

Griffith Asia Institute

Regional Outlook

ASIAN-WESTERN FILMS – WHERE THE EXOTIC
MEETS THE FAMILIAR: CHINESE IMAGES IN THE
WORLD CINEMA AND CO-PRODUCTION

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Asian – Western Films – Where the Exotic Meets the
Familiar: Chinese Images in the World Cinema and
Coproductio

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1 Introduction

When Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) was first launched in 16 theatres in the USA in December 2000, no one could predict that this film would change the direction of Chinese films over the following ten years. This film is a remarkable international Chinese-language coproduction. It was co-financed by a Chinese mainland studio, Hong Kong enterprise, Taiwan's film corporation and a branch of a Hollywood studio. It was directed by a Taiwanese-American director, Ang Lee, and featured a cast of Chinese, Hong Kongese and Taiwanese actors. It was distributed by a Japanese-owned distribution company, Sony Cinema Classic. This martial arts film not only became the first Chinese movie to win an Academy Award, but also harvested approximately US\$ 128 million in the American film market (Internet Movie Database Inc. B., n.d.). Despite these facts, this Chinese language film was unexpectedly not as popular with filmgoers in Chinese speaking lands, such as in mainland China and in Hong Kong. However, the film's success in the West has inspired many Chinese filmmakers to shift their strategy from the domestic market to focus on "East-meets-West". They began to be involved in more and more international co-productions in order to launch in the international market. "We do not need capital, but we do need a market. That is why we co-produce movies," is the Chinese film businessman's true voice. Wang Zhongjun, CEO and chairman of Huayi Brothers which is the biggest private film production company in mainland China. Huayi Brothers invested in the film *Forbidden Kingdom*¹, a 2008 American martial arts-adventure film starring Jackie Chan and Jet Li. Huayi Brothers was the first Chinese film company to invest in a Hollywood English-speaking movie, and the film gained distribution rights in the greater China region. The film soared to the top spot in its debut week in the United States and broke the box office record by overseas films taking of US\$128 million, although it seems that domestic Chinese audiences do not appreciate this mixed-blood blockbuster. The film is a typical East-meets-West film; there is major Chinese content in the film but the dialogue is in English; the American director and the leading Chinese cast co-operate in the film; the film was financed and produced by the US and Chinese companies jointly and was distributed globally.

When considering the reasons for such big differences between Chinese movies and Western films in the way of expression, different social backgrounds should be the general and decisive reason. To put this in perspective, the art of the Chinese movie is affected in many aspects by culture and tradition,

¹ This a typical western Chinese adventure, a discovery made by a kung fu obsessed American teen sends him on an adventure to China, where he joins up with a band of martial arts warriors in order to free the imprisoned Monkey King.

including emotional expression, narrative methods, style of performance, education awareness, and so on.

It can be seen that the interaction between Hollywood productions and their Chinese counterparts (or East and West) challenges the specific perspectives offered by capitalist regimes of production that are rooted in stable national identities. This cooperation could be a win-win deal, but it is still in the experimental stage.

It is a fact that since early in the history of the cinema the USA has been far and away the largest exhibition market for films. No other single country can simply match it², and European attempts to create a united multi-national market to rival the US market have so far made slow progress. With such a firm basis, the Hollywood industry can simply afford to spend more on its films than films in most other countries. Expensive production values help create movies that have international appeal, in part precisely because they are blockbusters of a type that are rarely made anywhere else. However, in recent years, Hollywood's loss of audience in regional areas such as Hong Kong and India, in the face of competition from a vernacular and popular local cinema, suggests that there are other communication and cultural systems waiting to be commercially tapped in the same way that Hollywood has tapped the West. The East Asia market of China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Vietnam might well provide such a system. China, with more than one-fifth of the world's population, has its own strict policy for local movie industry protection, especially after joining the World Trade Organization as a developing country³. Also, Hollywood films, as basically international European products, have problems competing successfully against commercially orientated popular East Asian and Indian products. Appreciation of entertainment may well be a cultural matter. Thus, it is significant for Western filmmakers to understand and borrow the Eastern image in order to approach the target market in these circumstances.

This chapter will begin with the history of the Chinese image, and its shifts on the cinema screen, especially in relation to American film history, in order to understand the Western audience's acceptance of the Eastern image, and its influence. The chapter will then discuss contemporary Chinese cinema in the international market and its status in the West. An understanding of these points will give insight to the central argument of this chapter, which is the co-production between the West and the East and the inherent challenges.

² By the late 1990s, India had overtaken Japan and America as the producer of the largest number of feature films per year (800-1000) ,but the international influence still cannot reach the level of Hollywood in the US.

³ In 2001, China joined WTO and in order to protect the domestic film industry, the government initially only allowed 20 overseas films to be imported and distributed in domestic cinemas per year.

Basically there are three elements which fit together to show the whole picture of Chinese cinema and Chinese elements in global cinema in the history of Western culture. The first element can be considered to be the export of pure Chinese movies to global markets. The first Chinese influence on the global market can be traced to the fifth generation directors in the 1980s, together with other directors from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Well known directors such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige and Wang Kar-wai (Wang Jiawei), as well as other Chinese directors maturing in recent years such as Zhang Yuan and Jia Zhangke, together with the rapid development of the Chinese economy, brought more and more Chinese productions to global cinemas. The second element involves Chinese images in western films. In fact, the history of Chinese images in Western movies is as long as the history of film itself. As early as 1890, the American company, Mutoscope, made two brief subjects on the visit of a Chinese official, Li Hongzhang, to New York City. Later in 1919, the film *The Broken Blossom* was considered to be the greatest work of D.W. Griffith ever released in the West, despite the fact that the Chinese character was performed by a Caucasian man in full make-up. During the more than one hundred years of motion picture history, Chinese images in Western directors' hands have been manipulated into many classic types, negative and positive, reflecting the attitude of the times towards China and the historical political balance in the world. The third element, also the most interesting one, is the "Western Chinese movie". This refers to those who produce Chinese movies in English, aimed at Western audiences or the global market. The earliest example of this type of co-production would be the motion picture *The Good Earth* made in the 1930s. This film was the first formal Hollywood film co-operated with the Chinese government, despite the fact that the film was fully produced in Los Angeles, and the main characters were all played by non-Asian actors. Later, winner of nine Academy Awards, the film *The Last Emperor*, made in 1987 and directed by the Italian, Bernardo Bertolucci, opened a new chapter in this type of co-production. All Chinese characters in this film were played by Chinese actors, and spoke in English although the scenes were shot in China. On one hand, these days thanks to the temptation of big profits and much investment from overseas, Chinese filmmakers are eager to work with Western crews to produce English language blockbusters. On the other hand, many censored topics still remain on Chinese bureaucratic film producing system's black list, such as the background relating to the Cultural Revolution and issues regarding religion. This raises the subject of the current research project, which links the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards, the Catholic Church, and the last foreign missionaries in China. Targeting Western audiences and an investment market, the freedom to create the screenplay and the search for global investors are the main reasons for producing this screenplay in English. Not only are the Chinese interested in this model of co-production, there is a trend towards co-production between the West and the East, especially in the area of Western-Asian film making in the current process of globalization.

Therefore, the main purposes of this chapter is to analyze the existing model of East-West movie co-productions in order to build up a new model of Western-Asian co-production that could overcome existing problems and gain acceptance in the global market. The screenplay "The Last Foreign Nuns in

China” is an English language work that concerns China and it has historical precedents. Potentially it could be produced as western-Asian co-production.

By conducting studies on a range of typical Western made oriental films, it is possible to show the cause of the difficulties in reaching the global target audiences in both the East and the West. Based on the case studies, it can be summarized that “culture, identity and language” would be the main focus in the East-meet-West/Western made Eastern co-productions. During the dissemination of the films across different countries, there is always much confusion and misunderstanding of real information due to the differences among the target audiences and their multi subjective interpretations of the contexts. In the conclusion of this chapter, several suggestions will be made which attempt to solve these problems for Western filmmakers who aim to maximise the profits from both the western and eastern markets, through co-producing Asian-English films.

2 The Early Years: China on the American Screen

The very earliest motion pictures shown all over the world were of a newsreel or documentary variety. Recording in motion pictures events and places of interest these began to appear around 1900. In American film history, among the early motion pictures which have been identified from the records of the United States Copyright Office, are a number dealing with China (Jones, 1955). In 1896 the American Mutoscope Company issued two brief features on the visit of a Chinese official to New York City — these being *Li Hung Chang at Grant's Tomb*, and *Li Hung Chang Driving through 4th and Broadway*⁴. In 1902, this company and the Biography Company also released several films on China — *Ch-Ien-Men Gate, Peking*, and *Street Scene, Tientsin*. From such films as *Chinese Procession* (1898), *Scene in Chinatown* (1903), *Chinese Laundry at Work* (1904), it can be seen that the life and customs of Chinese people have been portrayed on American screens from the earliest days of motion picture history.

By 1910 fictional entertainment had become the primary product of the motion picture industry, and China and Chinese people continued to appear as subject matter for some of these film productions (Jones, 1955).

In 1917, a significant film on China appeared produced by D.W. Griffith, *Broken Blossom*. This film was based on Thomas Burke's story *The Chink and the Child*. D.W. Griffith chose Lillian Gish as "White Blossom" and Richard Barthelmess, a Caucasian, to play the role of "The Yellow Man". This film was set in Chinatown and highlighted the contrast between the setting and the gentleness and poetic sensitivity of the Chinese and the coarseness and brutality of the English villain. The philosophy and the

⁴ According to the international movie database, there were several films were made to record Li Huang Chang's (Li Hongzhang) visit to America, including *The Arrival of Li Huang Chang* (1886), *Li Huang Chang Driving Through 4th St. and Broadway* (1896), *Li Huang Chang at Grant's Tomb* (1896), *Li Huang Chang 5th Avenue & 55th Street. N.Y.* and *Li Huang Chang* (1901) also known as *Li Huang Chang and Suite: Presentation of Parlor Mutoscope*.

way in life of the Far East were portrayed extremely favourably in this film, and was the starting point for the production of a series of films with Chinese themes.

However, in the early stage of American film production, most of the films involving Chinese elements typically portrayed white supremacy and racism. For the most part, Hollywood's depiction of Asia has been inextricably linked to the threat of the so-called "yellow peril".

Rooted in medieval fears of Genghis Khan and Mongolian invasions of Europe, the yellow peril imagery combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East. Given that knowledge about Asia and Asians has been limited in Europe and America, much of this formulation necessarily rests on a fantasy that projects Euroamerican desires and dreads onto the alien other. Thus, as Western nations began to carve Asia into colonies, their own imperialist expansion was in part rationalized by the notion that a militarily powerful Asia posed a threat to "Christian civilization" (Marchetti, 1993, p.2).

This aspect of the yellow peril fantasy existed throughout early cinema history and was displayed in movies such as *Shadows* (1922), *The Chinese Parrot* (1927), *Chinatown Charlie* (1928), *Chinatown Nights* (1929), *Chinese Blues* (1930), *Chinatown After Dark* (1931) and the numerous serials based on the character of Dr. Fu Manchu. In these movies, Chinatown as a background for a mystery or crime scene always appeared.

The number of films dealing with China or prominently featuring Chinese locales or characters began to increase noticeably in mid 1925. It was in this period that the Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan films had their beginning. Aside from the characterization of the Chinese villain Fu Manchu and the Chinese detective Charlie Chan, these films were important inasmuch as they reinforced the mysteriousness of all things Chinese. The kind of mystery presented in the Fu Manchu films is related to evil, mysterious shadows, secret sliding panels and strange drugs with oriental powers. On the other hand, the Charlie Chan films showed the Chinese people to be solving mysteries, to be gentle and polite. However, despite the fact that both of the characters are defined being as "Chinese", their identities are branded more as "Chinese-American" rather than "Chinese-Chinese".

Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government--which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man (Rohmer, 1915).

- Nayland Smith to Dr. Petrie in *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*, Chapter 2

In the book, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu*, the author Sax Rohmer, indicates the character's outlook as "Shakespeare" and "Satan", both of whom are considered to be popular Western icons, although he also mentioned "the yellow peril incarnate in one man" to emphasize the Asian race of the character. This could be one important reason why the audience and original readers of the book accepted the film's adaptation using a white man pretending to be Asian in this film. Also, the character of Charlie Chan is a detective living in Honolulu. Although he is a Chinese-American and the role was originally played by a Japanese, it was not until a white actor was cast in the title role that a Chan film met with success, beginning with 1931's *Charlie Chan Carries On*, starring Swedish actor Warner Oland as Chan.

This interesting phenomenon, of Asian characters being played by Western actors, may be due to a lack of Asian professional actors, although in the Charlie Chan series there is always a regular Chinese face, Keye Luke, who played Chan's "Number One Son". The attitude toward ethnic origin in many films seems designed to blur the distinction between Asian and Caucasian characters during this period. In 1916, the film *Broken Fetters* told the story of an American artist who fell in love with an enslaved Chinese girl. In order to rescue her, he gambled away all his money trying to win enough to buy the girl's freedom. When a quarrel erupted in a gambling house, he was able to rescue the girl. In the end, the girl turns out to be the daughter of the former American Consul in Shanghai. Therefore she actually is a white American. In another movie, *East is West* (1930), when little Ming Tong, a Chinese girl faces family resistance to her marriage to white hero Billy Benson because of her Chinese identity, she finds out she is in fact the daughter of a famous American missionary, and she was stolen when she was a baby. The problem of miscegenation was settled in another movie, *Son of the Gods* (1930) in a similar way. A Chinese man falls in love with an American girl, but they face a challenge once the girl "discovers" he is Chinese. However, in the end they discover this Chinese man was adopted son by his family and he actually is a Caucasian American. A happy ending ensues.

Despite the fact that this series of "Chinese or American identity drama" offered by screenwriters creates a reasonable solution for settling the question of ethnic background in films, and maybe this was not easier to accept for local audiences in the early 1900s, the films actually break basic logic by intentionally confusing the two races, Caucasian and Mongoloid. American audiences not only accepted that white people dressed in Chinese traditional clothing and even had a pigtail, masqueraded as Chinese, but also were persuaded that an Asian person could be revealed to be a white American. On one hand, this simply reflects the serious, desperate situation of miscegenation issues in America — the fact that except by changing the whole Chinese identity, a mixed marriage could not be condoned by society. On the other hand, it also could be considered to be a method by which filmmakers could reduce ethnic resistance when by depicting people other than white Americans as the main characters in movies.

At the same time, during the 1930s a more realistic portrayal of China began to be evident on the American screen. In the early 1930s China claimed the attention of the world with the Manchurian

problem⁵. With China at the forefront of the news, factual short documentaries on China began to appear in greater number on the American screen. There is a record of at least sixteen short documentaries featuring China being produced during the 1930s. However, the first important, serious attempt to portray China realistically in a Hollywood feature film was in *The Good Earth* (Jones, 1955, p.20). This film embodied a completely new approach to the subject of China.

When Pearl Buck's novel, *The Good Earth*, appeared in 1931, it immediately raised much attention. In 1933 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer began its production of the film of this book. In order to make the film, MGM studios actually entered a formal agreement with the Chinese government. The agreement states that "the film should present a truthful and pleasant picture of China and her people" (Jones, 1955, p.45). The film crew went to China to shoot footage for the movie, and rented 500 acres of land in Hollywood. A replica was built of the Chinese landscape, everything possible was done to recreate the "feel" of China, even to an imported water buffalo which was used to turn the Chinese water wheels. The director tried to make everything as authentic as possible. Ironically MGM, even though it was pursuing the real China, refused to consider the Hollywood star Anna May Wong for the leading role, choosing instead the European actress Luise Rainer. She was required to make up as a "yellow face", though she was asked by MGM executives to screen test only for the villainous role. Wong decried "you're asking me - with my Chinese blood - to do the only unsympathetic role in the picture, featuring an all-American cast portraying Chinese characters" (Quan, 2004). This was the American standard and the only screen role at that time for a "true" Chinese image.

It was in the early 1940s that a realistic representation of China became definitely and clearly established on the American screen. In June of 1941, the March of Time company issued its film, *China Fights Back* which identified the true background of China's battle against the invading Japanese. During the next two years, several full-length documentaries on China's role in the war were shown on American screens, including *The Battle of China* (United Artists, 1942) and *Ravaged Earth* (1943). Factual short films based on newsreel footage continued to appear — e.g., *Inside Fighting China* (United Artists, 1942); *China* (The March of Time, Forum Edition, 1945); *China Carries On* (20th Century-Fox, 1945), etc (Jones, 1955).

⁵ The Japanese invasion of Manchuria by the Kwantung Army of the Empire of Japan, beginning on September 19, 1931, immediately followed the Mukden Incident. The region was the historical homeland of the Manchus, who founded the Qing Dynasty of China. In 1931, the region was seized by Japan following the Mukden Incident and in 1932, a puppet government was created, with Puyi, the last Qing emperor, installed as the nominal regent and emperor. The Japanese occupation of Manchuria lasted until the end of World War II. This part of history was also revealed in the film, *The Last Emperor* (1987).

3 Chinese cinema in the Global Market after 1949

Tracking history, the entire period between 1949 and 1972 (the time of re-establishment of the diplomatic relationship between China and America) was an era of “hostility” towards China, partly due to the North Korean and the Vietnam Wars. The reality is that since the Communists gained control of the Chinese mainland there have been many films which have attempted to give a picture of what is going on in China, because of the anti-foreign sentiment in China. However, the theme of Communist China as being an American enemy, as well as being regarded as an enemy of many capitalist countries has received some attention in film, mostly in films dealing with the Korean War, such as *Retreat Hell!* (Warner Brothers, 1952) and *Hell and High Water* (20th Century-Fox, 1954).

It should be noted that films from China have been exported to the Western world ever since films began to be made in this country. These motion pictures, which early in the last century were traditional Chinese dramas recorded on film, had rarely been shown outside of Chinese-American circles (Jones, 1955). In the hundreds of motion pictures produced which deal with China or with the Chinese, a number of clear stereotypes have appeared and reappeared over the years. Motion picture stereotypes have special importance and significance because, through visualization, explicit stereotypes become particularly potent because they have an implied reality. Thus, the evil mandarin (Dr. Fu Manchu), the detective (Charlie Chan), the Chinese peasant (*The Good Earth*), the Chinese Cook and the Chinese Laundryman, etc. had been popular on the American screen before the Cold War, however, Chinese protests against unfavourable characterizations took many forms. To begin with, pictures characterizing China or the Chinese in an unfavourable light were not permitted distribution in China, or unfavourable portions were cut before the films were shown. As a more extreme method of protest, the Chinese government (far long before the PRC government) on a number of occasions threatened to close the offices of certain motion picture companies in China and to ban distribution of their films. In several instances, in bringing protest to bear on what the Chinese considered to be particularly offensive films, this threat was temporarily carried out. The Chinese government brought pressure against a few studios in an attempt to prevent the distribution of such films outside the United States. It also notified Chinese diplomatic representatives throughout the world to make official protest against the showing of films objectionable to the Chinese government. The Chinese government has a history of film censorship.

After US President Nixon visited China in 1974, curiosity about China again rose in the Western world. The 1970s to 1980s were the heyday of Chinese movie making. Large film studios and movie-making companies began to form in Hong Kong. At the same time, the first Chinese movie star, the legendary,

Bruce Lee, went on to make movies for Hong Kong studios and for Hollywood that literally swept Asia and the rest of the world into a kung fu mania. With the death of Bruce Lee in 1973, Chinese movie making reached its peak and then went into a decline. During 1966–1976, movie making fell into the doldrums in mainland China, and nothing but propaganda movies were made during the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution. In Taiwan, a small but fledging movie making industry was slowly taking off. Movies made in Taiwan during this period were mostly romances. A few Taiwanese actors and actresses, such as Lin Chin Hsia and Lin Feng Chiao, achieved great fame throughout Chinese speaking countries during this period.

Before any further discussion on the Chinese image in the global cinematic market and its history is entered into, what Chinese cinema is must be clarified. In Zhang Yingjin's (2004) book *Chinese National Cinema*, he mentioned many scholars who extensively questioned the term, "Chinese cinema". Is the word "Chinese" in the term "Chinese cinema" meant as an ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political or territorial marker? In ethnic terms, mainland China consists of a majority of Han people and fifty-six officially classified national minorities, while Taiwan claims a long history of aboriginal people, and Hong Kong has a multiracial, multi-ethnic population. In cultural terms, although most Chinese may choose to identify themselves with a civilization thousands of years old, in reality they are aware of regional differences such as those existing between northerners and southerners on the mainland, or mainlanders⁶ and islanders in Taiwan. Perhaps the most striking difference is in the widespread, diverse, often mutually unintelligible dialects found all over China. Thus, in linguistic terms, Mandarin cinema stands in opposition to Cantonese cinema in Hong Kong and the Taiwanese-dialect films in Taiwan. Furthermore, since 1949 in political terms, ideological and institutional differences in the governments of mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan have left indelible marks on film productions from what are often referred to as the three Chinas.

The point at issue here is that simply "Chinese" will not ever be an adequate marker. After all, critics like Yueh-yuYeh can suggest no better term to replace "Chinese cinema" than "Chinese-language cinema" (*hua yu dian ying* or *zhong guo dian ying*) (Berry, 1998, p.135). Ideally, like "literature in Chinese", "Chinese-language cinema" should be a broader term than "Chinese cinema" as the former may include Chinese-language films directed by people from the Chinese diasporas in Southeast Asia, Western Europe and North America. However, "Chinese-language cinema" may also be a narrower term because it is misleading to assume that commonalities in Chinese cinema are found in its common linguistic features.

Not only did many of these Chinese movies take Chinese speaking society by storm, they also took Asia, and eventually the rest of the world, by storm. Chinese movie making talent had arrived on the world screen, although most of the film stayed in art house screen circles rather than expanding commercially.

⁶ Migrants, especially from the mainland due to the domestic wars between the CCP and the National Party. These people are known as "Wai Sheng Ren" by local residents.

Filmmakers like Chen Kaige, Tian Zhuangzhuang, Wu Ziniu, He Ping, Huang Jianxin and Zhang Yimou, many of whom were graduates of the Beijing Film Academy, were branded as the fifth generation. They brought the Chinese wave into the global cinema. Films like Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) and Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* (1987) reached international audiences and gained critical acclaim around the world.

Even though they don't necessarily emulate the fifth generation directors, many Chinese directors compete in restaging and reinventing exotic, erotic rituals and other ethnic cultural elements. To a great extent such "competition" was triggered by western interest in, or demand for, such a genre. Film festivals, as the trend setter, in turn provide a platform for this trend of ethnography to circulate. Hence Dai Jinhua laments that, "winning such prizes has become a prerequisite for film making; western culture, artistic tastes, and production standards related to international film festivals now determine our purely national films" (Dai, Wang & Barlow 2002) .

In *Inferring Meaning: New Cinemas and the Film Festival Circuit* (1994) Bill Nichols studied national cinemas in the festival circuit and stated that film festivals become a crucial means of mediation through which new films are encountered. For him, film festivals enable the cultural reception of an alien culture in which discovery processes operate. Like Nichols, Julian Stringer (2001) defines international film festivals as "situated sites", where festival films are developed as a new genre to be prepared for the Western spectator. Dudley Andrew (2002) conceptualizes the notion of new genre/new cinema as a desire to satisfy the needs of international film festivals that sought to define new trends in cinema.

As clarified by Zhang Yingjin (1996), directors of ethnographic films are fully aware that in order to make a palatable visual feast to satisfy Western expectation and convention, they have to include "formulaic but nonetheless essential or magic ingredients" such as:

...primitive landscape and its sheer visual beauty (including savage rivers, mountains, forests, deserts); repressed sexuality and its eruption in transgressive moments or eroticism (read "heroism"); gender performance and sexual exhibition (including homosexuality, transvestism, adultery, incest)...and a mythical or cyclical time frame in which the protagonist's fate is predestined. Through the recreation and reorganization of these elements, ethnographic cinema was made on a reproducible basis. Dai Jinhua perceptively observes that, "when the narrative of history ceased to be a deconstructive retelling based on a (Chinese) reality, it became a (Western) postmodernist replication" (Zhang, 2006).

Bill Nichols stresses that there are two aspects of "a different culture" standing out in the festival literature which prove tempting to festival-goers: for one thing, the "artistic maturity" that will eventually place an emerging director in an international fraternity of auteurs; for another, "a distinctive national culture" that marks itself off from the dominant Hollywood styles and themes (Nichols, 1994).

In the case of the Chinese cinema, nonetheless, worldwide acclaim for the “artistic maturity” of the fifth generation directors is intricately intertwined with the “distinctive national culture” they have depicted in their works.

Around the same period, the distinctive talents of Hong Kong names such as those of Jackie Chan and John Woo were familiar with lots of younger Hong Kong moviegoers through video cassette, despite the fact that most Hong Kong movies never received theatrical release beyond the key Asian regional markets (Fu & Desser, 2000, p.4).

Anne T. Ciecko in her essay *Transactional Action: John Woo, Hong Kong, Hollywood* mentioned the global status of Hong Kong films in the 1980s:

.....to the Western spectator, Hong Kong film is often perceived as synonymous with the popular in its most degraded sense, for example, “chopsocky” martial arts films as opposed to the “art” films of the Chinese “fifth-generation” filmmakers” (Ciecko, 2000, p.20).

This negative attitude to Hong Kong films was popular in the 1980s, thanks to the large number of poorly made Kung Fu movies produced following the death of Bruce Lee, who was the first man of Chinese descent to achieve Hollywood superstar status since the 1970s (Fu & Desser, 2002, p.3). Nevertheless, whatever its critical reception in the West, Hong Kong cinema has increased in popularity, along with Hong Kong’s booming economy, since the 1980s.

Tsui Hark, another great Hong Kong director, directed and produced a few blockbusters around the legends of an early kung fu master. These led to a revival of martial arts movies, which had gone into a downtrend ever since the death of Bruce Lee in 1973. Not only were Chinese martial arts movies a great showcase for Chinese kung fu, many of them had gripping storylines, great acting, strong production and strong social themes.

Unlike the closed mainland film market, since the 1980s Hong Kong cinema had to face challenges in competition from Hollywood in the domestic film market. On one hand, some Hong Kong filmmakers improved the production quality of Hong Kong films by co-producing with China. On the other hand, some well-educated directors explored new commercial genres combining Hollywood and local Hong Kong content, which caught the cineaste’s eyes. The films of Hark Tsui and John Woo, together with those of other Hong Kong new wave directors, pushed Hong Kong back to the filmic forefront. Hoards of younger moviegoers outside of Hong Kong watched the Hong Kong-made action movies from video outlets, cable television, and select festivals (Yau, 2001); especially those of John Woo, which returned Hong Kong to the forefront of the film world. With the commercial distribution of *The Killer* (1989) in the United States and on mainstream pay-TV, first a bootleg then a legitimate video market for distribution of Hong Kong films was established in the 1980s and early 1990s (Fu and Desser, 2000, p.4). Finally, John Woo was invited to Hollywood to direct major Hollywood studio pictures in the early 1990s. Meanwhile, Jackie Chan also became a talented action film actor and director. His films

integrate traditional Hong Kong Kung Fu and comedy genre with Hollywood commercial elements, and are popular with both Eastern and Western audiences.

While the action directors and stars such as Tsui Hark, John Woo, Jackie Chan moved to Hollywood for mainstream action, Wang Kar-wai's art films became the new landscape of Hong Kong cinema and were considered indications of the culture of contemporary Hong Kong (Marchetti, 2000). With *Chungking Express* (1994), *Fallen Angels* (1995) and *Happy Together* (1997) being distributed in America and in other overseas markets, Wang was gradually accepted by Western audiences and critics by right of his unique personal art style.

During the 1990s, the Chinese film industry experienced a restructure from top to bottom. In the face of dramatic economic changes on the Chinese mainland, even the noticeable art film directors of the fifth generation had to begin to consider film market value rather than pure artwork, under the era of the planned economy.

By some measures, the film industry continued to flourish in the 1990s with many films collecting international awards. Successes include Chen Kaige's *Farewell My Concubine* which shared the Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival with Australian Jane Campion's *The Piano* in 1993, Li Shaohong's *Blush* (1994), He Ping's *Red Firecracker Green Firecracker* (1993) and Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). Meanwhile, some of these directors also attempted commercial works, but without gaining the positive results they expected. Following *Farewell My Concubine* in 1993, Chen Kaige cooperated with the same investor, the Hong Kong Tomson Corporation, and cast the same actors, international movie star Gong Li from the Chinese mainland and Leslie Cheung from Hong Kong, to produce the commercial feature *Tempress Moon* (1995). Nevertheless, this film, which was officially banned by the Chinese government, was a failure in the overseas market. Meanwhile, Zhang Yimou became conscious of the importance of commercial production after the shared-revenue blockbusters came to China. He tried to direct two films *Shanghai Triad* (1995) and *Keep Cool* (1997) as commercial experiments in the mid 1990s, both of which encountered criticism and failed in the commercial market (Ma, 2004). After this failure, he turned back to directing art-films again. The nineties also saw the rise of the latest wave of Chinese cinema from the so-called sixth generation of filmmakers with the work of directors like Zhang Yuan, *East Palace West Palace* (1996), Wang Xiaoshuai, *Beijing Bicycle* (2000) and Jia Zhangke, *Unknown Pleasure* (2002). These films were well received at international movie festivals and were able to be distributed in the global market. Between 1990 and 1994, approximately one fifth of the annual slate of feature films were co-productions made with a range of countries including Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, the United States, France and Italy (Alliance, 2004).

4 Commercial Testing of Chinese Film vs Remaking by Hollywood

After two decades of intensive, exhausting, tit for tat negotiation, in 2001 China finally joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). Indeed, the importation and co-production of films accelerated the evolution of the Chinese domestic film industry under the current climate of globalization in the film world. It hastened the catching up of Chinese filmmakers to world film business concepts. A Hong Kong, Chinese mainland and Taiwan co-production film titled *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (2000) set a very good example for Chinese filmmakers to follow in the commercial route to the international market. The production of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* is a watershed in recent Chinese film history. Co-production martial arts films changed the attitudes of Chinese filmmakers, giving them a taste of the commercial world, and this film was also the first big feature that directly involved the Hollywood studios. Moreover, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* combined the genres of Chinese martial arts and Western special effects, as well as combining an oriental historical background with a modern love story or sexual appeal, leading Chinese filmmakers to imitate this on a large scale. It enhanced the co-operation between directors on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong in order to approach overseas film markets, especially the American film market, although the original intention of Sony-Columbia for the release of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* was opening the huge Chinese domestic film market and to gain the right to invest in Chinese film (Chow, 2005).

Following the *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* phenomenon, Chinese mainland and Hong Kong filmmakers suddenly began to focus on commercial martial arts blockbusters. One of the first commercial martial arts films, *The Touch* (2002) retained the character of the heroine and the photography of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, and invited some well-known American film stars, in addition to being financed to the amount of US \$20 million more than the US \$15 million budget of the former Oscar winner (Hansen & Alexandra, 2001). This film was aimed at the North American film market and was only for distribution in the Western world. The dialogue in the film is mainly in English, despite the story being placed in western China. Although, this film did not impress the movie fans in China, it was successful overseas as a commercial production. Furthermore, there were many historical costume films produced after *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. When Zhang Yimou's *Hero* was released in 2003, it was a record-breaking commercial success in both the domestic and international markets, and has been praised in the popular media for its artistic sophistication and mesmerizing visual qualities. Zhang's film, as part of what one critic (Chan, 2004) calls the "global return of *wuxia* (martial arts)" also epitomizes the two-way traffic between Hollywood and Chinese cinema, particularly in terms of the adaptation and transformation of conventions and aesthetics within an export-driven cultural industry. Following *Hero* (2002), the martial arts film reinforces the Chinese images onto a global screen. Many

Chinese directors have managed entry into the American mainstream cinema market with commercial blockbusters, rather than showing in art house cinemas as in the past. There is a long list of these commercial successes, including Zhang's *House of Flying Daggers* (2003) and *The City of Golden Armor* (2006), He Ping's *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* (2003), Chen Kaige's *Master of the Crimson Armor* (2005), the Hong Kong new wave pioneer Hark Tsui's *The Legend Of Zu* (2001), *Seven Swords* (2005) and the comedic master Stephen Chow *Shao Lin Soccer* (2002), and *Kung Fu Hustle* (2004). In America the two most popular Chinese Kung Fu stars' productions were Jackie Chen's *The Myth* (2005) and Jet Li's *Fearless* (2006). All of these co-productions were financed with overseas capital, produced with Hong Kong companies and made on the Chinese mainland.

During the last 20 years of the 20th century, a new generation of Chinese-language film directors in the above areas has arisen. This new generation has realized the cultural features of modernity and a century of cultural integration. In the grim context of globalization, an imminent task for Chinese filmmakers is to recognize their existing environment so as to promote harmonious and durable development in their industry.

Compared with the European and African markets, it is obvious that Asia has the greatest box office potential, especially after the re-opening of the Chinese market. Since the 1990s, more and more Asian images have appeared in Hollywood films in order to minimize "cultural discount" and achieve better box office returns from Asian countries. Both Jackie Chan and Jet Li have become major Hollywood action movie stars. Gong Li, Michelle Yeh and Zhang Ziyi have been appearing on mainstream screens and attracting a greater Asian audience. Because of the focused attention on China and its dramatic booming economy, Chinese elements have been extensively embedded in Western films. Hollywood directors since the 1990s have already noticed the benefits of borrowing pure Chinese culture in order to remake a Western-taste Chinese blockbuster and to begin to change the interests of Western audiences.

The Walt Disney Productions' film, *Mulan*, is based on a Chinese legend in the form of an ancient Chinese poem titled the *Ballad of Mulan*. The movie marked the first time this studio had drawn on an Asian story to make an animated feature, Disney's thirty-sixth. Nevertheless, with movie-goers across the world as its target, Disney gave the Chinese legend a universal spin by Americanizing and Disneyfying it. The production of *Mulan* adopted the same "global-localization" logic. On one hand, the theme of *Mulan* caters to the Orientalist imagination of the East, especially that of ancient China, among the Western audience. On the other hand, as a well-known Chinese legendary character, Mulan would undoubtedly attract a large Asian audience. *Mulan* has been criticized for distorting the original spirit of the Mulan legend by being tailored to the Disney style. The film displays Disney's flexibility and readiness in scouring and borrowing from foreign cultures beyond Europe. This is a common strategy for this Hollywood major studio, making use of the cultural repertoire to secure its global entertainment business goals. Earlier films of a similar nature include *Aladdin* (1992) which was adopted from Middle

Eastern culture, and *The Lion King* (1994) with a background in Africa. The Disney Studio invested US\$100 million and five years to make *Mulan*. It made meticulous efforts to present Chinese culture in the best light in the film, with a determined respect for the original Chinese story. The studio sent a large production team of over a dozen people to conduct two-month-long field research in China. It invited Asian-American and Chinese artists as consultants, overseeing costume design, background drawings, calligraphy and visual effects. In fact, the very image of Mulan was refined to resemble Chinese-American actress, Ming-Na Wen, who provided the speaking voice for the character in the movie. The Hollywood studio made a greater effort to create this ABC (American Born Chinese) film as a popular icon. This animated film is a great success as a “Hollywood-Chinese” legend and is the first step for the West-made-East production. Thanks to the bad fame of the Chinese government’s censorship, it is much easier to make an animation rather than being a film with live actors.

Mentioning government censorship here, the regulations set by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television(SARTF) in China place excessive restrictions on co-production, such as percentage limits on the number of overseas actors/actress, restrictions on time slots for broadcast, restriction on length, quotas of co-produced programs-in addition to the complexity of content examination(Zhu, Keane & Bai, 2008, p.185). The risk of co-production, apart from the limitation of content, is the uncertainty of China’s reviewing system, which is deeply rooted in authoritarianism and its ideologically determined. Co-production between China and the west certainly provides a mix of opportunity and risk.

Moreover, pure Chinese language movies have been mentioned previously. In spite of the fact that they were made by the mainland fifth generation directors in the 1980s and other directors from Hong Kong and Taiwan, they were exported to the global markets. These movies were welcomed by overseas audiences due to their artistic value and perceived exoticism. Created as commercial blockbusters after China joined the WTO, they targeted the global market by packaging Chinese culture as being mysterious and oriental; however these Chinese films are not the focus of this paper.

5 Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, one of the elements discussed involved the term “Chinese images in Western films”. Tracking the history of Chinese images for more than a hundred years, and seeing the journey of Chinese characters in American films and on the global screen to the current time, we see a long list of typical Chinese images. These can be positive or negative, good or evil, healthy or ill, smart or stupid, right or wrong, as the images are seen in classic Hollywood films of the early golden era, during the cold war, in the era of globalization. Chinese elements have been blended into Western creations, at their best often resulting in films that are interesting, exotic and offbeat, as well as being informative. The best of these films give outsiders a glimpse of what life is, or was, like in a different culture in a different era. Jackie Chan first succeeded in establishing a foothold in the North American market in 1995, with the worldwide release of *Rumble in the Bronx*, attaining a cult following in the United States that was rare for movie stars from Hong Kong. In 1996, his film *Rumble in the Bronx* which cost US\$7.5 million to make received US\$32 million at the American domestic box office. Chan’s first huge blockbuster came when he co-starred with Chris Tucker in the 1998 buddy cop action comedy *Rush Hour*, grossing US\$130 million in the United States alone (Internet Movie Database Inc. C., n.d.). This film, or the series the film engendered, made a star of Jackie Chan. In these films, Jackie Chan won the audience by his breathtaking stunts, combined with Western-style humour. However, his abilities in the action/comedy genre didn’t work in another film made in Hollywood “*Around the world in 80 days*”. This film with a budget of only US\$ 110 million gained US\$ 24 million from the American domestic box office and a total of US\$ 72 million worldwide (Nash Information Service, 2010). This story has been adopted by Hollywood twice before, both times achieving great success. However, in the Chan version the story was changed from the adventure of an English gentleman to that of a Chinese hero with a mission to save his village’s treasure from gangsters. It is interesting to note that when the adventurers arrive in China, the Englishman faces a communication barrier with the villagers, but not with the governors or the gangsters. In the plot of the Chan version of the film, a letter is written from the Chinese server to his Chinese father, and in order for the master, or the audience’s convenience, this was written in English. The mixture of English and Chinese in the narrative of the film makes the plot illogical and uncomfortable to watch. It is also interesting that few critics in the West have pointed out this weakness. Most of the feedback denounces the acting, the humour and the action (Puccio, 2005; Thompson, 2004). Apparently, a Western audience accepted that Chinese people spoke fluent English in the 18th century in China, since they were able to communicate in English perfectly on the big screen in *The Good Earth* in the 1930s, *The Keys Of The Kingdom* in the 1940s, *The Last Emperor* in the 1980s and *Mulan* in the 1990s.

Moreover, as mentioned above, as early as 1937, the producers of *The Good Earth* attempted to create a real depiction of China to present to Western audiences. This film achieved worldwide success, and the main actress Luise Rainer, won the best actress award in a leading role at the Academic Awards, acting in her role as a Chinese farmer's wife. Western audiences ignored her non-Asian appearance enjoyed the fluent English script and her talent as an actress among hundreds of supporting Chinese actors. MGM indicated that during the 1930s to 1950s the film *The Good Earth* had been shown in 183 different countries, and viewed by an estimated 42.5 million people internationally, as well as being seen by approximately 23 million Americans (Jones, 1955). However, it is now difficult to gauge the reaction of Chinese audiences in the same period since no historical record has been found which proves either a positive or negative reaction to the roles played by American actors in Chinese flavoured films. In fact, there is no record that this Hollywood-Chinese film has ever been officially shown in China.

Although it is difficult to gauge the reaction of Chinese audiences to co-productions between Hollywood and China (Jones, 1955), to understand the Chinese audience's attitudes to Western made Chinese films, another American Academy Awards favourite *The Last Emperor* (1989), was the first officially coproduced film made by an overseas production company collaborating with a Chinese company. Several years after Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy, in 1987 Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci arrived in Beijing and made the first, fully English speaking Chinese narrative film, *The Last Emperor*. This is the true story of Aisin-Gioro Pu Yi, the last ruler of the Qing Dynasty. Told in flashback, the film covers the years 1908 to 1967. The screenplay was inspired by Pu Yi's teacher, Reginald F. Johnston's book, *Twilight in the Forbidden City*, and Pu Yi's own biography *The First Half of My Life*. Most of the members of the film crew were from the West, including the leading actor, American born Chinese, John Lone. This European (co-produced by Italy, UK and France) Chinese film cost US\$25 million to produce, and showing on the American screen only, it received approximately US\$44 million at the box office (Internet Movie Database Inc. D., n.d.). Surprisingly, this film remains the number two position in a long list of "Chinese movies"⁷, right behind Chinese director Zhang Yimou's *Jet Li's Hero* (2004) which grossed US\$ 53.6 million at the box office. This film was openly released in China in the late 1980s. In fact at that time, local governments, schools and other organizations organized people to go to the cinema to see the film, however it did not make a great impression on local audiences. Many of the audience members from Beijing (the main setting of this film) in interviews recalled that there were several discrepancies in the film compared with what they knew to be historical fact. *The Forbidden City*, which they are familiar with, was shown in scenes unfamiliar to them, and the original soundtrack is in English rather than Mandarin. The interesting points they raise here have also been affirmed by Chinese audiences who watched the film after the China Central Television (CCTV) movie

⁷ According to the website "the-numbers.com" which is the American box office record website managed by Nash Information Services, LLC, *The Last Emperor* has been listed as "China's movie".

channel broadcast it several times, and after the wide release of the DVD version⁸. This is a Western Chinese film which is not accepted by Chinese audiences but gained wide approbation and acceptance by western audiences.

Interestingly, a question should be raised here, “why must the script be in English?” Why do westerners remake other national images by presenting them in English rather than in their own language if the filmmakers are pursuing the reality of the foreign culture? Obviously the main reason is because the English speaking directors find it easier to communicate with the cast in order to give directions if everyone speaks English. However, the real reason behind this is the requirement for as wide a distribution as possible.

Tom O'Regan (1992) in *Too Popular by Far: On Hollywood's International Popularity*, examines in depth the concept of the Hollywood film industry as being a national, cultural, textual and aesthetic industry, or a system in relation to its international popularity. Pointing out some advantages which seem to be enjoyed by Hollywood over other countries' national film industries with his generalisation that the English-speaking countries are economically advantaged, O'Regan's assessment is that one of the factors would be Hollywood's English-language nature.

Another advantage enjoyed by Hollywood is that it produces for wealthy and populous English-language speakers. This gives it immediate access to other English-speakers without recourse to subtitling or dubbing (O'Regan, 1992).

Hollywood's dominance “can therefore be explained by the fact that the English-speaking market for video and television products has much greater spending power than do markets comprised of other linguistic populations” (Wildman & Siwek, 1988, p.136). In effect, the higher budgets of wealthy language groups buy audience acceptance in other linguistic markets, thus offsetting the natural preference for “material in native tongues” (Wildman & Siwek, 1988).

However, the international market no longer equates to an English speaking market due to the shifting world economic pattern, leading to an awkward situation for co-productions which catered to a Western audience only. The aim of the West-made-East movie is to highly target the global market including the Asian market. The Hollywood blockbuster *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) ,⁹ adapted from

⁸ **There are several online discussion boards showing the different opinions from Chinese local audiences about this film. See attachment.**

⁹The film opens with Chiyo (Suzuka Ohgo as a child, Ziyi Zhang as an adult) being taken from the small fishing village of Yoroido and sold to the proprietress of a Kyoto geisha house. At first, Chiyo's goal is to find her sister, Satsu, from whom she has been separated, but after a brief reunion, they are parted forever. Chiyo's plans to become a geisha - a "moving work of art" who sells her skills, not her body -

the bestselling novel of the same name,¹⁰ tells the story of a Japanese geisha during World War II. It is simple to understand why Western producers were keen to make this purely Asian story into a big Hollywood blockbuster. There is a long tradition of studios producing big budget films from bestselling novels and the Asian market is the target for production companies. Although *Memoirs of a Geisha* is a purely Japanese story, rather than choosing Japanese actresses, the three leading actresses are Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi (*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Jet Li's Hero*), Michelle Yeoh (*Tomorrow Never Dies*, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*), and Gong Li (*Farewell My Concubine*), due to concerns about acceptance in the global market. Despite the fact that the US\$85 million budgeted film received gross US\$57 million and total worldwide gross of US\$161 million at the box office, the critics of this film in Asia gave negative reviews (Internet Movie Database Inc. E, n.d.).

Japanese audiences have been very critical about the problem of using non-Japanese actresses in the leading roles, although these above mentioned Chinese actresses are very popular in Japan thanks to the success of their previous Chinese roles. The Japanese audience members believe the story did not reveal the true nature of Japanese culture as represented by the geisha. Also, a Japanese story in which everyone speaks English rather than Japanese also raises questions. A New Jersey-based Japanese correspondent, Akihiko Reisen, wrote a dense article on the movie. Interestingly, he mentioned the use of English dialogue as being one of its main drawbacks, but not for the obvious reasons. Having everyone speak English turned the story into a "flat-sounding play," he wrote, "as if it were being put on by a high-school troupe" (Brasor, 2005). The dominant negative criticism from Japanese audiences seems to show a very similar attitude to that of Chinese audiences towards the film *The Last Emperor*.

To some Chinese, the casting was offensive because they mistook "geishas" for prostitutes. The eight year long Sino-Japan conflict World War II had left its mark on the Chinese people. Due to anti-Japanese feeling in China at that time, the Chinese government postponed the cinema release of

are dashed when she runs afoul of Hatsumomo (Gong Li), the house's most consistent earner. For her infractions, she is denied the chance to attend the geisha school and must perform menial chores, but others see something in her. The Chairman (Ken Watanabe) recognizes her as a girl of amazing character and offers her a simple kindness. Chiyo vows to become a geisha and make him her patron. A celebrated geisha, Mameha (Michelle Yeoh), takes Chiyo under her wing. When Chiyo is ready to make her debut, she is given a "geisha name" – Sayuri – and introduced into society, where she must compete with Hatsumomo for the best clients.

¹⁰The novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* was a huge success. It was on the New York Times bestseller list for 58 weeks, sold more than 4 million copies in English and has been translated to 32 languages. It inspired a fascination with anything to do with geishas. Models at fashion shows in Paris and Milan showed kimonos and obis after the book came out, and tourists came to Japan seeking insight into the world of the geisha.

Memoirs of a Geisha several times. The conclusion is obvious. This Hollywood made Japanese film was a total failure in the two most important Asian markets because of the cultural conflicts and lack of understanding of audience's particular properties.

Feedback from the American domestic audience presented the different attitudes towards this film. Few critics in the US mention the Chinese cast issue, therefore it can be easily understood why such a movie made a few decades earlier might have used white actresses in "yellow face", like for example, in *The Good Earth*. The process of Hollywood directors choosing Asian actors is well under way due to the development of modernization and globalization.

However in *Memoirs of a Geisha* the director's decision about the dialogue being in English is more problematic. Zhang and Gong are not adept at this language and their delivery of it and their cadence is frequently incorrect. The castigation of this East-meet-West film is largely in regard to the English language acting in the film, except in instances when scenes rely on the non-verbal aspects of the performances. Spoken with heavy accents and inaccurate pronunciation, the dialogue sounds forced, the performances are proved through the actors' expression, which exudes honest inhabitancy of their roles. Even the leading actress, Ziyi Zhang, admitted that the most difficult part about her role was the English (Wadler & Schwartz, 2004). The same problem also occurred for the leading male role, played by Japanese actor Ken Watanabe who mentioned that "dialogue itself is not so difficult, but understanding the meaning behind the words and what the director and the scriptwriter want is a challenge" (McNeill, 2007).

Due to the poor English-language performance, in post-production one of the tasks of the sound editors was to improve the cast's English pronunciation. This sometimes involved piecing together different clips of dialogue from other segments of the film to form new syllables from the film's actors, some of whom spoke partially phonetic English when they performed their roles. Ironically, the achievement of the sound editors earned them an Academy Award nomination for Best Achievement in Sound Editing. In a similar case, the sound edition of *The Last Emperor* won the Oscar for Best Achievement in Sound Editing. At least, in the 1980s the America-born leading actor's English was fluent enough for everyone's taste.

Certainly there are many successful cultural adaptations. Take the British director Danny Boyle's Indian film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2009) for instance. In the US market alone this US\$14 million budget film recouped an investment total of US\$141million. This film also won an Indian audience with the release of two versions, in English, *Slumdog Millionaire* and in Hindi, *Slumdog Crorepati*, with dubbing by the original cast (Sinha, 2009). Indian English film is a special case, since English is the country's official language. Western audiences, even Chinese or Japanese audiences, would not have an issue in accepting an English version with subtitles. Moreover, the local Indian casts with their Indian accents vividly of bring Indian culture to Western and Eastern audiences. Interestingly, there are still some Indian

critics who criticize the character of the slum boy, saying that his speaking of perfect English does not ring true. However the Hindi version of this film settled this problem, and gained greater popularity in India. It not only allowed access to the large non-English speaking population, but also raised 50% more at the box office in the domestic market (Sinha, 2009).

During the dissemination of a film across different countries, there is always much misunderstanding of the real information due to the differences among the target audiences and their multi-subjective interpretations of the contexts. For example, the Chinese language film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which is highly popular in the Western world but which was not widely accepted by a Chinese audience. The distribution company actually lost over half million US dollars during the film's release in China. The Chinese audience in general considers this film to be missing vital ingredients. The Kung Fu scenes do not contain great visual effects, the love story lines are disappointing and the uneven Mandarin, spoken in strange accents by the various actors (the four leading actors are from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and America) are hardly enjoyable. John Pomfret, the former Beijing bureau chief of the Washington Post bluntly asserted, "*Crouching Tiger* took off in the United States because it was very Chinese, while it failed in China because it was too Chinese" (Kokas, 2011, p.52). This reveals the difference in audiences' psychology between East and West. The approach to oriental culture by Western production companies requires a better understanding of the Asian individual cultures, rather than a mixture. Each Asian culture has its own identity, even to a Western audience. It is possible to make the Western-Asian film in English in the current tide of globalization, however, in order to not lose the aesthetics, an ideal cast would be able to fully overcome the language barrier, or better still, be native of the target culture identity.

Michael. F. Mayer (1965) in his book *Foreign Films on American Screens* reviewed numerous European films imported to the U.S. Mayer analysed the cause of success or failure of these films in regard to the films' internal elements. He listed the particular aspects of exemplified films which he assumed to be what attracted the American audience, such as sexuality, interesting personality, humour, mystery and thrillers, spectacle, neo-realism, problems of day-to-day life including heartbreak and tears, escapism, or simply something different or perhaps bizarre. He concluded by saying that "the foreign film audience likes many of the same things that domestic film audience have liked over the years". However, this seems to be the weakness of his work as his analyses of the films' textual and cultural context is only at a general level. He also fails to provide any evidential material that could explain the preferences of the foreign films' audiences in America in relation to the audiences' cultural, social or historical backgrounds, which could have supported his conjecture. This might simply imply a potential difficulty in analysing any films' success in terms of the audience's preference in the context of their culture, a problem which this dissertation also encounters. From the investigation of the above case study, it can be summarized that there are three key aspects that should be emphasized in the West-meet-East co-production: culture, identity and language.

Culture is a large topic. It normally refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. It is not easy to consider and cover all of these in a film's creation. However, reproducing a moment in an Eastern culture in a western made movie, in order to targeting that culture's audience, some sacrifices must be made which may influence the story line or the plot itself.

Through an outsider's eyes, the cultural adjustment certainly needs adaptation. In *The Last Emperor* for a Chinese audience, *Memoirs of a Geisha* for a Japanese audience or *Slumdog Millionaire* for an Indian audience, local people can easily point out any instance of non-realism in the films. This may be hard to overcome, even though the filmmakers consult adequately with the locals. However, there are some issues in respect to cultural resistance which could easily be solved by re-editing and multi-endings, when the film is distributed to different nations. Take *Memoirs of a Geisha* for the Chinese market as an example. The central argument against it for the Chinese is linked to anti-war feeling in a scene in which the Chinese star Zhang Ziyi's character prostitutes herself to a Japanese character. In the Sino-Japanese war, a large number of Chinese women were forced to be "comfort women". This single plot line brought huge negative emotions in China, and raised extensive debate about whether this film should be banned. The production company's ignorance about historical conflicts between China and Japan partly led to this film's failure in China. If the production company could re-edit this part of the film and remove the issue causing conflict, this might reduce the Chinese audience's resistance. Similar situations not only appear in Hollywood blockbusters, even in productions from Hong Kong, in order to get into the mainland Chinese market, some sacrifices need to be made. For example, *Infernal Affairs* (2004), an indigenous film from Hong Kong studios, was not only a box office winner in Hong Kong, but also interested Warner Brothers in purchasing the re-shooting rights with an offer of US\$1.75 million. In the version released in Hong Kong, the evil character with multiple murders to his credit gets away under the nose of the police. To obtain distribution on the Chinese mainland, a more politically correct ending replaced this, featuring the man's arrest (Sala, 2003).

Even though the world is undergoing a process of globalization, national identity and linguistic independence still heavily influence the audience's acceptance. Therefore, the second point, the definition of "identity", in respect of a person's conception and expression of their individuality or group affiliation, should be distinguished.

Tracing the history, there are many examples which prove that Western audiences easily accept people of different nationalities representing other nations, therefore Western filmmakers in the past have not had a sense that they should distinguish the Asian culture particularly. In the Hollywood blockbuster *Anna and the King* (1999), a Hong Kong movie star, Chow Yun-Fat, was chosen as a Thai king. In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, three Chinese actresses played the Japanese leading roles. In the animation film

TMNT (2007), for the Japanese role to be dubbed into English, a Chinese actor's voice was used. It is not surprising that film producers consider certain Asian stars in order to attract their audience. However, from past experience, most Western filmmakers only consider the Asian stars' popularity in the West, rather than in their native culture or the appropriate culture represented in the particular film. It is certainly not because there is a lack of Japanese actresses with the ability to play the leading roles in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, but simply that the three Chinese actresses have a certain image in the Western world. It is not as easy as inviting an Australian film star to act as an American, Western producers neglect the cultural identity in each market in Asia. In reality, taking China, Japan and Korea as examples, these three major markets have entire different contemporary history, language and social values. A purely Western movie might be popular in the three markets at the same time, but for co-production relevance to their own culture, national identity plays a big role in audience acceptance. Western producers do not see or respect each country's strong national identity. They consider Asia, and especially the Far East as an integrated identity. This could explain why there are always several "old" faces which dominate all Asian films in global co-productions in recent decades, no matter where the story occurs. This is also one of the reasons for the failure in individual national markets of several West-made-East films in Asia. Therefore, seriously considering the national identity of the cast in order to make use of natives to represent their own cultural image is a way of enhancing a film's identity and gaining cross-cultural acceptance.

Last but not least, the English language co-production is presented to a non-English-speaking audience living in the culture of the film itself. In many cases, cultural-linguistic markets are emerging at a level less than global but more than national. These markets are based on common languages and common cultures that span borders. Although geographical closeness or cultural proximity helps media cross borders, language and culture seem more important than geography, as the example of Europe shows. It seems that people there and elsewhere tend to look for television programming, internet sites, and music that are culturally proximate, showing a desire for cultural products as similar as possible to one's own language, culture, history and values. Thus, even though people often like the cosmopolitan appeal of European and American television, movies and music, they tend to choose media from their own culture, or one very similar. This language barrier occurs in the Western world as well as between the West and the East. Language is a crucial divider of media markets, and of course this refers to the film market also. Therefore, the West-made-East coproduction filmmaker should take a lesson from other media market experiments, reconsidering the importance of language in order to please both markets in the West and the East. One possible solution is "dubbing". *Mulan* and *Kun Fu Panda* (2008), two Chinese-content animated films, have been fully accepted by Chinese audience after dubbing by local voices, as has *The Forbidden Kingdom* (2008) which was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, as previously mentioned, *Slumdog Millionaire* was dubbed into Hindi by the original cast for it to be shown in the Indian market. Although the language barrier is not the only problem facing Hollywood-Asian English film producers, dubbing certainly can raise the aesthetic level for the audience. Even re-dubbing the English version for release in the English-speaking market will help to increase the

interest of the local audience in order to settle any problems of poor pronunciation by an international cast. However, there is one last issue, which is that the cast of a film would possibly lose the opportunity to be nominated for international film awards, including the most influential, the American Academy Awards due to non-original voice casting. Normally, international film awards become a big part of marketing campaigns for movie promoters, however, the pros and cons of this will not be discussed further in this paper.

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