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**Old Teachings, New Marketing
Strategies, and Hollywood's Industry:
The Cultural Conflicts between the U.S.
and China**

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Abstract

This study aims at identifying the analogies and differences between American culture and Chinese culture stemming from marketing strategies and their adaptation. It shows in particular that some Chinese literary masterpieces, including Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, can be considered as starting point and as inspiration for American financial strategy, business attitude and general approach to the American mentality and lifestyle. The objective of this research is to explain how the teachings contained in such works represent the cornerstones that inspired American successful entrepreneurial spirit and why they are considered now the key for American marketing approach to China and its enigmatic culture, especially through the translation of brands into Chinese language.

The study then investigates the economic factors and cultural influences that China exercised over U.S. Film Industry, by focusing on the economic and cultural reasons why Hollywood decided, or rather, was forced to accept financing from China in order to expand (and save) their Film Industry and why Chinese film production companies chose to invest in this business to learn the know-how needed to produce successful films in China.

The research concludes with a comparison between the American Dream and the Chinese Dream and their origins.

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INTRODUCTION

U.S. and China have very different ways of looking at the world. These two countries have particularly different historical background, social ideologies, and ways of managing international relations. Analyzing cultures from a culturological perspective does not lead to determining which is better or worse, but rather to understanding how different cultures are socially constructed, how the perception of difference has been negotiated over time, and whether it is possible to find analogies between them; in some cases, these analogies have blatantly served marketing purposes such as growing a business or saving a long-lasting Film Industry.

My thesis aims at defining the positive and negative influences that American and Chinese cultures have exerted on each other in the contemporary era. It is divided into four chapters which investigate the consequences arising from cultural exchange and confrontation in specific contexts, such as the world of business and popular culture.

In the first chapter, I show how U.S. companies targeting Chinese market have taken into consideration many different cultural aspects, customs, and habits in order to deal with modern Chinese consumer's tastes and preferences. At the same time, they have respected ancient traditions like the importance of gaining and losing face, or *miànzi* (面子). The companies that better understand and interpret these features, for example, have manifested their comprehension of Chinese culture through an ingenious and effective translation, or rather adaptation, of their brand to Chinese language. In fact, the strategic choice of characters, used to make brands pronounceable in Chinese, when it is not limited to reproducing only phonetics or meaning, can reveal unexpectedly effective messages and, eventually, interesting references to values and contents. For instance, the Chinese name of Coca-Cola, 可口可乐 *Kěkǒu Kělè*, both accurately reproduces the original sound of the brand and is also able to evoke a very relevant meaning: Chinese people, by reading Coca-Cola's characters immediately think of "what is worth drinking in moments of happiness", or simply, "the drink that makes you happy". This translation became so effective as to make useless the presence of the original brand on bottles and cans distributed in China. In this case, the commitment to studying and effectively interpreting Chinese culture generated an enormous reward in terms of brand awareness, allowing Coca-Cola to achieve much greater success than other foreign

brands. The strategy adopted by the American multinational corporation concerning Chinese market approach recalls one of the most famous teachings of Chinese general and philosopher Sun Tzu: “To know your Enemy, you must become your Enemy”. Here, “becoming your enemy” means identifying with Chinese culture and specifically being able to gain market shares by understanding and giving value to its traditions. Actually, this is just one of the principles which refer to a broader influence that Chinese literature classics such as Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War* and *Golden Rules of Business Success* by Tao Zhu Gong had on shaping American business and strategic mentality. In reality, Chinese military strategy treaties had already become a subject of great interest to American military leaders at the time of the U.S. conflicts in Asia against Japan, North Korea and Vietnam. In a gradual way, over time, the teachings contained in such books have been interpreted in a broader and modern context, especially outside the military sphere. Soon, these titles became popular among entrepreneurs and political leaders from all over the world, because they were considered as an excellent repository of ingenious strategies and clever tactics to be used to become successful.

The second chapter will dwell on how the content of these classic works became trending references also in American popular culture, starting with the 1987 film *Wall Street* by Oliver Stone to the most recent American TV series, such as Vince Gilligan’s neo-western crime drama *Breaking Bad*; and it will investigate why many American high-ranking officers, political leaders and successful entrepreneurs from all over the world, including Chinese tycoon Jack Ma, have been inspired by these writings to the point of becoming (especially *The Art of War*) their favorite books. But all that glitters is not gold. In fact, in the case of Jack Ma, co-founder of Alibaba Group, one of the leading multinational companies in the field of e-commerce, retail, Internet and technology, rumors has it that besides being inspired by Chinese literature classics and Jin Yong’s wuxia novels to grow his business, he had also been subject to Chinese Communist Party influence.

The aim of this chapter is also to present and discuss the effect that present-day Chinese media along with the heavy presence of the Communist Party exerted over Chinese people, important entrepreneurial realities, and international relations, also considering the resulting cultural controversies. The *longa manus* of the Chinese government

extends up to the national booming film industry whose expansion has always been controlled over the years, for example, by applying preventive censorship or limiting the number of western movies showed in the country. The economic-cultural relationship between U.S. and China in the motion picture industry along with the ensuing debates will be explored in the third chapter.

China is one of the most populated countries in the world, with one of the highest middle-class growth rates and therefore a massive number of potential theatergoers. From a commercial perspective it is easy to understand why Hollywood longs to enter China's movie market and why it is so important that their films are watched by the Chinese. Chapter three will consider how American movie production companies are increasingly becoming interested in learning Chinese culture and working hard to assimilate their different way of making movies in order to meet the expectations of Chinese consumers. It will also examine the problems arising from this commercial adaptation and, in particular, the techniques and stratagems adopted by both nations to impose their respective cultural influences.

The fourth and last chapter will consider the conflicts emerging from two different national ethos which find expression in the American Dream and Chinese Dream. After explaining their origins and underlying ideologies, I will examine in particular, how the Chinese government, inspired by the social values of the American Dream, decided to create their own Dream mainly for political purposes. In fact, the last part of the chapter brings to attention the propaganda efforts carried out by the Communist Party to "pilot" and instill in their people the principles proposed by President Xi Jinping's political campaign. As the government-sponsored TV series like *In the Name of the People* (人民的名义 *Rénmín de míngyì*, considered by western critics as the Chinese version of American political thriller web television series *House of Cards*) shows, it is clear that the aim of the Party is to involve every citizen in fighting corruption which is one of the most critical issues affecting the country; while, at the same time, documentary films like *Amazing China* (厉害了, 我的国 *Lihaille, wǒde guó*) show the intention of the Chinese propaganda department to promote the string of successes achieved by President Xi Jinping over the years.

Contrary to popular belief, the strategy of Chinese government did not simply generate a passive acceptance of patriotic principles among the people but, in some cases, also

triggered a certain sense of individualistic pride, atypical in Chinese culture. That is what inspired Hong Kong director Peter Chan to produce 2013 movie *American Dreams in China* (中国合伙人 *Zhōngguó héhuǒrén*). An unconventional film, based on a true story, which narrates the tumultuous journey of three young Chinese businessmen, reflecting the ambition of a whole generation of Chinese people who, after the Cultural Revolution ended, perceived the chance of a new beginning and were brave enough to try their best to achieve personal success or, in other words, their interpretation of the American Dream.

1. Western brands in China

1.1 Entering the Chinese market by understanding Chinese culture

In recent years, the global relevance of the Chinese consumer is becoming increasingly perceptible and influential. For some decades now, China has been experiencing a very rapid socio-economic transformation and many of the consequences derived from this quick growth are reflected in consumption and purchasing habits of its immense population.

Considering the speed of development of this phenomenon and the size of the population involved in this evolution of consumption, it is difficult to make exact predictions about the outcomes of these changes.

Those multinational companies that want to take advantage of the immense opportunities offered by the expansion of this market cannot avoid working to understand it and try to adapt to their needs and culture. Undoubtedly, companies are asked to review different aspects of their internal organization, as well as the creation of an “ad hoc strategy” to find the correct positioning in this market, as the Chinese consumer has its own characteristics, often expressed through different needs from those of the “western consumer”.

The recent and rapid evolution of this market of incomparable proportions draws the attention of scholars belonging to different fields of study, from economics (marketing,

business management) to cultural studies (sociology, anthropology), each of which contributes to the production of pieces of a living and constantly changing socio-economic mosaic.

The evidence of the global importance of the Chinese consumer is a recent circumstance: up until a few years ago, in fact, China impressed the outside world mainly due to its productive capacity and to the highly competitive prices of its products at international level, causing many businesses in other nations to fear for their survival. Lately, important changes have been taking place in this area too: while previously the label “Made in China” was mostly considered synonymous with poor quality, now there is a general improvement in the quality of Chinese products. The main cause is that in these decades Chinese companies have gained a huge experience in terms of production. Moreover, even the Chinese consumers themselves now have higher expectations for the products they buy, as they are now accustomed to the new standards of consumer products. As a result, in recent years the concern for “Made in China” products has left room for an interest in the potential for the Chinese consumption market.

Among the fundamental elements that have influenced the profound changes in the Chinese consumption behaviour in recent years there is also the change in the priorities defined by the Chinese government, which have moved from placing the emphasis on productive capacities to giving greater importance to consumption. The post-Maoist government has promoted a profound paradigm shift in the country's economic policy: production orientation has been replaced by personal consumption.

The continental proportions of China imply specific attention on the part of multinational companies that intend to enter this market full of opportunities.

The importance of the Chinese consumer market is not only ascribable to its gigantic size, but also to the fact that it is not possible to exclude its influence on the wider side of global market.

In this sense, it is appropriate to start considering the Chinese consumer market as one of the global trendsetter in the near future.

The evolution of this phenomenon has been and still is inevitably influenced by the enormous political, economic, social and demographic changes that characterize this country.

China is an immense market and for this reason it cannot be considered a single entity with homogeneous needs: it must be considered as a set of very different markets, segmented through variables related to income, age and place of residence.

In order to understand the characteristics of modern Chinese consumers, I will briefly discuss the recent historical and political context that has influenced their evolution.

1.2 Brief history of the evolution of the Chinese consumer

1.2.1 Maoism: “Communism is not needing money to eat”

Since its founding in 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has begun a process of socialist transformation under the guidance of “Grand Helmsman” Mao Zedong. Taking inspiration from the Marxist philosophy, the communist ideal wanted to achieve a social condition of equality, where economic power was exercised by the community as a whole and not by individuals.

During the Maoist thirty-year period, the concept of “modernity” was identified with the increase in industrial production and with the triumph of collective ownership over private ownership. Chinese socialism meant that the public sector was given greater importance than the private sector, and that consequently the ideals of egalitarianism and collectivism were pursued, at the expenses of the rights of individuals and private property. This has certainly contributed to the leveling of the social disparities present in pre-Maoist China, but the general standard of living of the masses had always remained very low, below initial expectations. In short, during this thirty-year period the Chinese consumer was not recognized as an entity and there were no laws guaranteeing them rights.

It is possible to affirm that the Maoist period was characterized by a general uniformity of consumption imposed “from above”: most of the Chinese population wore the same clothes, had the same model of bicycle and the same reduced possibility of buying consumer goods.

One of the numerous slogans of this revolutionary period exemplifies the idea related to money and consumption under Maoism: “Communism is not needing money to eat” (吃饭不要钱就是共产主义 *chīfàn bù yào qián jiù shì gōngchǎn zhǔyì*).

This notion has been totally distorted in the following decades, as evidenced by the slogan that appeared in the Dengist period “getting rich is glorious” (致富光荣 *zhìfù guāngróng*).

1.2.2 Dengism: “Get a loan and realize your dream”

Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping, who ruled the PRC from 1978 to 1992, came to power. Under his leadership, China followed the policy of “opening to the outside world” (*duìwài kāifàng* 对外开放), considered essential both for national economic development and for raising the standard of living of the population. This period marked a turning point for the consumption of Chinese population: the opening first of all allowed a general increase in income, which led to a change in the characteristics of population consumption and a revolution in social hierarchies. The new policies adopted by the government revitalized the national economy, increased individual well-being and raised the standard of living of the urban population.

With the breakthrough promoted by Deng, the private sphere gained ground over the public sector and the egalitarian social structure of Maoist China collapsed.

The social and economic reforms presented by the new government provided the Chinese population with greater freedom of personal expression, which had been fundamental to overcome the rigidity of socialist collectivism in favor of individualism, a feature typically linked to capitalist societies.

Among the policies, to stimulate consumption adopted by the Chinese government in the post-Maoist period, there was a very important one that pushed banks to increase personal loans in order to incentivize the population to buy consumer goods and to increase expenses for education and traveling. As often happens in China, this new policy was accompanied by a slogan, the content of which clearly stands out from the

Maoist conception of money and consumption: “Get a loan and realize your dream” (借钱圆梦 *jiè qián yuán mèng*).

1.2.3 After Deng Xiaoping

A further turning point for the consumption of the Chinese population was marked by the entry of the PRC into the World Trade Organization, which took place in 2001. From that moment, China had to grant greater access to foreign companies in its market and personal consumption has become for the first time the main driver of Chinese economic growth. The rapid economic growth experienced by China was accompanied by the emergence of mass consumption, with the related appearance of advertising, fashion and luxury goods.

During the 1990s, most urban residents began buying discretionary goods previously considered luxuries but now seen as necessities, such as refrigerators, washing machines and color televisions.

The qualitative development of the Chinese market was very fast: while in the early years of opening up to the market economy consumers were looking for products that met mere criteria of functionality, since 1985 the interest in novelty represented by consumer goods has diminished and consumers have started looking for higher quality products; since 1992, the priority of consumption has passed to abstract features such as aesthetics.

Due to the strong imbalance between production and consumption inherited from the previous period, the Chinese government has promoted various consumption stimulation policies, including the reduction of working hours to eight hours five days per week and the establishment of new vacations, in order to increase the availability of free time for urban classes, time to spend their earnings and therefore mitigate this imbalance.

While comparing these recent government policies to the mass mobilizations of the Maoist period, the differences immediately stand out and it becomes clear that they had completely different natures: while in the 1950s and 1960s the population was urged to

work actively in all ways to raise national production standards, now the same population is being encouraged to spend without hesitation.

The purpose of these policies remains the same, namely the economic growth of the nation, even if the actions requested from the masses are the opposite. Another difference with the previous period is that now the population is being pushed to “act” while maintaining a passive attitude in the political sphere.

1.2.4 Collectivism vs. individualism

Despite the growing individualism that has characterized the spending behavior of the Chinese consumer since the last few decades, a peculiar feature of Chinese culture can be seen in the tendency to collectivism and conformism. It is possible to consider part of this inclination towards collectivism, already traditionally significant for Confucian influence, as a legacy of Maoist socialism, under which the individual and his needs were subordinated to the masses and the collective interest. The process of “de-collectivization” that began in the 1980s implied a modification of this particular feature through the expansion of personal spaces: the consequence was a greater propensity for individualism.

Starting from the observation that consumer choices are influenced by the culture to which people belong, in the article: “The Effect of Culture on Consumer Choice: the Need for Conformity Vs. the Need for Uniqueness” Beichen and Yanbin explain that while the “western consumer” pursues uniqueness and originality through the purchases it makes, its “Eastern” equivalent tends towards conformism and social norms adjustment, as they consider of the utmost importance to be positively evaluated by others.

In light of this, the Chinese consumer makes purchases taking into account the influence that a certain product can have on their public image and, unlike the western consumer, it is difficult to see them buying products which are not already popular on the market.

The greater importance attributed by the Chinese population to the social sphere than to the personal one is closely related to materialism and ostentatious consumerism. Since a product to which the society attributes a high value guarantees a respectable social

status to those who own it, the possession of a greater number of products with a high perceived value is considered fundamental to improve one's position within the community. Although traditional Chinese values give great importance to frugality, the purchase and ostentation of high value products allow and favor a good social position. Consumption in China is considered a way to stand out from the masses and to express one's individuality.

However, this individuality is not comparable to that commonly conceived by the “Westerners”, since, as we have already seen, the former continues to show collectivist characteristics. As a consequence, it is possible to affirm that the Chinese middle class is characterized by the pursuit of a sort of “collective individualism”, which aims at the constitution of a collective social identity. What these people aspire to is an individualism that does not distinguish them from one another, but from other social groups.

With a formula that echoes the modern definition of Chinese socialism, we could say that we are faced with a different type of individualism which is affected by peculiar Chinese characteristics.

It is clear that, despite the increase in the importance of the individualistic factor, the tendency to conform to social standards continues to have a considerable influence on Chinese consumer purchasing decisions and it is therefore a cultural trait that companies must take into account when they intend to deal with this market.

1.3 Gaining and losing face in China, the importance of “Mianzi”

A very important concept in Chinese culture is that of “face”, or *miànzi* (面子). This is closely linked to personal prestige and so to the social acceptability of the individual, concerning the projection and affirmation of one's own public image. This is an easily understandable concept also for other cultures, but it is considered useful to present a brief in-depth analysis due to the particularly significant role played by it in the Chinese society especially in relation to consumer behavior and purchasing decisions.

The *miànzi* has a profound influence in interpersonal relationships, its importance has been the subject of numerous studies, especially with reference to business and

commercial exchanges. However, other studies have shown that this concept also profoundly influences the consumption behavior of the Chinese.

In particular, the results of some surveys carried out by Lin, Xi and Lueptow and published in the article “Public Face and Private Thrift in Chinese Consumer Behavior” have showed that, normally, Chinese consumers are more inclined to spend a larger sum of money for the purchase of a product if it is to be used in public rather than in the privacy of one's home or family. The article in question shows as an example the difference in approach of the Chinese consumer for the purchase of mobile phones, to be used in public, and the purchase of washing machines and other household appliances, whose use is limited to the domestic environment: while for a mobile phone, which contributes to the creation of the buyer's public image, it is shown that there is a tendency to sustain a considerable expense, on the other hand, for the purchase of household appliances there is a noticeable predisposition to thrift. Another notable trend reported by these scholars is related to cigarette consumption: almost half of the smokers interviewed declared to buy or have purchased two different types of cigarettes at the same time, one cheaper for private consumption and another, up to five times more expensive, for public consumption and to be offered to other people.

On a more general note, it is also interesting to notice the differences between western culture's figurative concept of “face” and the cultural notion of “Chinese face” which remembers the collectivism-individualism nature mentioned in the previous paragraphs. In contrast to the western idea of “face” which is more self-reliant and individualistic, the “Chinese face” is more other-directed and complementary.

That is to say, it is less about one's personal dignity or self-esteem and more about how one is viewed by others. The “Chinese face”, differently from the “western face”, can also be donated or earned as well as be taken away or lost. Yvonne Chang of the University of Texas, in her 2008 Intercultural Communication study titled: “Cultural ‘Faces’ of Interpersonal Communication in the U.S. and China”, explains the difference:

“Deeply rooted in the Chinese concept of face are conceptualizations of a competent person in Chinese society: one who defines and puts self in relation to others and who cultivates morality so that his or her conduct will not lose others' face. This contrasts with the American cultural definition of a person who is

expected to be independent, self-reliant, and successful. The end result is that a Chinese person is expected to be relationally or communally conscious whereas an American person is expected to be self-conscious” (303).

So, according to Chang’s sociological point of view, western cultures tend to center on the individual as an independent, self-sufficient being. In educating children, the emphasis is on helping them develop a tough sense of personal morality and identity. On the contrary, for more than 4,000 years, Chinese culture has disparaged the notion of the individual by stressing the importance of the family and group. It was all about bringing honor to one's clan. With the focus on the collective, the sense of self-importance bleared so much that it basically disappeared. In fact, individualism was considered as unethical. As a result, “Chinese face” can be collectively created and owned:

“Interesting as the Chinese physiological face is, the psychological face makes a still more fascinating study. It is not a face that can be washed or shaved, but a face that can be "granted" and "lost" and "fought for" and "presented as a gift". Here we arrive at the most curious point of Chinese social psychology. Abstract and intangible, it is yet the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated” (Lin Yutang 199–200).

From a literal perspective, *miànzi* means “face” but we’ve said that it also represents one’s reputation and social status. In the course of its century-old continuous history, Chinese language has collected a very extensive catalog of explicit and implicit rules that, even today continue to regulate social habits: the so-called Chinese etiquette or *lǐjié* (礼节).

In the past, almost every aspect of Chinese life was regulated by what the Grand Master Confucius called *lǐ* (礼), rituals; failing to observe one of these rites was equivalent to breaking the Confucian ethical code which, at times, could lead to serious consequences. With the advancing globalization and modernity, the weight attributed to the observance of these ritual norms has been diminishing but not completely lost.

“If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given them by punishments, they will try to avoid the punishment, but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given them by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good” (Legge 2-3).

In general, from a Chinese point of view, “becoming good” is equivalent to behaving correctly in order to avoid public embarrassment and to save face or reputation. *Miànzi*, therefore, refers to the dignity of every person as well as the prestige that they possess in the places they attend: work, school, family etc. This can be achieved by obtaining good grades, excellent results at work, achieving an important economic position, but also by possessing a valuable car, branded clothes or a good-looking wife. In this regard, for the Chinese it is a real humiliation to make a mistake in public: “losing face” (丢面子 *diū miànzi*) is a source of great embarrassment and shame.

This means that any foreigner, including foreign companies, that relate to Chinese culture must always bear in mind the importance of avoiding any word or attitude that could lead to “losing face”.

To confirm the obsession of the Chinese people for this issue, there are dozens of ways of saying and proverbs. For example: “Men cannot live without a face as trees cannot live without bark” (人后脸, 树后皮 *rén hòu liǎn, shù hòu pí*). A common insult is to say that a person “has no face” (你没有面子 *nǐ méiyǒu miànzi*). Another typical expression is to “blacken the face” in the sense of “bringing shame to someone” (往脸上抹黑 *wǎng liǎn shàng mǒ hēi*); or a “face-saving project” (面子工程 *miànzi gōngchéng*) as in: “that new expensive airport is just another ‘face-saving project’ for local officials to suck up to their bosses”.

In reality, Chinese vocabularies have two words to describe the concept of “face”, each of which has different cultural nuances. We already know that one is *miànzi*, and the other is called *liǎn* (脸). While the *miànzi* is the result of the process of integration within society, the *liǎn* is innate, it represents the inner aspect of the individual whereas the *miànzi* refers to the external one. In Chinese culture, people are thought to have only one *liǎn* but various types of *miànzi*.

The *liǎn* can be evaluated only by oneself and, to do so, it is necessary to analyze every little detail of one's conscience; the *miànzi*, on the other hand, is judged by others on the basis of how a person conducts their own social life, their own capacities and potentialities.

The *liǎn* is much more difficult to lose or to reproduce than the *miànzi*; because of this, people usually worry about keeping their own *liǎn* safe, but are willing to risk their own *miànzi* in an attempt to increase its value. While a person who loses his *liǎn* “is no longer considered a human being” (丢脸即不是人 *diūliǎn jí búshì rén*), losing one's *miànzi* is considered a little less serious. (Zuo 58, Yang 140). Therefore, from a social point of view, the *miànzi* is certainly more important.

People can “damage” it (伤 / 损面子 *shāng / sǔn miànzi*) and risk “losing it” (失 / 丢面子 *shī / diū miànzi*); or they can “fight for it” (争面子 *zhēng miànzi*) to increase its value (增加面子 *zēngjiā miànzi*). Those who are pleased with their own (好面子 *hǎo miànzi*) are normally obsessed with taking care of it (保 / 顾 / 护面子 *bǎo / gù / hù miànzi*); while those who take it too seriously (爱面子 *ài miànzi*) or long for it (死要面子 *sǐyào miànzi*) could even pretend to have one (假装 / 充面子 *jiǎzhuāng / chōng miànzi*). *Miànzi* can be given (给面子 *gěi miànzi*), loaned (借面子 *jiè miànzi*), even sold (卖面子 *mài miànzi*) and, if desired, can also be compared to others (X面子比X大 - X *miànzi bǐ X dà*).

“Losing face” is thus one of the worst things that can happen in the life of a Chinese because it means losing its reputation and therefore its role in the society.

1.4 Western brands translated into Chinese

The issue of keeping intact one's face is also a priority among western companies which want to enter the Chinese market. Approaching a complex market like China is not easy. For this reason it is good that companies intending to invest in China are well prepared in order to avoid public mistakes and to preserve their own face.

One common error is to underestimate the question of foreign brand names' translation into Chinese language. Many western companies pretend to be already well-known in

the market and expect Chinese customers to understand western writing but, in truth, they are unconsciously taking the risk of being unrecognized, misinterpreted or even worse. This kind of imprudence can easily lead to a false move with a consequent “loss of *miànzi*” compromising the reputation of the company and leaving the brand in a tricky situation, difficult to handle and to recover.

Adapting a western word to the Chinese language requires a particularly complex process. The first action that is usually taken, is also the simplest one. It is about making a name, in this case a brand, pronounceable in Chinese. This circumstance involves its transcription into ideograms or “signifying signs” that make the sound of our syllables. The first level of translation then consists of the most basic result that is the closest consonance of our brand in Chinese phonetics.

The result, although from a certain point of view is considered acceptable, is often strange or inappropriate to a Chinese native speaker. In fact, most Chinese names consist of two ideograms, whereas in western languages, which are polysyllables, we almost always exceed three.

The consequence is that for a Chinese it is difficult to remember a name made up of more than two syllables which, moreover, is meaningless. The alternative, which in this case is quite contrary to the principle of recognition of a brand, is to base the translation on the meaning. By renouncing the sonority of the name we can in fact formulate a translation related to the contents, to the meaning of the name or brand. In this case, it is a sort of change of identity or rather a re-edition of one's own identity depending on the country to which one is exposed.

Both solutions, even if plausible and used, do not satisfy, for example, the prerequisites of many brands that have invested a lot of time and even more money to create an international commercial identity and that do not want to give up being recognized in the same way all around the world.

This necessity has pushed some brands to find a compromise solution, which perhaps would be better defined as a balance between the affinity of the original sound of the brand and a meaning that is both functional to its values and in tune with the nature of the product.

The result of this cultured and virtuous exercise makes the brand, however noticeably foreign, no longer strange in its content to the Chinese mentality. Let us consider different types of translations:

a) Translations based on the sound of the original name:

This choice allows to maintain the phonetic identity of the name almost unchanged. On the other hand, however, it involves a total renunciation of the meaning of the name; in other words, with this choice, the content is lost as well as the transmission of the message it promotes. It is certainly unthinkable for brands that have been created to transmit messages functional to their values to give up their contents.

Less critical, but not without contraindications, in the case of patronymics. Translation of family names following this approach is very widespread. Above all, in the case of fashion designers it is a common practice. To give some examples: Armani: 阿玛尼 *Āmǎní*; Gucci: 古奇 *Gǔqí*; Calvin Klein: 卡尔文克莱因 *Kǎěrwén Kèláiyīn*; Marc Jacobs: 马克雅克布 *Mǎkè Yǎkèbù* etc.

In this instance, it is just a transcription of the natural pronunciation of a foreign name and it is almost always used in documents where the trademark names are registered (商标公告, *shāngbiāo gōnggào*). It is hardly used commercially because the corresponding meaning is, in the best case, meaningless but in many cases misleading if not even embarrassing. In the case of Ferrari (法拉利) for example, in spite of the sound, *Fǎlǎlì*, that is certainly very close to the original, the three ideograms that build the Italian brand respectively mean: “law”, “pull”, “benefit”. Together they are meaningless. For Lamborghini (兰博基尼) the situation is very similar, *Lánbójīní* sounds very good but, “orchid”, “rich”, “foundation” and “monk” are definitely inappropriate meanings.

b) Translations based on the meaning of the original name:

Some brands that are surely courageous or perhaps more attentive than others to the Chinese market and popular culture have faced the problem of translation, preferring the meaning over the phonetics of the word.

Three examples will suffice to understand the meaning of this choice.

Apple Computer, the \$800 billion company, the most valuable brand in the world, in China chose to call itself 苹果电脑, *Pínguǒ* (apple) *Diànnǎo* (computer).

The Cupertino tech giant, with this choice, decided to identify much more than other brands with the Chinese reality.

Recently, verified that the Chinese-friendly name was not enough, to strengthen its Chinese identity and also to overcome the difficulties in sales caused by the increasingly appealing low-cost alternatives to the iPhone, the company has opened a very expensive research center in Beijing that will allow the company to come even closer to local partners and universities.

Volkswagen was born by the will of of Adolf Hitler in 1937, from a project of the engineer Ferdinand Porsche.

The first car had to be easy to build in large series and economically accessible. Volkswagen in German literally means “car of the people”.

The managers of the company wanted to use the same meaning also in the Chinese: 大众汽车 *Dàzhòng* (people) *qìchē* (car), as every reference to the people is still very much appreciated in China.

Another example is Sprite, the lemon and lime-flavored soft drink, which in English means “elf”.

This meaning would not have transmitted anything positive to Chinese, for this reason, instead of a literal translation like 妖精 *yāojīng* (elf in Chinese) was preferred 雪碧 *Xuěbì* which means “snow-emerald”.

While moving away from the original name, both in semantic and phonetic terms, the translation recalls the characteristics of the product, the emerald green color of the bottle and the freshness of the drink evoked by the snow.

- c) Translations looking for a balance between the sound and the meaning of the original name:

The great potential and the enormous interpretative charm of Chinese characters enable to push the perceived meaning of the brand well beyond the boundaries of western writing.

The strategic choice of ideograms, used to make brands pronounceable in Chinese, when it is not limited to reproducing only phonetics or meaning, can reveal unexpectedly effective messages and, eventually, lead to interesting references to values and contents.

The maximum effectiveness in the Chinese translations of western names or brands is obtained by using the most virtuous and cultured opportunity of translation, that is an original combination of phonetic affinity and the recall of the values of the brand.

In this case, the Coca-Cola example would be enough to understand the quality and refinement of this choice.

Coca-Cola, whose translation in Chinese is 可口可乐, *Kěkǒu Kělè*, which literally means: “what is worth drinking in moments of happiness”, or simply, “the drink that makes you happy”, is so effective as to make useless the presence of the original brand on bottles and cans distributed in China.

To understand the weight of the decision we must take into account that the western brand Coca-Cola is one of the most famous in the world, alone as a brand, it is worth almost 80 billion dollars.

Well, the Chinese version of the brand, which renounces the aspect that made it famous everywhere in the western world, has reached a level of integration in the language that it is no longer necessary to specify the type of product.

To increase the value and quality of the choice it should be noted that the term 可乐 *kělè* (“cola” in Chinese) is to be considered as a neologism for the Chinese language. For this reason it has been integrated into other importation brands such as Pepsi-Cola, which in Chinese is called 百事可乐 *Bǎishì Kělè*, and also from very popular drinks of Chinese production such as 非常可乐 *Fēicháng Kělè*, known as “the Chinese coke”.

Originally Coca-Cola did not have this name in China.

When the Chinese population was still used to drinking only tea without sugar and hot water, it was difficult to make an effective conversion to the sweet and carbonated taste of Coca-Cola.

The first version of the Chinese brand name of Atlanta was 可口可辣 *Kěkǒu Kělà* the first part, 可口 *kěkǒu*, was identical to the current one, but “Cola”, was translated with exclusively phonetic criteria: *kě là* respectively “power” (intended as “power of being”) and “spicy”.

This meaning did not benefit the understanding of the product, and perhaps defined its limits.

Kělà later was replaced with *kělè* which introduced much more evocative and pertinent concepts to Coca-Cola, like “power of being entertaining, joyful”.

The almost identical sound along with the captivating and suggestive meaning of the brand values have proved to be the recipe for the success of Coca-Cola in China.

Coca-Cola was not the only one to choose a different translation from the initial one usually based only on phonetic transcription.

To make sure that western brands were more understandable and “memorable”, and adapted to the tastes of potential Chinese consumers, many companies chose to register names specifically designed for the Chinese market.

McDonald’s from 麦克唐纳 *Màikètángnà*, with a series of rather coarse references to “wheat”, “overcoming”, “exaggerating”, “receiving”, chose to become 麦当劳 *Màidāngláo* which means wheat “of the right age, mature”.

In this case, the renunciation of a phonetic closer to the western one has repaid with a greater relevance of the meaning.

Danone from 达诺内 *Dánuònèi* which literally means: “reach”, “promise”, “interior”, has been transformed into 达能 *Dánéng* which focuses on mental associations proposing a new combination between 达 *dá* “reach” and 能 *néng* “possible”.

I would finish these short “case histories” citing the strategy of the brand Kodak which does not have a particular meaning in English but that has chosen to have one in Chinese by leaving the sound of the brand almost unchanged.

In 柯达 *Kēdá* are used two ideograms each of which, although put together they do not represent a “complete word”, have a meaning relevant to the brand: 柯 *kē*, that means “grip”, intended as “camera grip” and 达 *dá* that transmits the sense of “reaching”, “communicating”.

Kodak has achieved more in China than it has been able to do elsewhere, this can be explained by the fact that it has maintained the extraordinary phonetic simplicity of its brand and, at the same time, it was associated with an evocative meaning of the values to which it refers its image.

2. Chinese literature and American business strategy

2.1 How Chinese military treatises transformed American strategic approach

Whether used in the West or in the East, the term "strategy" has always been related to the idea of warfare. This word defines the multitude of moves and schemes elaborated to reach, once the dots have been connected, a desired outcome, result or advantage. It derives from the Greek *stratos*, "army", and *ago*, "to lead". So it refers to the objective ability that a general must have to lead and direct his troops. Also in Chinese, the term does refer to the military background, but it has a more emphatic meaning on the subjective qualities necessary for the action of leading and on the actual plans to be devised. 战略 *zhànlüè* is one of the translations used to express the concept of strategy, the two characters respectively mean "war" and "scheme". Therefore there is a character in clear reference to the war and another to give importance to its tactics. In close relation to the notion of strategy, there is one of its applications: the “stratagem”, a compound of a Greek derivation of *stratos*, "army", and *egema*, "act of conduction". In the western culture, once again, the reference to the military context is evident, but in the East the meaning takes a much broader and more general path, even if it still depends on the context. The Chinese terms 计谋 *jì móu* and 计策 *jì cè* allude respectively to "the dynamic elaboration of planning and its execution in relation to the development

of the situation including the various opportunities that may arise" and "to the ingenious idea", the expedient which, for its effectiveness or proven and lasting validity, is able to make the difference.

What stands out is how the strategy has become the object of study and application in areas that are very different from warfare and battle. Competition, understood in a general sense, nowadays involves sectors such as the economy, institutions, politics, business and sport. In these everyday-life fields it is common practice to face trials and difficulties that often leave people stranded in a dead zone. The ancient Chinese philosophy, in its military branch, provides precious suggestions in order to have a greater awareness of oneself, one's exact context, the obstacles to overcome and the broad and open vision that every strategy needs, as a requirement, to be effective. An advantageous position, the control of one's own emotions, the ability to walk more roads and in different ways are features that each time provide elements that certainly improve one's possibility to succeed. But it is necessary, on the other hand, to understand the ultimate end of the war, as it is intended in the Eastern culture. The West has always had a dichotomic view of concepts such as war and peace, or politics and war, as if the use of only one of the two opposites was essential. The Eastern different conception places relevance not on one of the two contrasting terms, but on the context, whose detailed knowledge determines the use of the two components and in which quantities. In fact, a fundamental assumption in this Chinese philosophical interpretation is the rejection of all extremism, in favor of a propensity that pushes towards balance and harmony. The restoration of a pre-existing harmony, or the establishing of a new one, certainly does not involve a massacre of innocents, nor the enrichment at the expense of the closure of other companies.

This is the main reason why Westerners, especially those who share the principles of American business culture, approach Chinese military works, such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, while completely obscuring their real meaning. The erroneous interpretation of the teachings contained in such works could bring to some forms of radicalization and lead the reader to the conclusion that Chinese military treaties are only a receptacle of some sort of unknown secrets and expedients which constitute a "pocket guide" to defeat enemies, outsmart competitors in the world of business or, more generally, to triumph in life. This cynic misinterpretation ruins the ethical message of these works

and ends up minimizing the quality and the depth of their teachings. Strategy must have some moral values to surround itself with, otherwise it will lose its original interpretation and the value of the outcomes will remain anonymous and destined to failure.

Culture, particularly in China, has influenced the thinking and military tactics of strategists in every sector, with a vital impact on the elaboration of every military plan and national security. In addition, scholars and analysts have often asserted that all of China's policies and behavior throughout its history have always been accompanied by the distinctive traditional Chinese philosophy. Of course, these cultural assumptions, and therefore also strategic thinking, vary from country to country, since every nation has a different culture, with peculiar traits and different approaches. In China, most scholars have identified Confucianism and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, which has Taoist roots, as the cultural source of Chinese strategic and military thought; other scholars, on the other hand, have highlighted a "pacifist" nature, typical of Chinese ancient history, and a new more recent course, characterized by the use of force, both internally and externally, but with the only aim of defense. A further analysis has instead focused on the concept and use of the art of stratagem and its predisposition by the Chinese, a really important guiding principle which is at the base of classical Chinese philosophy.

In reality it is impossible to attribute to a single tradition the cultural bases of a nation's strategy, since culture is made up of several currents. So it appears more appropriate to take into consideration all the cultural derivations that strategic thinking can have. Taoism itself is not limited to a separatist vision, but takes into account all the components and their changing interactions. The study of Chinese military strategy was also a subject of great interest to foreign countries, especially the U.S., which drew great inspiration from the teachings of these doctrines not only for the military field but, above all, for the world of business, politics and also more generally for the pursuit of personal success and the building of a winning mentality. Suffice it to say that, at the time of the American conflicts in Asia against Japan, North Korea and Vietnam, Chinese military strategy treaties have exercised such a heavy influence over the American military leaders, that it was ordered to insert books as *The Art of War* in the training programs of the United States Marine Corps and Military Intelligence personnel. During

the Gulf War in the 1990s, both generals Norman Schwarzkopf Jr. and Colin Powell used Sun Tzu's principles concerning strategy, speed and deception to strike at enemy's weaknesses. However, over the years, as previously mentioned, these texts have been subject of more in-depth analysis even outside the military sphere and have been interpreted in a broader and modern context. The consequence has been that today these books are almost never approached in relation to military sphere in the first place. The teachings contained in such books have had a great influence on entrepreneurs and political leaders from all over the world, because they are considered as an excellent repository of ingenious strategies and clever tactics to be used to become successful.

Chinese wisdom, as opposed to the use of force that is typical of the western world, has always manifested itself in every contest, be it political, commercial or military, in the form of a stratagem, in close relationship with the concept of strategy. The stratagem has the general meaning of an artifice, a "strategic trick" (Hong 131), whose invisible and non-violent use leads to the achievement of a desired result. As has been said above, it is repeatedly mentioned in military works such as the *Thirty-Six Stratagems* or *The Art of War*, but also in "Legalist" texts, such as the 韓非子 *Hán Fēizǐ* or Taoist works, as in the 道德经 *Dàodéjīng*. It is precisely in the latter that the concept of 道 *Dào* is explained, according to which everything is an apparent contradiction, that is, all things are unity of opposites, interaction of yin and yang. Although Taoism has its roots in nature and has always been associated with Chinese cosmology, it nevertheless proposes some major hints of great relevance that can be related to the notion of strategy. These cues are well analyzed in Taoist works, especially military-style works. These ideas are identified through four "essential characters": 勢 *shì*, 形 *xíng*, 因 *yīn* and 節 *jié*, that respectively refer to the ability to put oneself in a situation of advantage by taking control of non-tangible qualities such as psychic ones, the tangible attribute of physical strength, the capacity of reacting to the context, to adapt to the given circumstance and the notion of timeliness or timing. Furthermore, the greatness of the Dao also defines the vastness, the foresight and the significance of a mental vision that knows how to see beyond the limits. A narrow vision, in fact, makes men mediocre and incapable of reaching a certain level. Finally, it must be taken into consideration that the

Dao, as well as the idea of virtue (德 *dé*), are assumptions that often occur throughout Chinese philosophy, not only in Taoism. For these reasons, Chinese strategic thinking cannot but derive from the thousand-year philosophical and cultural tradition. Besides the wise use and application of 勢 *shì*, 形 *xíng*, 因 *yīn* and 節 *jié*, already described above, also the 奇 *qí* factor, that is the surprise or the irregular, linked to the concept of deception and unorthodox, determines and helps the acquisition of the final result.

The different uses of the stratagem and its historical recurrence made it possible to speak of a real culture of the stratagem. This Chinese cultural substrate has its origins in the historical period of the birth of stratagems, later studied and divulged by the greatest philosophers and military works which, with the help of wider channels of diffusion, have brought to the result of creating an authentic culture of the stratagem. This historical context characterized by continuous wars, known as "The Warring States period" (時代 時代 *Zhànguó Shídài*) and the great ability of the intellectuals of that time to extrapolate and put in writing strategies and war devices led to the birth of stratagems. It is no coincidence that the most discussed topics in the philosophical field regarded peace and harmony (to be restored and maintained), the art of warfare and military wisdom. Amid all the significant bibliographic material left, which was accessible only to a certain elite, "The Seven Military Classics" (武经七书 *Wǔjīngqīshū*) stands out.

The most important work contained in this collection is undoubtedly *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu, but references to strategy and military art are easy to find in Confucian and Taoist works as well. The importance given by the Chinese to their history helped in handing down the literary corpus on the culture of the stratagem, which occurred mainly through plays or bamboo and wooden slips. Among the most well-known texts that refer to the use of stratagems there are: 史記 *Shǐjì*, the "Analects of Confucius" (論語 *Lúnyǔ*), the previously mentioned 道德经 *Dàodéjīng* and the "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" (三国演义 *Sānguó Yǎnyì*). It must be remembered that many of these texts were jealously guarded by the governments or emperors in force, both for the preciousness of the contents, and for not allowing the people to become aware of artifices useful to disrupt social order through a riot or a rebellion. Currently, as we have

seen, they have become public domain works, on which not only commentaries, versions, interpretations, but also fiction and film have been written.

2.2 Sun Tzu and *The Art of War*

The Art of War (孫子兵法 *Sūnzi Bīngfǎ*) is a military strategy treaty attributed, after a long oral tradition of at least two centuries, to the Chinese general and philosopher Sun Tzu (孫子 *Sūnzi*), who lived in China probably between the sixth and fifth centuries BC. It is probably the oldest existing text of military art (roughly 5th century BC). It is composed of thirteen chapters, each dedicated to a different aspect of war. Its first translation dates back more than two hundred and fifty years by a French missionary and, over time, was studied and applied by Napoleon and probably also by some Nazi officials. This explains why the work also had a great influence in European military strategy. In remarking the historical relevance of the text, it shall be sufficient to dwell on its application by many other exponents of recent history, such as General Michail Illarionovic Kutuzov (who defeated Napoleon in Russia), Lawrence of Arabia and Mao Zedong. The references present in military treaties following *The Art of War* suggest that this text was actually consulted throughout history as the first compendium of notions, tricks and stratagems on warfare and expedients to use for winning and prevailing over the enemies. As has been said, it is a text whose advice can be applied, like other works of Sino-Japanese culture, to many aspects of life, even beyond military strategy.

It is essential to anticipate the constant presence of a Taoist background that characterizes all the thirteen chapters, whose understanding is important to really perceive what the author wants to convey. The symbol of the Tao itself is a clear demonstration of this idea: it is composed of a white part that seems to chase another black one. It is the alternation of opposites that interact with each other, generating a circulatory motion that maintains and preserves the equilibrium of the whole universe. This view does not appear in the West, where the cultural and religious tradition has imposed and still imposes the dependence of an opposite on the other, a superior entity that rises above its contrary, making life predictable and somehow reassuring. As

opposed to the dualistic western view, according to which one of the opposites must almost necessarily prevail and win over the other (heroism, courage, heart and the desperate attempt to achieve victory at all costs in western war history and cinematography, for example), classical Chinese philosophy counter-proposes the idea that cause and effect of the whole world flow into the same thing, just as everything is related and interacts with its opposite, without distinctions of superiority. So, Sun Tzu demonstrates that he had a broader vision, nothing but the aim of restoring the order and balance of things, in favor of pure harmony (和 *he*), thus preferring acting on the context and not on the enemy. In fact, the battle is seen as the worst-case scenario, while the maximum victory over the enemy takes place without having to fight. Everything happens in a spontaneous and natural way, as Taoism wants. As mentioned above, although it was born as a compendium of military art tips, the work can easily be interpreted in other fields outside the sphere of war. It is no coincidence that many American authors have tried over the years to provide their own version, with particular attention to the use of this treatise in the worlds of finance, economics and business, but also in the "battles" and obstacles that everyday life presents us; not always grasping the real meaning, the essence of Chinese philosophy that firmly unites all thirteen chapters. In reality, reading the text does not lead to being the new Warren Buffet or George Soros, nor should it be interpreted as a "guide to becoming rich". Furthermore, considering that the craving for adding, at all costs, the greatest possible number of zeroes to one's bank account is a form of extremism, as well as a form of weakness, that is strictly banned by Master Sun. In the American popular culture the reference to the work is present on several occasions, starting from the 1987 film *Wall Street* by Oliver Stone to the most current American TV series such as Vince Gilligan's neo-western crime drama *Breaking Bad*; the well-known website *CEO.com* includes it in the "Leadership Books To Read Before You Die" list; Rick Wartzman, executive director of *The Drucker Institute*, wrote for *Forbes*: "Ask businesspeople to peg the writer whose thinking is most clearly reflected in both military and corporate circles, and odds are that you'll hear the name Sun Tzu" and many other successful American leaders and entrepreneurs have referred to *The Art of War* as their favorite book.

2.3 Seven business lessons from *The Art of War*

Although it was written more than 2000 years ago, many of the teachings contained in *The Art of War* can be applied to the modern world of business. This book has become a must-read for business leaders and entrepreneurs because it is considered an excellent guide to strategy, tactics and success in the business sector. The following seven examples are representative cases of seven business lessons learned from *The Art of War*:

1) All warfare is based on deception:

“Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.” (Giles 6)

Business is like warfare. It is, for the most part, a zero-sum game. Companies fight to increase market share, customers and sales. The goal is to keep the competition unaware of your actions. When Snapchat rejected Facebook's acquisition proposal, the latter made it appear that they had decided to renounce that idea, taking a step back and deciding to remain inactive. Instead, they secretly worked on a new version of their social network that contained many of the features contained in Snapchat taking the "enemy" by surprise and beating the competition.

2) Supreme excellence is winning without fighting:

“In the practical art of war, the best thing of all is to take the enemy's country whole and intact; to shatter and destroy it is not so good. So, too, it is better to recapture an army entire than to destroy it.” (Giles 9)

Winning every battle is excellent. But winning every battle without having to fight is the "non plus ultra". According to Sun Tzu, you do not always have to fight to win. This concept can be applied to the business world as well, for example: you can sell your

company, accept a union with a competitor or try to acquire a competitor. The increase in self-publishing and eBooks has led to greater competition in the publishing sector. Instead of fighting each other, *Penguin Books* decided to join *Random House* and create the *Penguin Random House*. This gave birth to the largest commercial book publishing company in the world and guaranteed the new company the financial strength to cushion the blow and especially granted them time to plan new strategies to contrast the new publishing trend.

3) Don't be second:

“Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy, will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted.” (Giles 15)

The field, in this analogy, is the market. It is important that companies bring their product to market before their competitors' arrival. The goal is to be aware of market tendencies and changes and be able to put new products on the market before other rivals. When American entrepreneur Elon Musk, at the beginning of the 2000s, saw the need for cars that did not produce CO2 emissions and decided to develop a car that would use renewable resources for fuel, he founded Tesla. Other automakers did not believe that electric cars would take hold. A few years later, the Tesla Model S almost doubled the sales of the Mercedes S-Class. Tesla was the first to take the field, while *Mercedes*, together with other car brands, were left behind and now must hurry to recover.

4) Never announce your attack

“The spot where we intend to fight must not be made known; for then the enemy will have to prepare against a possible attack at several different points; and his forces being thus distributed in many directions, the numbers we shall have to face at any given point will be proportionately few.” (Giles 16)

This is often referred to as the "element of surprise". If a company does not know what are their competitors' strategies for the future, they cannot plan countermeasures to defend itself. Competitors are forced to prepare by investing resources in different areas of development. A good example, in this case, is Apple. The technology company is notoriously reserved; employees are not allowed to talk of certain products to other people in the organization, unless they are involved in the project. Let us take the Apple Watch launch as an example: in December 2011 rumors about a wearable device developed by Apple began to circulate. Two years later, in February 2013: *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Apple was working on an iOS-based smartwatch, Apple's mobile operating system. Meanwhile *Bloomberg* announced that the company had dedicated 100 people to the development of the project. A few months later, the *Financial Times* communicated that Apple hired even more people to work on the new smartwatch. In April 2014: Apple's CEO, Tim Cook, revealed the launch of a product in the near future, but he did not say what it was. In summer 2014: *Reuters*, a popular business and financial news organization, reported that production was beginning shortly. In September of the same year, as usual for the launch of the company's new products: Apple's CEO introduced the Apple Watch. The company had kept the project hidden for several years. Even when the major publications wrote articles associated with their Apple Watch, the company did not say a word. Tim Cook only stated that a new product was under development but did not say what it was. This tactic explains why a company should never announce their attack in the competition.

5) If the left is strong, attack from the right:

“For should the enemy strengthen his van, he will weaken his rear; should he strengthen his rear, he will weaken his van; should he strengthen his left, he will weaken his right; should he strengthen his right, he will weaken his left. If he sends reinforcements every- where, he will everywhere be weak.” (Giles 16)

Every company, regardless of size, has weaknesses in one area or another. Even the large and well-established companies, with billions of dollars in revenue, have their weak spots. Let us consider Alibaba as an example. According to *Forbes*, the Chinese e-

commerce platform has over 500 million active users on its China retail market (Tmall and Taobao) but is having difficulty establishing itself outside of China. Thus, over the years, that market has been occupied by other industry giants like Amazon and eBay. To date, these two companies, thanks to their foresight and the ever-increasing quality of their services, share out the European and U.S market as undisputed leaders. This means that if Alibaba decided to concentrate its resources to “conquer” even just a part of that market, it could weaken its strength in the Chinese territory and favor the rise of other companies like JD.com and the Suning group.

6) Warfare requires drums and flags:

“On the field of battle, the spoken word does not carry enough: hence the institution of gongs and drums. Nor can ordinary objects be seen clearly enough: hence the institution of banners and flags.” (Giles 20)

There are generals and soldiers in war. While in the world of business, there are managers and employees. However, in both fields, tools are needed to help leaders share their ideas and future strategies. Managers usually hold meetings to communicate new ideas or the progress of projects to the highest-ranking positions of their company. In a second moment, all-hands meetings are organized to share the results or the new strategies with all the employees through presentations, audio video contents etc. This is the drum of modern times. When a company wants to change its image or update it, they think of a rebranding or a new slogan. A lot can be understood from the logo or the "payoff" of a company. Just think of the success obtained in the media by Google after updating their logo. This is the flag of our times.

7) Avoid the 5 dangerous faults:

“There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general:

- (1) recklessness, which leads to destruction
- (2) cowardice, which leads to capture
- (3) a hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults

- (4) a delicacy of honor which is sensitive to shame
- (5) over-solicitude for his men which exposes him to worry and trouble” (Giles 24)

These are the five dangerous faults of a leader. Being too brave can lead to incautious behavior, but not being brave can lead to cowardice. A leader must always be lucid and not be provoked by insults from the enemy. A leader must know that there is no shame in escaping the battle to fight another day. Finally, a leader must take care of their troops but it is impossible for them to deal with every single problem, so they must surround themselves with people whom they can trust in order to share responsibilities with them. A good leader must be able to treat his employees while remaining focused on the most important tasks.

These are just a few lessons learned from the teachings contained in *The Art of War*.

These examples can help to understand why the book has been so successful even outside the context in which it was thought and written and, above all, the reason why it is finding more and more space within the shelves of the libraries of great leaders, future entrepreneurs and successful businessmen.

2.4 Golden Rules of Business Success by Tao Zhu Gong

Tao Zhu Gong 陶朱公 is considered to be one of the founding fathers of Chinese commercial business. He was a prominent Chinese military strategist, statesman, diplomat, economist and philanthropist who lived VI and V century B.C. during the “Spring and Autumn” period.

Also known as Fan Li 范蠡, he is widely identified as the first Chinese billionaire, based on a proportional calculation of his fortune in current terms. One of the secrets behind his success lay in his ability to grasp the personality of other human beings an advantage that, if used correctly, helps gain the trust of others. The classical teachings of Fan li, as well as those of Sun Tzu, are still studied by many of the most important contemporary business leaders who approach ancient Chinese military philosophy to turn the stratagems of the art of advantage to their own purposes to exploit them, in a

modern key, in the current economic and commercial context. The art of advantage was the prerogative of the masters of strategy who, since ancient times, revealed stratagems to warlords, statesmen and diplomats not only to achieve success in military campaigns but also to tackle complex issues and extricate themselves in competitive contexts at every level. As has been said, in Chinese doctrine, there is a total interconnection between the forces that shape philosophy, spirituality, the art of combat and the art of advantage in politics and economics. Consequently, the principles that move the commander into battle are the same that guide the entrepreneur in the business world, the politician in exercising power and ordinary people in social life. The stratagems of ancient Chinese philosophy therefore also have a psychological and not only military value. Each stratagem is a “key” to victory by undermining the psychological equilibrium of the opponent.

In his book *Golden Rules of Business Success* (经商宝典 *Jīng Shāng Bǎo Diǎn*), Fan li listed the 12 essential principles for achieving success in the business world in accordance with his vision. Besides, the legend of this man has been handed down from one generation to another through traditional Chinese operas, movies and, in more recent times, even comic books. The famous Chinese illustrator Fu Chunjiang, for example, selected and drew some of Fan li’s most inspiring teachings in the 2001 book *Golden Rules, Tao Zhugong's art of business* (经商宝典. 陶朱公商训 *Jīngshāng bǎodiǎn. Táo Zhūgōng shāng xùn*). The stories are full of business-wise lessons and strategic thinking which reflect his 12 “golden rules”, but there are also life stories, intrigues and romantic themes involved; they contain struggles, fighting and many references to Chinese ideologies. Let me use some of them to introduce these principles:

1 - Know people (能识人: 知人善恶, 账目不负 *néng shì rén: zhī rén shàn è, zhàngmù bù fù*). Knowledge of positive and negative sides, strengths and weaknesses of people have a favourable impact on business. Knowledge and understanding must be profound and all-embracing: character, personality, good and bad sides, strengths and weaknesses, attitude, behaviour, skills under pressure, history, lifestyle and background. Only in this way can one gain an advantageous position and conduct successful business. Fan li says that you must be able to perceive for yourself, with your experience, the characteristics of people.

One day, one of the shopkeepers at Fan li's pharmacy was about to have an accident because he was saturated with work. Fan li become aware of the situation and decided to hire an assistant. But as it was a very delicate position (the assistant would have to handle the accounting), so he decided to get advice from his other assistant, and he took him to see three young men who looked promising and were dedicated to raising water buffalos at a farm. When they went to look for them, the first was asleep, the second was betting with some friends and the third, was passing the buffalo from one side of the shore to the other. Fan li chose the third, named Xiao Wen (小文), without even interviewing him (Xiao Wen appears in a multitude of stories along with Fan li, as his disciple). Years later, Xiao Wen had become an excellent shopkeeper, praised by all. The elderly shopkeepers agreed with Fan li's obvious decision, since the first of the boys had ended up falling asleep at his job and causing a fire, while the second ended up robbing his employer to settle his gambling debts. Fan li later added that he chose Xiao Wen not only because of his ability to work, but also to avoid the losses he predicted the other two would cause. Because he wanted to make a profit and avoid losses, both at the same time.

2 - How to treat people (能接纳: 礼文相待, 交关者众 *néng jiēnà: lǐwén xiāng dài, jiāo guān zhě zhòng*).

Treating people respectfully and cordially, following established rituals, helps one become widely accepted by a particular audience, with a positive impact on business. The importance of cordiality and respect is directly proportional to the prohibition of pugnacious, irascible and instinctive attitudes. Yet when, as in business, accepting every type of customer is the practice, one must know how to manage every type of personality well. In this principle there is an evident reference to the importance of the concept of *guānxi* (关系) which, as has been explained in the first chapter, indicates relations, human relationships and interconnections between individuals, a very important traditional value in China, not only in business; and to the value of *zhōng* (忠) that in Chinese culture is what keeps a bond tight, namely, faithfulness, loyalty and devotion. This advice focuses on learning how to manage customers and never prejudging a prospect or possibility of selling because, at the very least, you will get publicity if you treat them well.

Once upon a time, some old men with poor appearance entered the fancy silk shop of Fan li. Ah He (阿荷), the assistant shopkeeper, seeing his apparent poverty, did not attend to them. When Fan li finished with another customer, he started to take care of the old men and asked them very politely what the cause of them going to his silk shop was. It turned out that the Duke of Qi had named his eldest son a senior official and wanted to celebrate him with new clothes. Fan li attended them personally, made recommendations and ordered Ah He to help them. After that, he admonished the boy because he had prejudged potential clients because of their appearance. He added that customers had to be treated well if only because it gave the business fame and good name. The next day, numerous clients showed up because the old woman had recommended Fan li's shop to her friends.

3 - Focus on one business (能安业: 厌故喜新, 商贾大病 *néng ān yè: yàn gù xǐ xīn, shānggǔ dàbìng*).

Abandoning old business to embrace new ones is the curse of many businesses. In this context, a calm and rational approach is what matters in order to assess one's own resources and make them flow in the most suitable direction, while maintaining a far-sighted perspective and analysing not only the people involved but also the tangible opportunities and circumstances on hand. Fan li warns that you have to be focused on a business until it bears fruit, be patient and avoid unnecessarily “jumping” from one type of business to another, especially one you are not familiar with. He advises to devote oneself to what one knows.

This concept is illustrated with the story of the ruin of a beekeeper who left apiculture because it was a very expensive job, to devote himself to the production of fruit without knowing that trees take years to grow and to bear fruit. These efforts, this concentration on one business deal in particular recalls the concentration that Sun Tzu requires in war. Whether adversaries are strong or weak, accurate knowledge means one can always avoid their strengths and destroy their weaknesses. Sun Tzu says: “By discovering the enemy’s dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy’s must be divided” (Giles 16). One way to avoid the strength of adversaries is move into areas unknown or in any case uncongenial to them. This can also create resources for attacking their weaknesses at the same time.

4 - Being organized (能整顿: 货物整齐, 夺人心目 *néng zhěngdùn: huòwù zhěngqí, duó rén xīnmù*).

Attractively and neatly displayed goods will catch the attention of customers while a disorganized presentation does not call for sale. This shows that Fan li was a pioneer of marketing concepts as well as product placement. His military background ensured he learnt the importance of organisation, which in turn depends on discipline and planning. Moreover, even for Sun Tzu, the effectiveness of an army depends on how and to what extent it is organized (治乱, 数也 *zhì luàn, shù yě*). This discourse also applies to the business world, regardless of whether the company is large or small. It is not the vastness or broadening of business that determines efficiency but the structure and excellent organisation. The most common mistake among Chinese businessmen is to recruit relatives, again because of *guānxi* (关系), rather than professionals. Consequently, this lack of skill will generate hindrances and obstacles to the work of professionals, thereby blocking the way for company growth. A more precise and defined organisation would therefore avoid inefficiency and also help project the right image of strength, well-being and assurance.

5 - Be flexible (能敏捷: 犹疑不决, 终归无成 *néng mǐnjié: yóuyí bù jué, zhōngguī wú chéng*).

Doubts and the inability to make decisions, in the end, will not bring about any results. On the contrary, results will only be achieved through flexibility, adaptation and the ability always to be ready to take the right decision as rapid as possible.

In a corporate context, as in war, business conditions may change rapidly and radically, such as the devaluation of the Baht in Thailand in 1997. Foreign investors and speculators did not have even a second of hesitation before transferring huge sums of money into Asia, as well as foreign companies that rushed to the East to expand their business and build more infrastructure. Everyone was betting on Asia. Nevertheless, devaluation rapidly became a continental crisis, both economically and politically, and many governments collapsed. Only those who were fast enough to withdraw their investments and avoid the following continental crisis managed to make profits out of their investments. This demonstrates the unpredictability of any event on any scale of

importance. Going back to the principle of flexibility and promptness, above all it means that a company or organization must have a spirit of adaptation and be well organized in order to take quick decisions. Adaptation involves aligning oneself with circumstances and then reacting and exploiting the opportunities provided by the circumstance itself. Moreover, this ability to change in response to external variations recalls a similar concept expressed by Sun Tzu, whereby the army must be like water, which has the passive force to overcome everything (Giles 17). Enterprise, on the other hand, is understood as the ability to take risks and be far-sighted.

6 - Requesting payment (能讨账: 勤谨不怠, 取讨自多 *néng tǎo zhàng: qínjǐn bù dài, qǔ tǎo zì duō*).

Prudence and diligence are always recommended in the ability to solicit payment. This skill is directly linked to the management of finances and resources or, to use an economic and managerial glossary, attention to financial statements, income and liabilities. In other words, if a payment is claimed, one must demonstrate being up to date with balances and having respected deadlines. Another link can be processed in relation to *guānxi* (关系) and the ethical value of *zhōng* (忠). Both concepts, thanks to the solidity and importance they have within the Chinese landscape, are a kind of guarantee, a passe-partout. However, in cases where the demanding payment must be imposed in some way or other, it is well worth keeping in mind the importance for the Chinese of not losing, or causing to lose, face (丢面子 *diū miànzi*). Humiliation hides a deep-rooted sense of defeat, which is why the Chinese prefer indirect confrontation to avoid serious embarrassment.

7 - Employing people (能用人: 因材施教, 任事有赖 *néng yòng rén: yīn cái qì shǐ, rèn shì yǒu lài*).

The reasons and qualities why a person is employed are an assurance of the reliability of that person in that position. Employing the right people in the most appropriate roles for them, where their skills and competences find their best expression, not only helps avoid problems but also helps optimise the efficiency, sense of responsibility and motivation of all individuals. Consequently, in this context, the first principle of Fan li

no longer suffices: getting to know people is the first step, knowing how to employ them optimally is the next one that assures successful work.

The creation of a human resources office in virtually every company is a clear example. Personnel in this sector research and analyse in detail the most appropriate profiles for particular roles in the company that have to be met with the most appropriate human resources.

8 - Knowing how to discuss matters (能辩论: 坐财有道, 阐发愚蒙 *néng biànlùn: zuò cái yǒu dào, chǎnfā yúméng*).

People rich in wisdom, knowledge and culture will indoctrinate the ignorant. This explanation seems to allude to the traditional image of the wise philosopher surrounded by disciples. Knowing how to discuss and be eloquent is a rare art which enhances a person's credibility and importance. Mood swings and an emotional personality will obviously not achieve a winning position in any discussion. It is always advisable to adopt a calm, reassuring and well-mannered profile at the same time as being persuasive, clear and able to convince others to do things they would prefer not to do. It is also fundamental to accumulate as much information as possible, knowing how to extrapolate truth from analysis and opinions, and then organize a convincing, demonstrative and creative analysis through brilliant dialectical communication skills. These skills are a strength in any sector, from politics to election campaigns, investment requests and every type of negotiation. This principle also takes up the concept of losing face (丢面子 *diū miànzi*), something highly discouraged in any public situation. Feelings are very dear to the Chinese. There is a saying in China: A gentleman may be killed but not humiliated (士可杀, 不可辱 *shì kě shā, bùkě rǔ*).

A curious expedient is the different type of approach between China and the West. Oriental peoples, and the Chinese in particular, are all highly respectful and, when they welcome guests, they begin the conversation by making humble excuses. However, this apparent sign of weakness means that the Chinese are very keen on treating visitors well, praising them and their backgrounds, such as their companies. In the West, on the other hand, the approach is more direct, placing oneself on the same level as guests, using pleasantries to put both sides at ease and break the ice. In general, in the West, private conversations during meetings are an approach that should be avoided. On the

contrary, the Chinese, during negotiations, often tend to talk privately in Chinese in order as not to be heard by their western counterparts, perhaps with the excuse of interacting with the interpreter.

9 - Knowing how to buy (能办货: 置货不苛, 蚀本便经 *néng bàn huò: zhì huò bù kē, shíběn biàn jīng*).

Buying goods without discernment and focusing only on saving money will lead to capital losses in the end. In other words, it is better to spend a little more for a higher quality product because this quality will ensure it is not a wasted purchase and capital will not suffer irreparable losses. Asking for low price for supplies, raw materials or sales material, could lead to buying the worst products and end up not selling them as bad as they are. Fan li says that people who buy to sell on have to be “smart” when it comes to buying products, not greedy. Because, as the proverb says, if you are too greedy, you end up with nothing. In other words, they must know how to scrutinize and understand all the positive characteristics of the product to be sure when buying it, in addition to knowing how to negotiate the price well. This is also the first mention of quality control. A careful analysis will be able to distinguish between a product that generates a significant volume of business and another that it unlikely to sell well.

Even a simple product that has not seen significant changes over time can still multiply sales when combined with a good marketing strategy. Let's take McDonald's hamburgers, for example. They have remained virtually identical over the years but the introduction of small toys as gifts appealed to many children, who therefore encouraged their families to eat a meal at one of the fast-food restaurants in order to get the toy.

10 - Seizing opportunities (能知机: 售贮随时, 可称明哲 *néng zhī jī: shòu zhù suíshí, kě chēng míngzhé*).

Knowing how to sell and stock at the right time, in other words knowing how to capitalize on opportunities, is a skill of wise and attentive people. This capacity is expressed in a context of changes in any competitive environment. This is why the principle is defined as a skill, precisely to be able to identify and grasp an opportunity even within the variables of every situation. At the same time, knowing how to exploit opportunities is not enough: one must also be able to dodge threats and risks. Excelling

and capitalising in the business world are two actions that inevitably involve risks. The Chinese term for “crisis” is 危机 *wēijī* and the individual meanings of the two characters it comprises clearly define the success-risk correlation. The first character means “danger, damage”, while the second means “occasion, opportunity”. Every crisis affects people who are unable to dodge the damage and seize the opportunities, while favouring those who are capable of doing the opposite and thereby be successful. Risk is certainly not a path to take with blind faith but a strategy based on the right calculation and judgement. An opportunity arises from careful analysis of the current situation and only then should it be exploited quickly.

An example of marvellous opportunities grasped at the right time and in the right circumstances is Dell Computers. In the 1990s, Michael Dell - the company's founder - had no money to invest in large distribution channels for his computers. He noticed, however, that the economy was doing well and that everyone had a basic knowledge of computers as well as having credit cards. He therefore bypassed large retailers to implement strategic distribution to customers. Since competitors had already invested in large-scale distribution, they could not react. When Dell decided to move to the Asian market in the late 1990s, he noted that this form of direct distribution was something new for Asians. As a result, the US company invested heavily in an information campaign about Dell products and how to order and pay for them. Not only were Asians well-informed about how to make payments but Dell also managed to seize precisely the right moment during the Asian economic recovery after the 1997 crisis.

11 - Stand as an example (能倡率: 躬行以律, 亲感自生 *néng chàng lǜ: gōngxíng yǐ lǜ, qīn gǎn zìshēng*).

Acting in a disciplined manner in accordance with the rules will develop a sense of confidence, trust and closeness in the people around us. The leader's behaviour will therefore have an impact on all members of the organization, be it a company, a movement or an army. The following Chinese saying is a clear explanation: “The behaviour of a soldier affects only himself; that of a general affects the entire army” (兵熊熊一个, 将熊熊一窝 *bīng xióngxióng yīgè, jiāng xióngxióng yī wō*). Since the conduct and morality of the leader affects everything else, responsibilities will also be attributed exclusively him. In China, a leader is associated with the characteristic of

being enlightened (明 *míng*). The left component of the character means the sun and the right one means the moon. The evident Taoist background of the term implies the interaction of a pair of opposites, namely the sun and the moon, light and darkness, yang and yin. Indeed, wise people know how to use one or its opposite. Many tend to take on a mass mentality, allowing themselves to be transported instead of being at the helm. In fact, to stand out from others and succeed, one must have the courage to do things differently and go against the trend. Yet not only find a new way of doing something but also new assets, new ways of thinking and new standards. While remaining humble at the same time. This is precisely the purpose of the eleventh principle of Fan li. At times, going against the trend may involve disobeying a superior's orders. An apparently inadmissible scenario if you look at China, where values of loyalty, faithfulness and relationships are so important, not only towards the sovereign and the State but also towards the organisation one belongs to. We only need analyse the Chinese term 国家 *guójiā*, which means the Nation, the State. The first character refers to the Chinese term 国土 *guótǔ*, which is the national territory, while the second character refers to the term 家庭 *jiātíng*, or family. It is evident, therefore, as a testimony to the value of relationships and loyalty, that family is the foundation of a State for the Chinese. However, loyalty, which is reciprocal in a State or organisation and earned in the field, is exactly why we should not be afraid of being different and seek new methods.

12 - Be forward-looking (能远数: 多寡宽紧, 酌中而行 *néng yuǎn shù: duōguǎ kuān jǐn, zhuó zhōng ér xíng*).

An estimate of positive and negative factors, of what can be expanded or limited, what will affect a given decision and a given process, can be calculated in relation to the situation and its variables. Evidently, it will be crucial for estimating and forecasting to be objective and set aside emotional and human aspects, as well as being able to understand the overall vision. This factor is the *conditio sine qua non* for formulating a shrewd strategy. Whatever the field, it is difficult to achieve everything. It is preferable to focus on priorities, on strengths and on the most important goals in order to make the best use of your resources. Sun Tzu also outlined how preparing oneself on every front

is equivalent to being weak everywhere. It is wiser to strengthen a particular front, such as the right or left side, the rear or the avant-garde, so as to be weak only on the opposite side (Giles 16). Depending on resources and circumstances, it will then be possible to define the appropriate strategy. Today, however, even this may not be enough to truly excel. In fact, over and above strategy, one must also assess what future scenarios may be like, which trend will attract the mass of customers or which technological innovation will be more effective in future situations with the aim of being always one step forward. In this regard, it is very easy to assume that during the peak period for sales of old mobile phones, the idea of creating a device combining even more features assembled together, namely, the smartphone already existed.

Now let us see how one of the most successful entrepreneurs of our time was inspired by the combination of these ancient Chinese military and strategic teachings and modern wuxia Chinese fiction to build one of the most valuable and biggest companies in the world.

2.5 How Jack Ma applied *The Art of War* and Jin Yong's wuxia novels in growing Alibaba's business

Jack Ma (马云) is arguably the most famous Chinese entrepreneur. He is the co-founder and executive chairman of Alibaba Group (阿里巴巴集团), one of the leading multinational companies in the field of e-commerce, retail, Internet and technology. Jack Ma founded the company in 1999 with other 17 friends and students in his Hangzhou apartment. Now, according to *Fortune*, it is one of the most admired companies in the world, owning and operating many and various businesses globally in multiple sectors; specialising in online sales services as well as electronic payment platforms, shopping search engines and cloud computing services (“Alibaba Named to Fortune's World's Most Admired Companies List”). Jack Ma poured his own philosophy into Alibaba's business model and his extraordinary personality, along with his charisma, made him a world class public speaker and even earned him the second place in the 2017 “World's 50 Greatest Leaders” list by *Fortune*, outshining American tech

moguls as Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg etc. (“The World’s 50 Greatest Leaders”). By Jack Ma’s own admission, many of his intuitions together with his way of handling business and winning mentality, found great inspiration in the wuxia novels of Jin Yong, one of the greatest and most popular Chinese martial arts fiction writers ever. Jack Ma himself, on the occasion of his passing in 2018, posted on Sina Weibo:

“Without Jin Yong, Alibaba would have never become what it is today. Without Jin Yong, Alibaba would never have tens of thousands of passionate entrepreneurs starting their own businesses. Starting a business means doing something other people cannot. A business “Xia” serves his country and people. One should be true to his heart like the characters in *The Smiling, Proud Wanderer* 笑傲江湖. One should be true to his friends until death. Alibaba believed in these words because they came from you” (“Jack Ma Pays Tribute to His Idol, Who Inspired Him to Start Alibaba”).

Jin Yong’s novels echoed the spirit of “Xia” (侠), standing for a chivalrous hero and the virtue he represents, resembling the values of integrity, discipline and courage which are recurrent themes in such works. The vigorous “Xia” spirit that inspired Jin Yong’s heroes is the same that motivated Jack Ma and fostered his ambitions. Many of these principles are contained and, in a large part, derive once again from Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*. Let us see how Jack Ma was influenced by Jin Yong and Sun Tzu’s ideals and how these assumptions encouraged his business approach:

“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles” (Giles 10). This principle examines the importance of knowing both your and your opponent’s strong and weak points, with the purpose of using them to build an effective strategy.

Jack Ma used his knowledge of China and, in particular, his understanding of Chinese culture, history, philosophy and people’s mindset to take advantage over Alibaba’s foreign competitors which were trying to enter the Chinese e-commerce market in the first 00’s. That’s why he decided to include a LiveChat customer service on Taobao, Alibaba’s online shopping website. Aliwangwang (阿里旺旺) allowed buyers and

sellers to build a relationship, trust and negotiate in real time, making personal every transaction and respecting the culture of bargaining, still very popular in China. American e-commerce colossus eBay, Alibaba's major rival in China at that time, completely ignored this function and, in general, did not make any effort to create a bond with Chinese consumers. Jack Ma compared eBay's approach to Chinese market to a jumbo jet: "a global technology platform sounds great, like a Boeing 747 flying great. But if the airport is a school yard, you cannot land. Even if you want to change a button, you have to report to, like, fourteen guys" (Clark 172). In 2005, after eBay's failure in conquering Chinese market, he added in an interview on *Forbes* magazine: "eBay may be a shark in the ocean, but I am a crocodile in the Yangtze River. If we fight in the ocean, we lose—but if we fight in the river, we win" ("The Crocodile and The Shark: Could Alibaba Swallow eBay?").

Jack Ma invested years in studying western culture, management theories and thriving businesses, he took what he needed and left the rest. He merged that with his love and understanding of Chinese culture and consumer habits to design an all-inclusive technology and create the first real global Chinese brand.

"We cannot enter into alliance with neighboring princes until we are acquainted with their designs" (Giles 37). This precept warns that before joining forces with potential rivals, you must understand their plans.

In 2005, American leading internet company Yahoo! and Alibaba — which, in the meantime, become China's largest e-commerce company — announced an ultimate agreement to create a long-term strategic collaboration in China. According to agreement terms, Yahoo! would have provided Alibaba with his assets, including cash, and both companies would have worked together to grow the Yahoo! brand in China. Yahoo! invested \$1 billion to purchase 40 percent stake in Alibaba, making the American company the largest investor in Alibaba Group. This was the first partnership model of its kind for an Internet company in China. Besides substantially increasing Alibaba's current assets, by adding the Yahoo! China brand to Alibaba's businesses, the new collaboration allowed the companies to be quicker to react to local market needs and put in place new forward-looking products and services specifically designed for China's rapidly-evolving economy and dynamic Chinese consumer behaviour. The

partnership between Yahoo! and Alibaba, de facto, took advantage of one of the best local management teams, while leveraging Yahoo!'s global resources with the shared aim of beating the competition.

“Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look upon them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death.” (Giles 31). This principle demonstrates that a general must always show the quality of benevolence in dealing with soldiers.

Jack Ma put a lot of effort into creating a unique work culture at Alibaba and, in particular, transmitting his personal philosophy to his employees. It could sound like a commonplace but the mentality of Alibaba's employees, or “Aliren” (阿里人), have demonstrated to be one of the key factors in the success of the company. Jack Ma's charming, outspoken and fun-loving attitude, along with his high energy, contributed at building a work environment characterized by participation, fun and excitement. In growing Alibaba business, he made sure that the company was being created “in his image and likeness”, imparting his personal traits and sharing his vision with employees. Every year Alibaba organizes a series of activities to acknowledge and inspire the spirit of the company in each “Aliren”: singing karaoke, setting up huge company retreats focused on fun and not work, dressing in outlandish outfits at work, adopting the names of the protagonists of Jin Yong's novels as nicknames and even arranging group wedding to celebrate the couples who have got married over the past year. Jack Ma managed to create a work atmosphere in which Alibaba employees regard him as a mixture of father figure, inspiring guru and frontman of a band. The outcome is a hardworking and super loyal group of executives, managers and employees who would follow him to the ends of the Earth.

“It is the rule in war, if our forces are ten to the enemy's one, to surround him; if five to one, to attack him; if twice as numerous, to divide our army into two. If equally matched, we can offer battle; if slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; if quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him” (Giles 9-10). This teaching focuses on examining the enemy's condition, drawing attention to the importance of keeping up

with competitors and being able to choose the right strategy to adopt in every circumstance.

5 years ago, Crid Yu, vice president and managing director of InMobi's North American business declared that Alibaba was behind in mobile e-commerce development: "They still have a very strong desktop presence, but they don't have a big mobile presence" ("Alibaba's Achilles' Heel: Why Mobile May Be a Problem"). Alibaba found itself in an awkward position due to the very powerful presence in the local market of Chinese technology giant, Tencent. Alibaba, at that time, did have mobile apps which promoted mobile presence but, truth is that the company was way far behind other competitors. "The reason: Rival Tencent has a commanding lead in mobile over Alibaba. That growing market is key for any tech company hoping to get a grip on consumers" ("Alibaba's Main Chinese Competitor in Mobile").

In China, especially young people, prefer to use mobile phones instead of personal computers. Alibaba had to invest a lot of money and resources in a short time, before it was too late, to develop and strengthen mobile apps so that their softwares could be opened and work well on any smartphone's operating system such as Android, IOS and Windows. Developing and upgrading mobile apps was necessary to catch up with other companies and it also represented a crucial passage to make Alibaba a dominant player in the worldwide e-commerce sector. Mobile apps play a very important role in modern times. Due to rapid development of technology, the number of smartphone users in China reached over 700 millions in 2018 ("Number of Smartphone Users in China From 2017 to 2023 in millions"). Alibaba specifically designed a range of mobile apps that allow customers to gain access to its e-commerce platforms and get informations on the products they like as well as carry out transactions by just clicking on the screen of their smartphone. By doing so, the company created a next-level customer experience, in other words, an easier way for Alibaba's consumers to buy or sell their goods anytime and anywhere just using their smartphones. This upgrade was perceived as a simplification and affected purchase behaviour as people ended up spending less time on computers and more time on personal devices.

Smartphone apps as well as a mobile e-commerce platforms were proliferating in the late 00's. Several companies were competing for an upper hand in mobile e-commerce sector, for example WeChat, developed by previously mentioned Chinese tech company

Tencent, was one of the first companies, together with Alibaba, in taking the lead of escalating Chinese mobile e-commerce. Lack of first-move advantage could have caused Alibaba to become a secondary choice in the panorama of Chinese mobile user and therefore change the company's strategies and attitude towards its competitors.

“Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances [...] He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain” (Giles 17). This principle emphasizes the flexibility that a good captain must adapt in choosing his strategy. Every situation is different and a captain should always be able to stay one step ahead of the events.

Alibaba put a lot of effort into building a good brand reputation and popularity in their customers' mind. This was achieved through the company's qualitative variety of services and thanks to effective advertising campaigns. On the other hand, while growing the business and widening its range of activities, Jack Ma realized that the company still had many almost untouched sectors as social media, sharing economy, media entertainment etc. Not so long ago, these segments might not have seemed to be interesting to the current operating model of Alibaba but, without any doubt, there were many markets yet to be investigated and harvested. Starting from 2014, Alibaba Group decided to re-design their actual operating model to become more flexible and diverse with the aim of exploiting the untouched sectors. The same year, the company entered the business of film, online video and television by acquiring Hong Kong-based film and TV studio ChinaVision Media which was rebranded Alibaba Picture (阿里巴巴影业集团); one year later it bought Youku Tudou (优酷), the Chinese YouTube, that is now pushing hard to make it the local alternative of U.S. media-services giant Netflix by promoting popular Korean dramas or American hit shows such as *2 Broke Girls* and in 2014 the company also launched its own mobile social app Laiwang (来往), trying to close the gap with its main competitor, Tencent's WeChat. In recent years, Alibaba continued to put billions of dollars in acquisitions, marketing and investments to take a leading position in emerging businesses buying stakes in other emerging companies such as Kuaidi Dache (快的打车), a transportation company that provides ride-booking

services; Sina Weibo (新浪微博), the Chinese Twitter-like microblogging website; UCWeb (UC优视), China's major mobile browser company; Meizu (魅族), a smartphone manufacturer; Autonavi (高德地图), a web mapping, navigation and location-based service provider and even invested in the Guangzhou Evergrande soccer team.

By acquiring and developing new assets, the company diversifies its activities and, at the same time, gain direct access to the know-how of different businesses. Thus, by becoming a more versatile organisation, Alibaba could easily modify its tactics to face any upcoming challenge.

These examples make it easier to see the connection between Alibaba's strategic management and works such as *The Art of War* or Jin Yong's novels. In particular, they allow to understand how the chivalrous "Xia" spirit as well as old Chinese strategic thinking appealed to modern times far-seeing entrepreneurs like Jack Ma, guiding and inspiring him to create one of the most successful Chinese-born businesses. Thanks to its solid financial resources and durable presence in various sectors, Alibaba Group can afford not to be afraid of the uncertainties of the future and the strong competition in the industry. Furthermore, the company's sound and innovative business model is very difficult to replicate making it hard for new competitors that enter the market to challenge Alibaba's empire. In conclusion, the company only needs to keep on innovating and diversifying its business to secure a competitive advantage and stay one step ahead of other international rivals. Let us see if it will continue to do so even after Jack Ma's announcement of leaving the company to pursue educational work at the end of 2018.

2.6 The shadow of the Chinese Communist Party

Only a few weeks after Jack Ma's announcement of retirement from Alibaba Group, Chinese magazine *People's Daily* (人民网) revealed that the co-founder of the company was a member of the Chinese Communist Party ("Beijing to Honor Founders of Three Internet Giants"). The news came with the publication of a list of one hundred people

chosen by the Chinese government for their special contribution in making China the greatest power in Asia. Among these, there are the founders of three major Chinese internet companies: Robin Li (李彦宏), co-founder of the search engine Baidu; Pony Ma (马化腾), chairman and chief executive officer of Tencent and, obviously, Jack Ma (马云,) head of Alibaba who, as the magazine revealed, turned out to be member of the CPC. In reality, political affiliation appears to be a rather common practice for both public and private entrepreneurs who choose to do business in China. It is not so surprising therefore that Jack Ma, with a net worth over \$35 billion and leading figure of one of the most important entrepreneurial realities in the world, can be registered with the Communist Party. In another article, Chen Qingqing also reported a presence of the Party in Alibaba since 2000, through a “Party Branch” which then evolved into a “Party Committee” in 2008. But Membership of the Party and corporate management are two separate matters, observed Su Wei, who is a professor at the Party School of the CPC Chongqing Municipal Committee. “The board of shareholders is in charge of decision-making and daily operations, while Party cells are set up to make sure the company's operations are in line with the principles and policies of the CPC”, he specified (“Concerns Over Alibaba Founder’s Party Membership Reflect Lack of Knowledge of CPC Grass-Roots Functions: Experts”). And within Alibaba, everyone agrees that business decisions are not influenced in any way by political presence, even if being a member of the Communist Party means giving priority to its interests. Furthermore, as reported by the *BBC*, the company denied that its founder ever placed the Party before the company in matters of significant decisions (“Why is Jack Ma a Member of The Communist Party of China?”). However, the news of the political association of Jack Ma came just at the end of its mandate as executive chairman of his “creature” and in a moment in which the trade war between United States and China had been exasperated, following the decision of raising duty rates. So, the timing may not have been entirely accidental. Moreover, in February 2019, the news of the collaboration between Alibaba Group and the Chinese government for the realization of a propaganda app was leaked (“Alibaba is The Force Behind Hit Chinese Communist Party App: Sources”).

It is called Xuexi Qiangguo (学习强国), literally “study and strengthen the nation”, and starting from the early days of 2019 it has reached the top positions in the list of the

most downloaded apps in China. The app features news, documentaries and videos, but with a peculiarity: all the contents in question concern the thought of Chinese president Xi Jinping. In fact, the idea behind the application was designed by the country's propaganda department with the aim of spreading the communist ideology in the country. In addition, Xuexi Qiangguo also supports a chat mode: perhaps for this reason, the app even ended up eclipsing WeChat, the instant messaging service that is practically indispensable for most Chinese. The name of the new app actually betrays its propaganda purposes, the expression also presents a play on words with the name of President Xi: “study Xi and strengthen the nation”. The success of the app that, in a short time, reached the top of the list of most-downloaded app on the Chinese App Store, came directly from the high-ranking positions of the Chinese government: as revealed by *TechCrunch*, members of the Chinese Communist Party as well as State employees were “cordially invited” to be among the first to download the application, becoming an example for the rest of the population (“A Government Propaganda App is Going Viral in China”). In order to ensure that the proposed news thoroughly reflect the Party's ideology, Xuexi Qiangguo gathers its contents from 18 State-run news agencies. However, there are also some interesting mechanisms that favored the huge growth of this application. Xuexi Qiangguo also features loyalty programs which let users accumulate points, whenever they read articles, view content, or participate in quizzes that are periodically proposed by the service, with the aim of verifying the knowledge of Xi Jinping's thinking. This explains why country's propaganda department decided to release the app precisely in anticipation of the upcoming session of the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, which was held in March 2019. Besides, the registration is based on real names, allowing therefore to control who really installed the app and who did not. According to *Reuters*, the app was developed by a little known special unit of Alibaba named the “Y Projects Business Unit” (“Alibaba is The Force Behind Hit Chinese Communist Party App: Sources”). The company declined to comment on rumors about the development of the application but, given the recent news of the relationship between Jack Ma and the Chinese Communist Party, it is difficult to imagine a different reaction. Speaking of latest methods and technologies for the diffusion of China's propaganda in the country and the control over people's civic conscience, for some years now, the Chinese government has been experimenting with a

system of “social control” called Social Credit System, defined by many as “Orwellian”. In short, it serves to monitor citizens, organizations and companies through a complex system of control and evaluation, connected to reward and sanction measures which are established by the authorities. To understand what we are talking about, imagine trying to book a train journey and hearing that you have not paid two bills and so you do not have the necessary privileges to buy that ticket; imagine being subjected to a thorough security check at the airport because, a short time ago, you smoked in a non-smoking room. These situations, in some parts of China, are already a reality and, soon, the whole nation will adopt such mechanisms to “improve” Chinese society. The project was born in 2007, when the Chinese State Council issued several “guiding opinions concerning the construction of a Social Credit System¹”. At that moment, the idea of Social Credit System (社会信用体系) came to life: a mechanism for evaluating people, companies and local administrations that should allow, according to Chinese legislature, to reliably organize a complex amount of information related to payments, behaviors, sanctions and much more, and to use them to evaluate the subjects and to implement the effects of this evaluation. The expectation of the government was to create a self-sustaining system, with citizens, companies and institutions that collaborate to signal those who do not respect the mechanisms and who are not committed to improving their rating score. The government's optimism about this project, which has grown over the years, is almost entirely based on the technological element, which here performs a triple function: In the first place, it allows direct, diffused and effective monitoring, not simply based on data entry carried out by an official (who might be corrupted) but rather on multiple data collection channels; in the second place, it allows to create and manage this big data network and to easily share information with all the involved authorities; and furthermore, it allows the results coming from this system to be automatically and immediately updated by “crediting” the score in real time and, on the other hand, by allowing all the concerned offices to “read” the score and to determine which services the citizen or the company are entitled to. In 2014, Chinese Communist Party renewed the confidence in the project by issuing the “Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014-2020)” which identified the four

¹ See the article on China Copyright and Media: “State Council General Office Some Opinions Concerning the Construction of a Social Credit System” for further details.

fundamental areas of the system: “honesty in government affairs” (政务诚信), “commercial integrity” (商务诚信), “societal integrity” (社会诚信) e “judicial credibility” (司法公信). As far as people are concerned, the credit score is determined by various negative elements (unpaid bills, fines, warnings) and positive ones (social services, volunteering). A positive rating means having access to free or preferential services such as fast lane in Municipal Offices and free bike sharing rides, while a negative rating corresponds to restrictions on the purchase of domestic flights tickets, fast trains or vacations in certain hotel categories, being subject to more frequent security checks and limited access to certain job offers or loans. In this regard, in December 2018, Shenzhen Airport introduced a simplified procedure for accessing security controls for citizens with a high social credit rating, subjecting the other users of the airport to more thorough checks. As for companies, various elements can be taken into consideration such as, for example, attention to the environment, regular payments, social responsibility and numerous other factors. Here too, a positive rating is equivalent to easier financing and tax incentives, while a negative rating corresponds to limitations on access to government announcements, more strict controls or restrictions in accessing to credit. With reference to government organizations the situation is even more strict, being subject to heavy sanctions, often much harsher than ordinary penalties. The amount of data collected is enormous and the government is well aware that the success of the initiative depends on the implementation and organization of a complex infrastructure of data networks .This is why Chinese administrations are orchestrating an impressive activity of cooperation and information sharing, which involves customs, railway authorities, airlines, credit institutions, and many other entities, in order to put as much data as possible into the system. We are talking about unprecedented mass profiling, which could soon affect 1/5 of the world's population, if the Chinese government keeps its promise to implement the system by the end of 2020. Anyway, it is very hard to think how this Social Credit System could meet the privacy regulations of the country: although in China the GB/T35273-2017 (Personal Information Security Specification), which largely recalls the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), went into effect on 1 May 2018, the law itself constitutes a simple optional standard and is especially addressed to private companies, allowing the government to collect personal data without limits, in complete autonomy.

While the Chinese approach is unique in its tentacular structure and its unprecedented centralization at State level, it is also true that we are not talking about a completely new global trend. Consider, for example, credit history and credit score systems in the U.S., where people who need financing are concerned about the “responsibility” of their online purchases and how they will be judged by credit institutions. Therefore, it is clear that “judgement” of people's behavior carried out by the respective State authorities is progressively becoming more effective and incisive in almost every modern country.

In conclusion, it is evident that Chinese government wants to exert a considerable influence and control over its people, trying to involve those who demonstrated to bring value and resources to this mission. In a way or another, Chinese Communist Party aims at involving every citizen in what appears to be a common desire to improve the country. In fact, apparently, in the cities where the Social Credit System was applied, the surveys show an 80% approval, reporting a sensational diminution of delays in debt payments (“Why Big Brother Doesn’t Bother Most Chinese”). Whether such result depends on the actual enthusiasm of the population, whether on the worry of the people in responding negatively to government's surveys, this is nevertheless an important signal that we will still hear about this project for some time and that it will most likely arouse more and more controversy, at least, outside China.

3. Economic factors and Chinese cultural influences on Hollywood

3.1 Why Hollywood needs China

In recent years the American film industry has experienced ups and downs. In 2010, for example, the tickets coming from American movies represented only a third of those which had been sold worldwide, a market share that, after the glories of the early 2000s, has been constantly shrinking. Not to mention that, from the point of view of funding, the bad moment of the world economy also manifested itself in the form of a decline in financial support for the motion picture industry. This led American filmmakers to turn to new markets and new sources of income, with the result that China, one of the fastest

growing economies, and home to a thriving film industry, has suddenly become their favorite destination. It must be said, however, that also the pervasive Chinese censorship is well known, an issue that raises many questions in the American Studios. In fact, setting foot in China means obeying a series of rules which are not exactly aimed at freedom of expression. But in order to break through that door, recently some American producers have proposed many films with the objective of ingratiating themselves with the Chinese market and to place their movies in as many Chinese cinemas as possible. For example, in the Hollywood blockbuster *2012*, starring John Cusack, it is precisely China that heroically provides the arks necessary to save humanity from the devastating floods and its imminent end. But it is important to remember that the film had to be approved by Beijing before entering China and smashing their box-office records.

The American way of life along with the values and the myths associated with it, have spread for years through cinema. In fact, American movies (even the most frivolous) have always been considered a powerful means to convey thoughtful content and messages. The implicit meaning and morality of a movie often prevail over its storyline and they are hard to ignore. But something is changing. To settle down in the Chinese market, Hollywood is accepting even preventive censorship of its products. After all, Chinese movie market is the second largest in the world at the moment and it is expected to overcome the American one by 2020; box office grosses have recently exceeded RMB60.98 billion, that is almost \$9 billion. However, there is price to pay in terms of “cultural autonomy”, but it seems that the majors are willing to accept it: *Bohemian Rhapsody*, for instance, directed by Bryan Singer, reached Chinese cinemas in March 2019 deprived of several scenes related to the sexual orientation of Queen’s frontman, Freddie Mercury, some of which are very important, such as when Mercury (played by Rami Malek) confesses his homosexuality to his ex-girlfriend. An additional example would be Ang Lee who, in his 2012 *Life of Pi*, had to change the line “Religion is darkness” of one of the characters because it was considered disrespectful. 2013 *Iron Men 3*, directed by Shane Black, also faced some problems while the new 3D version of *Top Gun*, originally directed Tony Scott, did not make it to the Chinese theaters. If it is not strange that a movie which glorified American Aviation during Cold War could experience difficulties, it is certainly surprising the preventive censorship that affected

some 3D computer-animated comedies, including the apparently harmless *Despicable Me 2* produced by *Illumination Entertainment* in 2013.

An army of ten thousand volunteers assists the central censorship commission, which has been the protagonist of restrictions on the use of the Internet as well, and its criteria are not always predictable. Apparently, it is better to avoid religious themes so as not to offend anyone, not to praise the U.S. Armed Forces too much and to minimize references to China, which are frequently disputed. Co-productions are favored but, in this case, the script is evaluated beforehand and subsequent variations will not be tolerated. *The New York Times* denounced these procedures (to which America's movie industry has cynically adapted), which seem to undermine the inviolability of the freedom of expression. The reason for this compromise between Hollywood movie industry and China is mainly economic but also political, as it happens, the goal is to please the Chinese government, in the hope that the latter will admit American films in their market. It is no surprise that several American filmmakers are making agreements directly with Chinese film production companies which are in close collaboration with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in order to censor and adjust their films in advance. At the same time Chinese authorities are currently trying to buy key companies from the American film industry, the CCP is actually gaining more and more control over what Hollywood can and cannot produce. This interest of Chinese leaders to influence Hollywood goes far beyond mere censorship and profits: it is a real “culture war”, whose victims are American spectators (including therefore worldwide spectators) and the iconic creative freedom of American culture. Hollywood is indeed the “dream factory” of America, and more than any other cultural industry, has been able to shape collective imagination on a national and global scale. Moreover, Hollywood provides a common basis for dialogue on a national scale, to the point that it can be said that American mentality has largely been formed through popular cinema.

Between the 20s and the 70s, Hollywood took over the world. Through comedies and dramatic works, along with western, noir, gangster, horror and musical films, Hollywood succeeded in imposing a purely American reference model, which has also proved to be valid for the entire West. The audience, on both sides of the ocean, has been fascinated by the many films produced by Hollywood and, above all, they have

been seduced by their protagonists. At the base of this success there are also the ethical values present in each American movie. Hollywood, in fact, was able to speak to ordinary people by not assuming any particular point of view, but only from the perspective of universal human values. And it is no coincidence that this point turned out to be the most suitable to meet with the customer market. American films have always been able to portray many cultural features of the country which, transformed into images, have granted to Hollywood an eminently popular character and therefore an enormous success. Precisely for this reason American culture was the only one that was able to produce screenplays and films capable of expressing, without being ashamed, a clear faith in the values of honesty, democracy, friendship without ideological barriers and justice. And now the Chinese government is entering directly into the production phase of the stories through which Americans are used to identifying themselves.

3.2 Perception management and preventive censorship

According to the 2015 report of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), a congressional commission created by the U.S. Parliament in 2000 to monitor and analyze national security risks connected to trade relations with China, the CCP's vision of art, including film, "is a method of social control" (3), and points out that when China intervenes on the content of films the major concern is "protecting the interests of the CCP" (9). A political position that can be seen by watching some of the films that have been censored or blocked by the Chinese government's control systems. For example, in the 2013 movie *Captain Phillips*, directed by Paul Greengrass, Tom Hanks plays the captain of an American merchant ship which is attacked by Somali pirates and get rescued by the Navy SEALs. The Chinese censorship document stated that the government had prohibited the distribution of the film in China "because of the film's positive portrayal of the United States and U.S. military" (13). A scene from the 2016 film *Mission: Impossible III*, starring Tom Cruise, has been removed because it showed clothes drying on a clothesline in Shanghai and was deemed a negative portrayal of the city, despite the fact that the film had only

been partially shot in Shanghai, a city where, by the way, many people do not even own dryers. In *Man in black 3*, Barry Sonnenfeld was forced to “cut a scene in which civilians’ memories are erased, a scene that a Chinese newspaper wrote may have been perceived as a commentary on China’s Internet censorship policies” (11). The list of similar cases is very long, and could even include Harald Zwart’s *The Karate Kid* which, despite being carried out under the strong control of the CCP, has been in trouble because of the villain role who was played by a Chinese. Not to mention 2012 *Skyfall*, where the movie was deprived of the scene in which James Bond kills a Chinese security guard because “Chinese regulators were unwilling to tolerate a Chinese citizen being killed by a foreigner” (11). According to Amar Manzoor, author of *The Art of Industrial Warfare*, the use of cinema made by the CCP can be understood in a similar way to how a company promotes its own brand by attacking that of their main competitors. Manzoor makes the example of the 2014 fourth installment of the *Transformers* film series: *Age of Extinction* directed by Michael Bay: the movie contains at least 10 cases of Chinese product placement, from real estate companies to computers and wine. According to Manzoor, from a strategic perspective the government was looking for a more effective Chinese positioning on the American market, since they could get better penetration through American movies compared to what they could achieve with just Chinese films. Again, following Manzoor, it is all part of the more general idea that by infiltrating high-level culture and positioning yourself favorably, the effect of improving the image of your own brand is easier to reach. Of course, the “brand” of the Chinese government is made up of violations of human rights, censorship, poor-quality products, espionage and authoritarian regime. But through film censorship the Party aims at altering the perception of the rest of the world in a favorable way. Therefore it forces Hollywood not to show any of its negative aspects, on the contrary, it imposes a false positive image of China. It also prohibits Hollywood from positively representing the United States, which is the main competitor of the Chinese government. According to Ronald J. Rychlak, Professor of Law at the Faculty of Law at the University of Mississippi, authoritarian regimes have been making use of films to obtain political advantages since the beginning of the 20th century. Following his interpretation we can conclude that the entertainment industry is extremely influential, we just have to look at how the Soviets controlled movie theaters

and ballet and how the Nazis used the same strategy. Rychlak is an expert on the subject: he wrote the book *Disinformation* together with Lieutenant General Ion Mihai Pacepa, the highest ranking Soviet intelligence officer who ever deserted to the West, and made known the particular tactics used from communist regimes to create false stories and to distort reality. Rychlak observes that the best arts have the effect of leading people to question things, to think about it, and drive us to consider new possibilities. According to Rychlak, this is precisely what the communists do not want. Artists can talk about the power of art but the totalitarians will never understand it, because they abuse it.

Hollywood has opened up to Chinese government's censorship, because it sees a golden opportunity to enter the Chinese market. The CCP manipulates Hollywood's desire for a collaboration, limiting the number of foreign films admitted to China with a system that is actually on the edge of the directive of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Every year, only 34 western movies may be shown in China, so western film companies battle with each other to win the favor of the Chinese government. And the conditions of entry are inflexible: Hollywood must choose between undergoing a 25% cut of box office sales or selling their movies to the CCP at a set price. The films are chosen by the Chinese state agency responsible for film censorship known as "State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television" (SAPPRFT). This authority is deliberately wide-ranging because its mandate includes provisions that protect the interests of the CCP; in fact, the director of the agency, like all SAPPRFT officials, is a member of the Party with a long career as a propagandist. Getting the suitability for one of these 34 films, is like playing Russian roulette, since the Party is not congruous with what films are allowed or rejected. This leads filmmakers to go beyond superficially knowing Chinese government norms and make direct attempts to satisfy Chinese censors. From some e-mails leaked by Sony Pictures Entertainment it was discovered what lies behind the changes that the Studios have had to make to adapt to the tastes of the CCP. According to the July 2015 article "How Sony sanitized the new Adam Sandler movie to please Chinese censors" by *Reuters*, Sony executives deleted a scene from the 2015 film *Pixels*, directed by Chris Columbus, in which the Great Wall was damaged by a hacker that was called a "Communist-conspiracy brother" because they feared the

images could play a negative role for the eligibility of the film for the Chinese market. On the other hand, scenes showing the destruction of the Washington Monument, the Taj Mahal and some parts of Manhattan were left untouched. Again, following *Reuters*, Li Chow, a representative of Sony Pictures in China, wrote in an e-mail in December 2013, to the top executives in Sony asserting that although making a hole in the Great Wall may not be a problem as long as it is part of a global phenomenon, in reality it is pointless because it certainly will not facilitate the release of the film in China. What Chow meant with his message was actually a suggestion concerning the removal of that scene because it might prevent the 2015 film's release in China. Among the other films that have taken similar measures also the 2012 movie *Red Dawn*, starring Chris Hemsworth, originally presented of a group of Chinese communists invading the United States, but the nationality of the protagonists was changed to North Koreans. Another example would be *Bohemian Rhapsody*, as previously mentioned. Also in this case the worldwide award-winning movie was severely censored: all references to homosexuality by Freddie Mercury have been eliminated, *CNN's* article "Six LGBT moments cut from 'Bohemian Rhapsody' in China" reported about two full minutes of footage deleted for a total of six cut scenes that, according to the CCP's directives, incite "abnormal sexual behavior": starting from the scenes in which Mercury shows off with his provocative movements to the kiss stolen by Paul Prenter, his companion from '77 to '86; or the moving face to face with his girlfriend Mary Austin in which Freddie explains that he could be bisexual and the confront with the Queen's drummer Roger Taylor, who addressed as a "gay" the new haircut of the singer; also the creation of the video of "I Want to Break Free", with the band disguised as women, and the furtive encounter between Mercury and the waiter Jim Hutton, have all been completely removed. In addition to self-censorship, Hollywood also follows another path to reach the Chinese market: it works directly with Chinese companies on the films and permits CCP a more direct supervision of the production process through the Chinese agencies responsible for censorship. By adopting this approach, the films are no longer classified as foreigners. But these co-productions provide additional requirements: according to the USCC report, co-productions must include at least one scene shot in China, the participation of at least one Chinese actor, obtaining a minimum 1/3 of the total investment of the film by Chinese companies and, in general, to show positive images

of China. In 2013, Disney chose this approach by collaborating with the Chinese global media company DMG Entertainment Group for the production of the movie *Iron Man 3*. Filmmakers accepted heavy requirements to satisfy the CCP, such as the additional inclusion of scenes and locations for the “Chinese version” of the movie in which extra Chinese actors appeared. They also made sure that the role of supervillain was played by British actor Ben Kingsley even though the comic book's character on which the film is based is Chinese nicknamed “The Mandarin”. It is a fact that Hollywood films are increasingly showing the United States in a negative light as well as trying to avoid references to religion and praising the Chinese regime in general. It is not a figment of somebody's imagination: they are rather inflexible requirements that the Chinese government has placed on Hollywood, and most major Studios are complying with these conditions in order to enter Chinese theaters. And with the Chinese multinationals that keep on creating partnerships or buy foreign film assets around the world, these forms of censorship could become even more widespread in the future.

While Hollywood has only recently been looking for Chinese companies to form partnerships with and simplify their entering in China, on the other hand Chinese companies have been targeting international film market for years, with the aim of rooting the CCP influence in this industry. In 2016, Dalian Wanda bought Legendary Entertainment for \$3.5 billion, becoming the first Chinese group to own a major Hollywood movie company. This acquisition followed that of 2012 (for \$2.6 billion) of AMC Entertainment Holdings, which runs AMC Theaters (the second largest U.S. cinema chain) and which also owns the Australian Hoyts Group and the group European Odeon & UCI. There are also rumors that the Wanda Group is trying to buy 49% of Paramount Pictures. Other large Chinese groups interested in acquiring western media companies are Tencent, DMG Entertainment (DMG Yinji), Baidu and state-owned broadcaster CCTV. Many of these companies have unclear connections with the CCP but, regardless of how much they are controlled by the Party, most Chinese companies have an obligation to be connected to the government itself. The state-run Chinese news agency Xinhua, in 2016, published an article titled “Xinhua Insight: Red stars at foreign companies” stating this liaison, and it is noted that the CCP constitution establishes that organizations with more than three members must have a government representation,

including foreign companies based in China. Apart from the fact that the companies themselves have no reason to make propaganda in favor of the government, having a Chinese headquarters means being subject to the laws of the Communist Party, including those on censorship. And, furthermore, at higher levels of the Chinese regime, the leaders of the CCP have clearly declared their interest in using films and other forms of entertainment and information to achieve their strategic goals.

3.3 Culture warfare and Hollywood's adaptation to Chinese filmmaking

In January 2012, *The Telegraph's* journalist Peter Simpson reported that, in a speech in front of the CCP plenum, the former Party leader Hu Jintao talked about some “hostile international powers that are strengthening their efforts to westernise and divide us” (“Chinese President Hu Jintao warns of cultural warfare from West”), claiming that the strategy of several countries was aimed at reinforcing their own power of cultural persuasion. Hu argued that some international forces were attempting to undermine China, through a long-term infiltration in the cultural and ideological fields. Hu also complained about the “growing spiritual and cultural demands of the people” as possible causes of pro-democracy movements, and asked urgently the CCP to raise the level of surveillance and take effective countermeasures. A speech that coincided with the purchase by the Dalian Wanda Group of the AMC Theaters. *The Huffington Post* then commented on Hu's speech: “One thing we can count on is a revamped effort at censorship, Big Brother surveillance, and thought control. This may sound like hyperbole, but it isn't; President Hu Jintao has, in fact, been very blunt on these points” (“China's New Cultural Revolution”). If, on the one hand, this kind of strategy of the Chinese government may seem obscure and contorted, on the other the Party has expressed itself very clearly in its anti-American rhetoric, as in its intentions to contrast this “culture warfare”. David Major, founder and president of the CI Center, a U.S. company that provides training services for counterespionage, in a testimony to the USCC, on June 9, 2016, explained the nature of the CCP's ideas that underlie the cultural warfare: “it means influencing the cultural biases of a targeted country by imposing your own cultural viewpoints” (Major 4). Major pointed out that this strategy

is part of a broader type of unconventional Chinese warfare known as the “Unrestricted Warfare”, outlined by two colonels of the Chinese Air Force in 1999: “Culture Warfare” is just one of the twelve strategies that they exposed in what they both described as a war “without limits” and “without morality”. One of the latest strategies of the Chinese government on this line, known as “Three Warfares”, is a direct offshoot of the Unrestricted Warfare and focuses mainly on perception management: The CCP’s Central Committee and the Central Military Commission approved the use of part of the Chinese Army for these Three Warfares in 2003. The Three Warfares consist of: Psychological Warfare, Media Warfare and Legal Warfare. In the July-September 2012 edition of *Special Warfare*, Dean Cheng explained the use of these new warfare concepts by the CCP, like others used by Iran and Russia, and demanded that the United States begin to contrast them. The two aspects of the Three Warfares strategy that directly affect the culture of warfare are Psychological Warfare and Media Warfare. The document indicates that the Psychological Warfare aims at undermining the enemy’s operational capacity by demoralizing both the military and civilians, using TV, radio, uncontrolled voices and more. Media Warfare instead aims at influencing domestic and international public opinion, in order to create public support for military actions and dissuade opponents from taking actions in opposition to China’s interests. The third type of warfare in question, the Legal Warfare, can be seen in the manipulation of the CCP of international laws underlying the restrictions on film imports and violations of WTO rules. Numerous comments from leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and army officers show how the regime sees the strategic use of entertainment in the context of cultural warfare. In December 2013, the Chinese military newspaper *中国国防报 Zhongguo Guofangbao* launched an invective against the video game *Battelfield 4*, accusing it of portraying a Chinese general in the role of the villain and of constituting a new form of cultural penetration and aggression aimed at discredit the image of a nation in the eyes of others, adding that the fact of representing the Chinese general as the antagonist in the game caused the perception of China as the “common enemy” in the eyes of western public (“官媒：国外游戏抹黑中国形象 扭曲事实误导青少年 Foreign videogame discredits Chinese image distorting facts and misleading youngsters”). When these kinds of statements are considered in the context of the Chinese Communist Party’s ban on films like *Captain Phillips* and the 3D version of the

old *Top Gun*, due to the positive light in which the U.S. military was shown, the strategy becomes even clearer. Starting from August 2014, Chinese government began restoring the films of the 1930s, the *South China Morning Post* talked about "culture war" and "soft power push", pointing out that in 2014 the CCP declared they wanted to invest RMB100 million (about \$15 million) to finance 5-10 films that are capable of exerting influence. As mentioned by the *South China Morning Post*, Zhang Hongsen, Head of SAPPRFT, declared: "It must be recognized we are in a full state of competition with American films. ...This is about defending and fighting for cultural territory" ("China dusts off 1930s film classics in culture war"). It is therefore not only a mere question of economy but also a culture matter of what content is proposed. To conquer the East, western cinema is changing its skin. Not only the structure of the films, but also the values that are transmitted. Starting from the big blockbuster movies. When in the late 90s John Woo's films or wuxia movies, like 2000 卧虎藏龙 *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, started coming out of China (in truth mostly out of a "pre-Handover" Hong Kong) and arriving in the West, the way in which American cinema sought to captivate their audience began to change: slow motion, exasperated emotions, use of cables and omnipresence of choreographed physical fight (all reached its peak and consecration in *The Matrix* written and directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski). Now the opposite is happening. The western market is no longer sufficient to bear the costs of the great American Colossals, it is necessary for the whole world to see them, especially the most populous countries and, for this reason, they must be able to respect their different cultures and identify with their values. Among these countries, China is the one with the most potential, with more screens (way more than Russia) and with a greater propensity for American cinema; India is currently almost impenetrable and supply is saturated by domestic production. It is now almost 10 years since Hollywood has Beijing in its sights, so much that we can now say that China is no longer the future of American cinema but its present. However, there is a reason if people watch many American films, a relatively large number of European movies and a few Chinese or Indian movies. Chinese and Indians make films differently from Europeans. From their stories they want other values to emerge compared to those we expect to see. In summary, their films are made like those of Hollywood (they certainly do not cost less) but to us they appear naive, Manichaeian, too long and too full of characters that never get to the point.

They appear to be sentimental, unable to tickle the perverse charm of evil, childish and conditioned by incorruptible ethical principles. Even the American cinema (not to mention the European one) has been like this for so long. Until the end of the 60s (with the notable exception of some detective stories and the “film noir”) movies were synonymous with happy ending and celebration of predictable morals.

As already mentioned, in order to penetrate the Chinese market, American cinema worked both on political relations, progressively softening the law on the number and type of films that can be imported, and also from the artistic point of view, so that now the highest-grossing films are increasingly similar to the Chinese equivalents. An emblem is 2019 流浪地球 *The Wandering Earth*, directed by 郭帆 Frant Gwo, through which Chinese industry has proved able to do science fiction even with the same Hollywood ambition (but not with the same fantasy since the film brings together so many suggestions and ideas that have already been seen over and over again) while, on the other hand, Hollywood floods the market with *Transformers*, *Fast & Furious*, *Warcraft* and Marvel and DC superheroes. A success in Asia can be so important as to overturn a flop, as happened to *Warcraft* which grossed over \$210 million in China as compared to \$47 million in the U.S.; although, more often, it ratifies and amplifies it. And for this to happen, however, the film must be tailored to the Chinese market. Lorenzo Di Bonaventura, producer of the *Transformers* saga, was one of the first to understand how to interpret Chinese public. Following his vision, it is all a question of how the characters are approached, for example, Chinese cannot accept a story in which an elder is not treated with respect. But, in reality, judging from the movies there are far more technical reasons. The films must be longer and “wider” first of all, they have to last over 2 hours because Chinese movies do not have three acts as the traditional western narratives (balance, its rupture that triggers the adventure, final recomposition) but five (balance, rupture, recomposition and new break coming from another part of the story and eventually final recomposition). This is also why a very large cast is needed. The lone hero does not exist, so the new “families of heroes” like in *Fast & Furious 7*, directed by James Wan, have come to Hollywood (their last movie was the American highest gross in China). More and more actors, more and more bands, and the villain of the previous film regularly becomes part of the good ones in the next episode.

Worldwide blockbusters from the 2000s are also based on a rigid division between men and women, very far from our modern standards of gender equality. In the 2015 movie *Jurassic World*, also a great Asian success, the imbalance between the protagonist Chris Pratt (a tough and virile man who solves the situation) and Bryce Dallas-Howard (a woman in heels everywhere who follows him, helps him, tries to love him and not getting into trouble) recalls the 80s Hollywood cinema, when in *Romancing the Stone* directed by Robert Zemeckis, Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner reversed this rigid scheme making it obsolete.

To please the Asian public therefore Hollywood has to take a step back. The latest films such as *Roma* directed by Alfonso Cuarón, *The Favourite* by Yorgos Lanthimos and even *Green Book* by Peter Farrelly (but also certain American superhero movies as *Wonder Woman* directed by Patty Jenkins or 2019 *Captain Marvel* by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck) are examples of a cinema which looks ahead and seeks to ride the crest of changes in society. *Transformers*, *Jurassic World* and *Fast & Furious* go in the opposite direction. Furthermore, even plots and adventurous weaves follow the passion for deception and swindle of Asian cinema. In the latest *Fast & Furious*, for instance, the historical protagonist of the series, Vin Diesel, vigorously overturns every scheme, upsetting every conviction. Dominic Toretto, a character who has never yielded an inch on values such as trust and loyalty, all of a sudden betrays his “family”, creating chaos and confusion hard to imagine. A betrayal to which no one really believes (if not the other protagonists of the film) and which in the end will turn out to be a bluff. It is an easy trick, typical of mainstream Chinese cinema, where double-crossing is basic like movies about “getting a second chance” are for Hollywood. The powerful mix of features that American cinema borrowed from the Chinese one: length, very large cast, five acts, many deceptions, exaggerated physical fights, clearly defined roles between men and women, poor individualism, in the end produced *Avengers: Infinity War* and its sequel *Avengers: Endgame* both directed by Joe and Anthony Russo. The two films are the culmination of this process. Not surprisingly, according to “[boxofficemojo.com](https://www.boxofficemojo.com)”, the first one was the fourth American highest-grossing movie in the history of China (\$359 million) preceded by 2017 patriotic action movie *Wolf Warrior 2* which is in first place with \$854 million, 2019’s Chinese sci-fi epic *The Wandering Earth* (\$690 million) and *Operation Red Sea* (\$575 million); until May 2019, when its sequel *Endgame*, full

of deceptions and double-crossing to discover, took the third place grossing \$614 million.

3.4 America vs China: What pushes these nations to create partnerships

Over the past 100 years Hollywood has established a comprehensive industrial apparatus. This system is backed by an advanced financial, legal and accounting system. In contrast, Chinese filmmaking infrastructure is still at a rather early stage. Zhang Zhao, CEO of Le Vision Pictures argued that there are fundamental differences for China and U.S. film systems: China needs to make these two systems suitable for Sino-U.S. collaboration (“China gets tough on fake co-productions”). Due to its underdeveloped film system China does not use “completion guarantors” for movie production as employed in the United States, Europe and Australia. This means that if a film exceeds its approved budget, there is no sponsor to take responsibility for financing overages. Western methods simply do not apply in China, which has its own accounting regulations and laws. There are differences even in production management. For instance, in order to catch up with a schedule, Chinese crews normally work 24 hours without interruption or even longer. While, according to the U.S. labour laws, some American crews can work only 8 hours per day. The result is that the autonomy of the director diminishes and the costs of the movie end up growing conspicuously, complicating the position of the producer. The worst is that if nobody finds the key to these problems, other issues will certainly follow. Another disagreement regards revenue sharing and copyright division. The big production companies are cautious about copyright. When a Chinese company provides capital for a production and the copyright of the film is not shared, this could lead to a serious irritation from the Chinese partner. In the early 2000s, Chinese film industry was not powerful enough to compete for copyright, in fact, the rights of films such as *天地英雄* *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* were owned by Hollywood, even though Chinese partners put money and labor. But, increasingly from 2012, the Chinese side of Sino-U.S. productions began to retain the copyright of the coproduced movies. Another problem is the different view on the revenue sharing mechanism. Sino-

American co-productions essentially have decided to opt for a regional revenue sharing business model: revenues coming from the Chinese market will go to the Chinese party and foreigners will receive revenue from the overseas market. He Ping, former consultant and producer of Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, set up co-productions with Huayi Brothers for a number of movies since early 2000. Following Ping's idea, regional sharing way is favored by Chinese investors who generally try to avoid global sharing with America. The motivation is that Chinese investors do not gain much from global sharing returns, sometimes just tens of thousand dollars. American distributors cost a lot of money and, on top of that, they also ask for an agency fee, so the rest of the revenue is very little. (Tang 65)

Starting from 2012, global revenue sharing is progressively applying to Sino-American co-productions, since both markets are too large suffer the loss of profits. Nevertheless, Chinese partners are still very confused about how Hollywood calculated their revenue sharing and their "creative accounting".

Also 2012 movie *The Expendables 2* opted for the regional revenue-sharing model. Zhang Zhao, CEO of Le Vision Pictures, was not very positive about accepting a worldwide revenue-sharing program. First of all, because the film's projected revenue could be overwhelmed by the exaggerated financial cost for the global revenue sharing. Second, because many Chinese film companies suffer accounting fraud troubles, which may lead to legal disputes if they were implicated in global revenue sharing. The Chinese system is not ready to embrace international rules as regards legal and accounting issues. The reason why Hollywood can do business at international level is because it has a massive experience in administrating this sector, and thus, most part of the world prefers to use the U.S. dollar as payment currency. They have a solid legal and financial structure, which is combined with a wide experience in co-participations with many foreign countries. It will take a lot of time for China to establish such a mature market system as Hollywood has. The aim of Zhang concerning Hollywood's co-productions was to understand how Hollywood's mechanism works, such as its financial regulations and insurance system, which is to say, how American studios get their money back after their investments ("合拍如何更 '合拍'" How co-production becomes more in tune?").

Americans, perhaps, are not considered best partners in co-productions. This is because historically Hollywood has never needed help from outside. They often want to have authority over all aspects of a project and basically look at other participants as sources of money instead of full and equal partners, they are not interested in their ideas nor contribution as regards production. Therefore, for the durable success between Chinese and American co-productions it is fundamental to create a solid working relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocal exchange on both a creative and economic level (Nemschoff & Yu).

Although, with reference to conflict of interest, paying respect to each other may be considered as pure rhetoric. Very often the Chinese film industry complains of Hollywood studios' arrogance and, in particular, points out that American law and regulations are too intricate, but independent producers in the U.S. are more tolerant and collaborative. On the occasion of the 17th Shanghai International Film Festival Forum (SIFFORUM) in 2014, Eben Davidson from Paramount Pictures indicated two problems: first, the "Chineseness" of content, and, second, the different approach to film production in China. Some American representatives at the convention declared that Chinese film system needs to be updated, to be more like the Hollywood model. This is very unlikely to happen for China; even if, the intention of learning from Hollywood is supported by many industry people regarding acquiring a knowledge of its creative skills, distribution model, technology, budget management, accounting etc.

In fact, over the last few years there has been a climate of optimism and enthusiasm among the critics. According to box office editor Phil Contrino, Chinese filmmakers are improving their filmmaking techniques and their connection with Chinese audiences (Turney 44–47). We need only think, for example, of local films such as 人再囧途之泰囧 *Lost in Thailand* directed by 徐峥 Xu Zheng and 郭敬明 Guo Jingming's 小时代 *Tiny Times*, which knocked off Hollywood blockbusters from the top of box office revenues. There are different opinions whether the government should permit Chinese film industry to have more opportunities to co-produce with, and learn from, Hollywood or not. Some people disagree with the vision that Chinese filmmakers should just copy from the American studios model. In fact, China does not praise blockbusters as before. For quite some time, some local films like 中国合伙人 *American Dreams in China* and 北京遇上西雅图 *Finding Mr. Right* have been able to surpass Hollywood films in

terms of box office results; to the extent that American box office was outstripped by China's domestic box office, only Korea and India have obtained a similar accomplishment in the world. When, at the beginning of the 2000s, China asked Hollywood for collaborations, they were told to solve their piracy problem first. But now, American studios are rushing to find opportunities for Chinese collaborations. Chinese film industry has now become an important part of the worldwide film industry chain and there is no reason to doubt the future of China's film productions.

Hence, it is clear to understand why Chinese filmmakers, in the last decade, grew tired of being considered Hollywood's apprentices and pretended to be seen as equal collaborators.

Sino-American co-productions are not easy. The U.S. has the most dominant film industry of the world. Recently, they have tried to test the Chinese film authority's convictions by playing with co-production rules, with the aim of gaining more market profits with less sacrifice. This led to a sort of "fake coproductions" phenomenon, consisting of American major film studios' intention to commercially exploit China, one of the largest market in the world and, on the other side, Chinese filmmakers who dramatically want to learn from Hollywood worldwide distribution organization. Zhang Zhao, CEO of Le Vision Pictures, also commented on this topic: co-production with the U.S. will support Chinese film industry for the next fifty years precisely as co-productions with Hong Kong have encouraged the development of local film during the 90s ("好莱坞与中国电影的全球战略 The global strategy of Hollywood-China film coproduction"). The aim of the Chinese government, in this matter, is to use Hollywood's influence to spread Chinese culture around the world. The favourable reception of Chinese culture by international audiences is therefore founded on two conditions: channels to distribute their products, and marketing strategies to increase their appeal. The U.S. has all the characteristics for meeting both conditions. Even though co-production between China and the United States gives the impression of being a long and winding road, it has the promise to lead to a wonderful panoramic viewpoint.

At the present time, apparently Hollywood “tent-pole” films are not giving enough Chinese elements to satisfy the government. In comparison, China-led productions are authorized much more rapidly because they are featured with many Chinese attributes. Nonetheless, China-led productions are more difficult to distribute globally and only occasionally attain significant box office returns abroad. Hollywood films now seem to speak louder about Chinese soft power than China’s own films or China-led productions. According to Rosen Stanley, Director of the East Asian Studies Center at University of Southern California,

“Hollywood blockbuster films have in fact been far more effective in promoting China’s public diplomacy initiatives than China’s own films. Hollywood has been careful to ensure that its films are China-friendly, and has learned from experience that deviations from a China-friendly strategy are punished, either by the Chinese public at the box office or by film authorities by outright bans.” (“The Use of Film for Public Diplomacy: Why Hollywood Makes a Stronger Case for China”)

In other words, Hollywood blockbusters have economic interest in making China look good.

No matter how many challenges or barriers are erected between China and U.S. collaborations and it does not even matter if the basic structure for international film co-production in China is fully prepared, Hollywood has already started to bet big on China. On the other hand, we have already mentioned Chinese’ intentions to invest more and more in American film production companies, even regarding films that will not be distributed in China. The objective of Chinese studios is to invest in western cinema to get some market share outside of China.

Thus far, the highest barrier between China and the United States has been that of language and cultural differences. Language differences are not difficult to recognize but people often do not consider how much of a challenge they constitute for film production. Differences in meaning caused by translation can easily lead to misunderstandings, making producers wonder whether a movie should be filmed in English or in Mandarin. Jianxin Huang, one of the fifth generation of Chinese

filmmakers, believes that trying to adapt Chinese stories to English cannot but result in cultural conflict. However, American audiences showed less interest for films that have been shot in Mandarin. Feng Xiaogang, one of the most famous directors in China, stated that one of the main reasons that holds Chinese films from going outside China is language: Chinese films speak Mandarin which is the common language in China. The major part of the audiences in the world are used to English film and do not like watching movies with subtitles (Tang 58). As it happens, the target market of a film is directly reflected by the choice of language. Ellen Eliasoph, the CEO of Village Roadshow Entertainment Group Asia, believes that it is practically impossible to make a movie that is loved by everybody. According to his vision, telling a good story should be the focus of Chinese directors, they should concentrate more on directing a good film, instead of meeting the taste for everyone (“中美合拍，步步忧心 China-US coproduction, challenges on every step”). Terence Chang see things exactly the same way: in co-productions it is not convenient to spend much time in finding compromises for audiences from different cultures. Filmmakers should focus only on one market, if a film was designed for the American market, for example, then they should find ways to make it more American, and vice versa (“中美合拍，步步忧心 China-US coproduction, challenges on every step”).

Cultural differences can result in dissimilar expectations among audiences. American audiences tend to be interested in contemporary settings, while Chinese audiences appreciate historical drama. The different literary backgrounds generate a divergence in storytelling between the two cultures. As we have seen, Americans usually apply the Western European form of storytelling, giving special importance to conflict. In general, the protagonist tries to reach goal but has to overcome some challenges. Such clashes are normally inserted in a three-act structure. The story generally contains moral lessons. In China, Confucianism heavily influences storytelling by emphasizing the ethical and philosophical message. The lesson is conveyed in subtle or obvious ways that can be learned from the story (Nemschoff & Yu). Neither approach is better, but individuating common ground between the two traditions is not simple.

China and the U.S. have also very a different business approach. As we have seen in the first chapter, Chinese are used to do business by cultivating their relationships (关系 *guānxi*), by drinking and eating together. Americans prefer to sit down with lawyers.

The Chinese, in terms of deal-making, prefer to let subordinates reach an agreement before the executives sign the contract. Chinese style is often misunderstood by Americans because it is very distant from their way of closing deals and usually ends up creating conflict. Even the contract styles are very different: Chinese companies generally prefer approximate contracts rather than well-written complete agreements that bind them down on the key issues. They are more willing to sign contracts that allow for continuous re-negotiating and defining of agreement details as the deal comes to the closing. Which is precisely what the foreign party tries to avoid.

3.5 China overturns Hollywood's flops: *The Great Wall* (2016) case

The Chinese film market is interesting for various reasons, but to sell films there you have to accept the vetoes of the Chinese government and create something that matches the rest of the world's tastes as well. For a film that is distributed in the U.S. and China, it is almost impossible to satisfy both audiences and the risk is to turn the movie into a fiasco in either of two countries ending up not covering the expenses. Recently, as has been said, Hollywood has been changing its way of doing films with the aim of finding the right balance between pleasing both Chinese and American spectators, naturally their effort consisted in adapting American movies to Chinese tastes, taking the risk of overdoing it and therefore compromising American audience's expectations. However, in many cases so far, this strategy demonstrated to pay off since the box office grosses achieved in China saved the bad scores obtained in the rest of the world. This is the case of *The Great Wall*, a co-production between China and Hollywood which, out of \$330 million grosses, collected more than 50% in China and only 13% in the U.S. ("The Great Wall 2016. Box Office Mojo"). The movie was released in China in December 2016, and in the United States a couple of months later in February, 2017. It was the most expensive film (over \$150 million) ever shot entirely in China. The movie starred Matt Damon, Willem Dafoe and many popular Chinese actors who, together, used the Great Wall to defend humanity from a monster attack. However, since the film trailer was released for the American market at the end of 2016, journalists and commentators begun to accuse the film of "whitewashing" especially on social media, denouncing the

tendency to engage white actors for roles that could (or should) be interpreted by actors of different ethnicity. Critics wondered why was Matt Damon entitled to save ancient China or why the Chinese could not manage it on their own. Critics were not entirely wrong: when it comes to diminishing non-white actors, the American film industry has a long and troubled history. Some exponents of the sector boycotted the 2016 Oscars, after only white actors and actresses were candidates for the second year in a row in the four main categories. Recently, the American superhero film *Doctor Strange* or the 2017 science fiction film *Ghost in the Shell* and the romantic comedy *Aloha*, directed by Cameron Crowe have been criticized for choosing white actresses for originally Asian roles, and these are just the latest examples of a long tradition of “whitewashing” in Hollywood.

Nevertheless, the issue also has an ironic side that many have not understood. Despite the illustrious presence of Matt Damon, there are perhaps more Chinese actors in *The Great Wall* than in any other major U.S.-Chinese co-production of the past. In China, the film was described as the first of its kind directed by an important Chinese director, supported by a Chinese-owned Hollywood film studio and which talks about Chinese historical themes. *The Great Wall* represents a step forward as regards the influence of the Chinese film industry in the world. The film is undoubtedly among the co-productions with the highest budget ever, and it is the first film with a big budget to have a Chinese creative force behind it. In recent years, Hollywood has begun to seek the favour of cinema fans in China, the second largest film market in the world that, as has been said, may already become the first next year by overtaking the United States. The Chinese film industry wants to produce films capable of attracting national audiences and, at the same time, succeeding abroad. Making a film that appeals to both Chinese and American audiences is a great challenge for the global film industry, something that is often sought but rarely achieved. The reason is partly due to the stringent requirements imposed on films in China. Very few movies have managed to find a balance between these conditions and the demand of the Chinese and American public, thus realizing a blockbuster that will be successful in both markets as *The Great Wall* tried to do. So far, among the dozen or so official co-productions between the United States and China in the past, some movies have been successful in China such as

Lust, Caution, a 2007 espionage erotic period drama film directed by Ang Lee and 2016 *Skiptrace*, a Hong Kong-Chinese-American buddy cop action comedy film directed by Renny Harlin, but just a few really impressed Americans. There is also a handful of films that are called “faux productions”, that is films initially conceived to be co-productions between the United States and China, but which have lost their status due to financial or regulatory complications. This category includes films that have gone well in the United States, such as *Iron Man 3*, *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, 2012 *Cloud Atlas* and *Looper* directed by Rian Johnson. Some Hollywood films managed to be successful in China even without being officially co-productions, such as 2009 *Avatar* and *The Martian*, directed by Ridley Scott (certainly, showing the Chinese space agency that intervenes to save the situation, as it also happens in *The Martian*, can be helpful). But entering the Chinese market without obtaining the co-production status can be risky for Hollywood studios. Chinese authorities could release the film in less popular periods, in conjunction with other important western films, postpone its release until the Chinese have already seen the illegally downloaded versions, or ban it altogether, all decisions that can cut down the box office grosses in the country. The co-productions which must meet the Chinese authorities requirements that deal with censorship but also commercial needs, can result in artificial and forced works. One of the few successful stories for both Chinese and American audiences to date has been *Kung Fu Panda 3*, a 2016 3D computer-animated wuxia comedy film produced by DreamWorks Animation, whose winning formula, however, is not easily replicable. As a family film, *Kung Fu Panda 3* did not violate the restrictions of censorship; subtitles were not a problem, because the studios had made two versions of the film to make it fit both English and Chinese; since it was an animated film, finally, the question of the ethnicity of the actors never emerged.

The Chinese and Hollywood studios behind *The Great Wall* were convinced that they had found the magic formula. In their film, supported by Universal Pictures and other studios, there were many popular Chinese actors, including the famous Andy Lau, the actress Jing Tian and the leader of the boyband TFboys Wang Junkai. On top of that, it was directed by Zhang Yimou, perhaps the most famous director in China. Furthermore, in the movie appears an element of the country which is well-known in the rest of the world: *The Great Wall*, and the film is produced by Legendary Entertainment, a

Hollywood studio that in 2016 had already been bought by the Chinese company Dalian Wanda, the first time that an important American media company passed under Chinese control. The film was written by Hollywood screenwriters and starred popular western actors such as Matt Damon, Willem Dafoe and Pedro Pascal, in what appears to be an attempt to attract audiences even outside of China. It is this very aspect that made the film so controversial in the West, where in recent years Hollywood has been increasingly criticized for its alleged racism, both explicit and implicit. The negative reactions to *The Great Wall* were driven in part by the Asian-born American actress Constance Wu, who wrote on social networks that the film perpetuates “the racist myth that only a white man can save the world.” (“Constance Wu Slams Matt Damon's Casting in *The Great Wall*”). According to other people, the choice of the casting highlights the assumption that the average American film lover is either white or prefers white actors. There is also another aspect which could be seen as problematic with reference to the heroism of the character played by Matt Damon, a European mercenary who ultimately helps save China: it seems that the film awkwardly clashes with the history of colonialism suffered by China, which was conquered, subdivided and impoverished by European armies, in a terrible period that the Chinese still remember as the “century of humiliation” (百年国耻 *bǎinián guóchǐ*).

The Great Wall director, Zhang Yimou, defended the film from whitewashing allegations by stating that, in many ways, it is the opposite of what is said: “For the first time, a film deeply rooted in Chinese culture, with one of the largest Chinese casts ever assembled, is being made at tentpole scale for a world audience.” “Matt Damon” added Yimou “is not playing a role that was originally conceived for a Chinese actor” (“The Great Wall director addresses Matt Damon whitewashing controversy”). Others have connected this choice to obvious economic factors, arguing that the presence of Matt Damon in the film was more likely to bring spectators from all over the world, who normally would not have seen a film set in ancient China, to the cinemas. Legendary Entertainment did not respond to the request for comments. From a certain point of view it might seem that Chinese directors are worried about promoting films with Chinese characters to a global audience. Chinese directors think that if they play a Chinese as the protagonist they will lose the global market. But they seem to

forget that China is a huge market. Moreover, even the strategy of putting a white Hollywood actor in the main role of a film to expand its range can fail, as Constance Wu pointed out. And the same is true for Chinese films: Chinese studios paid millions of dollars to play famous actors like Christian Bale, Adrien Brody and John Cusack in local films that ended up having little success in western markets. In China, discussions around *The Great Wall* have been very different. Most Chinese were happy with it and saw Zhang Yimou's involvement in a big-budget Hollywood movie and the prominent role assigned to the Great Wall, as important factors that could increase China's cultural influence abroad. And now that Legendary Entertainment is owned by the Chinese company Dalian Wanda, people working in the film industry are curious to see if China's influence in Hollywood and in the global film market will increase even more in the coming years. In reality, the risk is that many Sino-American co-productions could be very successful in one market and not meet the expectations in the other.

There are a lot of films that in the United States turn out to be a flop but compensate with the grosses coming from China. Before continuing with the analysis, I would like to specify that all the following box office data come from “boxofficemojo.com” and that the term “flop” has nothing to do with the quality of the work, but it defines a film that was not capable of covering its costs with the box office grosses. Conventionally, a movie reaches its break-even point when it collects at least twice its budget (most of the ticket cost goes to movie theaters and distribution).

2016 American action fantasy movie *Warcraft*, directed by Duncan Jones, is the perfect example to represent a hope for Hollywood majors that may make a wrong move with one of their films. The movie costed \$160 million and collected \$220 million worldwide, excluding China: it was a total disaster. Unexpectedly, the Chinese market blessed it with an additional \$213 million, bringing the total grosses to \$433 million. Marketing expenses, which are notoriously high and sometimes are omitted in budget calculations, were not revealed but, in spite of that, *Warcraft* managed to stay afloat.

2017 American action film *XXX: Return of Xander Cage*, directed by D. J. Caruso, the third installment in the *XXX* franchises and the second starring Vin Diesel, was in a borderline situation as well: it costed \$85 million and collected \$182 million worldwide. China added other \$164 million, raising total grosses to \$346 million and legitimizing a further sequel.

A very recent and exemplifying case was Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One*: a hazardous high-budget blockbuster without a powerful brand behind that was going to be a flop, grossing \$354 million compared to a \$175 million expense without even knowing marketing costs. China has enthusiastically embraced it, adding an extra \$212 million to grosses and bringing the total to \$566 million.

The same happened to the last *Tomb Raider* starring Alicia Vikander. The film costed \$94 million and grossed \$272 million, 78 of them came from Chinese movie theaters.

Also 2017 *Transformers: The Last Knight* was significantly helped by China. Chinese grosses only (\$228 million) basically covered its \$217 million; the movie grossed \$605 million in total.

On other occasions, it happened that some films struggled so much that they could not even benefit from their excellent reception in China. For example, 2015 *Terminator: Genisys* (cost \$155 million, total grosses \$240 million, 113 of which came from China) and *Pacific Rim: Uprising* (cost \$150 million, total grosses \$288 million, 100 of which collected in China) which remained flops despite the appreciation in the East.

However, there are also situations in which Chinese audience is not much decisive as regards prominent worldwide successes. This can happen when a product relies on a strong brand awareness or is part of a very long and famous saga, that unfortunately Chinese spectators were not aware of because China's market was still closed to foreign movies when first installments came out. Star Wars, for instance, represents the “Chinese nightmare” for Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures. The good results achieved for 2015 *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, which grossed \$124 million in China, boded well for attracting the new target market. The Chinese, who did not have the chance to see the first, 42 years old, historical trilogy, gave the series a chance, but they rapidly lost interest, reserving a modest \$70 million gross for the 2016 movie *Rogue One* and even a worse \$42 million score for 2017 *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. The same happened to *Solo*, a Star Wars spin-off that, in China, grossed just \$16 million. Things got worse for Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*, perhaps the most substantial failure of these hopes: the film costed \$150 million and it grossed just over 11\$ million in China out of a total gross of \$259 million worldwide. It was practically ignored.

Reactions from Walt Disney Pictures Pixar Animation Studios confirm this theory. American 3D computer-animated comedy-adventures such as 2017 *Cars 3* and 2016 *Finding Dory*, were considered a success everywhere but since they were sequels of movies that were released only in the West a decade earlier, they respectively grossed embarrassing \$20 million and \$38 million. Vice versa, other brand new and original 3D computer-animated films such as 2017 *Coco* directed by Lee Unkrich and 2016 *Zootopia* have triumphed with \$189 million and \$235 million. Perhaps, a story dedicated to the cult of ancestors and a fairy tale about anthropomorphic animals were easier to understand and more enjoyable to watch for Chinese spectators. The same approach that, for example, took DreamWorks Animation, which constructed the Kung Fu Panda franchise to break into the Chinese market, by realizing a special version of *Kung Fu Panda 3* with Mandarin labial (costs \$145 million, \$521 total grosses, 154 of which collected in China).

In the meantime, the parallel enthusiasm of Chinese investments in Hollywood film industry, which exploded between 2015 and 2016, seems to have slowed down. After buying significant shares of Imagine Entertainment and Lionsgate, and taking control of Legendary Entertainment as majority shareholders, Chinese magnates are gradually redirecting their investments towards local film industry. Some say that the downshift happened when, precisely *The Great Wall*, the first experiment of important co-production between Hollywood and China, did not achieved the very high numbers projected for either the Chinese market or the rest of the world. This would explain why, apparently, Legendary Entertainment shares are for sale once again. On the contrary, the H Collective 2017 success 战狼 2 *Wolf Warrior 2*, which grossed an impressive \$854 million (99%) in China, indicates that U.S.-Chinese co-productions can still work. In any case, what appears to be clear is that while Hollywood cannot afford to ignore China, on the other hand, China seems to maintain its good cinematographic self-sufficiency.

4. American Dream vs Chinese Dream

4.1 A very short history of the American Dream

“I think I can see the whole destiny of America contained in the first Puritan who landed on these shores...” (De Tocqueville 35). This is what Alexis de Tocqueville commented during his famous trip to the United States to emphasize the importance of the Puritan colonies in the construction of the formation of the new nation. The Puritans created a profoundly religious, economically active, and politically innovative society in the New World, where the awareness of a national identity separate from the motherland was very rapidly consolidated. The Puritan dream was to bring their political and religious project to fruition: to build the New Jerusalem on Earth, the emblem of the sacred nation which God entrusted with the task of spreading His Word throughout the world. The virgin and uncontaminated land of the Americas was the ideal place for building the Holy City and the Puritans considered themselves to be the people chosen by God through a Covenant entrusting them with the mission of building the perfect community, the promise of happiness, abundance and prosperity, thereby renewing the alliance already established with ancient Israel. The fathers of New England consciously wanted to be the founders of a different society from the mother country and for them religious life could not be conceived on an individualistic scale, nor separable from political-social life; consequently, the State and the Church were seen as two sides of same medal. This is why the “City upon a Hill” was, and still is in the current debates, intended to be a model of Christianity in religious as well as political-social terms.

The myth of the “City upon a Hill” dates back to 1630, when John Winthrop, the future governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on board of the *Arbella* sailing to the shores of the New World, preached the mission of the future United States: to be a model and an example of Christian charity for the entire world. Thereafter, a sensation of superiority towards the rest of the world came about in the American imagination with the firm conviction of being the “guiding light” for all peoples. In his famous sermon “A Model of Christian Charity”, Winthrop recalled a passage from the *Gospel of Matthew* which combines the image of the sacred city with light, one of the main symbols of the Biblical text already found in the first book of *Genesis* (1:4), where light is created immediately after the sky and the earth.

The new “City upon a Hill” becomes a “Beacon” with the task of guiding the path of the new people and witnessing how the divine project intersects with the political and social one.

Cultural influences from Europe spread in the new society, including natural law, the Enlightenment, English empiricism, Scottish deism, Puritan theology and the evangelical experience of the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century. The Enlightenment placed all men on the same level and sought to free them from ignorance and darkness by stimulating their courage and the use of reason, exhorting the creation of a civil environment in the search for ideals of freedom and happiness. This context was fertile ground for the doctrine of natural law, a philosophical current which presupposes the existence of a natural state prior to the affirmation of organised societies, seen as the result of a pact between the people and the holders of power as guarantors of universal rights. Hence, the State, and the laws it issues, is the sole guarantor of the natural and inalienable rights of man. It was therefore the fusion of the principles of natural law and religious sentiment that subsequently inspired the writing of Thomas Jefferson, who was commissioned in 1775 to draw up the document that officially marked the birth of the United States of America on 4 July 1776: the Declaration of Independence. It appealed to the inalienable rights of man, which Jefferson drew from the philosophical thinking of John Locke and his *Two Treatises of Government*, where he declared that the State cannot deny the citizen the protection of certain natural rights such as life, freedom, civil equality and private property.

The new government is thereby committed to protecting and assuring the inalienable rights of man, principles of an intuitive nature that were readily accessible to the majority of citizens and capable of legitimising the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The right to pursue happiness in some manner took the place of Locke's right to property, although Jefferson by no means underestimated the importance of property but rather focused on the concept of happiness understood as a reward for the toils of life. The postulation of this right plays a role of fundamental importance in the construction of the American imagination in that projections of Eden merge here with expectation of earthly happiness. A concept that was initially in the minds of philosophers now becomes the prerogative of an entire nation and a government determined to safeguard it. Happiness becomes a myth to which the Nation aspires

together with the will to create a society where free individuals can be rewarded and happy.

This history-myth dualism was also influenced by the Protestant religion; the colonists rebelled against the King of England to become the true bearers of Christian values: those who pursue ideals of justice and freedom. Hereafter, the American territory became loaded with dreams, ambitions, aspirations and promises: a spiritual happiness made of prosperity, salvation and moral balance as well as earthly happiness characterized by wealth, property, abundance and economic well-being.

Inasmuch, the concept of happiness also took on a collective as well as individualistic character, becoming a moral duty which all citizens sought to achieve in order to build the

Promised Land on Earth. One of the founding texts of the American imagination, which helped the United States to define its own identity, is the work of writer Hector St. John De Crèvecoeur who in his famous *Letters from an American Farmer*, provided a definition of the new American Man. In particular, in the third letter, *What is an American?*, the author describes the life of the colonies of North America and the birth of a new society founded on natural law principles such as equality and self-determination, which gave life to a new human race generated by the fusion of different ethnic groups. "The new man" shed European clothes to begin a conversion process that reached its climax with the embrace by Alma Mater (America) which, unlike Old Europe, welcomes its children allowing them to complete that process of transformation and regeneration that will lead each individual to become a citizen (De Crèvecoeur 44-45). Using the metaphor of "transplantation", De Crèvecoeur describes this process arising from the encounter of good seed with uncontaminated nature that culminates with a baptism for new life. The outcome of this transformation is a new humanity, "a new race of men", a variegated progeny that has no equal in the rest of the world and that originates from a peculiar mixture of races (De Crèvecoeur 53-54) - the famous melting pot.

He describes American society as new and ideal: its citizens work hard, respect their neighbours influenced by the American environment, whose properties help each individual develop his or her faculties, which can be amplified and enhanced here enormously. Thanks to De Crèvecoeur's first-hand experience, from being a European

gentleman to play the role of an American “farmer”, the Americans received the necessary assurance to believe in their country and their future, so much so that he can be defined as the creator of a myth. He is the emblematic confirmation that both cultures of the two continents, America and Europe, needed, in distinct ways, to believe in the utopia of building the perfect society and that therein justice, equality, prosperity and a happy life would have been the models of aspiration.

The land very soon came to be immensely important to all Americans. It was not seen simply as something desirable or as an obvious comfort; many Spaniards, Germans, French and English saw the American landscape as a valid benefit rather than a mere marketable product: it could become “home” (Cullen 152). This belief defined the structure of the frontier society that would cross the continent and give a name to that phenomenon that has characterised and influenced American society since the outset: The American Dream.

The term was used for the first time by John Truslow Adams, who in his 1931 book *The Epic of America* says: “The American Dream, that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement... it is not merely a dream of motor cars and high wages but a dream of social order...” (Adams 404).

The American Dream is the ideal country where life is better, richer and fuller for everyone with the possibility of rising in accordance with one's abilities and merit. It is not simply pure materialism but a genuine social order, the aspiration to become what one is worth without any kind of barrier.

The true basis of the dream is that everyone, without distinction, is entitled to desire a higher life, a better life that can be achieved through work and the pursuit of one's dreams. A shared dream is hidden behind the American Dream: to have a family, children, a home, a luxury car and a rewarding job.

4.2 The origins of the Chinese Dream

“Today, everyone is talking about the Chinese dream. I feel that the biggest dream of the Chinese nation is to achieve its rejuvenation. This dream summarises the

long-cherished desires of generations of Chinese people, embodies all the interests of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation; the Chinese dream is the hope shared by every child in China” (“习近平：承前启后 继往开来 继续朝着中华民族伟大复兴目标奋勇前进 Xi Jinping: Carrying Forward the Past and the Future, Continuing to Move Forward, Continue to March Forward Toward the Great Rejuvenation Goal of the Chinese Nation, my translation”).

President Xi Jinping spoke these words on 29 November 2012 during a visit to the National Museum in Beijing. The exhibition of the day was titled “The Road to Rejuvenation” (复兴之路 *fùxīng zhī lù*) and traced the history of China from the period of “humiliation” at the hands of foreign powers through to independence achieved thanks to the leading role of the CCP. Xi Jinping chose this occasion to announce the Party's new theoretical contribution towards achieving the Chinese Dream (中国梦 *Zhōngguó mèng*), the goal of the Xi–Li Administration. The context chosen by the President to announce the leitmotif of his government differed significantly from that of his predecessors. Guangdong, chosen by Jiang Zemin, and Jiangxi, chosen by Hu Jintao, involved clear indications as regards the direction of the socio-economic policies of their respective governments. The goal of Xi Jinping's government seemed to be more vague but certainly more ambitious. Following President's vision: the goal of achieving the Chinese Dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation means achieving the prosperity of the country, the revival of the nation and the happiness of the people (“Full text: China's New Party Chief Xi Jinping's Speech”). Given the vagueness of its connotations, the Chinese Dream has given rise to several interpretations. Colonel Liu Mingfu, author of the book 中国梦:后美国时代的大国思维与战略定位 *The China Dream: Great Power Thinking and Strategic Posture in the Post-American Era*, interpreted it as a military dream. Liu Mingfu is convinced that Xi Jinping took inspiration from his book to express China's desire to become the world's leading military power. British weekly *The Economist* attributed authorship of the concept of the Chinese Dream to Thomas Friedman, a well-known commentator for the New York Times (“The Role of Thomas Friedman”). In October 2012, Friedman wrote an article for the U.S. newspaper titled “China Needs Its Own Dream” in which he

identified the Chinese Dream with the need to implement development capable of meeting the needs of the population at the same time as being sustainable. However, even before the above-mentioned book and Friedman's article were published, the Chinese Dream had already appeared, not as a political but as an advertising slogan. During the Beijing Olympics in 2008, Chinese cities were inundated with dream-related slogans. In this regard, Giovanna Puppini researched the advertising slogans that accompanied the arrival of the Olympic flame in China's capital. Her study highlighted how the dream metaphor is recurrent in all Chinese Olympic slogans, which is surprising for advertising language which by definition is creative and seeks to be original. Puppini concluded that Chinese Olympic slogans can be ascribed to what Michael Schoenhals called "formalized language"². Schoenhals described political language as a tight code, where vocabulary, style and syntax are much more limited and rigid than in everyday language (Schoenhals 1). It could be argued that the Beijing Olympics were not only a political test for the rise of Xi Jinping, as already mentioned, but also verification of the persuasive power of the new slogan. However, while the "Olympic centenary dream" has already become reality, the dream of "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation", according to Xi Jinping, will soon come about. The Chinese Dream, as espoused by Xi Jinping in his speeches, involves achieving the great *fùxīng* 复兴 (rejuvenation) of the Chinese nation. ("China's Dream Needs Chinese Power": the New Era in Xi's Thought"). The key to the term *fùxīng* may be found in understanding what the effective attainment of the Chinese Dream really means. The term *fùxīng* is made up of the characters *fù* and *xīng*. The first means "return-repeat", the second "rise, enthusiasm, vigour". The expression "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" therefore expresses the concept of enthusiasm or vigour already seen in the Chinese nation and that is about to return. From this point of view, one may agree with what Zheng Wang stated, namely that the successes and goals that China has already reached or is about to achieve are seen by the Chinese people as the attainment of its *fùxīng* rather than its "rise" from nothing, as many western scholars believe ("Not Rising, But Rejuvenating: The "Chinese Dream""). All the more, reference to the past is

² See the conclusion of Giovanna Puppini's article on Cosmopolis: "Come si Costruisce un Sogno: Slogan Pubblicitari a Servizio delle Olimpiadi di Pechino 2008 How to Build a Dream: Advertising Slogans for Beijing 2008 Olympic Games".

a rhetorical strategy exploited in political discourse throughout the world. Murray Edelman outlined how the impact of political language lies in the reconstruction of the past and its ability to evoke the potential of the future (Murray 101). The analysis developed by Zheng Wang went in the same direction, taking up the thinking of the Norwegian sociologist and mathematician Johan Galtung, namely that the combination of the memory of past traumas and glory helps generate the collective awareness of being a “chosen” people. Zheng Wang applied Johan Galtung's theory to the Chinese reality and noted how the Party used historical memory to glorify the Party itself, consolidate national identity and justify the PRC's one-party political system in the post-Tian'anmen and post-Cold War era (Zheng 41-49). A clear example of the re-enactment of the glory of the Chinese past is represented by celebrations during the opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics. On that occasion, traditional culture played a leading role together with the “four great inventions” (四大发明 *sì dà fā míng*) of Chinese civilisation: Compass, Gunpowder, Papermaking and Printing. In this context, it is legitimate to believe that Xi Jinping's recollection of the century of humiliation suffered by China after the First Opium War (1839-1842) was an integral part of the project to build a national identity for the Chinese people and justify the CCP's role. In this regard, the President, quoting a verse from the poetry of Mao Zedong, “Loushan Pass” (娄山关 *Lóushān guān*), stated:

“The condition of China yesterday is well expressed by the verse ‘do not say the impervious pass is like iron’. In the history of humanity, rarely has one seen suffering and sacrifices comparable to those suffered by the Chinese nation in modern times. Yet the Chinese people never gave up, continued to fight and resist. In the end, they took their destiny into their own hands, started the grandiose project of building their own country and fully demonstrated the great spirit of the Chinese nation that has patriotism as its heart” (“习近平：承前启后 继往开来 继续朝着中华民族伟大复兴目标奋勇前进 Xi Jinping: Carrying Forward the Past and the Future, Continuing to Move Forward, Continue to March Forward Toward the Great Rejuvenation Goal of the Chinese Nation, my translation”).

Even before Xi Jinping, other leaders had already appealed to past humiliations to mobilise the masses to build a modern China and ultimately achieve “the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” (中华民族的伟大复兴 *Zhōnghuá mínzú de wěidà fùxīng*). For example, this expression had already been used by Jiang Zemin during his speech for the 80th anniversary of the Party: “We have started the feat of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, we have taken the right path to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (“江泽民在庆祝建党八十周年大会上的讲话 Jiang Zemin's Speech at The Celebration of The 80th Anniversary of The Founding of The CCP”³). Speeches by previous leaders clearly outlined the government's objectives. In the decade of Jiang Zemin, progress and economic growth were given priority: the “Great Rejuvenation” as envisioned by Jiang Zemin may well be seen to coincide with economic development. Objectives were well defined even during Hu Jintao's government: the need to build a “harmonious society” presumably suggested the existence of internal imbalances in Chinese society and, consequently, the goal was to remedy the social imbalances caused by frenetic economic growth (“China Makes Commitment to Social Harmony”).

On the contrary, the current President chose a deliberately vague concept to indicate the purpose of his government that also echoes the myth of the American Dream. During the XII National Popular Assembly, Xi Jinping distanced himself from the erroneous identification of the Chinese Dream with the American version in stating: “Achieving the Chinese Dream means travelling the Chinese road and it consists precisely in socialism with Chinese characteristics” (“习近平:在第十二届全国人民代表大会第一次会议上的讲话 Xi Jinping's Speech at the I Session of the XII National Popular Assembly”). In his meeting with American President Barack Obama, he described the Chinese Dream as an even greater dream than its counterpart across the ocean: “The Chinese dream of prosperity for the country, rejuvenation of the nation and happiness of the people is a dream of peace, progress, cooperation and common advantage; it is interconnected with the wonderful dreams of all the peoples of the world, including the American one” (“习近平同美国总统奥巴马共同会见记者 Xi Jinping and U.S. President Barack Obama Meet With Reporters”). It is thereby the media's task to

³ Please note that this article as well as the following Chinese articles of this chapter are the result of my translations.

explain in an even more articulate way that the Chinese Dream is far from being merely an oriental review of the American Dream. The main and most emphasised difference is that the American Dream is an individual dream, whereas the Chinese Dream is a collective one: all Chinese people must contribute to the attainment of the great dream of the Chinese nation (“中国梦区别于美国梦的七大特征 Seven Key Differences Between the Features of the Chinese Dream and the American Dream”). Zheng Wang suggested that an appropriate overseas comparison should be sought not in the American Dream but, rather, the appeal by President John F. Kennedy in January 1961: “and so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country” (“Not Rising, But Rejuvenating: The "Chinese Dream"”). In the same way, the Chinese Dream requires the commitment of all Chinese people: “implementing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a glorious and arduous undertaking that demands the combined commitment of generation after generation of Chinese people”, explains Xi Jinping (“习近平：承前启后 继往开来 继续朝着中华民族伟大复兴目标奋勇前进 Xi Jinping: Carrying Forward the Past and the Future, Continuing to Move Forward, Continue to March Forward Toward the Great Rejuvenation Goal of the Chinese Nation”). One could put forward the idea that current Chinese political discourse exploits the dream metaphor to construct what Gramsci called the national-popular collective will, albeit with “Chinese characteristics”. Gramsci in his *Quaderni del carcere* wrote that the modern Prince should effectively be limited to these two fundamental points: formation of a collective national will wherein the modern Prince is precisely its active and operative expression, and intellectual and moral reform (“O Conceito de Vontade Coletiva em Gramsci The concept of the Collective Will in Gramsci”). The Sardinian philosopher attributed a central role in the construction of a social and political order to the national-popular collective will. Against this background, the Chinese Dream may be conceived as a tool for creating social order in a China no longer guided by charismatic revolutionary leaders. Xi Jinping therefore seeks to build a solid ideological foundation shared by all people and a collective will that moves in the same direction as the Party: “The Chinese Dream is the dream of the country, the nation and every Chinese person. The well-being of the State, the well-being of the Nation is the well-being of everyone. Only if every person strives for splendid dreams will it be possible to convey an imposing force to attain the Chinese

Dream” (“习近平：在同各界优秀青年代表座谈时的讲话 Xi Jinping’s Speech at the Meeting with All the Excellent Representatives of Youth”). Inasmuch, the Chinese Dream conceived by the political class with the aim of coagulating the dreams of individuals seeks to fill the ideological, moral and ethical void found in today's China, where, following far-reaching social transformations, the bond ensured by the dominant ideology that has supported the CCP historically is no longer extant. The question the first Chinese Marxist, Li Dazhao, asked himself turns out to be rather topical: in the ideological, political and moral crisis of China, the problem is not to be found in the way for assuring national survival but in finding the conditions for “spiritual rebirth” (Li 10).

Nonetheless, while Li Dazhao refused to recognise Confucianism as a suitable base for the revival of China, the current leadership seems to have changed its mind and continued along the path taken by the fourth generation of leaders, reconciling the economic liberalism introduced by Deng Xiaoping, the moral and ethical values of Confucius and the ideology of Mao Zedong. Xi Jinping promoted this trend as soon as he took office: after the reference paying homage to Mao Zedong, the father of the country, and Deng Xiaoping, as the instigator of the re-emergence of China, the President went to Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, to demonstrate his filial piety to the Master.

Realities until only a few decades ago considered as irreconcilable are now brought together and combined in the Chinese Dream to redefine and consolidate the CCP's guiding role.

The article of Chinese newspaper *People* “中国梦:共建共享的梦 The 'Chinese dream': a Dream That is Built and Enjoyed Together” exemplifies this conjugation of Marxist principles and Confucian precepts and states that the Chinese Dream cannot ignore the ground from which it grew: traditional Chinese culture and socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. The author, Li Xiaobiao, explains how one can identify a certain similarity and several points in common between the communist society of “free associations” and the society of “Great Unit” (大同 *dàtóng*). The idea of *dàtóng* comes from Confucian tradition and refers to a society governed by ideals of peace and fraternity, where rulers and subjects join forces to improve it so that all citizens enjoy high levels of well-being. Confucian precepts - the ideological foundations of the

Chinese Empire for millennia - are taken up today by the CCP to legitimise the “heavenly mandate” (天命 *tiānmìng*) of the Party itself. Confucian rules are still seen even today as a useful tool for assuring social order and maintaining the guiding role of the CCP. Political language, in exploiting classical quotations, is a full expression of this trend. Contemporary political discourse seeks to create certainties, encouragement and reassurances, as well as to stir people to work together to build a shared well-being. This is probably the key to understanding the Chinese Dream: an appeal whereby everyone makes a contribution to achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The aim of creating a goal shared by the people and the party is to combine the interests of the latter with those of ordinary people and thereby create a collective imagination together with a strong sense of national identity. The new rhetoric is ever closer to the interests of the people and interprets its needs and problems in order to restate the Party's capacity to solve them (“The Chinese Dream: China's New Rhetoric and Its Implications in China's Development Path”).

While the concept of the Chinese Dream seems to have lost its Marxist ideological connotations, it is nevertheless reiterated that: “socialism with Chinese characteristics is the right way to achieve the Chinese Dream, which our Party has found by guiding the people through endless difficulties” (“习近平：在同各界优秀青年代表座谈时的讲话 Xi Jinping’s Speech at the Meeting with All the Excellent Representatives of Youth”). Inasmuch, although individuals in pursuing their dreams themselves contribute to achieving the Chinese Dream for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, it is always the Party's task to determine the correct way to do so. The strength of the Chinese Dream lies precisely in being a dream and not reality and its purpose is to build a "collective will" that seeks to achieve a shared "dream" rather than actually implement the dream itself.

4.3 Chinese and American Dream: Two different cultural approaches

After the “Three Represents” socio-political theory of Jiang Zemin and the “Scientific Outlook on Development” socio-economic principle of Hu Jintao, China is now

pursuing the new “Chinese Dream”: the “dream” was theorized by President Xi Jinping in his debut speech as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2012.

“Our people have an ardent love for life. They wish to have better education, more stable jobs, more income, greater social security, better medical and health care, improved housing conditions, and a better environment. They want their children to have sound growth, have good jobs and lead a more enjoyable life. To meet their desire for a happy life is our mission.” (“Transcript: Xi Jinping's Speech at The Unveiling of The New Chinese Leadership”).

A few weeks later, the same dream will become the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation”, as articulated by Xi during his famous visit to the National Museum of China in Beijing, and then it will assume further nationalist nuances adding that, above all, the Chinese dream will be the “dream of the people”.

In 2013, Liu Qibao, head of the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, even invited the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to conduct a research on the Chinese Dream and “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, with the aim of providing academic support for greater confidence in the Chinese path, theories and system. In order to understand what the Chinese Dream really consists of, Chinese magazine 人民论坛 *The People's Tribune*, tried to summarize the essence of Xi Jinping's idea through a seven-point comparison (also mentioned in the preceding paragraph) with the only other “dream” model ever created to date: the American one (“中国梦区别于美国梦的七大特征 Seven Key Differences Between the Features of the Chinese Dream and the American Dream”).

In short, the Chinese Dream aims at the prosperity of the country, the American Dream, instead, focuses on the success of the individual. The goal of the Chinese Dream is to revitalize the nation, the American one aspires to personal glory; the first must be carried out by the Chinese people themselves, the second must exploit the talents and natural resources of other countries. The Chinese Dream is made of harmony and common happiness, the American Dream is based on the freedom and happiness of individuals. But now, let me present my translation of the article and focus on the major cultural differences between Chinese dream and American dream:

“At the closing meeting of the 12th National People's Congress, President Xi Jinping gave a further explanation of his idea of the Chinese Dream: to fully understand this concept, it is necessary to give the Chinese people "a pair of tailor-made shoes", these shoes must make you feel comfortable and must be light, as if you had wings on your feet. Then the best way to grasp its meaning is to compare it with the most famous "pair of American shoes", in other words: the American Dream.

Until now, only China and the United States, these two great nations, have had the courage to create their own “dream”. Not all countries have the requirements to do so. It requires the capacity to grasp one’s destiny and have the courage to imagine. It demands determination and belief to realize these dreams. Without these ambitions, how can a small country in the shadow of a giant dare to dream? A country with poor resources and whose economic lifeline depends on another will always tremble with fear. How can such countries even afford to sleep peacefully?

The major objective of the country is to realize the goal of building a healthy society in a comprehensive way, building a prosperous, strong, democratic, civilized and harmonious socialist modern country, and realizing the Chinese nation’s great rejuvenation; in order to achieve national prosperity, national rejuvenation, and people’s happiness said Xi Jinping at the closing meeting of the 12th National People's Congress.

James Truslow Adams, author of the book *The Epic of America*, argues that the American dream of allowing all social classes to spend a more prosperous and happy life have been the most ambitious objective that U.S. committed to so far.

Inevitably the Chinese Dream and the American Dream are different for a series of historical, cultural, economic and geographical reasons. These differences can be condensed into seven points.

The Chinese Dream lies in the prosperity of the nation, the American one consists in the well being of each individual.

Compared to China, the U.S. have great geographical advantages: they are surrounded by the sea on three sides and therefore are easier to defend against attacks. Since their foundation they have been an hegemonist power, throughout history they have never been subjugated by other countries, on the contrary, they have often plundered the resources of other states on their own initiative. This is why they have never been afraid for national security, leaving the people free to take care of their own enrichment. China, on the other hand, from early on has been tormented by the need to keep its peripheral areas stable; throughout the course of its history it has never stopped being at war with the neighboring countries; several times it was conquered and devastated. History teaches us that the strength of a nation consists in the guarantee and in its ability to ensure a peaceful and happy life for its people. This is why the Chinese Dream must put the strength and prosperity of the country in the first place.

The goal of the Chinese Dream is national rejuvenation, the goal of the American Dream is instead the success of single individuals.

China is a country that embodies various ethnic groups, first of all the Han people, generally known as the natives of China who, since ancient times, have always proceeded together in all adversities, remained united by a common cause, nourishing a deep feeling for this land. It is a common opinion that a weak nation is easily vulnerable to the bullying of other countries, that is dishonorable to every citizen, and that puts lives at risk. How could this be considered as happiness then? The U.S. national situation is much more complicated than the Chinese one: whites and blacks are at opposite poles. For a long time black people have suffered discrimination and today, although the law provides for equality, however, the inherent discrimination of people cannot be erased. Even a small accident can lead to a racial conflict. The United States is a multi-ethnic country, people are not really attached to the land, they have no idea of what national

values mean, and it is natural that they can only have personal affirmation as their main target.

The Chinese Dream needs to be realized by the Chinese people, the American Dream can only be achieved through the talent and resources of other countries.

The notion of American Dream can be traced back to the “Declaration of Independence”, which emphasizes natural rights: everyone has the same right to life, to be free and to seek happiness. The American Dream, in particular, put the accent on the fact that the origin or social class is not important, because everyone, relying on their abilities and their own achievements, has the same opportunities for success. All this has a noticeable appeal to the citizens of smaller countries which are characterized by a strong distinction between the classes and that are seduced and incited to go to the U.S. to try to achieve their dream. Throughout history, the United States has often exploited people from other countries to elevate the nation. For example, at an early stage, a large number of slaves were imported from Africa for working in the plantations and in the nineteenth century Chinese labor was used to repair railways. Today, Mexicans and Eastern Europeans are employed in all types of physical work, while white people constitute the wealthy class and represent the image of living the good life. But China is a very big nation, which has over 1.3 billion inhabitants, and cannot count on the talent of large numbers of foreigners arriving from outside the country; this is why Xi Jinping, stressed the fact that to achieve the Chinese Dream it is necessary for China to walk down its own path developing a Chinese spirit and harnessing the power of the country.

The Chinese Dream embodies the harmony and happiness of the community, the American Dream consists in the freedom and happiness of individuals.

From early on, the Chinese have immediately matured the concept of “homeland”. Deep collective consciousness has always been very strong, as the old proverb

goes “if the family lives in harmony all affairs will prosper”. If there is harmony within a family, and everyone is healthy then personal happiness will also be achieved. This is why the happiness of the Chinese has to be interpreted in a collective sense. Within the family, happiness is shared; the same happens in a nation. So Xi Jinping introduced three major “sharing concepts” to describe the vision of the Chinese Dream: sharing the opportunity of living a good life side by side, the opportunity of realizing one's dreams and the opportunity of leading together your country towards maturation and progress. European and American culture, on the contrary, enhances individualism and seeks the achievement of freedom and personal happiness.

The Chinese Dream has a deep historical sense, the American Dream is built only on practical approach.

A part of the self-confidence in the realization of the Chinese Dream comes from history. The Chinese civilization has about 5000 years of history, on many occasions it was prosperous and happy, in those times it was the most flourishing country in the world. Recently the prospering of TV series on the emperors of these eras reflects the fact that the public has this mentality. In the West some countries fear the impetuous rise of China, partly for historical reasons: they believe that the Chinese can regain the abilities of the past and become a threat for their country. Xi Jinping's aim is to achieve the dream of the “Chinese nation's great rejuvenation”, which makes people feel a strong sense of optimism and confidence. By contrast, the United States has only two or three hundred years of history behind them. Since the beginning of its foundation, America exploited the natural resources and talents of other nations and it has gradually become a “superpower”, so their dream is to continue to carry on what is already a reality, avoiding the raising of conflicting powers and continuing to forge their own American Dream.

The Chinese Dream is based on group work, the American Dream relies on individuality.

To achieve the Chinese Dream it is necessary to concentrate everyone's efforts; it is necessary that everyone exerts oneself and works conscientiously, using the skills and qualities of everyone, channeling the commitment towards a single direction. This dream is based on knowledge, strength and collective wisdom. In short, it can only be achieved by counting on the strength of the entire nation. Looking back at the past, it is not difficult to see how the Chinese are brilliant people, but it is also a nation which likes to “torment itself”: moved by a self-destructive tendency, often passed through periods of maximum evolution, periods of suffering, and even risking that the development of the country was reduced to an involution. For this reason today, collective knowledge must be directed towards a single and clear objective. On the contrary, the U.S., since its foundation, has undertaken the path of pragmatism, which simply consists in the personal search for happiness and wealth. In other words, their strength has been built on a series of individual successes. The Chinese people are able to do great things but, first and foremost, they must succeed in unifying their conscience.

The Chinese Dream is aimed at national glory, the American Dream is aimed at personal fame.

Since the Opium Wars, the national territory has been invaded and occupied, the country devastated and people have been thrown into misery and suffering, life lost its meaning. Every humiliating treaty, every devastating calamity has been a trauma to the people. In modern history, many people of the highest ideals have shed their blood simply for the pride of the nation, for its safety, so that the people could live and work in peace and serenity. Today, the People’s Republic of China has become the most important point of reference in the Far East. If China had not had such a tragic history, it would have been difficult to understand the Chinese people's thirst for hope. The United States did not experience such suffering, so they are unable to create this kind of dream. As a result, their dream is rather based on the wealth, success and social climbing of each individual” (“中国梦区

别于美国梦的七大特征 Seven Key Differences Between the Features of the Chinese Dream and the American Dream”).

The Chinese Dream therefore is the key concept of the political vision of Xi Jinping and also summarizes the objectives of China in the 21st century. This is a dream that concerns the great revival of the Chinese nation which, as we have seen, recalls the rhetoric of the American Dream (“Chinese Embrace America’s Culture but Not Its Policies”) but, at the same time, distances itself from it. It carries within itself the concept of rebirth, of return to past glory, from all points of view, including the cultural one. This reference has become a constant in Xi Jinping's speeches that, through the use of metaphors, helps to delineate a nation that is walking towards a new era: “新思想、新观点、新论断 New Thoughts, New Ideas, New Arguments” (Peng 59-64). Those that seem to be Xi Jinping’s original metaphors around which a huge propaganda campaign was made are actually not new at all, but based on old concepts reinterpreted as new. There is a substantial continuity with the previous leaders, in particular with Mao Zedong, manifested through the use of common metaphors (Xing 69-94); the speeches of Xi recall the same political rhetoric of Mao in form but, in the contents, he poses himself politically in the wake of Deng Xiaoping, continuing the path of economic reforms. For example, one of the most important points which the realization of the Chinese Dream depends upon is the destruction of the plague of corruption, a particularly serious problem that has always threatened the social and governmental stability of China. Starting from his very first speeches, Xi Jinping condemned the pervasive presence of corruption and said officials needed to put an end to its spread or it would “doom the party and the state”, a disease that has to be fought and necessarily eradicated to achieve the dream (“New Communist Party Chief in China Denounces Corruption in Speech”). Another rhetorical device is the use of animal metaphors to indicate the targets to hit for the fight against corruption, for example, he vowed to crack down on both “tigers and flies” (老虎苍蝇一起打 *lǎohǔ cāngyíng yīqǐ dǎ*), that is, the government will not only hunt down powerful officials, but also low-ranking officials (“Xi Jinping Vows to Fight ‘Tigers’ and ‘Flies’ in Anti-Corruption Drive”).

4.4 Chinese propaganda in TV series and theaters

In recent years, the fight against corruption has become public knowledge, arousing a strong interest also in popular culture thanks to the TV drama series *In the Name of the People* (人民的名义 *Rénmín de míngyì*). In reality, this is just one example of how the Chinese government has proven capable of keeping up with the times, and of exploiting the new trends in the world of media to spread its propaganda through modern entertainment (which is becoming increasingly popular thanks to young Chinese).

The first episode of the series was viewed over 7.5 million times just on the online streaming platform Aiqiyi and scored 350 million views across all platforms (“China’s New TV Show About How Good it is at Fighting Corruption Has Been Viewed 350 Million Times”). It has been proclaimed the most acclaimed Chinese TV series of 2017 and even surpassed 7% in ratings, smashing the 10-year-old single day ratings record for a Chinese Drama. (“《人民的名义》收视破7 创十年国产剧史最高纪录 《In The Name of The People》 Breaks 7%, Smashing 10-Year-Old Chinese Drama Single Day Ratings Record”) was released in March by Hunan Television and broadcasted on Youku, iQiyi and Mango TV online platforms. The secret of its success is precisely due to the fact that it is based on the anti-corruption campaign inaugurated by President Xi Jinping as he was appointed General Secretary of the Party in 2012. The series was renamed, for obvious reasons, the Chinese *House of Cards* and it deliberately shed a light upon prosecutor's efforts to unearth corruption and harness "flies and tigers" or the corrupt practices at the base and at the top of the communist hierarchy. Everything is spiced up with a series of ludicrous sketches that are as absurd as plausible: Mountains of red 100 yuan bills that come out of closets, refrigerators and even the quilt of a bed, so many that the police bill counters are jammed. Here, the reference to one of the most striking news reports in the last few years is evident; in that case, given the size of the loot, sixteen bill counters were used. The line that divides fiction and reality is imperceptible, and the whole series seems to push legal limits putting Chinese censorship system to the test. The name of Xi Jinping is hidden in the final syllables of two of the names of the three spotless protagonists of the series: Sha Ruijin and Hou Liangping.

Born from the collaboration between the TV and Film Production Center and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, *In the Name of the People* is not the first television product to plunge into the murky world of Chinese politics. The series arrives about a year after the screening of the eight part miniseries *Always On The Road* (永远在路上 Yǒngyuǎn Zài Lùshàng), sometimes also translated as Never Ending Anti-Corruption Struggle, produced by the state China Central Television (CCTV) in tandem with the Central Commission for Disciplines Inspection, the highest internal control institution of the Communist Party of China. According to the official press, in 2016, the Commission revised 11 TV programs on corruption. This is the revival of a genre that, despite the widespread disinterest of the Chinese in politics, has survived with ups and downs for about twenty years. That is, since Liu Tianming's novel *Heaven Above* (苍天在上 Cāng Tiān Zài Shàng) obtained the green light from the Central Propaganda Department in 1995, precisely when Jiang Zemin administration was busy removing the rotten apples from the Party. A sign that the gap between political and popular issues has been constantly reducing. That was really the case until 2004, when the authorities banned the entire sector, pointing to the poor-quality content. With the result that the anti-corruption fiction films have suddenly disappeared from the primetime spot, giving way to less sensitive themes: family comedies, historical documentaries and war stories steeped in nationalism.

Only after the arrival of Xi Jinping, modern palace intrigues went back to populate the show schedules. With a purely pedagogic function, that of embodying socialist values in a vivid and brilliant way. In terms of style, themes and plot, *In the Name of the People* is not very different from the anti-graft works made by contemporary Chinese novelist and scriptwriter, Zhou Meisen, before the 2004 ban. What distinguishes it is rather the rejection of that old dark and pessimistic tone which he used to describe the phenomenon. And then, of course, the quality. With a total cost of 120 million yuan (\$17.5 million) that is twice the amount of average Chinese TV series and a five times higher budget, *In the Name of the People* has a stellar cast compared to Chinese standards. It has been a while since, about thirty years ago, sloppy and unappealing patriotic productions dominated the screen. It was a sort of exploratory phase of the TV series industry ('78-'88), which was followed by a period of growth ('88-'98) and maturity (from '98 to date), in which a progressive opening to the private sector (2008)

coincided with a diversification of themes and subjects. Over time, the focus has shifted from the aseptic description of a glorious past to an introspective narrative of feelings and human relationships. This is why the depraved officials of *In the Name of the People* are, first of all, victims of their corruptible fragility. With its daily dramas, everyday life has gradually conquered the small screen. With the help of capital from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan and greater competition between state and private companies, which today constitute the 80% of the sector.

Stanley Rosen, professor of political science at the Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, in his book *Art, Politics and Commerce in Chinese Cinema* explains that it is a tug of war between non-governmental subjects and provincial broadcasters on the one hand, and the CCTV (controlled by the central government); the first two, enjoying greater freedom, tend to push the current limits. Sometimes they bypass the censorship control by taking shelter behind a showy propaganda narrative to enrich their programs with extravagant and sometimes violent elements, especially when it comes to World War II and Japanese invaders.

In spite of the propaganda, with about 15 thousand episodes every year, today the Chinese television series market is the most active in the world. According to the 2016 report of the Motion Picture Association of America (“The Economic Contribution of Film and Television in China in 2016”), TV industry made a total direct contribution to Chinese GDP of 254 billion yuan (\$33 billion) in 2016, with Free-To-Air Television providing the largest contribution worth \$12 billion. The diffusion of streaming platforms such as iQiyi, Youku, LeTV and QQ Video, which is scheduled to reach 140 million paying members by 2020, has contributed to the increasing of the competition with the promotion of individual productions and exclusive content through the purchase and the sale of broadcasting rights. As for internet services, the flourishing of the national market is directly proportional to the marginalization of foreign competitors that have been excluded using a mix of ideological motivations and protectionist aims. In 2016, the "State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television" (SAPPRFT) imposed to Chinese TV channels a maximum limit of two foreign TV shows to be broadcasted between 7:30 pm and 10:30 pm with the aim of leaving space only for innovative programs with Chinese genes, characteristics and cultural styles. In September, restrictions were extended to online screenings. At the

same time, the diatribe on the deployment of the American Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system south of Seoul in 2017 ended up banning from China South Korea's beloved soap operas for over a year. And although, after a long negotiation, the government decided to open the door to Netflix, the world leading streaming platform, through a forced partnership with the local company iQiyi, the American media-services provider is struggling to take off due to the many limitations. On the other hand, according to Wang Liping, Made in China TV series achieved an export value of \$85 million in 2017 (“Chinese TV drama internationalization”). Over 1600 Chinese films and television productions have been translated into 36 different languages and broadcasted in more than 100 countries. The point is that most television productions are now no longer financed by government funds but by private production companies which move according to profit logic. They still often have to adhere to the “official line” to avoid censorship but they are no longer exclusively a form of government propaganda.

Amazing China (厉害了, 我的国 *Lihale, wǒde guó*) is the new flagship of the Chinese propaganda and a huge box-office success. Designed to promote the work of President Xi Jinping, the 90-minute documentary produced by CCTV summarizes the string of successes achieved over the first five years of government, from infrastructural works to science, through the “Belt and Road” project, the new silk road through which Beijing intends to re-launch (commercial and cultural) exchanges across Asia, Europe and Africa. The film begins with the speech given by the leader inaugurating the last Congress of the Party at the end of the first five-year mandate. The objective then shifted to rural China, with a presidential visit to illustrate to the people the plan whereby the government intends to defeat poverty by 2020, the central policy of the current administration. “Who else could have done all this? Only the communist party,” Xi asks and answers (厉害了, 我的国 *Amazing China*). The camera dwells on development projects launched in the self-governing regions where ethnic minorities are concentrated, a litmus test of modernisation in China as well as the obstacles encountered by Beijing in harmonising culturally very diverse segments of society: “We are grateful to the Party, long live the Party!” said a Tibetan woman. The film closes

with a musical encouragement performed by pop singer Sun Nan: “We are confident! We will go on!”

The *Xinhua* news agency claims that the film was mentioned repeatedly by officials and ministers during the annual session of the National People's Assembly to demonstrate the level of development achieved by the world's second largest economy (““Amazing China” Becomes Highest-grossing Documentary in China”). And obviously to promote the merits of its main architect. There is very evident close timing between distribution in cinemas (2 March 2018) and the decision of Parliament to endorse the elimination of the two consecutive mandate limits that potentially entrusts Xi with Presidency for life (11 March 2018).

Box-office takings seem to reward far too generously a documentary based on clips already broadcast last year on TV. Indeed, *Amazing China* took more than 70 million dollars at the box office - a result that means it currently tops Chinese documentary box office records, even surpassing *Twenty Two*, the 2017 production dedicated to the history of “comfort women” forced into prostitution by Japanese soldiers during the Japanese invasion of China. The goal - sources at the *South China Morning Post* claim - was to reach one billion yuan. Evidently not by focusing on quality, as experts point out. While the Maoyan portal awarded the film a score of 9.6 out of 10, the more reliable Douban site was forced to disable the function that allows users to leave comments and assign scores to avoid unpleasant incidents, while IMDb was even more categorical in its judgement: 1 out of 10 (“Xi Jinping Takes Leading Role in Hit Propaganda Film Extolling ‘Amazing’ China”).

Even though the Chinese film industry has improved greatly, there are those who believe that the secret behind the success of *Amazing China* should really be sought in the aggressive government promotion at public employment levels. This would explain why a Thursday in mid-March, despite being a working day, afternoon screenings in the main cinemas of Shanghai were almost entirely booked.

In southern China, the Guangdong Federation of Trade Unions actively encouraged promotion of the documentary by organising group screenings. The Chinese press also suggested that several employees of state-owned companies saw tickets delivered to them with orders to go to the cinema, while many people complained on the Internet not only of the request to see the film at their own expense but also the obligation to write

positive reviews. “After the announcement of that limit of the two presidential mandates has been removed, this is definitely a bit too much,” a rather annoyed government employee said to the *South China Morning Post*. Yet there are also those who, driven by renewed patriotism, acknowledge the efforts of leadership in an attempt to improve the quality of life in the world's most populous country. “Our lives are much improved and this encourages us to be prouder of our Chinese nationality,” said a veteran from Beijing after voluntarily going to the cinema (“Xi Jinping Takes Leading Role in Hit Propaganda Film Extolling ‘Amazing’ China”).

Recently, communist propaganda has resorted to increasingly enchanting techniques to catch the attention of audiences as transversal as possible by co-opting certain aspects of local pop culture, from rap to cartoons. Yet even if modes of expression change, the same cannot be said of the substance, which still sees red nationalism as the leitmotif in all the most popular “Made in China” film productions. In 2017, according to “boxofficemojo.com”, the box office was dominated by *Wolf Warrior 2*, a vindication of Chinese special forces in Africa as well as China's all-time most successful film (\$854 million). The following year was the turn of *Operation Red Sea* (\$575 million), a film celebrating the evacuation operations carried out by the Chinese Navy to save foreign citizens stranded in an imaginary Arab country. Enthusiasm for the genre is such that at the end of the year the state body supervising the film industry announced the conversion of five thousand cinemas all over the country into “People's Cinemas”, in other words intended exclusively for screening patriotic films.

It must be added that as early as the summer of 2017 the government had decided to broadcast a short film trailer titled “光荣与梦想——我们的中国梦 Glory and Dreams - Our Chinese Dream” in all the country's cinemas with the opening scenes of the films (“《光荣与梦想——我们的中国梦》：中国广电总局首支公益广告正式发布-高清版 《Glory and Dreams - Our Chinese Dream》：National Radio and Television Administration's Public Good Advertisement Officially Released - HD Version”). The trailer only lasts about three minutes but the intention is clear and linear: celebrate China in all its power. This is the “surprise” that has greeted Chinese theatergoers since 1 July 2017: the government decided to screen a propaganda spot before every film. The pivotal words used by the party were included in the clips, such as “the core of the values of socialism”, and other slogans that are part of the “Chinese dream” of the

President of the People's Republic of China and General Secretary of the Communist Party Xi Jinping.

In order to implement the project in the most appealing and painless way possible, the State government administration that controls the press, publications, radio, film and television products - which also produced the commercials - hired some of the most popular Chinese stars, such as Jackie Chan, Fan Bingbing and Angelababy. One of the four adverts, for example, featured Donnie Yen, one of the characters who appeared in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016), who read some of the maxims of Chairman Mao Zedong. At the beginning of the video, Li Bingbing, who was in the cast of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014), said in an angelic tone: “It matters little what you do. The important thing is not to disappoint our country, our society, our people and your family. This is how you will contribute to achieving the Chinese Dream.” Nevertheless, the Chinese were not convinced by this approach: many people arrived deliberately late at cinemas precisely to avoid the advert. The government certainly did not like this kind of awareness.

4.5 *American Dreams in China* by Peter Chan

2013 Chinese drama *American Dreams in China* (中国合伙人 *Zhōngguó héhuǒrén* — literally, “Chinese business partners”) directed by Peter Chan thoroughly captures the spirit of the Chinese Dream. The movie is set in the 1980s, when China’s dynamic, idealistic and animated college students dreamed of adventure, such as studying in the U.S.. The story portrays the ambition of three Chinese students who wish to not only go to America, but also to become famous or successful; it recounts their loves and sorrows, and the sacrifices they must make to achieve their dreams.

Qingdao actor Huang Xiaoming 黄晓明, plays a student from humble origins, Cheng Dongqing 程东青, whose parents hail from an impoverished rural Chinese family. After taking three times the national college entrance exam, the *gāokǎo* (高考), with the hope of changing his fate, he is ultimately admitted to the famous “Yanjing University”,

a reference to Peking University in Beijing, where he meets Wang Yang 王阳 and Meng Xiaojun 孟晓骏.

Meng Xiaojun, played by Deng Chao 邓超, comes from a family of intellectuals; both his father and grandfather have studied in America, making it natural for him to follow in their footsteps. Tong Dawei 佟大为 plays long-haired Wang Yang. He represents a quintessential westernized college student during China's reform and opening period, when the country tolerated liberal views toward foreign cultural influence. He is obsessed with Hollywood movies, writes poems, and dates Lucy, an American girl played by Claire Quirk.

Cheng Dongqing is considered by Meng and Wang a *tǔbiē* (土鳖, literally a "ground beetle"), that is, nothing more than a country bumpkin who works diligently yet has neither a little of imagination nor aspiration. In the movie, Meng tells him: "If you truly want to change the world, to change the people around you, and to change your own destiny, there is only one place to go: America" (中国合伙人 *American Dreams in China*). Cheng is inspired by Meng's words to apply to U.S. universities.

After a few years, Meng Xiaojun obtains the permission to go to the U.S. and walks out of the U.S. embassy with a visa, vowing never to return to China: "U.S.A., here I come!" (中国合伙人 *American Dreams in China*). On the other hand, the applications of Cheng Dongqing and Wang Yang are rejected and Cheng is left with no choice but to become an English lecturer at his school. But it is precisely this rejection that sets him on a path that no one could predict: ironically, since then, he will help a lot of Chinese students to go to the U.S..

To assist his girlfriend Su Mei 苏梅 (Du Juan 杜鹃) while she tries to apply for U.S. universities, Cheng does his best to tutor English outside the university. Naturally, once she receives a visa and moves to America, their relationship shrivels up. There is a scene, much later in the movie, in which she re-encounters Cheng with her half-white child, making Cheng remember of their sour past together.

Professionally speaking, things get complicated for Cheng. He gets sacked from his job as a lecturer for his unauthorised private teaching and, with no other options, Cheng plans to use China's first KFC restaurant to start a private English-tutoring business, with the purpose of keeping costs as low as possible. In the meantime, it's Wang Yang's

turn to go through heartbreak: Lucy chooses to break up with him and to return, alone, to America. Broken-hearted, Wang cuts his hair and burns all his poems since, as he tells Cheng: “no one will publish them anyway” (中国合伙人 *American Dreams in China*). Suddenly, he becomes aware of the fact that he is not the unorthodox rebel he thought he was, but simply ordinary, like everybody else. Wang decides to become an English teacher as his friend Cheng and to join him in his business. To him, the yearning spirit of the 1980s, characterized by reverie and high expectations, is gone.

Across the Pacific, Meng Xiaojun’s fantasies of changing the world seem to be vanished. He ends up cleaning dishes at a restaurant, struggling to make ends meet. Upon a visit home, Meng sees the success of the new English tutoring school business of Cheng and Wang, who show up in a fancy limousine to pick him up from the airport. At this point, Meng decides to join his friends in the school, leaving his experience in the U.S. behind. They choose to name the school “New Dream”, with the aim of helping the dreams of Chinese teenagers come true and, in a short time, it becomes the largest private school in China, with more than two thousand students sending their applications to U.S. universities.

As the company grows, the trio deals with both personal and professional challenges. The toughest moment is when New Dream is sued by a New York for plagiarizing its materials, and in particular for allegedly stealing its TOEFL exam papers to help New Dream’s students with their applications to U.S. universities. The legal proceedings test the friendship between Cheng and Meng.

This might be the film’s weakest part, certainly the most melodramatic; but there is a scene, in a New York boardroom, in which Cheng Dongqing delivers a particularly striking line: “Chinese students are extremely adept at taking exams. You can’t imagine what they are willing to go through to succeed. You don’t understand China!” (中国合伙人 *American Dreams in China*). Cheng speaks these words in English, and you can nearly visualize Chinese audiences standing up and applauding. Perhaps, this dramatic moment constitutes the emotional climax of the film, capable of distracting viewers from the slightly nationalistic undertone.

American Dreams in China, according to “boxofficemojo.com”, grossed 600 million RMB (\$87 million). The movie was reportedly inspired by the story of Yu Minhong 俞

敏洪, also known as, Michael Yu, Xu Xiaoping 徐小平 (Bob Xu) and Victor Wang 王强, co-founders of New Oriental, the most famous education company in China. In real life, the company was denounced by Educational Testing Service (ETS) for copyright infringement, making the case a landmark among intellectual property lawsuits between Chinese and American companies. Today, former Beijing University English teacher, Michael Yu, represented in the movie by Cheng Dongqing, is the president of New Oriental and one of China's most distinguished public speakers. While in 2011, Victor Wang and Bob Xu, the real-life versions of Wang Yang and Meng Xiaojun, founded ZhenFund, China's largest angel investment fund.

The film also presents a calculated selection of music, including Hong Kong band Beyond's single "Boundless Oceans, Vast Skies 海阔天空" and "The Story of Time 光阴的故事", from Taiwanese singer Lo Ta-yu 罗大佑, representing an historical moment in which mainland China, just after reform and opening, started to welcome Taiwanese and Hong Kong cultural imports.

There is also a reference to the origins and early diffusion of Chinese Rock 'N' Roll in the late 80s, represented by the songs "Rock 'n' Roll on the New Long March 新长征路上的摇滚" and "Greenhouse Girl 花房姑娘", by Cui Jian 崔健 who is considered "Father of Chinese Rock" that launched rock music in China in those years.

In conclusion, *American Dreams in China* does not simply recount the turbulent journey of three businessmen, but it shows the aspiration of a whole generation of Chinese people who, after the Cultural Revolution ended, recognized the opportunity of a new beginning and dared to try their best to achieve their dreams. It is, de facto, a celebration of China's first group of *gètǐhù* (个体户), that is, Mainland-born entrepreneurs who come of age during the 80s and that have then become internationally-renowned business leaders. In particular, "dotcom magnates" such as Li Yanhong 李彦宏 (Robin Li), co-founder Chinese search engine Baidu; Ma Huateng 马化腾 (Pony Ma), co-founder of internet service provider colossus Tencent; Sohu founder Zhang Chaoyang 张朝阳 (Charles Zhang) and others like Ma Yun 马云 (Jack Ma), president and co-founder of Alibaba Group, all of whom were, by their own admission, inspired by the long list of American successful entrepreneurs and managed to reach their own

“American Dream” in China, making their fortunes in notoriously U.S.-dominated fields.

American Dreams in China is therefore a film about sacrifice, effort, reward. As Cheng Dongqing teaches to his students: “When you fall into water, you won’t drown; but if you stay in the water, you will. You have to swim, and never stop” (中国合伙人 *American Dreams in China*).

CONCLUSION

Although China and U.S. are very different, it is possible to find some analogies between these two cultures. An interest in each other’s cultures has only very recently become visible, for the most part, due to commercial reasons. The rise of China as one of the world’s leading economies along with the very large number of potential Chinese consumers is probably the most obvious factor that pushed the two countries to study the respective cultures and business attitudes in order to seize new profitable opportunities.

As discussed in the first chapter, the efforts of U.S. companies in examining and assimilating Chinese language peculiarities and consumer buying behavior generated huge rewards in terms of brand awareness and approval rating. On the contrary, it is evident that considering China simply as another market, ignoring the country’s language and cultural differences has proven to be a wrong approach. Relying on the consolidated success and image abroad of a particular product or brand, as many proud foreign companies did, is not sufficient. Actually, it could be even counter-productive as we have seen. When it comes to China, a completely new cultural perspective is needed, otherwise there is the risk of ruining one’s brand reputation towards one of the world’s largest markets.

A major example of cultural approximation generated by economic reasons has been pointed out in chapter three in which it has been explained why U.S. Film Industry needs China, and vice versa. Hollywood saw in the fast-growing Chinese middle-class a big opportunity to sell their movies and, at the same time, receive funding from Chinese companies interested to participate in the business. For this reason, American Studios’

directors had to adapt their movie characters to Chinese tastes making them more numerous and more well-mannered, for example. In general, they had to change their way of conceiving films, making them longer and more twisty basically by adding two acts to the three acts of traditional western narratives. Obviously, in turn, these substantial changes went to the detriment of western audiences' movie conventions, generating controversies.

On the other hand, in short time, Chinese entrepreneurs realized the high potential of movie market and decided to invest in it by acquiring large stakes in American movie production companies or directly take over some of the most famous Hollywood Studios, with the purpose of learning their valuable know-how. Chinese government, as it has also been detailed in chapter two and four, did not just stand by and watch. In order to maintain control over Chinese people and, in particular, over potentially menacing cultural influences contained in foreign movies, the Communist Party chose to adopt restrictive measures such as limiting the number of foreign films admitted to the country (only 34 each year) and supporting preventive censorship. As a matter of fact, Chinese censors retain the right to cut any troublesome reference to social or political themes which are in contrast with the government's ideas or denigrate Chinese stereotypes, in general.

It was to be expected that these socio-economic questions would generate debates and that, sooner or later, they would escalate into more serious cultural conflicts. This is how, in a short time, U.S. and China ended up in the middle of a real culture war. Truth is that both sides want to lead but by following separate strategies. It is a comparison between two different mentalities which have been developed throughout the history of their country. Today, U.S. and China may have found themselves contending the role of world's 21st century superpower but, certainly, they got there by taking very different paths. In actuality, the objective of this conclusion is also to highlight the key points of these two diverse trajectories and ascertain that critical differences are, nevertheless, rooted in the history of the two countries. So, it was fairly predictable that cultural clashes would have arisen. It must be always remembered that China is an ancient civilization with 5,000 years of history, while the United States have less than 250 years of existence. This difference in historical background has profoundly affected the vision that both countries have about the world. In fact, the Chinese generally think in cyclical

terms, since the history of their country is delineated by the rise and fall of dynasties. Sequences of prolonged good and bad periods which could last for centuries. On the contrary, the United States tend to see history in a linear fashion. Ever since 1776, the country basically only moved in one direction: towards greater national power and individual success. Therefore, American politicians think of progress as the natural order. Furthermore, at the basis of the U.S. ideology is that “all men are created equal” and have the same inalienable rights. The unconditioned American faith in freedom and democracy, universal values which should (theoretically) be applied everywhere, stems from this creed. The Chinese, on the other hand, are more particularists. For them, what is right for the world is not automatically right for China, and vice versa. These different mentalities are the foundation of two opposite approaches concerning the intervention in foreign conflicts and the preservation of human rights. By the way, U.S. revolve around the ideas contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Throughout history, millions of people became American citizens by living in the United States and accepting those principles. On the contrary, China's vision is much more based on ethnicity and what really represents “being Chinese”. Apart from the latest citizenship and nationality restrictions applied by Trump administration, “becoming American” was considered a relatively quick and easy process. Of course, applicants had to satisfy certain requirements such as being resident in the U.S. for five years (three if married to a U.S. citizen), showing a “good moral character”, demonstrating knowledge of the Constitution and also pass a citizenship test but, thereafter, even the children of naturalized citizens would, as a direct consequence, be Americans. However, moving to China or marry a Chinese citizen would not easily make you or your children Chinese. Conversely, it would be a very intricate process that even if it ended up earning Chinese citizenship, it would automatically annul previous citizenship since Chinese law does not recognize multiple citizenship status. Hence, the two countries have also different suppositions concerning key concepts such as citizenship, nationality and immigration. Another point is that U.S. focus attention on the rights of the individual while China emphasizes the interests of the community. The difference between American individualism and Chinese communitarianism inevitably alters their ideas concerning the role of State. The Constitution of the United States says that individual liberty and justice need to be preserved at all costs and places restrictions

on the powers of government. China instead has a long history of civil wars and bloodshed, so it is more understandable to argue that a powerful State is the best guarantee against anarchy and disorder. In the U.S., it is common belief that this Chinese rhetoric only mirrors the interests of the Communist Party. But, in reality, this necessity of an authoritative and reliable lead has its roots in China's distant past. In fact, while American leaders' emphasis on individual rights can be traced back to the War of Independence in the 18th century, on the contrary, China's need for a strong State dates back to the Warring States period, which began in 475 BC. So, different attitudes towards the State generated contrasting visions on the key factors that hold a society together. But it can be argued that, throughout history, the Communist Party had also been encouraging the Confucian tradition, which attributes great value to a sense of hierarchy and obligation, as fundamental prerequisite for the proper functioning of society. However, this cultural heritage has implications for international relations still today, since it influences the vision of Chinese government concerning how to correctly handle relations with their smaller neighbors.

In conclusion, the vastness of China has always affected the way in which the country conceives the outside world. In this case, finally, there is a strong resemblance to the United States. Truth is that both countries share the same “Middle Kingdom” mentality, that is, being sure of standing (metaphorically) at the centre of the world. This idea has its roots in China's past. Historian Gordon Kerr described it as “the extraordinary conviction of the Chinese people that their land is at the center of everything” (1). This conviction trembled during the “century of humiliation” which occurred between 1839 and 1949 when imperialism by Western Powers and Japan overthrown China. But having resurfaced, China is now once again accused of restoring a “Middle Kingdom” mentality, especially in its way of treating the rest of Asian countries. In the meantime, the U.S. have become more and more convinced of its role as world's sole superpower as well as beacon of light to other nations. American foreign policy is still based on the credence that the country is perceived as the “indispensable power” which has the task of securing global order.

It is comforting to learn that U.S. and China share at least one natural instinct which is, beyond any doubt, encoded in their cultural DNA. The problem is that, whereas both countries look at themselves as the “Middle Kingdom”, they cannot both be right.

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