (SIFF) |
| 佟大为     | <i>Tong Dawei</i>                 | Tong Dawei                                  |
| 同床异梦    | <i>Tongchuang yimeng</i>          | (Saying) same bed, different dreams         |
| 土鳖      | <i>Tubie</i>                      | (Saying) Soft shell turtle                  |
| 万达集团    | <i>Wanda jituan</i>               | Wanda Group                                 |
| 王阳      | <i>Wang Yang</i>                  | Wang Yang                                   |
| 卫铁      | <i>Wei Tie</i>                    | Wei Tie                                     |
| 文化软实力   | <i>Wenhua ruanshili</i>           | Cultural soft power                         |
| 吴京      | <i>Wu Jing</i>                    | Wu Jing                                     |
| 习近平     | <i>Xi Jinping</i>                 | Xi Jinping                                  |
| 协拍电影    | <i>Xiepai dianying</i>            | Assisted film                               |
| 协调      | <i>Xietiao</i>                    | Harmonization                               |
| 新梦想     | <i>Xin mengxiang</i>              | New dream                                   |
| 伊利      | <i>Yili</i>                       | Yili  |

|                         |   |  |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| 张艺谋                     | <i>Zhang Yimou</i>  | Zhang Yimou  |
| 战狼                      | <i>Zhanlang</i>   | Wolf Warrior (Film)  |
| 中国车                     | <i>Zhongguo che</i>   | Chinese train  |
| 中国电影合作制<br>片公司          | <i>Zhongguo dianying<br/>hezuo zhipian gongsi</i>                         | China Film Co-<br>Production Corporation<br>(CFCC)                       |
| 中国电影集团公<br>司            | <i>Zhongguo dianying<br/>jituan gongsi</i>                                | China Film Group<br>Corporation (CFC)                                    |
| 中国港                     | <i>Zhongguo gang</i>  | Chinese port   |
| 中国共产党                   | <i>Zhongguo<br/>gongchandang</i>  | Chinese Communist Party<br>(CCP)   |
| 中国共产党第十<br>九次全国代表大<br>会 | <i>Zhongguo<br/>gongchandang dishijiu<br/>ci quanguo dabiao<br/>dahui</i> | 19 <sup>th</sup> National Congress of<br>the Communist Party of<br>China |
| 中国国际广播电<br>台            | <i>Zhongguo guoji<br/>guangbo diantai</i>                                 | China Radio International<br>(CRI)                                       |
| 中国合伙人                   | <i>Zhongguo hehuoren</i>  | American dreams in<br>China (Film)                                       |
| 中国路                     | <i>Zhongguo lu</i>  | Chinese highway  |
| 中国桥                     | <i>Zhongguo qiao</i>  | Chinese bridge   |
| 中国网                     | <i>Zhongguo wang</i>  | Chinese network  |
| 中国梦                     | <i>Zhongguomeng</i>   | China Dream/Chinese<br>dream   |

|         |                                      |                                     |
|---------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 中华人民共和国 | <i>Zhonghua renmin<br/>gongheguo</i> | People's Republic of<br>China (PRC) |
| 中央电视台   | <i>Zhongyang dianshitai</i>          | China Central Television<br>(CCTV)  |
| 主旋律电影   | <i>Zhuxuanlü dianying</i>            | Main melody films                   |
| 走出去     | <i>Zou chuqu</i>                     | Going out strategy                  |

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