

**American Family Entertainment
and the Only Child Generation
in Contemporary Urban China**

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**Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
University of East Anglia
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Submitted April 2013

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor team, Mr Peter Kramer and Prof Mark Jancovich, for their always insightful suggestions and expert guidance. It has been a privilege and memorable experience to work with both of them. I am also grateful to Rayna Denison, who provided many comments and suggestions on my work during my upgrade panel. I would also like to thank Dr Melanie Williams and Dr Andrew Willis for their valuable feedback from the viva exam.

My special thanks go to the PhD students of my school, Erin Giannini, Oliver Gruner, Antonella Palmieri, Seb Manley, Vincent Gaine, Derek Johnson, Rachel Mizsei Ward, Heather Wintle and everyone else involved in the PhD seminars over the past years for their comments and suggestions on the papers I have presented in these seminars.

Lastly, but most of all, thanks to my parents, He Yuansheng and Pan Jie, my husband, Zhang Yu, for their unconditional love and support, without which this thesis would have never come into being.

Abstract

As a result of the economic reform which took place three decades ago, imported American family entertainment had gradually become an important part of the everyday entertainment for Chinese consumers. During the same period, a particular group of Chinese people, generally referred to as the post-80s or the only child generation, had emerged, grown up and become the main contributors to China's media consumption.

In this thesis, a study of the only child generation and the American family entertainment will be presented. The study sees the only child generation as groups of audience exposed to American family entertainment as the media, and the focus of this study is to understand the audience-media relationship between the two. As they are two objects emerged within their own social and cultural boundaries, the thesis will first tackle how the connection between the audience and the media was established. Then, the only child generation will be approached as a social creation. Findings on their social sophistications that are able to influence their relationship to media will be presented. Four case studies form the rest of the thesis. Each of the case studies will focus on one significant aspect of the generation's social characteristics and how it is connected to the group's receptions to media texts.

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Introduction

It is not very surprising that, up until the end of 2008, the world record keeper *Titanic* (1997) was still the most commercially successful film that had ever been screened in China,¹ but it may be unexpected to some that the second most successful film at the Chinese box office was *Transformers* (2007), the No. 30 in the table of all-time worldwide grosses at that time.² Why does it appeal so much to Chinese audiences? A report from *Beijing Review* sheds some light on this, pointing out that “people who are crazy for this film are actually not the kids, but those who were born in the late 1970s or the early 1980s”.³ An article from *Shanghai Daily* goes a step deeper, claiming that “their memories of the cartoon TV series *Transformers* in the 1980s attracted them to the film”.⁴ It is believed that, starting from 1988, Transformer cartoons and related merchandise had been gradually burned into the childhood memories of nearly a generation of Chinese people.⁵

The success of *Transformers* demonstrates the power of a special group of audiences in urban China. They belong to the generation of people who were born right after the establishment of China’s “One Child Policy” in the late 1970s. Lu Taihong, a Chinese professor of marketing studies, defines this generation as the

¹ Unless stated otherwise, China refers to Mainland China.

² The box office data come from: Box Office Mojo, *Worldwide Grosses*, <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/>> [accessed 13 Aug. 2008].

³ Anon., “Transformers in China: A 20-year Retrospective”, *Beijing Review*, 12/07/2007, <http://www.bjreview.com.cn/movies/txt/2007-07/12/content_69143.htm> [accessed 10 Apr. 2008].

⁴ Anon., “Cartoon spin-off tops Spidey box office”, *Shanghai Daily*, 17/07/2007, <<http://www.shanghaidaily.com/article/?id=323579&type=Metro>> [accessed 12 Apr. 2008].

⁵ The translated and dubbed version of *Transformers* (TV cartoons) was first aired in China in May 1988 by Shanghai Television.

Only Child Generation (OCG).⁶ According to his definition, the OCG is the first generation that has grown up under the reform and opening up era of China since late 1978, which also means it is the first generation that is exposed to foreign products such as American family entertainment in a massive scale. The Transformers phenomenon, which is only one of the many examples, indicates a long-term interaction between the OCG and American family entertainment. It makes me wonder how so strong a bond is formed. What does American family entertainment bring into the life of the OCG? What meanings do the OCG make out of the media messages in the entertainment? What is the relationships between the OCG and American family entertainment and why? Based on my studies of the above Transformers phenomenon and other cases that are all presented in this thesis, I want to argue that American family entertainment has a strong appeal for the OCG and plays an important role in their life, which is partly due to the internal development of China and partly due to the special qualities of American family entertainment.

The thesis starts with the study of American entertainment in urban china since 1978. As the first chapter, it investigates how the American entertainment products enter and perform in the Chinese market and summarises the key patterns during the last 30 years of their development in China. By means of analysing industrial data and reviewing relevant literature, this chapter not only provides an overview of the research background but also introduces the main issues that are relevant to my study of OCG's reception to American entertainment. The second chapter focuses on the Only Child Generation from a perspective that sees them as a social creation. By adopting a mediation model of the audience-media relationship, this chapter sets out

⁶ Lu, Taihong, Zhang, Hongming and Yang, Ji, "Zhongguo Dushengdai (Chinese Only Child Generation)", *China Marketing*, 05(2004), <<http://www.emkt.com.cn/article/285/28555.html>> [accessed 20 May 2008].

to form the schemata with which the OCG's reception to American family entertainment can be understood. Case studies are presented from Chapter 3 to Chapter 6 to reinforce my arguments. Each of these case studies has its own focus. Chapter 3 is a case study of *The Lion King* (1994) which is presented to support my arguments from social and family perspectives. As a representative piece of work by Disney, the film is also studied with a focus on Disney-branded entertainment products in China. A case study of *Mulan* (1998) is presented in Chapter 4, which focuses on female protagonists, female audiences and culture transitions in films. Chapter 5 covers the reception studies of *Harry Potter* series, which is linked with the OCG's education experiences. As the last to be represented in this thesis, Chapter 6 is the case study of *Transformers* series. It tackles Sci-Fi topics in films and nostalgia of OCG audiences and how they influence the reception of these films.

The rest of this chapter focuses on introducing the key objects and issues that are to be discussed in detail in the later chapters. Relevant works are also reviewed. Firstly, an overview of American family entertainment, Hollywood family films in particular, is given in the context of globalization. The Open Door Policy is introduced secondly. It is the reason why American entertainment products become legally available to Chinese consumers and inevitably influences the formation and status of contemporary Chinese media environment including the importation of entertainment products. Thirdly, the Only Child Generation is introduced. Popular arguments about this special generation are reviewed, which shows that the OCG has been brought to the attention of some scholars but is still insufficiently studied, especially when they are considered as audiences. At the end of this chapter, methodologies and resources that are used in the research are described. Contributions of this work are also stated in final section of the chapter.

Global Hollywood, American Family Film and China

“Hollywood is a place you can’t geographically define. We don’t really know where it is.” This is a famous comment given by John Ford when interviewed by BBC television back to 1964 and quoted by many in Hollywood related works suggesting that Hollywood, rather than a geographical location, should perhaps be best understood as a state of mind.⁷ People have long believed that Hollywood studios and their products are destined to go global. And they have. In 1998, Jack Valenti stated, “It is a fact, blessedly confirmed, that the American movies is affectionately received by audiences of all races, cultures and creeds on all continents.”⁸ In addition to seeing Hollywood as a globalized business, many have realised that it is also a symbol of American culture. In their first edition of *Global Hollywood*, the authors set out to explain the success of Hollywood, both nationally and internationally, from multiple perspectives on “Hollywood’s power and the immensity of US popular culture”.⁹ In *Global Hollywood 2*, an updated and enriched edition from the previous one, also includes Hollywood globalization with respect to China which is one of the major contexts of my research.

Film, like many other forms of entertainment, has both industrial and cultural aspects. Studies on Hollywood film in China are also focused on these two aspects and are sometimes mixed with political issues. On the industrial side, debates are often found to be around the competition between Hollywood and the domestic film industry. Jinhua Dai is among the first few Chinese scholars that warns the invasion

⁷ Rosen, Stanley, *Hollywood, Globalization and Film Markets in Asia: Lessons for China*, p.2-3, <http://sites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic152447.files/rosen_Hollywood.pdf> [accessed 10 July 2011].

⁸ Valenti, Jack, “Collapse of the Common Wisdom: How Movies Beat the Competition! A Recounting of a Very Good Year”, MPA Press Release, March 10, 1998.

⁹ Miller, Toby, et al., *Global Hollywood* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), p.1.

of Hollywood and its potential negative impact on the local film industry. She refers to Hollywood as “the wolf” and is deeply concerned about the fate of the already-weakened Chinese cinema.¹⁰ Similarly, Stanley Rosen, in his paper titled *The Wolf at the Door*, sets out to examine the impact of Hollywood blockbuster imports on Chinese film industry. However, he also points out that in the game between Hollywood and China, there are periods of optimism and pessimism on each side.¹¹ Ting Wang, in *Global Hollywood 2*, reveals that, the imbalance in box office between Hollywood films and Chinese domestic films is massive; however, due to the fact that the imports are based on shared revenue, the real return for Hollywood companies shrinks significantly. After all the tax, cut and other fees, there is only about 13 per cent from the box office left for the Hollywood distributors as opposed to their typical 40 to 50 per cent return elsewhere.¹² It is not a secret that the Chinese government is determined to keep the Chinese film market “relatively separate” from the free global market. According to Hong Yin, the Chinese government is likely to keep excluding film from trade liberalization for the foreseeable future. He further argues that, although it is not strong enough to “dance with the wolves”, if the government policies and measures, which claim to be imposed to maintain political autonomy, also act as industrial protections, the Chinese film industry still has time and space for self-development.¹³

¹⁰ Dai, Jinhua, “Tiaozhan dayu jiyu: Shiji zhijiao de zhongguo dianying (Challenge more than opportunities: Chinese film on entering the new century)”, a speech at National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature, January 6, 2002. <<http://www.china.com.cn/chinese/RS/99464.htm>> [accessed 10 July 2011].

¹¹ Rosen, Stanley, “The wolf at the door’: Hollywood and the film market in china from 1994-2000”, in *Southern California and the World*, ed. by E.J. Heikkila and R. Pizarro (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), pp.49-78.

¹² Miller, Toby, et al., *Global Hollywood 2* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.321.

¹³ Yin, Hong, *Kuayue bainian: quanqiuhua beijing xia de zhongguo dianying (Over the century: Chinese cinema in globalization)* (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2007), p.53-54.

In the context of culture, discussions often associate the global operation of Hollywood with “Americanization” which is also referred to as “Cultural Imperialism”.¹⁴ Many debates are based on this point of view. Wai-lim Yip argues that, to the deepest and widest extent, the cultural imperialism of the US is executed in China by means of Hollywood film.¹⁵ Some believed that the importation of Hollywood entertainment is causing the Chinese people to lose their cultural identities.¹⁶ Without completely opposing the above argument, it is also argued that, due to the censorship enforced by the Chinese government, all the changes have happened as ‘a result of Chinese decisions’ rather than of Western influence.¹⁷ Meanwhile, some are confident in resisting the cultural imperialism. It is claimed by Hong Yin that, it is hardly possible for Hollywood film to expel the enthusiasm of the Chinese people on their local reality, experience and culture. With such “cultural intimacy”, the domestic films are able to keep a foothold in the challenging market.¹⁸

In the list of worldwide box office grosses of all time, nine films out of ten can be put into the same category which includes big names such as *Toy Story 3* (2010), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2* (2011) and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011).¹⁹ This category is first defined and introduced by Robert Allen as a genre in a non-traditional sense named as “family film”. It includes realistic comedies, adventure fantasies, animated films and live action/animated hybrids and has become a “discursive marker for a set of film producing practices with the aim of

¹⁴ Miller, Toby, et al., 2005, p.64.

¹⁵ Yip, Wai-lim, “Colonialism, Culture, Industry and Desire”, in *Postcolonial Criticism and Cultural Identity*, ed. by Chingyuen Chang (Taiwan: Catcher Publishing Co., Ltd., 1998), pp.142-143.

¹⁶ Zhou, Shuo, ‘Lun waiguo dianying dui jindai Beijing shehui de yingxiang’ (The influence of Foreign Films in Beijing), *Journal of Capital Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, S2(2006), pp.75-76.

¹⁷ Starr, John Bryan, *Understanding China* (London: Profile, 1998), p.317.

¹⁸ Yin, Hong, 2007, p.52.

¹⁹ Box Office Mojo, *Worldwide Grosses*, <<http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/>> [accessed 13 Aug. 2010]

maximising marketability and profitability by achieving what can be called the cross-generational appeal”.²⁰ In fact, Hollywood family films are identified as the most successful products in the international film market, in both theatres and video rent/sale, since 1970s.²¹

As an important part of China’s American family entertainment import, Hollywood family film is the main object of my study. Among the first few imported Hollywood blockbusters, *The Lion King* (1994), a family film, became a great hit. It was so phenomenal that Chinese cinema of a period afterwards is referred to as the post-The-Lion-King era.²² From 2002 to 2010, over 50 percent of imported Hollywood films that are on a revenue-sharing basis are family films. China is one of the few countries in the world who do not have a film rating system. Instead, it imposes a strict censorship to prevent the production and importation of films that are considered to be overly violent or sexually explicit. Hollywood family film, avoiding such contents by nature, is the easiest to pass such censorship and become possible to be imported. What this study concerns is how Hollywood family film is marketed and received in China which has characteristics that distinguish itself from the rest of the global market.

Kristin Thompson said, “...it is virtually impossible to assess a national (film) industry in any given period without dealing with its attempt to counter American competition...”.²³ While impacting the local film industry, the globalisation of Hollywood is also promoting American business, culture, politics, lifestyle and

²⁰ Allen, Robert C., ‘Home alone together: Hollywood and the “family film”’, in *Identifying Hollywood’s Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, ed. by M. Stokes and R. Maltby (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 114.

²¹ Krämer, Peter, “‘The best Disney film Disney never made’: children’s films and the family audience in American cinema since the 1960s”, in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood*, ed. by S. Neale (London: BFI, 2002), pp.183-198.

²² Yin, Hong, 2007, p.333.

²³ Thompson, Kristin, *Exporting entertainment: America in the world film market, 1907 to 1934* (London: BFI Publishing, 1985), p.168.

ideology and is influencing the cultural identity and cultural preservation of its non-American recipients. Hollywood films have established their positions in the Chinese market, and in the hearts of Chinese audiences. They have influenced the past, are influencing the present and will, inevitably, to certain extent, influence the future of China. To understand what role they are playing on this one of world's now largest stages which they were previously shut down upon, it is necessary to first take a look at what made them possible to come back and what the environment was upon their return to the Chinese market.

The Open Door Policy, Entertainment Import and Chinese Media

Major Hollywood studios started to release their films in Shanghai as far back as the early 1920s. However, following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and particularly after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the Chinese market was completely closed to Hollywood films. Until the end of the 1970s when diplomatic relations between the PRC and the US were officially established, Hollywood started to see the opportunity to enter the Chinese market again. After the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee held in 1978, China finally launched the "Reform and Opening-up Policy". As an important part of it, the "Open Door Policy" which encourages foreign trade and economic investment, made it possible for American entertainment including the Hollywood films, together with other kinds of foreign products, to re-enter the Chinese market.²⁴

²⁴ Berry, Chris and Farquhar, Mary, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p.330.

Thanks to the restriction of film screening in the “Cultural Revolution” being lifted and the abundance of produced but not screened films accumulated in the previous decade, the Chinese film industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s was very prosperous.²⁵ A record high cinema attendance, which still remains unbroken today, was created during this period of time by Jet Li’s *Shaolin Si (The Shaolin Temple)* (1982).²⁶ By that time, domestic films were already not the only options for the Chinese audiences. There were also films imported from Japan, Indian and even from some European countries and the US, although most of them were old titles.²⁷

At the same time, televisions started to be found in more and more Chinese households and a massive development in television broadcasting began to take place in China. At the start of the development, the major problem was the lack of contents, especially after in 1979, China Film Distribution and Exhibition Corporation decided to stop supplying new feature films to all television stations who were then encouraged to import television programmes to fill the gap.²⁸ American television programmes were among the first batch of imports. In the 1980s, they were mainly imported by the China Central Television Station (CCTV). Those that were rejected by CCTV would often seek opportunities from local/provincial stations such as Shanghai Television. Some of the programmes still managed to achieve nationwide popularity even though they were not broadcast by the CCTV.²⁹ Junhao Hong, in his

²⁵ Shen, Yun, *Zhongguo dianying chanye shi (The History of Chinese Film Industry)* (Beijing: Chinese Film Bress, 2005), pp.203-204.

²⁶ Shaolin Si (The Shaolin Temple) (1982) created a record cinema attendance of 470 million; Refer to: Mtime, *Chinese Domestic Film All-time Grosses*, <<http://group.mtime.com/12781/discussion/253526/>> [accessed 12 August 2010].

²⁷ Zeng, Desheng, “Jiji kaizhan de dianying shuchu shuru gongzuo (Actively conducting film export and import)”, in *China Film Yearbook (1983)*, ed. by Chinese Film Association (Beijing: Publishing group of China Film Yearbook,1983) , pp.815-816.

²⁸ Guo, Zhenzhi, “Xinshiqi zhongguo dianshi de shinian (Ten Years of Chinese Television in the New Era)”, *Journalism and Communication*, 02(1990), 195-210(p.196).

²⁹ Hong, J.H., *The Internationalization of Television in China: The Evolution of Ideology, Society, and Media Since the Reform* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), p.61.

The Internationalization of Television in China, describes China's television importation of this period. This book also provides insights into the relevant policies, analysis of the industrial data and relatively objective observation of this part of history which are referenced in my study.

Compared to American television programmes, Hollywood films returned to China a bit later. As mentioned earlier, for many years since the beginning of film imports, only old titles were imported for their low costs. With the nationwide economic reform, the film industry itself was also undergoing a major change. As a matter of fact, since its golden age in the early 1980s, the Chinese film industry started to go downhill. The decade from 1984 to 1993 is recognised as one of the toughest times in Chinese film history, during which the Chinese cinema lost more than 60 percent of its attendance.³⁰ In order to re-activate the film market, in 1994, permission was finally given to the China Film Group Corporation by the China Ministry of Radio, Film and Television (MRFT, renamed as SARFT - State Administration of Radio, Film and Television in 1998) to release ten selected new foreign titles each year on a revenue-sharing basis, which brought to an end "the forty years' practice of buying old but cheap foreign movies". It also marked the re-entering of Hollywood films into the Chinese film market.³¹ Yun Shen in her *The History of Chinese Film Industry* and Ying Zhu in her *Chinese Cinema during the Era of Reform*, both provide a historical revisit to that particular period.

In November 1999, China and the United States finally reached a landmark agreement on the terms of China's entry into the World Trade Organization. According to the agreement, the number of films to be imported on a revenue-sharing basis was doubled to twenty titles per year. The allowance was in 2003

³⁰ Shen, Yun, 2005, p.215.

³¹ Rosen, Stanley, 2002, pp.49-78.

further increased to an abundance of fifty.³² Representative studies on China's importation of Hollywood films in particular include Ting Wang's historical background research leading up to Hollywood's re-entry into China in 1994 and Stanley Rosen's work on Hollywood and the film market in China from 1994 to 2000. These two studies, together with the works by Yun Shen and Ying Zhu mentioned earlier, provide precious second-hand data and information with regard to Chinese film industry and policies for this study.

When Hollywood films re-entered China, the film market was in great depression due to the rise of other forms of visual-audio entertainment, including television, videos tapes and VCDs - legal and illegal. The abundance of pirate copies of videos products and the easy access to them inevitably contributed to the unhealthy film market. However, it is also argued that, the existence of piracy in China has also prepared Hollywood a huge, growing group of audiences. Today's pirate users may as well become tomorrow's loyal consumers.³³ The book *Framing Piracy* by Shujen Wang provides a systematic examination of the illegal film distribution in China.³⁴ In this study, the market environment at the time when Hollywood films re-entered China is examined by taking into consideration of all the above aspects in order to provide a background for a more objective reception study of Hollywood films in China.

As mentioned earlier, the focus of this study is Hollywood family film. Some relevant television programmes are also involved but they are not the focus. To study the reception of Hollywood family films in China, there is a special Chinese film

³² Wang, Ting, "Hollywood's Crusade in China prior to China's WTO Accession", *Jump Cut*, 49 (2007), <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/TingWang/index.html>> [Accessed 23rd Jan 2008].

³³ Yin, Hong, 2007, p.47.

³⁴ Wang, Shujen, *Framing Piracy: Globalization and Film Distribution in Greater China* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

type that cannot be overlooked. It is called children's film. As its name suggests, it is a film genre dedicated to child audiences. It is a film category recognised by the Chinese film industry and its production is mainly funded by the Chinese government. The audience group this study cares about - the OCG - was its target audience group. It helps to understand the reception of Hollywood family films among the OCG audiences by comparing it to that of the Chinese children's films because the OCG themselves are often found to refer to one of the two film kinds when express their opinions on the other.

In general, the Open Door Policy makes it possible for the American entertainment products, such as the Hollywood family films, to come into the Chinese market. Being a part of it, American entertainment products are influencing, as well as adapting to, the media environment of China, in both industrial and cultural aspects, which has to be taken into consideration when examine their reception in China. As for this study, the focus is to examine the reception to Hollywood family films of a particular audience group - the OCG. A general introduction to the OCG will be given in the next section.

The Only Child Generation

An article in *Newsweek* published on 18th March 1985 for the first time discussed a special Chinese generation born after the establishment of China's "One Child Policy" in the late 1970s.³⁵ Titled "A Rash of 'Little Emperors'", the author expressed concerns over a new Chinese generation that "rivals the Me Generation of the US".³⁶

³⁵ Smolowe, Jill and Lin, Wendy, "'A Rash of 'Little Emperors'", *Newsweek*, 18 Aug. 1985, p. 16.

³⁶ A term used to describe American people who left behind the social activism of the 1960s and focused on improving their own souls through a variety of self-help methods. Source: 'The Me Decade', *Pendergast*, 10 Sep. 2002, No 5, Vol 4, 2002, p.948.

By referencing comments from parents, the article referred to those children as the “little emperors”. The author described their central positions in urban Chinese families by introducing the concept of “4-2-1 syndrome” – a typical family of four adoring grandparents, two indulgent parents and one spoiled child. By quoting from a talk given by Kang Keqing (a China Women’s Federation official), the author also explained their significance to the country – “they are the nation’s successors of the on-going revolution”. In the end of the article a question was raised as to whether the promotion of the One Child Policy would end up “breeding a generation of selfish, unruly youths”. A Chinese newspaper, *Workers Daily*, published the full translation of the article 11 days later. About a year after, a highly influential reportage titled “Zhongguo de ‘xiaohuangdi’” (China’s “Little Emperors”) was published in the Chinese magazine *Zhongguo zuojia* (*Chinese Writers*). The reportage suggested that enough attention must be given to the only-children in urban China; otherwise, they would become a problem for the society in the future. The use of “little emperor” became very popular in China when referring to the only-children in urban China because it matched people’s perception to these children. The article from *Newsweek* drew the world’s attention to China’s OCG, and also inspired the studies of this generation in the fields of education, psychology and sociology in China.³⁷

According to the definition given by Lu Taihong, the OCG refers to the only-children born under China’s “One Child Policy”. In order to slow down the population growth so as to lessen the tension in both social and economic aspects, the Chinese government in 1979 firstly trialled the policy in Beijing, Shanghai and some other major cities to allow each of the new couples to have only one child. The

³⁷ Lu, Taihong, Zhang, Hongming and Yang, Ji, 2004.

policy was extended nationally a year after.³⁸ The OCG people were born during the third baby boom of China. At that time, the One Child Policy had already been implemented but it did not prevent this particular generation from becoming huge because most of the population from the previous baby boom were just about to have their children. From the establishment of the Only Child Policy until 2008, the population of China increased by more than 320 million.³⁹ According to a government report, the number of only-children born in China during this period exceeded 100 million in 2008.⁴⁰ The gap in between is filled by non-only-children, most of whom were born in rural China and are not considered in my research.

The OCG is loosely defined in academia. In order to be more specific, the OCG in this study refers to the only-children born in urban China between 1979 and 1990 who, according to a recent census, have a total of around 23.5 million and constitute almost 80 per cent of the urban population of this age group. The purpose of the constraint in time and space are to impose a certain level of uniformity within the group in terms of age and experience. Unlike the later generations, this group of only children experienced the most dramatic social and cultural changes of modern China happened during the first decade of the Open Door Policy. The reason for only considering the urban population is because they have reasonably easy access to imported entertainment products including films since their childhood. One of the assumptions of the study is that the consumption of foreign media in their childhood

³⁸ Nie, Miao, 'Shidai Yanjiu Beijing xiade Zhongguo Dushengdai Xiaofei Xingwei Fenxi' (An Analysis on Consumer Behaviour of the Only Child Generation), *Market Modernization*, (20)2007, 167-168(p.167).

³⁹ Center of Population Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Science, *China Population Yearbook 1986* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press [China], 1986), p.409; Department of Population and Employment Statistics, National Bureau of Statistics of China, *China Population and Employment Statistics Yearbook 2008* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2008), p.106.

⁴⁰ Chen, Qing and Zhou, Qijun, 'Dushengziniu chaoguo yiyi' (Only-children has exceeded 100 million), *Wenhui Newspaper* (Shanghai), 07/07/2008, < http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2008-07/07/content_8502144.htm > [accessed 12 Aug 2008].

influences their preferences in entertainment consumption in their later life. In early 1980s, only an urban family could afford a television which was the major means of access to imported entertainment products at the time. Even nowadays, the rural-urban gap in China is still massive, not only in economic but also in social and cultural aspects. The urban and rural should be considered two distinct audience groups, which is why excluding rural population from this study is necessary.

It should also be noted that the above notion of OCG does not imply an absolute uniformity within the group. Diversity exists within the group. From the outside, it should be seen as a group of people differentiated from the other social groups by sharing among them certain distinct experience and characteristics. From the inside the sub-groups that perceive media text in different ways exist.

The Only Child Policy has deeply influenced the structure of Chinese families as well as the structure of the society and consumer behaviour in the contemporary Chinese market. Many articles and books can be found that look into the general OCG. There are works, not only from China, that are very concerned about the characteristics and socialization of this special generation. The most influential ones are probably those by Feng Xiaotian of China and Vanessa Fong of the US.⁴¹ Their studies offer insights into various aspects of the OCG which can be summarized as follows. Being the only children of their families, they have all the attention, care and support from their parents and even from their grandparents. They are more likely to get what they ask for than previous generations. The child-centred nuclear family pattern fosters their strong sense of self-identity and advocates individuality. At the price of all the family resource they shared with no one but themselves, they bear all

⁴¹ Feng, Xiaotian, *Zhongguo Dushengziniu (Chinese Only-Children)* (Beijing: Zhishi Press, 2004); Fong, Vanessa, *Only Hope: Coming of Age Under China's One-child Policy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004).

the hope and expectation of their families which places them under greater stress. In the 1980s, China experienced a baby boom for which the nation's infrastructure was unprepared. For an OCG child, in contrast with the privilege within the family, the competition he/she has to face in the society has never been as intense.

There are also studies that explore the consumption behaviours of the OCG. Examples include those by Lu Taihong and his PhD students and those by James McNeal in cooperation with some Chinese researchers.⁴² According to their research, the OCG is marked by high consumption patterns. Fostered by parents who are more capable of providing them with what they need, they have a stronger desire to spend than previous generations. Early exposure to various media including TV and internet creates early consumers as well. Their consumption is also influenced by popular culture, especially the imported entertainment such as American films and television, to a considerably high degree. It justifies the connection between the OCG and American family entertainment.

This study sees the OCG as a group of film audiences and examines their reception to Hollywood family films. Within a wider scope, it belongs to the realm of research that concerns the relationship and interaction between people and media. Within this realm, there are already studies on particular Chinese groups and their relationship and interaction with media. Stephanie H. Donald in her *Children, Media and Regional Modernity in the Asia Pacific* provides a potential framework for research in children's media and media use in the Asia-Pacific region. With regard to China, she highlights that the use of children's media is politically controlled and that children are crucial actors in the politics of national renewal and economic

⁴² Lu, Taihong, Zhang, Hongming and Yang, Ji, 2004; McNeal, James and Yeh, Chyon-Hwa, 'Consumer Behaviour Patterns among Chinese Children', *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*. 8.1(1996), 3-21.

reform. Also in her book, *Little Friends: Children's Film and Media Culture in China*, she sets out to tackle a particular form of media, Chinese children's film, and the culture within, in the life of Chinese children. On film and its audiences, Huilin Huang et al in 2005 carried out a series of studies on Beijing college students and their motives, objectives and preferences with respect to domestic films, film music and animated films and TVs.⁴³ Narrowed down to film reception studies, in 2002, Beijing Film Academy took part in the international reception study of the forthcoming *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003). The study was carried out across 20 counties and regions including China.⁴⁴ A report was published by Beijing Film Academy containing their findings, part of which was later included in *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's World Audiences* edited by Martin Barker, the proposer and organiser of the study. Interestingly enough, according to the report generated by Beijing Film Academy, over 60 per cent of the audiences were aged from 16 to 25. This proportion of audiences is very much overlapped with the OCG that my study is concerned about, which is evidence of OCG's strong presence in the reception of Hollywood films.

Hollywood family film, as a kind of American entertainment, had been with the OCG through their childhood, adolescence and is with them now in their adulthood. The study of the reception of the OCG to Hollywood family film and the interactions between them needs to take another important factor into consideration – time. In the timeframe of the studied OCG audience groups, has anything changed over time? Is their reception of one object at one time linked to their reception of another object at a different time? The thesis will present answers to these questions.

⁴³ Huang, Huilin, *Yingshi shouzhong lun (Reception Studies of TV and Film's Audience)* (Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press, 2007).

⁴⁴ Liu, Jun, 'Zhihuanwang 3 de kua wenhua jieshou xiaoguo yanjiu' (A Reception Study of *Lord of the Rings Part III* in China), *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 03(2004), 62-70(p.62).

Methodologies and Resources

Like for most studies in social sciences, psychological and sociological theories developed during the past century are used by media reception studies to underpin more detailed propositions. Recurring debates are produced by these theories as outlined by Janet Staiger in her *Media Reception Studies*.⁴⁵ Centred on “whether the individual or the text explains the meanings made and any effects”, four models of the individual/text relation were produced: education, reinforcement, mediation, and power.

The **education** model assumes no power from the individuals. It considers media “the learning site” from which knowledge and experience flows to individuals – the “empty vessels”. In this model, for example, learned aggression has nothing to do with innate or natural instinct. The second, **reinforcement** model, is characterised by seeing media as the reflection of culture and society and a conservative force in “maintaining social order”. In this model, individuals acquire information that provides cognitive support for their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. The third model **mediation**, as described by Staiger, conceptualises the individual as “having developed attributes of some sophistication from the social context” and asserts that the individual then “responds to the world based on those contextual, personal differences and uses media as a mediated access to the world”. In this model, individual and media are in constant negotiation, where power exists in both parties and influence happens in both ways. The fourth model is that of **power** in which, although the self-resources of individual are not neglected, that of the media are so overwhelming in terms of both insisting on their influence and fascinating.

⁴⁵ Staiger, Janet, *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p.7.

David Gauntlett observes that (as referenced by Staiger), researchers have the tendency to regard children as “empty vessels”, which is a characteristic of the dominant theory such as Piaget’s model of child’s cognitive development. Although this thesis engages the OCG from the beginning of its existence when members of this generation were still children, education model is not applicable. In this thesis, I not only acknowledge children’s own will and capabilities in choosing but also emphasise the dramatic social and cultural changes in China in the 1980s. During the era of change, contradictory media texts coexisted and none was able to gain a dominant position over the others. My research findings and the mediation model support each other.

Going with the mediation model, of significant use in this thesis is Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding theory.⁴⁶ Hall’s theory argues that in mass communication, meaning is not simply fixed or determined by the sender; the message is never transparent; the audience is not a passive recipient of meaning. According to Hall, a message must be perceived as meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded (by the audience) before it has an effect, a use, or satisfies a need. Hall also theorised three general ways of communicative exchange through encoding and decoding. First, the **dominant** way, also known as the hegemonic way, is described as such in which individuals interpret the meaning of the text in the way the makers of the text had intended. The second way is the **negotiated** way in which the reader acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions but, at a more restricted, situational level, makes own ground-rules and operates with “exceptions”. The third is the **oppositional**, or the “globally contrary” way, in which the receiver decodes the text

⁴⁶ Hall, S. (1973). *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*. Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

in oppositional to the intension of the sender and put it in a different framework of reference. In this thesis, I will adopt mediation model and encoding/decoding theory to explain the meaning-making and the reception of the media text conveyed by Hollywood family films to groups of Chinese audiences from the OCG.

Memory is both method and object in my research. For many texts used in the thesis are actually expressions based on someone's memories, effectively, I search evidence needed for the research in this person's memory. Of important theoretical support for this research is the conceptualisation of "collective memory" by Maurice Halbwachs.⁴⁷ According to Halbwachs, "the experience of time and memory is socially constructed". He emphasises the importance of group in the construction of individual memory by arguing that the personal and social conceptual schemata that are in place to shape memories can be transfigured by how that past is commemorated within the group and the strength of the group in maintaining the continuity of the memory in a particular way. Based on Halbwachs theory, in one of the case studies, I will investigate the construction of the collective memories of a particular OCG audience group, link to the group's recent nostalgic activities and discuss how the collective memories influenced individual's reception to media text.

The research relies heavily on text and textual analysis through the course of its truth finding. Methods of analysis to extract meanings from media and individual text include Aristotelian criticism, Rhetorical criticism and content analysis, which is evident throughout the case studies. Texts obtained for the study originate from a wide range of sources. Materials studied include audio-visual texts, reviews, comments and publicity materials such as posters and trailers. Resources, in terms of channels, include magazines (e.g. *Popular Cinema* (Dazhong Dianying, in Chinese),

⁴⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992

Hollywood Reporter) newspapers (e.g. *People's Daily International* (English version), *The New York Times*), and of significant importance, audience-driven websites, online forums and fans clubs (e.g. *Mtime* (Chinese), *Rotten Tomatoes*). Apart from those from the Internet which are available to the general public, some materials, for example, the publicity information of certain films, are obtained directly from institutions such as China Film Group Corporation and Hollywood studios who kindly offered their institutional reports, press books and annual reports for the purpose of this research. The research also uses first-hand information obtained by means of interview and focus group but only to a minimal extent as a complementary to the above resources.

In this thesis, apart from text of academic works, I also obtained a large amount of texts from online forums and fan communities and used them heavily in the reception studies of my research. Of great support and theoretical justification of this approach is a series of fandom studies by Henry Jenkins. Built on Pierre Levy's theory of "collective intelligence" which is conceptualised as a knowledge space which emerges from the collaboration and competition of many individuals, Jenkins describes the online fan communities "expansive self-organizing groups focused around the collective production, debate, and circulation of meanings, interpretations, and fantasies in response to various artefacts of contemporary popular culture".⁴⁸ Through the course of my research, I gradually realise that these online fan communities, made possible by their own characteristics of existence (anonymity, rapid, many-to-many communication and etc.), are able to provide valuable textual materials that cannot be obtained elsewhere.

⁴⁸ Henry Jenkins, *Interactive Audiences? – The "Collective Intelligence" of Media Fans*,

Focus group is used in the research in the attempt to obtain first-hand information. Although focus group was planned for each of the four case studies initially, only two had been realised due to time limitation of the study and social constraint in China. First-hand materials obtained from the focus groups are twofold: first, textual materials from real persons in a face-to-face communication; second, non-textual materials – the observations. The contribution of the focus groups to the research is not massive but very solid. Firstly, the text obtained from the participant is in line with what is obtained from online forums/communities, which increases the credibility of the text obtained from both sources. Secondly, the non-textual observations, although of limited quantity, is a healthy addition to the textual materials, which provide support for claims made by the textual analysis. The design and outcome of the two focus groups are listed in the appendix.

In this study, Hollywood family film is placed in a cultural context for examination. To be more precise, it is a different cultural context to its origin, in which case the local cultural industry need to be approached to provide such context. This thesis employs a combined approach of political economy and cultural studies, both outlined by David Hesmondhalgh in his *The Cultural Industries*.⁴⁹ Policy studies presented in this thesis is mostly textual, combining the study of relevant documentations and comments by government and government officials with the study of remarks by both Chinese and Western scholars. There are places where it is necessary to carry out analysis of numerical data, such as the box office for certain films. Such data are obtained from resources including *China Film Yearbooks* (1981 onwards), *China Film Weekly* (a trade newspaper published by China Film Archive) and *Box Office Mojo* (internet database) are used as the main resources for box office

⁴⁹ Hesmondhalgh, David, *The Cultural Industries* (London:Sage Publications, 2007).

information. In addition, some articles from *Variety* and *Screen International* are also used as complementary references.

Contributions

Through the literature review, I have studied works on Hollywood family film and findings of others who had studied groups of people that intersect with the OCG.

Their research and findings are great inspirations to me but, make me ask more questions, particularly because none of them set out to answer questions with regard to this particular combination of Hollywood family film and the OCG.

So my question is: what is the reception of Hollywood family film by the OCG? It is such a big question that it has to be deconstructed to be properly answered. Here and there in this introduction, I have been asking questions that constitute this final question. I will list them here just to put things in order.

What kinds of meanings does Hollywood film have for the OCG? In other words, how does the OCG perceive certain texts or messages in a Hollywood family film? In what circumstances do these meanings or perceptions emerge? Is there any reference to compare against? Has any of the meanings or perceptions changed, preserved or developed over time? What influences do they – not the films themselves but the meanings they have for the OCG to be precise – have on the OCG or to an even greater extent? What is the level or direction of these influences? To the OCG, are any of the influences cognitive or, are they merely emotional? Do they have any social or even political impact? To these questions, I wanted the answers. Through research, I have found my answers to these questions. It is these answers presented in this thesis that I want to share with the social world.

Ever since Hollywood re-entered China, there have been debates over “good or evil”. People have argued about “positive” or “negative” for almost every single Hollywood film that had been imported to China. I do not have the intention to strengthen either side of such debates or arguments. What I do want to contribute to is the discovery and understanding of the meanings and effects of Hollywood family films to the OCG. It is not to suggest that the research is not of value for judgment and evaluation. Quite the contrary, I hope for its implications for the judgements and evaluations of this particular media type. However, such implications are subject to interpretations which are more often than not subjective.

Chapter 1 American Entertainment in Urban China since 1978

Year 1978 is of great significance for China and its people. The establishment of the Open Door Policy led to a national economic reform that had fundamentally changed people's life and beyond. Three decades have passed. During this period, modernization has been going on at fast pace and tremendous change has been happening in various aspects from economy to the ideology. Lifting the bar for international trade has not only stimulated the market and resulted in an unprecedented economic growth but also brought about the nationwide evolution in culture in which the importation of entertainment played an important part. On 1st January 1979, the Sino-US Diplomatic Relations is officially established. Within the same year, Coca-Cola, which was considered as a symbol of the "Western capitalist lifestyle", became available in the Chinese market.⁵⁰ Since then, more and more US products carrying the label of "American Culture" have found their way to the life of the Chinese. McDonald, Nike, Disney, just to name a few.

Among all these US products is the object of this study, the American family entertainment with a focus on film and television. This chapter present a historical review of American entertainment in China starting from the Open Door Policy. It is organised by periods of distinct characteristics divided by turning events and sets out to answer 1) what happened; 2) why it happened; and 3) what the response was. In

⁵⁰ Yu, Fang, "1979: Kekou kele, kaifang de biaoqian (1979: Coca Cola, a symbol of opening)", in *Kaifang zhongguo: gaige de 30 nian jiyi (Opened China: the Memory of 30 Years' Reform)*, ed. by Economic Observer (Beijing: CITIC Press, 2008), pp. 24.

this chapter, American entertainment is placed into the context of cultural industry for examination. By doing this, I argue that “American cultural colonialism” which is popularly used to describe the influence of American entertainment products in the international market is not the only view to be seen throughout their journey in China. American entertainment should be best described as an important participant in China’s cultural modernization. As a participant, its influence during the process needs to be evaluated and understood by taken into account that of the relevant policies and regulations imposed by the Chinese government on them and that of the contemporaneous domestic entertainment industry.

Pre-1994: Television as the Window of the World

Television broadcasting started in China in 1958, but massive development only took place after the establishment of the Open Door Policy. In late 1970s, imported television sets started to appear in the Chinese market and gradually became one of the most desirable household appliances at that time. Television production lines were imported later, which made it more affordable for an ordinary urban Chinese family to own a television. It in turn resulted in a rapid development period for China’s television industry. From 1978 to 1982, the number of television sets owned nationwide increased by almost 10 times from 3 million to 27.6 million; and viewers from 80 million to 340 million.⁵¹

The rise of television soon became a threat to the Chinese cinema. In June 1979, China Film Distribution and Exhibition Corporation stopped their supply of new feature films to television stations. At that time, the programmes provided by the

⁵¹ Hong, Junhao, *The Internationalization of Television in China: The Evolution of Ideology, Society, and Media Since the Reform* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), p.88-89.

China Central Television were considered as a “miniature theatre” because of their short broadcasting time and heavy dependence on feature films. The functionality of provincial television stations was basically to relay what was being broadcast by the China Central Television. Hence, the sudden termination of film supply precipitated a crisis for television broadcasting. In August, the Central Broadcasting Bureau held The First National Conference on Television Programmes, at which television stations were encouraged to develop independency by producing their own programmes and, at the same time, to import television programmes to fill the urgent gap.⁵²

As a matter of fact, there was no specific policy for television programme importation in China before 1978. At that time, things like this were conducted according to the Party’s general disciplines. It does not mean the Chinese government lacked of control over what foreign programmes could be shown on the television but, quite to the contrary, the control was very strong and rigid. The purposes and standards of telecasting were strictly defined by the Propaganda Ministry of the Party and were well understood and carried out by their regional leaders, which formed a tight centralised control throughout the system.⁵³

After 1978, by implementing the Open Door Policy, the Chinese government started to loosen its centralised control over the market. Instead of rigid disciplines, vague guidelines started to be used to impose some level of regulation over television imports. Two of the most commonly used principles were “acceptability” and “affordability”.⁵⁴ For a programme to be acceptable, it does not have to expose the “darkness of the west”, but it must not be against Communism and the Party.

⁵² Guo, Zhenzhi, “Xinshiqi zhongguo dianshi de shinian (Ten Years of Chinese Television in the New Era)”, *Journalism and Communication*, 02(1990), 195-210(p.196).

⁵³ Hong, Junhao, 1998, p.63.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Pornography is not acceptable because it is considered as “a product of the decayed capitalist lifestyle” and is contradictory to Chinese culture and value. Being “affordable” basically means the price of the programme must be within the purchasing ability of the TV stations. The concern about cost had led to a national phenomenon that all television stations, even the only national television network, China Central Television, and the country’s second largest television station, Shanghai Television, were seeking every opportunity to buy foreign programmes as cheaply as possible. Of the two criteria, acceptability is always more important than affordability; it has to satisfy acceptability to be considered for affordability.

Besides the shift in centralised control, other changes also helped to open the door wider for television program importation. Deng Xiaoping, China’s vice-premier at that time, visited Washington, D.C. in January 1979. The visit initiated a series of important, high-level co-operation and exchange between China and the US, which continued to 1989. Many bilateral agreements were reached with regard to trade relations, interchange in science, technology and culture. These agreements in cultural co-operation pushed forward the importation of American entertainment such as television programmes.

In early 1980, China Central Television imported *Man from Atlantis*, a 13-episode American sci-fi television series that ran on the NBC Network during the 1977-1978 season. It was not very popular in the US, but still managed to produce highly favourable reaction in China. It became the first American television series ever broadcast on Chinese television. It was shown at 8 pm every Thursday. The sunglasses worn by the leading actor, Mark Harris, in the play soon became a fashion in urban China. Chinese media described it as a television series that “makes the whole

city a standstill”.⁵⁵ It is not hard to explain why a not-so-popular television series in the US could become such a hit in China if we take a look at the status of Chinese television broadcasting at the time. There were only a few channels to choose from and most of them share the same programmes. Some of the programme sharing was for propaganda purpose but for most of the time it was due to the lack to contents. From 7 pm to 7.30 pm every day, all channels had to relay the news programme (“Xinwen LianBo”) broadcast by China Central Television, which was one of the Party’s means of propaganda. Apart from that, content update was far from being frequent. There was a programme called “Song of the Week” on China Central Television for which a same song would be played at the same time every day for a week. Although television viewing was still not a boring experience, something new, something different could certainly make a difference.

In October 1980, another American television series, *Garrison’s Gorillas*, hit the Chinese television. Episodes started at 8 pm Saturdays. It was a 26-episode action television series shown on ABC network from 1967 to 1968. After the 16th episode, China Central Television decided to shut it down. It gave a notice at the end of the show saying it was the last episode, but the audiences did not buy it. After the shutdown, China Central Television received a lot of enquires asking for explanation. It is considered to be a remarkable cultural event in modern Chinese history. Before it, Chinese audiences were not found to question about what was/was not being shown on the television. China Central Television remained silent. Until 23 years later, in the book *China Central Television: All the First and Transitions* edited by China Central Television for its 45 anniversary, an explanation was given. “It was

⁵⁵ Hu, Lingzhu, “Dang meiju zaoyu yangshi (The American Television’s Encounter with China Central Television)”, *Century Weekly*, 05(2007), <<http://www.qikan.com.cn/Article/xsjz/xsjz200705/xsjz20070533.html>> [accessed 16 May 2010]

found to an absurd and pointless television series with no taste and real value in art and hence the shutdown.”⁵⁶

In 1981, Shanghai Television imported *Sugata Sanshiro*. It was the first Japanese television series ever broadcast in China. In 1983, *Fok Yuen Gap*, the first Hong Kong television series was imported through Guangdong Television and was dubbed in both Cantonese and Mandarin. These imported television series significantly enriched the content of Chinese television. Most of them were very popular among the Chinese audiences.

As a new element, advertising also contributed to the prosperous development of Chinese television and was soon integrated with imported television programmes. On 28th January 1979, Shanghai Television broadcast a TV commercial for the first time in the history of Chinese television. It was 90-second long and was for a tonic liquor product called “Shen Gui Bu Jiu”. On 15th March of the same year, Shanghai Television again broadcast the first ever foreign TV commercial for Swiss Rado Watch. Later in November, China Central Propaganda Department issued an official approval for television stations to host advertising activities.⁵⁷

For financial concerns, a new importation scheme, “barter”, was introduced. With a barter agreement, a Chinese television station could get free programmes from a foreign company by giving away commercial airtime. The first of this kind was signed in 1980 and brought the Chinese audience the Japanese cartoon series *Astro Boy* by China Central Television. In 1982, Twentieth Century Fox agreed to let China Central Television choose 52 feature films from more than 3000 titles for advertising time. Paramount sealed a similar deal by providing their *Star Trek* series.

⁵⁶ Tang, Shiding, *Zhongyang dianshitai de diyi yu bianqian 1958-2003 (China Central Television: All the First and Transitions 1958-2003)* (Beijing: Oriental Publishing House, 2003), <http://news.xinhuanet.com/newmedia/2006-06/06/content_4653104_2.htm> [accessed 18 May 2010]

⁵⁷ Guo, Zhenzhi, 1990, p. 197.

In 1984, another barter agreement was signed between CBS and China Central Television, according to which CBS would provide 64 hours of off-the-shelf programmes, including *Dr. Seuss* cartoon series, in exchange for 320 minutes of advertising. Of all the barter agreements, the most remarkable was probably the one that brought Chinese audiences Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck*. According to the agreement, Buena Vista got 2 minutes of commercial airtime for and within every half-hour episode.⁵⁸

Meanwhile, foreign news and educational programmes also started to appear on Chinese television. On 1st April 1980, a new agreement was made among China Central Television, Visnews (UK) and UPITN (US) to allow China Central Television to receive international news stories via satellites on a daily basis from London and New York. From 15th April 1980, China Central Television started to broadcast international daily news for the first time in its history. As an addition to the foreign documentaries, international news provided a richer and more updated picture of the outside world to the Chinese audiences. The import of foreign news programmes also influenced the domestic news production. Domestic news reports on TV started to become more compact with a trend to cover a wider range of topics in different ways. To meet the demand for English language learning, China Central Television brought in *Follow Me*, a BBC-produced television series providing a crash course in the English language. It was reported to have over 50 million viewers and is still one of the most influential foreign television programmes that have ever shown on Chinese television.

The increasing popularity of foreign television stimulated the domestic production. From 1979 to 1985, Chinese TV drama production experienced a

⁵⁸ Hong, Junhao, 1998, p.65-66.

tremendous growth. A total of 1300 episodes were produced in 1985 only. At that time, both foreign importation and domestic production were not sufficiently controlled or regulated. A lot of problems emerged, which include poor quality domestic productions and foreign programmes made available through illegal channels. The Chinese government realized the need for regulation.

There was no dedicated policy to regulate the importation of foreign television until the 1985 meeting of the Ministry of Radio and Television. The meeting proposed to strengthen the administration over audio-visual product importation, which effectively led to the promulgations of a specific regulation on television importation – Interim Measures on Imported Television Series Management. It was the only regulation used until November 1990 when two other regulations – Interim Regulations on Importation of Foreign Television Programmes, Censorship Criteria for Foreign Television Series – were put into effect. The most influential act was to limit the proportion of foreign programmes to twenty per cent of the total broadcasting time per channel per day and fifteen per cent of the prime time (6 pm – 10 pm every day). The Interim Regulations on Importation of Foreign Television Programs also gave the regional administration of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Fujian the authorities to approve importation based on the Censor Criteria for Foreign Television Series. The other regions still had to report to the Central Ministry of Radio, Film and Television for approval.⁵⁹

It is stated at the beginning of the Censor Criteria for Foreign Television Series that the purpose of the regulation is “to help introduce quality foreign television programmes, enrich the content of Chinese television, improve people’s understanding of the world and promote the cultural communication between China

⁵⁹ Zhou, Jingbo, *Shiliao suoyin (Historical Materials and Index)* (Beijing: China Radio and Television House, 2008), pp.109-110.

and the other countries”. It is clear that the regulation cares about the “quality”. As to what television programme is of quality, it is totally up to the regulation and its executioner to decide. Foreign television programmes were imported to enrich the content of Chinese television. This purpose was well fulfilled. In the 1980s, television was made the primary means of visual entertainment in urban China. The reaction of the domestic television industry was somewhat immature. The rush of mass production did not give them the edge in the competition against foreign programmes. Again, the regulation gave a hand. By limiting the time for imported television programmes, it helped to protect the local television industry. It is not surprising that the Chinese government would want the cultural industry to be under its control. It is certainly of great benefit for the Party’s propaganda. It may seem contradictory for them to encourage people to see and understand other places in the world through television, but with the censorship and control, what the Chinese audiences see is always a filtered image. The important thing is: the Chinese audiences do see something different, something that may challenge their belief, value and ideology, maybe just a tiny bit. But this tiny bit could have its influence – recall the response of the audiences to the shutdown of *Garrison’s Gorillas*.

In a way, the importation of television had prepared for the re-entering of Hollywood film to China. The raise of television was one of the factors that put the Chinese cinema in jeopardy in the 1980s and the popularity of US television programmes contributed to the positive anticipation for Hollywood films which were brought in to revive the film market. The journey of American family entertainment in China was about to enter a new era.

1994-2001: Have you seen the “Dapian”?

The history of Chinese film-making can be dated back to 1905 when the first Chinese film was produced. However, the world’s acknowledgment about Chinese cinema only started after China’s “Fifth Generation” film directors/makers, such as Zhang Yimo, Chen Kaige, and their works made the appearance. Starting from the success of *Huang Tu Di* (1984) (“The Yellow Earth”) by Chen Kaige, films by the Fifth Generation initiated a new interest in the West to study the Chinese cinema.⁶⁰ The Fifth Generation and their works represent the artistic achievement of Chinese films in the 1980s. However, their works did not win much popularity among the general Chinese audiences and certainly did not save the Chinese cinema from the great depression.

Chinese cinema was very prosperous from the late 1970s to the early 1980s, probably because of the restriction of film screening in the “Cultural Revolution” being lifted and the abundance of unscreened films accumulated in the previous decade.⁶¹ Among the many films, some became very popular and are still being talked about today. *Lushan Lian* (1980) (“Love Story from Mountain Lu”) is the first romance film made after the “Cultural Revolution” and in it is also the first kiss, although only on the cheek, ever to appear in a Chinese film. The film became very popular among the Chinese young people especially those in love. The female lead appeared in 43 different dresses in the film which became a fashion guide among Chinese women at the time.

Another film worth mentioning is *Xi Lin Men* (1981) (“In-Laws”), a light family comedy about the life in rural China. The film appealed to a great number of

⁶⁰ Reynaud, Bérénice, ‘Chinese Cinema’, in *World Cinema: Critical Approaches*, ed. by J. Hill and P.C. Gibson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.159.

⁶¹ Shen, Yun, 2005, pp.203-204.

audiences and set a cinema attendance record of 570 million. In 1982, another record-breaking film hit the screen. Jet Li's first ever martial art film *Shaolin Si* ("The Shaolin Temple") is also the first Chinese film produced in cooperation between mainland China and Hong Kong. These films and many others sent the Chinese cinema attendance through the roof in the early 1980s. At that time, domestic films were already not the only option for Chinese audiences. They could enjoy some films from Japan, India and a few selected from Europe and the US which were mostly outdated. Going to cinemas in 1980s was not expensive at all. Tickets only cost about 0.30 yuan RMB (about 5 cents) on average.⁶² Free outdoor screenings were still being offered, especially in rural areas.

During the nationwide economic reform, free outdoor theatres gradually went out of business and film exhibition turned mainly to indoor screenings. In the early 1980s, of the 110 thousand exhibition units, only 4 per cent were indoor theatres.⁶³ Government money invested to assist the reform of the film industry was largely drained by the production sector. It left the exhibition sector with inadequate support. There was little money to build new theatres or to improve the condition of the existing ones.⁶⁴ The lack of quality theatres became a serious problem, especially as television was getting more and more common in urban households. People would rather stay at home watching television instead of going to a cinema where it was not comfortable to stay. Apart from spending money in the wrong place, film reform in the early stage also failed to get rid of what actually halted the development of the whole industry, that is, the redundantly large distribution sector. A large proportion

⁶² Cao, Ming, 'Lishun jiage tixi' (Reorganizing the price system), in *China Film Yearbook 1989*, ed. by Editorial group of China Film Yearbook. (Beijing: Publishing Group of China Film Yearbook., 1989), p. 374.

⁶³ Shen, Yun, 2005, p.209.

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp.206-207.

of the profit of the whole industry was consumed to maintain this sector without enough money flowing back to film studios or theatres. In late 1980s, most studios were in financial crisis, which effectively led to inadequate film production.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, cinema attendance kept going down. From 1982 to 1989, the Chinese cinema lost about 40 per cent of its movie-going audience.⁶⁶

The emergence of video-tape, VCD and DVD was also considered to be one of the reasons for the decrease in cinema attendance. In China, these forms of video products came about in a special form – video rooms.⁶⁷ Most families in late 1980s were still unable to afford a home video device. Although the number of VCRs in use increased from about 50,000 in 1984 to about 790,000 in 1988, the proportion of televisions that were used with VCRs was still very low, peaking at only 2.3 per cent in 1987 between the 1984 and 1988 period.⁶⁸ At the beginning, video room was just another way for theatres to gain some extra profit. However, in 1990s, it started to become a threat to the film industry that was already in a crisis. Because of the lack in administration, a video room could usually provide its audiences with films that were not legally released in China. These films were mostly from Hong Kong, sometimes from the US and a few other foreign countries through the pirate channels. Cheaper tickets and richer contents gave them a competitive edge against ordinary theatres, although the viewing condition of a video room was often found to be very poor – providing only a medium sized TV and chairs that were not always comfortable. Video room was not considered a safe and healthy place. Most parents

⁶⁵ Zhu, Yin, *Chinese Cinema during the Era of Reform: The Ingenuity of the System* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), p.77.

⁶⁶ Shen, Yun, 2005, p.215.

⁶⁷ It is usually a small scale theatre that provides audiences with films using VCRs.

⁶⁸ Hung, A.S.C., *The Political Economy of the Film Industry in China (1979-1989)* (a dissertation submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Mass Communication, University of Leicester, Centre for Mass Communication Research, July 1989), Appendix IV.

would forbid their children from going there because of this and the concerns over the contents it provided – often contained violent and sexual scenes. Nowadays, video rooms have been removed from most urban cities; however, in some less developed regions they still exist.

The hard times of Chinese cinema continued in the 1990s. While in 1988 the number of screens was 161,777, this figure reduced to 65,000 in 1998. The national average cinema admissions per person fell from 19.58 in 1987 to the all-time low of 0.12 in 1997.⁶⁹ The Chinese film industry was in a deep depression. Under such circumstance and aided by an increasingly opening-up policy environment, permission was given to the China Film Group Corporation by the Ministry of Radio Film and Television to release ten selected foreign films every year starting from 1994 in the hope of reviving the depressive film industry. Those films had to “reflect the finest global cultural achievements and represent the latest artistic and technological accomplishments in contemporary world cinema” and were imported on a “revenue-sharing” basis.⁷⁰ Under a revenue-sharing agreement, China Film Group Corporation pays nothing to foreign studios for the film copies and the box-office revenue is split between the two parties.

In the second half of 1994, the Chinese media were full of speculation about the probable incoming of a US blockbuster, *The Fugitive* (1993). It also became a popular topic of conversation in the street. Instead of calling it a “dian-ying” which means “film” in Chinese, the media created a new word “da-pian”. In Chinese, the character “da 大” generally means “big” and is a character of rich meanings and implications; while “pian 片” is another way of saying “film”. So literally, it means a

⁶⁹ Acland, C.R., *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p.251 & p.255.

⁷⁰ Zhu, Y., 2003, p.220.

“big film”. I believe it is a short way of saying “**da-tou-zi-ying-pian**” which means “a film of high capital investment”. However, the way and the circumstance in which it was used had given it much more meanings than that. The way that the word is composed naturally produces an admiring and up-looking sensation. Calling it differently suggests to people that it is different. It tells people that this is not a “normal” film that you have seen before; it is “big”, it is different in a good way. According to the media, this film cost 44 million dollars to make. For most Chinese audiences, it was a “wow”. “How could a film cost so much to make?” “What is in there?” A lot of audiences would bring these questions to the cinema.

China Film Group Corporation, as the distributor of this highly anticipated film, started off cautiously. To begin with, it chose a few theatres of good quality from six major cities including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou as the pilots. The film was release in these theatres on 12 November 1994. The reaction was “sensational” and soon spread out. By the end of 1994, most theatres from urban cities had shown this film. The final box office reached a record high of 25 million yuan RMB, which was described as a “miracle” given the circumstance of the Chinese cinema at the time.

In January 1995, another “dapian”, *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995) which was a Chinese Kung Fu feature led by Jackie Chan, hit the Chinese cinema. Interestingly, Chinese cinema and audiences already knew about Chan, but none of his films was ever referred to as “dapian” before. The media and the publicity of *Rumble in the Bronx* emphasised the film as Chan’s effort to enter Hollywood. The combination of Chinese element (Kung Fu) and the “dapian effect” certainly worked. Breaking the record set by *The Fugitive* not long ago, the film wrapped up nearly 95 million yuan RMB at the box office. The success was also believed to be in connection with the fact that the film was shown before the Chinese New Year when most people were

on holiday. For the next few years, Chan's films had been present during this period. Before this, the Chinese cinema did not have "seasons". The releases were spread out through a year almost evenly. Since then, Chinese cinema started to realise that releasing a film in holiday seasons could potentially magnify the box office so there came the "New Year Season". Later in July, the upsurge generated by *The Lion King* (1994) set an example for the "Summer Holiday Season".

Year 1995 was a big year for Chinese cinema and moviegoers. In the first half of 1995, the national box office ticket sale increased by 50 per cent over the same period of the previous year. In Beijing, the total receipts rose by 80 per cent, and movie attendance in summer increased by 70 per cent comparing to the previous year.⁷¹ Almost every single one of the imported films acquired enthusiastic and favourable response. It is believed to be the year in which the Hollywood blockbusters (dapian) established their strong position in the Chinese film market as well as among the Chinese audiences. They indeed won a lot – *True Lies* (1994), *Die Hard* (1995), *The Lion King* (1994), *Speed* (1994), created box office legend one after another. These films started to bring the Chinese audiences back to the cinema. From these films, they not only got to know some of the international movie stars, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, Tom Hanks, Keanu Reeves, Bruce Willis and Jim Carrey, but also experienced the shock and satisfaction generated by the modern film-making technologies. It was still the early stage of the reform and opening-up. Some foreign products had got into the life of Chinese people who had got a hint of the outside world. They wanted to see more. Since most Chinese were still unable to go abroad these days, the Hollywood blockbusters played right up to their desire to

⁷¹ Fang, Cheng, "Dianying de yongtan (The aria of cinema)", *Chinese Film Market*, 8 (1997), pp.10-11; Kuhn, Anthony, "Raising the red curtain", *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1995. D.1,7.

see the outside. In one way of looking at it, the excitement caused by the Hollywood blockbusters is originated from the social status of China at the time.

The success of Hollywood blockbusters initiated reflection among Chinese film makers and directors. They had seen the Hollywood eye-catching technologies and how they transformed film watching into a whole new experience. “It is almost impossible to find a national film industry of any given time who does not attempt to counter American competition.”⁷² It applies to China too. To compete against Hollywood blockbusters, some of the “Fifth Generation” film makers started their transitions from art film to genre film in hope to produce China’s own “dapian”. One remarkable attempt in the early years was Zhang Yimo’s *Hero* (2002) which was found to be influenced by Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000). The Chinese box office of *Hero* was encouraging, totalling 250 million yuan RMB (about 30 million dollars)⁷³. Besides the “Fifth Generation” and their dapian, one worth mentioning is Feng Xiaogang who developed his own way to play up to the Chinese audiences. From *The Dream Factory* (1998) to *Big Shot's Funeral* (2001), his “Feng style” comedy films, most of which were relatively low-budget productions, established their position in the Chinese cinema especially in the “New Year Season”. Feng’s comedies took the place of Jackie Chan’s action films and became the regular “New Year’s Hits” in Chinese cinema.

From 1994 to 2001, China imported a total of 63 Hollywood blockbusters on revenue-sharing basis. These “dapian” influenced Chinese cinema from the industry to its audiences and started to induce policy changes from the Chinese government side. When publicity says “dapian”, moviegoers hear American, Hollywood, high-

⁷² Kristin Thompson, 1985, pp168

⁷³ The box office data come from: Box Office Mojo, *Hero* (2004), <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=hero02.htm>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2007].

budget and explosive scenes. For Chinese audiences, a dapian or not became a standard to evaluate a film before they see it. It could actually decide if they would go to see the film. “Is it a dapian?” people would ask. The dapian effect became a cultural phenomenon that even influenced the national film production. The importation of Hollywood blockbusters had indeed reactivated the film market. Money started to flow again. Both the distribution and the exhibition sectors got their share. Distribution became less dependent on government support while exhibition finally got some money to refurbish their old theatres or even to build new ones. The money did not flow to the production sector, the studios – they did not have “dapian”! The local film studios, makers and directors realised they need to change in order to compete against the Hollywood. Domestic “dapian” hence emerged.

One could argue that it all happened because of the presence of Hollywood blockbusters in the Chinese market. Indeed, it would not have happened this way if Hollywood blockbusters did not get into China. The local film industry would still be in deep depression. The question is: who took the initiative? Was it China or Hollywood? In light of the spirit of opening-up and market liberalisation and under the pressure to rescue the local film industry, it was China who made the invitation to Hollywood majors who had been longing to explore the Chinese market. It was not improvised as a mere command of will – there had been disagreement within the Chinese side. Beijing Film Corporation had been a strong opponent to China Film Group Corporation who wanted to bring imported blockbusters to the capital. According to Jun Gao, an insider of the Beijing film distribution sector, the disagreement between China Film and Beijing Film was so strong that some even made it personal. Beijing Film feared the Hollywood blockbusters would “shack the stability of the entire film industry”. China Film believed stability was everything

that the industry did not need – “it is dying anyway”.⁷⁴ At last, the “reformists”, those who support the importation, won the argument. In August 1994, The State Administration of Radio Film and Television issued an official government document instructing the use of revenue-sharing as the basis for film importation. Only after then was China Film able to put the importation of revenue-sharing films into action. Through the use of revenue-sharing, China not only secured the maximum return from the box office, with Hollywood studios taking away only about 13 per cent of it, but also preserved full control over the distribution and exhibition of these films. In the game between China and Hollywood, China had been in control and been striving to remain this stance through the implementation of regulations and policies. With the WTO waiting for China just around the corner, the journey of American family entertainment in China entered another new era.

Post-2001: Opened Door = Free Market?

In a speech at the University of California, Professor Shixian Huang from the Beijing Film Academy noted that the real “opening” in China came in 2001, as opposed to 1979 which was the standard year generally referred to as the start of the national reform.⁷⁵ In December 2001, China joined the WTO, for which China was obliged to further liberalise its market. The open door policy that China had pursued for the previous two decades before joining the WTO could be best described as a “selective” open door policy. To meet the WTO obligation, China had to open up more market

⁷⁴ Yin, Liang, “Yinjin shoubu dapian beizhi yangmaiban (Imported films accused to make Chinese film industry depended on foreign companies)”

<<http://gb.cri.cn/18824/2008/12/19/2225s2366491.htm>> [accessed 10 September 2011]

⁷⁵ Rosen, Stanley, *Hollywood, Globalization and Film Markets in Asia: Lessons for China*, p.2-3, <http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic152447.files/rosen_Hollywood.pdf> [accessed 10 July 2011].

sectors for the other member countries to export and invest as well as to further relax the market sectors that were already open – the film market was the latter.

On 18 December 2001, as a preparation for the incoming new situation on joining the WTO, the SARFT (State Administration of Radio Film and Television, formerly the Ministry of Radio Film and Television) issued the *Detailed Rules for Implementation of Film Distribution and Exhibition Reform*. The Detailed Rules explicitly proposed to “adjust the supply mechanism and separate the importation and distribution of imported films”. It also proposed to break China Film’s monopoly in releasing imported films by introducing another distribution company. On the importation side, starting from 2002, the imposed quota on revenue-sharing films was increase from 10 to 20 as part of the agreement reached during the bilateral negotiations prior to China’s admission to the WTO. On 29 June 2003, an economic arrangement (later referred to as Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement, or CEPA in short) was agreed between China and Hong Kong, according to which, Hong Kong produced Chinese language films could be excluded from the above quota subject to approval by the Administration. An approved Hong Kong film would be distributed as an imported film and receive “treatment” as a domestic film, such as priority in exhibition arrangement. The Arrangement promoted co-production between China and Hong Kong. On the domestic side, a series of Chinese blockbusters such as *Hero* (2002), *A World Without Thieves* (2004), joined by the co-productions by China and Hong Kong, with their remarkable box office performance, led one wave after another of counter-strikes to the Hollywood. The game between China and Hollywood reached a new platform to go forward.

To be fair, it is not a fair game. Although the quota of importation had been increased, China's exclusive control over the distribution and exhibition made it a tough game for Hollywood to play. The support and protection for domestic films was firmly executed. In December 2002, on entering the Chinese New Year Season, only Zhang Yimo's *Hero* and Jackie Chan starred *The Tuxedo* were released to the Chinese cinema. It helped *Hero* to achieve a legendary box office of 250 million yuan RMB for a domestic blockbuster. Year 2002 was considered to be the year in which Chinese cinema finally got out of the depression. The national box office reached a historical 1 billion yuan RMB. In this year, a total of 18 revenue-sharing films (16 of them were Hollywood family films) were imported and released in China. Despite of the unfair treatment due to *Hero* to the end of the year, these films still managed to constitute about 50 per cent of the entire box office. In 2004, another Zhang Yimo's film received the special "treatment" – the whole July in the Summer Holiday Season was exclusively given to *House of Flying Daggers* and secured its 150 million yuan RMB at the box office. In this year, the revenue-sharing importation quota was fully used. Although having sit out a whole month during the Summer Holiday Season, the 20 films still performed reasonably well by totalling 600 million yuan RMB at the box office.

Some changes introduced by the reform could have mutual benefit for both local films and Hollywood films. First of all, the Detailed Rules proposed a new distributing system built around theatre chains. By implementing the new system, the local film industry could finally get rid of the highly inefficient and redundant distribution sector. Under the new system, local studios directly release films to the theatre chains. For imported films, the theatre chains talk directly to China Film or Huaxia Film whoever is the distributor. To push the implementation, the Detailed

Rules declared that, those regions and theatres that failed to adopt the new system by 1 June 2002 were not be supplied with revenue-sharing blockbusters. The new theatre chain system effectively improved the revenue distribution within the business. Theatres and studios saw significant increase in the share they got from the box office. On 19 June 2003, as proposed by the Detailed Rules, the second distribution company, Huaxia Film Distribution Corporation, Ltd., was established. Huaxia Film is a state-owned holding company entitled to release imported films. According to the Detailed Rules, for the first year China Film and Huaxia Film each would have to bid to get half of the imported titles. The number of imported films each company can get for the following years is to be determined by their box office achievement and their performance in distributing domestic films, especially those recommended by the Administration. Breaking the monopoly of China Film, the establishment of Huaxia Film introduced a certain level of competition into the distribution sector. To secure their share of next year's imported films they had to put more effort in their service and marketing strategies. The efficiency and competition introduced into the distribution sector had benefited both the domestic and the imported films. Theatres started to earn enough money to be able to invest in their hardware improvement which could contribute to the further recovery of cinema attendance. The competition between China Film and Huaxia Film resulted in better preparation and publicity for the releases of both domestic films and imported films.

No matter it was in the governmental support and protection for the local production, or in the promotion of the new national film distribution system, or in the competition between China Film and Huaxia Film, imported films played an important and interesting part in the reform of the local film industry in the early 2000s. Being excluded from the good seasons, Hollywood had been a victim of

China's special treatment for its domestic productions. On the other hand, in pushing forward the reform of the local film industry, the entitlements to release and exhibit imported films (Hollywood blockbusters in particular) had been used as stimuli and rewards. Imported films were still known to be the money makers. Although some of the best domestic films were catching up with them, the average box office of domestic films in general was still far lower than theirs. The way in which imported films were used shows that, China knew the value of them in enlivening the film market and at the same time saw them as a potential threat to the domestic production if not managed sufficiently. The fact that China had never given up its control over the distribution of the imported films had shown its determination in remaining as the power user.

Another shift in policy apart from the importation quota related to foreign investment in Chinese film industry. Before joining WTO, although China opened its door for foreign films, film related foreign investment was strictly controlled, in some area, completely banned. At that time, the only way of foreign investment was through film co-productions. It was not allowed to incorporate production or distribution companies or to participate in any theatre building or purchasing activities. As an agreement reached between China and the US on China's accession to the WTO, China would ultimately lift the ban on foreign investment in Chinese theatres which was written into the *Regulations on Administration of Films*.⁷⁶ Furthermore, approved by the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Culture, the SARFT issued the *Interim Provisions Concerning Foreign-invested Cinemas* on 28 September 2003. The Interim Provisions reaffirmed that China would allow foreign investment to take part in cinema incorporations and specified that foreign

⁷⁶ Wang, Ting, "Hollywood's crusade in China prior to China's WTO accession", *Jump Cut*, <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/TingWang/index.html>> [accessed 30 September 2011]

investment should not exceed 49 per cent of the theatre's registered capital. It also excluded a few experimental cities from this stringent restraint. As of 2005, for cinemas in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Xi'an, Nanjing or Wuhan, foreign investment could contribute up to 75 per cent of the registered capital, subject to approval.

The reactions of foreign investors were different. Companies like United Cinema International (UCI) were holding a wait-and-see attitude. Most of them were concerned about the availability of US films in the market due to the hard quota, the not so convinced box office performance of the majority of Chinese films and the government ruling over film distribution and exhibition. Other companies were taking a more positive attitude. Among them, probably the most remarkable were a series of joint ventures which Warner Bros. International Cinemas (WBIC) was involved. In July 2003, Shanghai Warner-Yonghua Cinema, a multiplex cooperated by WBIC and Shanghai Film Group, opened for business. It was WBIC's first involvement in Chinese cinemas. At the time, most Chinese cinemas only had one screen, even for a more developed city like Shanghai. Warner-Yonghua was Shanghai's first multiplex. The choices, flexibilities and modern facilities provided by a multiplex make it more attractive to audiences than a traditional one-screen cinema. For three successive years since its opening, Shanghai Warner-Yonghua cinema kept the first place among all Chinese cinemas in terms total box office.⁷⁷ In 2005, cooperation between WBIC and Shanghai Film led to the opening of another multiplex cinema, Nanjing Shangying-Warner Cinema. It was the first Chinese cinema for which WBIC was allowed to commit to the majority of share (51 per

⁷⁷ Xinhuanet, *Warner Bros. secures domestic box office champion*, <http://news.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2006-01/09/content_4027551.htm> [accessed 30 September 2011].

cent). In the first year of WBIC's incorporation, the cinema saw an increase of 43 per cent in box office and 93 per cent in attendance comparing to the same period of the previous year.⁷⁸ By 2005, WBIC had invested a total of 8 cinemas across major cities in China. The total box office achieved by these cinemas was 120 million yuan RMB in 2005, a remarkable 6 per cent of the entire Chinese box office of the year.

In 2004, the SARFT and the Ministry of Commerce in their joint No. 44 Announcement (*Interim Provisions on the Administration of Chinese-foreign Equity and Contractual Joint Ventures of Radio and Television Program Production*) stated that China would started to issue approval to foreign investment to incorporate film production companies through joint ventures, given the condition that the registered capital of the joint venture is no less than 5 million yuan RMB and the total foreign investment does not exceed 49 per cent. Immediately after the Announcement, China Film, Warner Bros. Entertainment and Hengdian Group (a Chinese private enterprise) incorporated Warner China Film HG Corporation under the agreed holding ratio of 4:3:3. In November of the same, the second approved company, Huaso Film and Television Production Co., Ltd. was established. It was incorporated by Sony Pictures and Hualong Film Digital Production Co., Ltd – a subsidiary of China Film. These companies would produce television programmes, including TV entertainment shows, dramas as well as films in Chinese language which would then be sold to China and abroad.

At the time of reform, things were unstable, including the regulations and policies. This was tough for foreign investors. They did not want to miss out the chance just to “wait-and-see”; they certainly did not want to waste their money and time on something that would not turn into profit, either. Sometimes they just had to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

predict and make decision based on assumptions and also be prepared to deal with any potential policy changes. On 25 February 2005, the SARFT issued the *Notice on Matters Concerning the Implementation of the 2004 No.44 Announcement*.

According to the Notice, any foreign investor could only incorporate one media production company in China. It effectively resulted in a situation in which foreign companies like Warner Bros. Entertainment and Sony Pictures who had already incorporated a production company became unable to further expand their business in China. It would without doubt restrain the development of foreign investment in film and television production. It was also believed to be a measure to protect local production companies.

On 6 July 2005, the *Several Opinions on Canvassing Foreign Investment into the Cultural Sector* as jointly formulated by the Ministry of Culture, the SARFT, General Administration of Press and Publication, National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Commerce was issued. It was titled “opinions” but had de facto regulation effectiveness. According to the Options, the experimental cities introduced in the 2003 Interim Provisions were abolished. It means that, foreign companies like WBIC would not be able to have more than 49 per cent of the share and therefore would not be able to gain decision-making control over any of the cinemas it invested. It was considered a great frustration for foreign investors. In 2006, WBIC announced their decision to completely pull out from the six cinemas they run with their Chinese partners, which was also widely believed to be a result of this regulatory change. However, according to an insider, it was much more complicated than that. On the outside, WBIC appeared to be a vigorous participant of Chinese cinema reform; on the inside, they were actually very cautious. For most of their involvements, although they were allowed to invest up to a certain percentage,

they did not commit to it with real capital. Taking the Wuhan Warner-Wanda cinema project for example, when the project was kicked off, the entire capital investment was solely provided by Wanda Group (China). At the time, the Interim Provisions to increase the ratio of foreign investment in Chinese cinemas was already in effect. Apparently, WBIC knew the risk. According to the agreement, WBIC incorporate by giving the consent to use “Warner Bros.” in naming the cinema and providing billable management support. Their right to commit to the shares would be preserved for five years during which WBIC was allowed to purchase the cinema’s shares up to the agreed maximum at any time. Wanda had a high anticipation in WBIC’s management which later became a major disappointment and the root of disagreement between the two parties. WBIC basically adopt their multiplex management approach from the US which, in Wanda’s opinion, did not fit China’s situation. For one thing, the overpriced snacks did not receive the expected profit. Second, Wanda could not understand why all the screens had to be in use even when only 3 per cent of the seats were occupied. Such sort of disagreement did not only exist between WBIC and Wanda. Genxiong Li, WBIC’s partner in Guangzhou openly criticised, “WBIC’s management has problems”. Shanghai Film was also reluctant to let WBIC get involved in much of the management of their Warner-Yonghua Cinema.⁷⁹ Although WBIC insisted that their management had no problem, the cooperation between WBIC and these cinemas soon existed only in name. Furthermore, according to the Opinions, WBIC would have no immediate possibility to gain the decision-making control over these cinemas through share purchasing. And the relation between WBIC and these cinemas made it very unlikely for any

⁷⁹ Wang, Lin, “Meiguo huana yingyuan tuichu zhongguo zhenxiang (The truth behind Warner Bros. Retreating from Chinese market)”, *The Economy Observer*, <<http://mnc.people.com.cn/GB/54823/5068856.html>> [accessed 30 September 2011].

billable management work to occur. When withdrawing became a reasonable move, WBIC's cautious investing strategy paid off. Without much of financial involvement, WBIC had a smooth pull-out from its cinema business in China, unharmed.

The status of film importation was also changing. The most apparent change was the increase in importation quota for revenue-sharing films from the previous 10 to the new limit of 20 starting from 2001. Revenue-sharing had been the primary way for China to import Hollywood high-budget blockbusters because of historical reasons. Back to the days of *The Fugitive*, *Lion King* and *True Lies*, these blockbusters were imported to rescue the film market. The market to be rescued could hardly offer the money to buy out any Hollywood mega-productions. Even if it could, it probably would not take the risk. The market was simply so depressed at the time that no one could guarantee, even with a Hollywood blockbuster at the disposal, that Chinese audiences would pay to go back to cinema. Revenue-sharing, with minimum risk, was the obvious and sensible choice. However, revenue-sharing was not the only form of China's film importation – it never was. In fact, the most common way was buy-out. Before *The Fugitive*, China had been buying out-dated foreign films at low prices. With the recovery of the film market, this situation changed, especially after the SARFT, in 2004, started to give private companies the entitlement to release non-US buy-out films alongside with China Film and Huaxia Film. In 2005 alone, there were 77 titles submitted to the SARFT for approval among which 29 were approved.⁸⁰ The 29 buy-outs generated 100 million yuan RMB in the 2005 box office. Of course, it was not a huge number, but considering that the average buy-out price was only around 300 to 400 thousand yuan RMB, the return was quite to the satisfactory. One of the most remarkable buy-out films that year was

⁸⁰ Zhong, Minglan, "2005 nian jinkou yingpian de zhongguo shichang (The Imported Films in Chinese Market in 2005)", *China Film Yearbook*, p.273.

the French documentary *March of the Penguins* (2005). Beijing Nian'en Changying Cultural Communications bought the right to release the film in China for nearly 1 million yuan RMB, which turned out to be a very successful investment by grossing an astonishing twelve million yuan RMB at the box office. The enthusiasm in buy-out films among investors reflected the growing capital and confidence in the market. The enthusiasm also extended to Hollywood blockbusters. Recently, *The Expendables* (2010), as a buy-out, managed to harvest a box office of 213.06 million yuan RMB. It ranked No. 5 among all the imported film of 2010, almost 37 million yuan RMB ahead of the No.6 *Iron Man 2* (2010) which was a revenue-sharing import. Encouraged by the success of the film *The Expendables*, the average price for buy-outs increased by nearly 10 times from 2010 to 2011.⁸¹ For Hollywood, the rise of buy-out films in the market, on one hand, was certainly a new opportunity. It opened another possibility apart from revenue-sharing for Hollywood studios to sell their films to China. On the other hand, it also imposed a new challenge – the challenge from other film export countries and the challenge from the growing maturity of Chinese audiences and their diverse tastes fostered by the abundant films available to them.

Besides the rise of buy-out films, another type of films also started to get more and more popular and, in recent years, became a very strong participant in the film market. They include Digital, 3D and IMAX films. Because they need to be exhibited with non-traditional equipment in special venues, they are collectively referred to as “te zhong pian (special-venue films)” in China. In November 2002, the SARFT issued the *Interim Provisions on the Administration of Special-Venue Films*.

⁸¹ Anon., “Gansidui hou pipian chengben chaogao, feng xian jiangao jingti peiqian (*The Expendables stimulate the buy-out film market, risk increases*)”
<<http://yule.cvic.com/yspl/2011/0907/97359.shtml>> [accessed 10 September 2011].

To enrich the film market and also to encourage the cinemas to upgrade their equipment and venues, special-venue films were excluded from the revenue-sharing importation quota. In 2003, China Film Digital Cinema Co, Ltd. was established in Beijing. It is a subsidiary of China Film and is given the exclusive entitlement to distribute special-venue films in China. Starting from 2003, special-venue films became available in Chinese cinemas. These films were basically 2D Digital copies of the normal versions, until the 3D version of the *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (2008) was released in China in 2008. Another 3D release in the 2008 Chinese cinema was *Bolt* (2008), which was the first 3D animated feature ever released in China. Special-venue films in China took a big step forward in 2009. In this year alone, a total of 12 special-venue films, consisting of 5 3D, 4 IMAX, 2 IMAX Digital and 1 with both 3D version and IMAX version, were imported and released. Among them, *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs* (2009), as a 3D-only release during the Summer Holiday Season, achieved a satisfactory box office of 156.9 million yuan RMB and ranked at this year's 3rd place among all the imported films. The film was considered to be the box office dark horse of the year. Considering that there were only around 300 3D exhibition venues nationwide in 2009, its box office achievement was quite remarkable. Cinemas were encouraged by the box office success of *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs* and the number of 3D exhibition venues significantly increased. By the end of 2009, the national 3D-ready venues had increased to nearly 500. The fact that the importation of special-venue films does not subject to the revenue-sharing quota indicates a certain level of relaxation in the control over film importation with respect to the quantity. Certain Hollywood blockbusters with 3D or IMAX versions do not have to go through the revenue-

sharing route to get into the Chinese market. Both buy-out and special-venue are now legit and viable alternatives to revenue-sharing for Hollywood studios.

Another change in importation was the simplification and speedup in the approving process which made it possible for international simultaneous release. The delay in release would almost definitely have a negative impact on the box office. The worst situation happens when a film is released in China after its DVD release in the US or EU, one of the example being *S.W.A.T* (2003). The film was premiered in China on 23 April 2004, almost 5 months after its DVD release in the US. Although the DVD was not yet released in China, pirate DVD copies and p2p download of the DVD rips had long been available. This 200 million dollar worldwide grossed Hollywood blockbuster was described as “no much of performance” in the Chinese cinema.⁸² China realised that this kind of delay in release would only benefit piracy. “Reducing the censorship processing time is the right move. Time is money, time is profit – it applies to film market.”⁸³ The first imported film to achieve global simultaneous release in China was *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003). The second was *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004). Both of these two films achieved satisfactory box office results. “Global Simultaneous Release” started to be used as a publicity stunt. This phrase would appear on film posters, billboard advertisement and banners hanging outside the cinema. Although not every global simultaneous release had turned into box office success, pushing it forward had in a way shown China’s effort in combating piracy. In recent years, China had also closed down or regulated a series of websites that used to provide p2p download links for visual and audio products. It

⁸² Zhu, Yuqing, “Jifeng zhi jincao 2 (Strength is truly tested in crisis 2)”, *Chinese Film Market*, 2 (2009), pp20-23.

⁸³ Zhong, Minglan, “2005 nian jinkou yingpian de zhongguo shichang (The Imported Films in Chinese Market in 2005)”, *China Film Yearbook*, p.273.

helped to construct a healthier market which benefited both the local film industry and Hollywood.

Looking back in time, the new era for American entertainment in China after China's accession to the WTO has been an era of both opportunities and challenges. For Hollywood, the opportunities come from the relaxation of the policies as well as the recovery of the market – same for the challenges. It is hard to argue that the policies are kindly formulated to benefit Hollywood studios when they have a strong focus on protecting the local industry. China opened its door to Hollywood films; however, it is still not a fully liberalised market. The important thing is: the importation quota has indeed increased and some of the regulatory changes do have positive influence on both China and Hollywood. The real challenge is the instability of the policies. A new policy could become invalid in a matter of months, or even shorter, which could potentially benefit or harm business decisions made previously. Hollywood majors have been taking extra care dealing with such kind of situations. As for the reviving film market, it is good news for both the local industry and Hollywood. The increase in box office reflects the growing consumption capability of the Chinese audiences, which will consequently draw more investment into this business. The prosperity in the buy-out film market is demonstrating this capital movement. For Hollywood studios, this is a work-around to the hard quota on revenue-sharing importation to further increase their business share in the market. It also introduces new challenges for Hollywood. In the market, they will have to compete not only against the domestic productions, but also against the increasing number of new films from other places like Japan, Korean, India and some European countries. It is no longer the time when “dapian” is appealing enough for the Chinese audiences. They now have varied tastes for films; more importantly, they have

choices. How to attract more Chinese audiences to the cinemas will long remain as a subject for Hollywood studios, as well as their importers, to study.

Lessons for Hollywood

For the many years since its re-entry in 1994, Hollywood has been a participant of China's film industry reform. The relationship between Hollywood and China has ebbed and flowed, with alternating periods of optimism and pessimism on each side.⁸⁴ As of 2010, the total number of Hollywood films imported on revenue-sharing basis has reached 211. History has lost track of the number of Hollywood films imported on non-revenue-sharing but, drawing from some individual cases (*March of the Penguins*, *The Expendables*) and their aftermath, a reasonable guess should be that the number is increasing. The table below summarises the number of films imported each year from 1994 to 2010. The numbers in parentheses are those from Hollywood.

The Number of Films Imported from 1994 – 2010*

Year	Revenue-sharing (US)	Non-revenue-sharing
1994	2 (1)	60
1995	9 (6)	51
1996	10 (10)	44
1997	10 (7)	40
1998	10 (7)	45
1999	10 (7)	44
2000	15 (12)	27
2001	16 (12)	25

⁸⁴ Rosen, Stanley, "The wolf at the door": Hollywood and the film market in china from 1994-2000", in *Southern California and the World*, ed. by E.J. Heikkila and R. Pizarro (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), pp.49-78.

Year	Revenue-sharing (US)	Non-revenue-sharing
2002	19 (16)	24
2003	21 [†] (20)	20
2004	19 (14)	30
2005	20 (17)	29
2006	20 (17)	30
2007	20 (17)	30
2008	22 (17)	21
2009	19 (15)	33
2010	20 (16)	42

* Data are extracted from *China Film Yearbook* (1994 - 2010).

† There are years in which revenue-sharing importation exceeds the quota, which shows a certain level of flexibility in executing the policy.

Hollywood blockbusters are expected to perform well in the Chinese film market – basically why they are imported. The fact is: they do not always perform as expected. There is probably not much to talk about when it goes as expected; but when it does not, there is a good chance for lessons learnt. In this section, a mini case study of *Mulan* (1998) is presented. It should be noted that this is not a reception study of the film. It is represented here because serves as an excellent example for many issues that have been discussed in this chapter. A reception study of *Mulan* is presented in Chapter 4.

Mulan (1998)

The film *Mulan* (1998) was released in China in 1999. Disney had great expectation for this animated feature based on a Chinese folklore, hoping it might replicate the success of their 1994 film *The Lion King*. Worldwide, it was one of the most profitable films in Disney history. Quite to the opposite, it had proved to be flop in the animated heroine's birthplace. The film closed in Hunan province after taking just US\$30, 000 at the box office in three weeks. In Shanghai, only 200,000 of the city's

14 million population (1.4 per cent) went to see the film. Most arguments attribute *Mulan*'s failure to cultural issues such as the lack of cultural resonating from the audiences.

*“If the taste of an audience that is so different from that in the West is not easy to predict, then films based on Chinese stories, such as Mulan, are less likely to resonate culturally with the local audience as they can be easily Americanized or Disneyized.”*⁸⁵

The following analysis will show that cultural barrier is overrated in the unexpected failure of the film. In fact, the failure is a result of a combination of economic, political and cultural effects.

In 1999, the Chinese film market suffered from the decrease in cinema attendance across almost all regions.⁸⁶ The imported films did not manage to rescue the situation. In that year, a total of 44 films were imported, only one short from that of 1998. However, the total box office dropped sharply by 71 per cent.⁸⁷ Although the highly successful *Titanic* (1998) contributed a good amount to the 1998 box office, the drop in 1999 was still considered a sign of regression in the Chinese film market in general. There had been roundabouts during the recovery of the Chinese film market. Basically, there are two causes behind this particular regression. First, under the macroeconomic control imposed by the Chinese government, most enterprises and public institutions had to reduce their budget, which immediately reflected on their employee benefits. One of the affected common benefits was entertainment subsidise including “group tickets” for films. At that time, enterprises

⁸⁵ Wang, Ting, “Hollywood’s crusade in China prior to China’s WTO accession”, *Jump Cut*, <<http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/TingWang/index.html>> [accessed 30 September 2011]

⁸⁶ Zhang, Y., “Fengyu jiancheng de 1999 -Jinkou yingpian shichang zongshu (The Industry of Imported Film in 1999)”, in *China Film Yearbook*, ed. by Editorial group of China Film Yearbook. (Beijing: Publishing Group of China Film Yearbook., 2000), p. 147.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.147.

and institutions buying group tickets and then giving them to their employees as a kind of benefit was an important type of film consumption in China.⁸⁸ The loss in group tickets sale contributed a significant part of the box office decrease. Second, the Chinese audiences started to select which films to go to more deliberately. Instead of scrambling for a seat at any imported blockbusters, the Chinese audience started to pick only those films that satisfy their anticipation. *Mulan* and the other imported blockbusters did not come to the miraculous rescue of the Chinese box office in 1999 – if it were five years ago, they probably could have.

Apart from the general regression in film market, some political issues also contributed to *Mulan*'s failure at the box office. In 1999, China was preparing to welcome its two big days – the 50th National Day and the taking over of Macao. For the whole of the year, the Chinese mainstream media were preoccupied by the propaganda of these two events. It placed the publicity of foreign films like *Mulan* in a very hard place.

Another influential event was Disney's release of *KunDun* back to 1997. *KunDun* (1997) was a Disney-funded biography of the Dalai Lama. The Chinese government considered the content of the film politically provocative. As a result, all Disney's products were banned in China. It gave the censorship approval of *Mulan* a very hard time. After a year's negotiations, on 23 February 1999, the film was finally given the limited Chinese release (not to be released in Beijing), which was already eight months delayed from its release in the US.⁸⁹ Piracy had already become a serious problem in the Chinese film market, especially for imported films. According

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.148.

⁸⁹ Groves, D., Disney hopes China will welcome 'Mulan': 'Kundun' flap may affect release, *Variety*, Wed., Aug. 5, 1998, Variety.com.
<<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117479140.html?categoryid=13&cs=1&query=Mulan+china>> [accessed 01 Feb. 2008].

to Ying Zhang, “the problem (of piracy) remains unsolved for years with a tendency of becoming more serious,” which “compromises the development of a healthy film market”.⁹⁰ The delay in release increased the impact of piracy on *Mulan*. Before its final release in China, a large portion of its potential customers who could not wait might have already got their pirate copies.

By the time the film was release, the Chinese New Year Season had already passed. Therefore it did not get a bit share of the most profitable Chinese holiday market. At the same time, a lot of propaganda films celebrating the 50th National Day and the reunification of Macao started to get into the market. These films were given priorities in screening schedule by the government, leaving *Mulan* with even less space to perform. Two months later, *Mulan* was released in Beijing. It was another bad timing because most students were preparing for their mid-term examinations.⁹¹ Adding frost to snow, on May 7 1999, during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia (Operation Allied Force), five US JDAM bombs hit the Chinese embassy in the Belgrade district of New Belgrade, killing three Chinese reporters and outraging the Chinese public. The incident effectively resulted in a national ban of US films across all Chinese cinemas.⁹² It was only five weeks after *Mulan*'s release in Beijing. The ban led to a five-month gap during which no US films were exhibited in Chinese cinemas. At the end, to Disney's great disappointment, *Mulan* only grossed about 11 million yuan RMB (US\$1.78 million) in the Chinese market.

Of course, the “foreign-looking” incarnation and mannerisms of the heroine may as well be blamed for the film's poor performance in China; however, it is not the sole or the most important reason. The unexpected market and political conditions

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.148.

⁹¹ Zhou, F., 1999.

⁹² Zhang, Y., 2000, p.148.

under which *Mulan* was released in China put the film into a very disadvantageous position, which effectively led to its failure at the box office. If it was given a more ordinary situation, *Mulan* should have done better.

This mini case study should shed some light on how to understand the box office performance of an imported Hollywood film in China. *Mulan* is by no means a typical case because it was in release under a series of extraordinary conditions. However, it serves well as an example of the many challenges Hollywood have to face during its encounter with China who is not only an economic but also a political and a cultural entity. The market performance or the industrial significance of a film and the reception of the audiences to this film are different issues. But, knowing under what economic, political and cultural conditions a film is delivered to the audiences is important because it sets up the fundamental environment in which the meanings are to be interpreted. It is the ultimate reason for which the entire chapter is presented here as the first chapter of the thesis.

Chapter 2 Only Child Generation – A

Mediation Model

“Only where events occur in such a manner as to demarcate a cohort in terms of is ‘historical-social’ consciousness, should we speak of a true generation.”⁹³

The idea that the characteristics that distinguish one generation to another are formed by social and political events of its youth is not new and is often associated with the name of Karl Mannheim who emphasised that a generation is a social creation rather than a biological necessity. The Only Child Generation (OCG) is exactly the case. Although a definition of the OCG based on year of birth is given earlier, it is only intended to be used as a reference to social and political timelines. What make the OCG distinctive are their social characteristics.

As one of the world’s largest developing countries, China, in the late 1970s, was at its two historical turning points. One is the national economic reform initialised by the Open Door Policy, the other one is the implementation of the One Child Policy as a government-guided population control of the nation. Thirty years have passed. These two policies together have resulted in China’s tremendous changes in economic, social and cultural aspects. The Open Door Policy has led China through the remarkable economic growth and swift modernisation progress that the world has seen. The One Child Policy, as claimed by the government, has prevented 400 million births. A special Chinese generation emerged during this period. They were

⁹³ Schuman, Howard and Scott, Jacqueline, “Generations and Collective Memories”, *American Sociological Review*, 54 (1989). p.359.

born and grew up as the only child of the family and are referred to as the Only Child Generation (OCG). This thesis cares about the encounter between the OCG and an important participant of China's modernisation process, the American family entertainment.

In this chapter, the OCG will be approached as a group of media users and recipients. The chapter sets out to explore the “media qualities” of the OCG, that is, the characteristics they present when encounter media texts or messages, and to understand what tendency they have in meaning making and how they accept or reject certain meanings. The chapter is organised in the following way. Firstly, to provide some background information, the introduction of the One Child Policy, its implementation and consequently the emergence and the rise of the OCG are given. Secondly, tracing back in time, the chapter then focuses on the availability of entertainment to them from both domestic and foreign resources and their encounter with them from their childhood to their adolescence and adulthood. Thirdly, the chapter then digs into the four distinctive aspects of their life – family, education, gender and childhood memory – with which they often make connections when appreciating the texts and the messages they convey. By doing this, the chapter seeks to understand why certain texts resonate or fail to resonate to the OCG – the “media qualities” of the OCG.

The Emergence and Rise of the Only Child Generation

Nowadays, China is the world's most populous country with a statistical total of 1,339,724,852 according to the most recent National Census carried out in November

2010.⁹⁴ When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, the estimated population was about 500 million. By 1981, this number had doubled to 1 billion. Seeing the growing population as what would cause serious social, economic and environmental problems and hold back the modernisation of the country, in 1978, the Chinese government established a national population control scheme under the official translation of Family Planning Policy which is most commonly known by a different name – One Child Policy. It was set as one of the basic state policies of China.

The policy was initially applied to the first-born children in 1979 in urban China. Ethnic minorities and couples with rural registers are not subject to the policy. The policy is enforced at provincial level by a government department called Population and Family Planning Commission. Each provincial government has its own detailed rules to implement the policy such as the amount of the fines to be collected if one breaks the rules but it is basically implemented as such: if a woman wants to give birth, she or her family needs to apply for a “birth permit” from one of the local government's sub-district offices. The woman then needs to bring this permit to her antenatal checks as well as to her final delivery. If she is found to have child or children by the sub-district office, fines will occur before a birth permit is issued. If she gives birth at a hospital without showing a valid permit, it is the hospital's responsibility to report to the sub-district office. The new born baby will not be added to the household register until relevant fines are cleared. A household register in China is linked to education and other state benefits. The wording of the policy is to “encourage single child” but it is in fact implemented through punishing more than

⁹⁴ National Bureau of Statistics of China, Communiqué of the National Bureau of Statistics of People's Republic of China on Major Figures of the 2010 Population Census (No. 2), <http://www.stats.gov.cn/was40/gjtjj_en_detail.jsp?searchword=census&channelid=9528&record=2>, [accessed on 1 May 2011].

encouraging. In the early years of the implementation of One Child Policy, one could suffer more than just the fines, such as pay deduction or even loss of job.

The policy was effectively implemented. According to the statistics published by the Chinese government, more than 80 per cent of the new babies born between 1979 and 1990 are only-children; this thesis defines them as the OCG. The OCG emerged a special Chinese generation. They are special not only because they are the only child in the family. The family structure and the social environment into which they were born and in which they have to grow up differed to those of their parental generation. Not only their parents, but also the society know that they are different – they know it, too. When something different emerges, concerns arise. Interesting enough, the first to express such concerns were not the Chinese but the Americans, probably inspired by their “Me Generation”. An article titled “A Rash of ‘Little Emperors’” was published in *Newsweek* on 18 March 1985 in which the authors expressed their concerns about this generation including the 4-2-1 syndrome (a typical family of four adoring grandparents, two indulgent parents and one spoiled child). It seemed to have resonated with the Chinese society and media at the time. “Little emperor” was soon widely used to refer to the OCG – it is still being used today but most often appears in the form of “once the little emperor”.

Nowadays, the oldest of the OCG have entered their 30s; even the youngest have become young adults. Again, the world today is so different to that of the time they were born. How have they been? Have they fallen as “a falling generation” that people feared they might be? If we take a fresh look at this generation, we might think differently. There is a very popular Internet quotation originated by Libo Zhou, a Chinese comedian. He said,

“There is such a generation in China: at the time they were paying for primary school, universities were free; when primary schools finally became free, they had to pay to go to a university. When they were not yet to start working, everybody had a job; now they are looking for a job, so is everybody. ... Why are they always left behind? They complain. They suffer. They still have live and they have live strong. It’s their life.”

The OCG did not grow up under the favourable conditions like most people had predicted for them. Instead, their growing up is full of frustrations and challenges. The education reform, the job hunting crisis, the rocketing house prices comparing to their relatively stable income, they had to face them one after another. For them, it had been a struggling process to deal with these challenges from the society. At the same time, they also had to solve their problems within the family. As the only child of the family, they had been given the focus of attention as a child, and consequently, all the hope and responsibilities as a grownup. The 4-2-1 syndrome now works just the opposite way – one working adult taking care of 6 retired elderly.

The OCG has entered their peak time in consumption and is contributing a major part in the consuming capacity of the society.⁹⁵ They are also leading a consumption revolution in China.⁹⁶ In entertainment consumption, it is no exception. In a study carry out by Beijing Film Academy on the audience composition of *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, the OCG was found to constitute over 60 per cent of

⁹⁵ Yang, Yi, *On Consumer Behaviour of the Only Child Generation in China*. (Guangzhou:Jinan University Press), p.3.

⁹⁶ Lu, Taihong, Zhang, Hongming and Yang, Ji, “Zhongguo Dushengdai (Chinese Only Child Generation)”, *China Marketing*, 05(2004), <<http://www.emkt.com.cn/article/285/28555.html>> [accessed 20 May 2008].

the entire audience group aged from 16 to 25.⁹⁷ The challenges they have gone through grant them with rich life experiences and these experiences will work back on their appreciation of entertainment. It should be noted that, their appreciation of some entertainment will also influence their appreciation of the others. In the next section, an overview of the film and television entertainment for the OCG will be given. It will focus on several important kinds of film and television entertainment that they experienced in their childhood.

Entertainment for the OCG

In Chinese cinema, there is a special kind of films that are produced solely for children. They are called children's films. For quite a long time, these films have been mostly state-funded. Since 1949 after the foundation of the PRC, a rough statistic suggests that nearly 400 children's films have been produced. These films are not intended to make any profit; they are produced with a strong focus on education, encouraging good behaviour and promoting patriotism and communism.

The period between 1949 and 1980 is the first stage of development for Chinese children's film. A total of 56 children's films are produced during this period, most of which follow a model that praises the glory of the revolution and the new life in social democracy. Some of them, such as *The Letter With Chicken Feather* (Ji Mao Xin, 1954), *Flowers of the Motherland* (Zu Guo De Hua Duo, 1955), *Little Soldier Zhangga* (Xiao Bing Zhangga, 1963), *Little Wooden Head* (Xiao Ling Dang, 1963) and *Sparkling Red Star* (Shan Shan De Hong Xing, 1974), are representative works

⁹⁷ Liu, Jun, "Dianying 'qihuan' xiaofei: zhihuanwang3 de kuawenhua guanzhong jieshou xiaoguo yanjiu (Fantasy consumption: a reception study of *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*)", *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 03(2004), p.69.

during this period. Many elements from these films have become symbolic representations of that era. The theme songs, protagonists, and even some of the lines have left their indelible marks in the memory of their audiences. Also, these films create two set models for children's film which I summarized as the "little heroes in war" and the "good students at school". Many of these films are still being shown nowadays as activities organised by schools for their pupils to receive education in patriotism.

Children's film experienced its golden booming age in the 1980s during which a total of 115 children's films were produced. Chinese government put a lot of effort to help with its development. China Children's Film Studio was founded. It is a film studio dedicated to the production of children's film and was directed funded by the government. China Children's Film Academy was also established during this period. And the "Golden Calf Award", an annual festival and competition for children's film, was launched. The children's films produced during this period can be divided into three categories based on the storyline. In the first category are those films further developed from the "little heroes in war" but the protagonist portraying and the plot were very much improved. The second category covers the films that bear the characteristics of the "good students at school" model. This kind of children's film tells stories about the school life of pupils (e.g. *The Sonata of Little Hedgehog*, 1983) and middle-school students (e.g. *The Girl in Red*, 1984). Most children's films fall into this category. Among them, *My September (Wo de Jiu Yue)*, 1990) was one of the very few titles that became very popular among the OCG. The story is about two primary school boys who are very good friends, competing against each other for the opportunity to perform in the opening of the 11th Asian Games held in Beijing. The OCG audiences say, "the characters feel real", "deeply moved", "seen it many times",

“educational without giving lectures” when reviewing this film.⁹⁸ The third category is a new kind developed in this period – children’s science-fiction film, a good example being *Wonder Boy* (Pi Li Beibei, 1988) which is about an alien-adopted boy who has supernatural abilities and his adventure in seeking for friendship and understandings in the ordinary world. Being the very first Chinese film to tell a story about alien, its plot was considered very novel by the audiences. The later development of children’s film generally followed the above three categories.

Apart from children’s film, another kind of Chinese film, propaganda film, also had its significant presence in the childhood of the OCG. They are mostly war films about wartime heroes and events of significance to the founding of the Party and the PRC. The OCG had actually seen a lot of these films in their childhood, not totally spontaneously though. From time to time, the schools would organise free viewings of these films. The viewings would take place during normal school hours so all the pupils were expected to attend. After the viewing, they were often required to submit their “reflections” – an essay to describe what they had learned from the film. Having to write “reflections” bothered the OCG because they felt they were “forced” to do it. Born and raised in the peacetime, they feel hard to resonate with ideas that these films try to convey. “I know what they (the teachers) expect me to write. It’s just so hard and boring to fabricate the words.” “I’ll always remember this film because it was such a pain! Not a pain to watch but to have to write the reflections!”⁹⁹ These remarks are made by an OCG audience when describe his experience with a classic Chinese propaganda film *Di Dao Zhan* (*Tunnel Warfare*, 1965) in his childhood.

⁹⁸ Douban, *Wo de jiuyue (My September)*, <<http://movie.douban.com/subject/1467748/>> [accessed 22 August 2011].

⁹⁹ Tianya, *Shibayi ren de didaozhan (1.8 billion people’s Tunnel Warfare)*, <<http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/no06/1/187463.shtml>> [accessed 22 August 2011].

For the OCG, television was the spontaneous way of entertainment in their childhood. For China's entertainment import, television was ahead of film in the 1980s and the early 1990s. In the 1980s, there were already updated foreign programmes being shown on Chinese television, such as the Japanese cartoon series *Astro Boy*. There were also domestic programmes that the OCG could enjoy, including animated feature films which were generally shown on television instead of in cinema, cartoons, cartoon series, children's television programmes and even some drama series. Compared to film, their entertainment choices from the television were far more varied. Of all the programmes, animated programmes, including animated feature films and television cartoons, were the most important ones. The importance was reflected by both their abundance and popularity.

Shanghai Animation Film Studio is an icon of Chinese animated film. It was founded in 1957 and was specialised with the production of animated films including Chinese drawing, puppet, paper-cutting and paper-folding films. Many of its productions in its early years (1950s – 1980s), such as *Guo Hou Shan* (1958), *Yu Tong* (1959), *Xiao Kedou Zhao Mama* (1960), *Ren Shen Wawa* (1962), *Da Nao Tian Gong* (1965), *Nezha Nao Hai* (1979), *Hou Zi Lao Yue* (1981), *Tian Shu Qi Tan* (1983) and *Hu Lu Xiong Di* (1986), are considered by the OCG as the classics. These films are made using traditional Chinese forms of art such as Chinese painting and paper-cutting. The designs of the characters all bear distinctive Chinese fashions; they look very much like the characters that would appear in a traditional Chinese New Year Painting. Foreign cartoon programmes were also available on television for the OCG. Most of them were from the US, Japan and some European countries. Disney's *Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck* series was probably the most influential among them. Japanese cartoons such as *Astro Boy (Tie Bi A Tong Mu)* and *Ikkyu-san (Cong*

Ming de Yi Xiu), and those from European countries such as *The Smurfs* (*Lan Jing Ling*, Belgium), had also achieved a certain level of popularity. All these cartoon and animated programmes, from both domestic and abroad, constituted the majority part of OCG's television viewing experience during in their childhood.

In general, the OCG's childhood film and television entertainment is a composition of both domestic and foreign products, of both spontaneous and forced experience. When Hollywood family films with other Hollywood blockbusters later become available to them, their appreciation of these films are often found to have connections with their childhood entertainment experience as well as some other life experience of theirs which will be discussed in the following sections.

The Family as They Know It

Family in modern Chinese is 家 (pronounced as jiā), which means both “family” and “home”. It is a pictograph character developed from its ancient form  which takes the form of a house. The formation of the character reflects how family is traditional understood by the Chinese – it is a place for people to live in. In a traditional Chinese family, all family members should live together generation after generation. A renowned Chinese writer Lao She described the life of a family like this in his novel *Si Shi Tong Tang* (*Four Generations under One Roof*). Four-generations-under-one-roof is the ideal state for a tradition Chinese family. The fact that the eldest of the family, the sons, the grandsons and the grand grandsons all present and live together represents the continuance and prosperity of the family. This traditional family formation emphasises the family as a group and discourage the development of individualism. The purpose of the family is always higher than that of an individual

family member. Every family member should work together to achieve the greater goal of the family. Such family is bonded and run with a strong sense of hierarchy. The elder generation outrank the younger generation. The eldest of the family, often the male of the eldest generation, is the prime who controls the entire family. Complying with this family hierarchy, “xiao shun” (filial piety) is deemed as the most important duty of all. It not only implies the duty to take care of the elderly but also that to obey their will and orders.

With the development of the society, this traditional form of family gradually decomposed into smaller units. It happened as a result of the boom in urban residential construction during which people moved from houses to apartments. Because of the abundance in housing, married couples started to have the luxury to move out from their parents’ apartments when they get married. Although family members do not physically live together as in the traditional family form, the spirit of the tradition, such as the hierarchical state of mind and disregard of individualism, still present. Being “xiao shun” is still considered as the most important quality of a good son or daughter.

As a result of the One Child Policy, a typical urban OCG family is composed of three family members – father, mother and child. This rather closed circle makes it difficult to communicate with the outside. Because both parents had to work and often had no time to pick them up from the school, many of the OCG have to go home by themselves. For their safety, they were instructed to go home directly after school. And when they got home, they had to lock themselves in, do their homework. Then they would watch some TV and wait for their parents to come home. This family formation and life routine resulted in two disappointments in the family life of the OCG. The first is the lack of brothers or sisters. There was no one of the similar

age in the family to play together with. They were often left home alone with no one else to communicate with. The second is the lack of communication with the outside world. A residential apartment often makes a distanced neighbourhood. Neighbours do not look after or even speak to each other and the safety was not good in general. Most of the OCG had at least once told by their parents of this sentence or a similar, “When you’re home alone, no matter who knocks the door, do not open it!” The protection their parents imposed on them also distances them from society.

The hierarchical state of mind exists in the parent-child relationship in OCG families. The fact that the OCG children are the only offspring of their parents brings about some change into the hierarchy. As the only children, they become the only successors who can carry forward the legacy of the families to the future. An only child gets all the care and attentions from the parents which would normally be divided between brothers and sisters in a non-only-child family. A study by Shixian Ding shows that problems exist in the parent-child relationship in many OCG families in China. The OCG children grow up as the centres of attentions of their families. Considering their only child as the only hope of the family, a couple’s desire for this child to succeed is so strong that they cannot accept anything to go wrong. With the living conditions being improved, they are keener to provide the child with things to satisfy their material needs. At the same time, they want to stay in control and do not allow the child to challenge their decisions; they want to make sure that the child develops towards what they believe to be the good future. The study by Ding indicates that, these parents tend to use material input to express attentions and love to their children, which overlooks the emotional communication

and connection.¹⁰⁰ Because of the high expectations they have on their children, they often appear in a strict and powerful figure which makes the children reluctant to communicate with them. The situation results in a generational gap which is considered to be a serious problem in OCG families.¹⁰¹ The lack of communication with their parents is another disappointment for the OCG in their family life.

These disappointments they have for their family life influence their appreciation for entertainment. The OCG's reception to *Growing Pains* (1985–1992) is one of the examples that are linked with their childhood family experiences.

“It is a relief to my growing pains. Whenever I feel lonely or sad I will watch it.”

“I grew up with this TV. My childhood memory, the content, the anger, the happiness and the sadness, they are all in there.”

“I wish I had a family like this.”

The US situation comedy is about the life of an affluent family, residing in Huntington, New York, with a working mother and a stay-at-home psychiatrist father raising three children together. It displayed a different family to the OCG audiences sitting in front of the TV. The whole series of 7 seasons and 177 episodes in total was imported, dubbed and broadcast on Chinese television by Shanghai Television from 1990 to 1994 and is suggested by many OCG audiences as a “classic”.

Although the OCG audiences expressed their reception in different wordings, their expressions are mostly made in connection with their family life experience as the only children. It made them know “how sad it is to be an only child” and at the same time let them experience the “tender feeling” and the “warmth”. It also led them to

¹⁰⁰ Ding, S. X., ‘Dui chengshi yidai dushengzinü jiaoyu wenti de shehuixue kaocha’ (Social Studies on the Education of the Only Child Generation in Urban China), *Renkou yanjiu* (*Population Research*), 5(1989), 8-12(p.9).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.10.

judge their own experience and question about the way their parents treated them.

Many of the OCG agree that “it (the parent-child relationship in the story) is of great inspiration for us when we become parents” – note the indirect way they adopt to express disagreement to their parents. They look forward to the “democracy” among family members like it was shown in the TV, and appreciate the way they deal with disagreements between parents and children.

According to Nielsen ratings, *Growing Pains* is not among the most successful TV series in the US, with estimated number of viewers peaked during its 1986-1987 season at about 19.83 million.¹⁰² Compared to this, the reaction it caused in China is much stronger. This is because the audiences feel the difference between the family they experience in real life and that displayed in the drama which generated resonance from the audiences. Apart from the favourable responses from the audiences, its impact is also reflected in other ways. For example, a later imported television series from Disney Channel, *Lizzie McGuire*, is titled in Chinese as “*New Growing Pains*”. The Chinese situation comedy *Home with Kids* is also considered to be a Chinese adaptation of *Growing Pains*. Interesting enough, the family setup in *Home with Kids* is exactly the same as that in *Growing Pains* – two parents and three children of two boys and one girl – which is not a typical family setup in China.

From the above example it can be seen that, because they have these disappointments in their family life, the OCG will respond to media messages that are in connection with these disappointments. They will disapprove and reject the messages that they believe to be incorrect, approve and resonate with the messages that reflect their experience, and appreciate the solutions to their problems in the messages. It is an interesting fact that *Home with Kids* mimics the setup of *Growing*

¹⁰² Classic TV Hits, *TV Ratings: 1986-1987*, <<http://www.classictvhits.com/tvratings/1986.htm>> [accessed 26 August 2011].

Pains. In a way, the idea of creating *Home with Kids* and using a family setup like this indicate that the media are aware of what is missing in Chinese families and are using this understanding to play up to the audiences.

Tomboy, to Be or Not to Be

There is an old Chinese saying, “Bu xiao you san, wu hou wei da.” It means, “There are three ways to be unfilial; having no sons is the worst”, which shows how important it is in Chinese tradition for a family to have a male child. Traditionally, the continuance of the family, the everlasting of the family blood and legacy, is considered extremely important by Chinese people. The only way to achieve such continuance is for a male adult of the family to have a male descendent. The breakage of the family continuance is considered a devastating misfortune and those who are responsible are considered to be the sinner to his ancestors.

The following scene is often seen in film or television drama that reflects the life of a traditional Chinese family. A husband is waiting anxiously outside the delivery room, maybe a room of his own house, in which her wife is trying to deliver their baby. Suddenly, a baby’s cry is heard. Door open, a midwife emerges. Depending on what the midwife says next, the scene will develop in two different ways. The midwife says, 1) “Many congratulations! It’s a boy!” The husband bursts into happy tears and yells, “I have a son, now! The Zhang’s (the husband’s family name) finally have a descendent!” He then enters the room to his wife’s side, holding her hands, gratitude on his face. 2) “It’s a girl.” The husband snorts with anger and disappointment, then strides to the outside. The wife is left alone in the delivery room with the baby girl, tears running down her face. The above scenes may appear

in fictional stories but are very much based on reality. They are very likely to happen in real life especially in the old days.

With the cultural and social development of China, the equality between men and women is being emphasised by the public opinion and the mainstream media. However, the idea of preserving the family line and hence the favouritism to boys is still deeply burned into the ideology of many Chinese. Combined with the influence of the One Child Policy, it has generated a new series of social situations in China. Previously, if a couple do not have a boy, they can always try; after the establishment of the One Child Policy, most couples do not have the luxury to do so – they now have only one chance. China's One Child Policy has generated recurring debates in relation to gender issues. One general voice claims that it leads to serious social problems by encouraging abortion and introducing gender imbalance to the population. Steven Mosher, President of the Population Research, states that China's sex imbalance has already reached epic proportions by quoting a study published in the British Medical Journal by Weixing Zhe et al who suggests, "In 2005, males under the age of 20 exceeded females by more than 32 million in China, and more than 1.1 million excess births of boys occurred."¹⁰³ Mosher criticises One Child Policy for its contribution to the increase in on-demand-abortion and links the imbalance of sex to a series of social situations, including permanent bachelorhood and increase in prostitutions and homosexuality. The other typical voice takes a more positive perspective and argues that the Only Child Policy has improved the status of urban Chinese women, who were born as the only child, in their competition against men. While accepting that the policy does generate negative consequences, Ming Tsui and Lynne Rich in their 2002 paper suggest that, although not being an intended

¹⁰³ Population Research Institute, *When Gender Gaps: China's One-Child Policy and Baby Girls*, <http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=33382>[accessed 26 August 2011].

result, the policy has led to an improved educational opportunity for girls in urban China.

A headline article published by Associated Press described the One Child Policy as “a surprising boon for China girls”. Alexs Olesen, author of the article, reports that the implement of One Child Policy has led to an increase in the ratio of women in education. Vanessa Fong, a Harvard University professor and expert on China’s One Child Policy, gives the following remarks in her interview with Olesen, “In the past, girls were raised to be good wives and mothers. They were going to marry out anyway, so it wasn’t a big deal if they didn’t want to study. (Today’s urban Chinese parents) perceive their daughters as the family’s sole hope for the future. They (the girls) have basically gotten everything that used to only go to the boys.”¹⁰⁴ Studies on education for Chinese only children suggest that, depending on their sex, the expectations of their parents are different. A paper by Fengshu Liu presented the following conversation between two parents:

Mother: I would like her to be like a boy – open-minded, bold, and tough.

Less typical of a traditional girl.

*Father: I agree. The future society will be more and more competitive. It will be harder for girls because the society will still be in favour of males to some extent. So we want her to possess some of a man’s character. She can compete better then.*¹⁰⁵

Liu further reveals that, some contemporary Chinese parents have a new idea for bringing up their daughters – to help their daughters to develop some so-called manly

¹⁰⁴ Olesen, Alexa, “One-child policy a surprising boon for China girls”, *Associated Press*, 14 August 2011, <<http://news.yahoo.com/one-child-policy-surprising-boon-china-girls-152100729.html>> [accessed 28 August 2011].

¹⁰⁵ Liu, Fengshu, “Boys as Only-Children and Girls as Only-Children--Parental Gendered Expectations of the Only-Child in the Nuclear Chinese Family in Present-Day China”, *Gender and Education*, Vol.18, No.5, September 2006, 491-505(p.500).

characteristics, such as strong will, toughness, boldness, ambitiousness, competitiveness and independence, and at the same time, preserve certain qualities that are considered desirable to female, such as gentleness, considerateness and beauty.

Girls and gender issues are hot topics in Chinese mass media as well. According to a study by Bu Wei, “girl child” was raised as a matter of public concern by the Chinese mass media in the mid-1980s when reports were mainly concentrated on equal opportunities for education. For the OCG girls, the existence of gender bias would almost certainly have an impact on them, on their personality, their perception to self and others. A report by *Beijing Youth Daily* observes that the favouritism to boy that an only girl senses from her parents and grandparents may make her ego vacillate between shame (to be a girl) and success-seeking (for equality with males).¹⁰⁶ Even if such issue does not apply to an individual OCG girl, the fact that the social group to which she belongs simply is at the centre of such discussions and debates of the society would play its part. She would question if she is one of the girls who were not wanted by their parents in the first place.

The feeling of shame and desire for success fostered their admiration to powerful women figures of both fictional and real-life. Film *Sissi* (1955) was imported to China and was shown on Chinese television multiple times in the 1980s. The film was very popular among the OCG girls and the female protagonist, Princess Sissi, is considered as their childhood idol. In her recollection to the film, an OCG girl writes, “What I like the most about Sissi is her tomboy personality.”¹⁰⁷ In fact, the OCG female audiences are found to respond rather favourably to tomboy characters in film and television, probably the most representative being their

¹⁰⁶ Guan, Y., “The merits and demerits of only kids”, *Beijing Youth Daily*, 4 June 1997, p.008.

¹⁰⁷ Mtime, *Princess Sissi I*, <<http://i.mtime.com/cliwang/blog/340423/>> [accessed 5 September 2011].

reception to Disney's princess cartoon series. As pointed out by William Indick in his *Movies and the Mind*, most of these princesses, such as Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Pocahontas in *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* in *Mulan* (1998), are much more assertive and proactive than traditional princess characters and bear tomboy personalities. Similar to the reference to the general OCG using "little emperor", the OCG girls are also referred to as the "little princess". Perhaps their reception to these cartoons is also linked to their "princess complex", but the most important reason behind their favourable reaction is their admiration and resonance to the tomboy personalities of these characters. For the OCG female audiences, these characters represent a rule-breaking attitude.

Super Girl is a Chinese television singing contest show run by Hunan Television. It is very much alike *X Factors* and *American Idols* but is only for girls. The final episode of its 2005 season got 400 million viewers, almost one-third of China's population. That night, an OCG girl named Li Yuchun was voted by 3,528,308 viewers to become the winner. Li's popularity among Chinese girls is widely attributed to her notably boyish appearance, masculine stage presence and bold personality, which charmed her millions of girl fans across China. She does not wear makeup and has a haircut (and body) of David Bowie. She sings aggressively: loud songs and songs written for men. Li herself has admitted that she identifies as a tomboy.¹⁰⁸ Her wining and overwhelming popularity draws the attention of the world. *Time* (Asia) put her on the front cover of its October 2005 special issue and nominated her as one of the 25 Asia's heroes of 2005.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Lo, Malinda, "China's Super girl L Yuchun", *AfterEllen*, <<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/People/2006/2/supergirl.html>> [accessed 05 May 2009].

¹⁰⁹ Jakes, Susan, "Li Yuchun", *Time*, <<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2054304,00.html>> [accessed 05 May 2009].

Cai Lin, a professor of sociology and gender studies at Tongji University, said when interviewed by *The Guardian*, “The most popular girls these days are not tender or ladylike. As the society opens up, women can be brave, more independent and outgoing like boys.”¹¹⁰ In fact, for the OCG girls, tomboy is not simply a “can be” situation resulted from the opening up of the society. As discussed above, it is more of a state of the mind struggling from deep inside the OCG girls themselves agitated by the social and family pressure they have to face. It is also an interesting fact to notice that Li’s popularity is mostly among the girls. Male viewers are often found to poke fun at her. Among Chinese male youths, Li Yuchun is often referred to as “Brother Chun”, a mocking nickname referring to her sexual ambiguity. A lot of materials such as composite images and video clips that are deliberately generated to make fun of her can be found on the Internet. The different responses to Li Yuchun between male and female indicate that tomboy, as an untraditional female figure, still generates controversy in the society. The OCG girls admire such powerful, boyish figures; however, whether or not they should become the same, is not an easy decision for them to make.

The OCG girls are at a special position in the OCG as well as in the society. They have characteristic reception to certain entertainment and media messages. In a later chapter, Disney’s animated feature *Mulan* (1998) will be studied. It is a case study in which the reception of the OCG, OCG females in particular, to female protagonists in entertainment is examined.

¹¹⁰Joffe-Walt, Benjamin, “Mad about the girl: a pop idol for China”, *The Guardian*, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/oct/07/chinathemedia.broadcasting>> [accessed 05 May 2009].

Struggling in the Mass Production of Education

*“Like other Asians, who traditionally revere scholars, they value learning. They also see education as both the path to success and consistent with their sense of filial piety, the way to bring esteem to their family.”*¹¹¹

– Stanley Karnow

*“We must promote science, promote technology, and at the same time, promote education. We must set up key primary schools, key middle schools and key universities and make sure that our best talent concentrate at these key schools through strict examinations.”*¹¹²

– Deng Xiaoping

“Xue er you ze shi” is a Confucian slogan for education. It means he who excels in study can follow an official career. Education is highly valued in Chinese tradition. It is deemed as the path to glory. Starting from the Sui Dynasty (581-618 AD) and lasted through the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD), an Imperial Examination System (ke ju) was adopted by the imperial administration to examine and select candidate for bureaucrats and was opened to all male adults of the nation. The idea of securing a successful future through education was still widely accepted in the Chinese society nowadays, although different ideas have started to challenge this traditional belief.

The period between year 1981 and 1990 is the third baby boom in modern Chinese history with the birth rate peaked at 23.3 ‰ in 1987. During the baby boom, Chinese population increased by a total of 143 million. The number of children that are at the age to start primary school (7 years old) increased from 95.7 million in

¹¹¹ Karnow, Stanley, *Smithsonian magazine*.

¹¹² Yang, Dongping, “*Woguo jiaoyu gaige yu fazhan sanshi nian (30 Years Education Reform in China)*”, <<http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/49157/49166/8142858.html>> [accessed 6 June 2010]

1987 to 119.5 million in 1994 by nearly 25 per cent.¹¹³ The increase in birth imposed a serious test on the nation's education system. To accommodate the existing and incoming students, schools increase the number of classes and the student quota per class. As recollect by a primary school teacher, at the worst time, her class used to have 118 pupils. In a few years' time, most of these pupils would enter a higher school, and ultimately, aim to enter higher education. In 1999, the year in which the first part of the OCG started university or college, the Chinese government decided to introduce significant increase to the capacity of higher education institutions. As a result, in the three years from 1998 to 2001, the number of registered students in higher education almost doubled from 6.43 to 12.14 million.¹¹⁴ Chinese education from bottom to top had become a de facto educational mass production.

Chinese education is also criticised for being exam-oriented.¹¹⁵ It is a combined result of people's misconception about education and a failed matriculation system. As believed by most of OCG's parents, if their children had to go to a good university to be able to have a successful career later. Under the current matriculation system, it all boils down to the National Matriculation Test held every year. The National Matriculation Test was suspended during the Cultural Revolution and was resumed in 1977.¹¹⁶ A student has to achieve higher score in this test to be admitted to a better university. Although there are other routes through which a student can be admitted such as recommendation and outstanding performance in art or sports, for

¹¹³ Statistical data from *China Education Yearbook 1988 & 1995*.

¹¹⁴ China Education and Research Network, *Zhongguo gaoxiao kuozhao sannian dapandian (Three years' expanding of Chinese university)*, <<http://www.edu.cn/20021106/3071663.shtml>> [accessed 9 Nov 2010].

¹¹⁵ China Education and Research Network, *Qiantan yingshi jiaoyu yu suzhi jiaoyu (Exam oriented education and quality education)*, <<http://www.edu.cn/20010823/207816.shtml>> [accessed 9 Nov 2010].

¹¹⁶ Yang, Dongping, "*Woguo jiaoyu gaige yu fazhan sanshi nian (30 Years Education Reform in China)*", <<http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/49157/49166/8142858.html>> [accessed 6 June 2010]

the vast majority, succeeding the National Matriculation Test is their only hope. Driven by this objective, school education is focused on training the students' ability to take examinations. In some extreme cases, students are taught by their teachers about how to guess the answer based on the formation of the question without having to know the real reasons why it is the right answer.

The OCG has been struggling in the mass production of education and the underlying exam-oriented principle. Starting from primary school, they had been given an overwhelming amount to homework to do to "prepare for the future". Under exam-oriented education, curriculum design of schools completely disregards individuality. With the education reform imposed by the Chinese government, private schools came into being. They are supposed to bring personalised education more tailored to individual needs. But in reality, they are "schools for aristocrats" which are too expensive to ordinary OCG. As a result, most OCG still stuck in the mainstream education system. For many of them, time is being spent on things they are not interested in. There is no room for preference, personality and interest of individuals. Everyone is taught the same then go to the same exam. The system is actually against the nature of the OCG. Raised as the only child of the family, they are fostered with a strong sense of individualism and the desire to be unique.

*"I love to study. I think it is very important, because if you don't study you fall behind. My problem was the school. It's just not for me."*¹¹⁷

Han Han, a poster child of the OCG who dropped out of school when he was 17 gave the above remarks during a television interview. Han is now a Chinese professional rally driver, best-selling author, singer and probably the most popular

¹¹⁷ Zhou Libo (Shanghai famous TV comedian)'s interview of Han Han (well-known OCG writer).

blogger in the world.¹¹⁸ Not every OCG has the courage and determination to pursue their individual desire in education. Very importantly, they do not have the support, either from the society or from their family, to support them on this. Going to school becomes their duty to their parents and a heavy burden to carry.

There is an interesting factor in OCG's experience of the mass production of education, that is, the learning of the English language. From the foundation of the PRC to the mid-1960s, the teaching of Russian dominated China's foreign language education because of the nation's intimacy with the former Soviet Union. From the late 1960s, English gradually replaced Russian as the primary foreign language taught in school education. Piloted in 1978 and nationally extended in 1983, English joined Mathematics and Chinese to become one of the mandatory subjects for both science and arts students taking the National Matriculation Test. Accordingly, English is set as a compulsory subject for almost all pre-university schools at all levels. At university level, English is still a compulsory course to take except for student of other foreign language majors. During the three decades from 1978 to 2008, English language education in China experienced rapid development as a result of the increasing demand for English speaking personals to assist international business and trade in an open-door environment. Entering the 21st century, China has become the world's biggest market for English language education.

As a result of the mass education, being English-learner becomes a shared characteristic among the OCG. The growing popularity of English language education has caused concerns. As pointed out by Yongwei Bian, "English, however, is not a subject like mathematics or physics. English also carries culture(s)." Bian further claims, "Learning English in China, which opens for the learner greater

¹¹⁸ Tatlo, Didi, In Search of a Modern Humanism in China, *The New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/14/world/asia/14iht-letter.html>> [accessed 9 Nov 2010].

access to various media, and cultural information and forms via digital and electronic devices, brings with it more intimate contact with cultural values and life views that can differ very strongly, or be completely new, from the original cognitive, affective and social implications conveyed in Chinese with which the students were born and socialized.” According to Bian’s research, with the learning of English, Chinese college students’ identification with native language and culture decreases.¹¹⁹ Whether or not the learning of English results in an increase in the OCG’s intimacy with another culture, it does increase their intimacy with film and television entertainment that is in English. There is a tendency to watch film or television programme in its original English language rather than the translated and dubbed version among the OCG. It is partially because they want to learn English – a perfect excuse for taking some of the precious study time to enjoy a film or two – and partially because the OCG, as the audiences, want to take the initiative to decode the media texts. Translation is part of the decoding process, during which meanings may accidentally or inevitably lose its original intention, or be deliberately filtered or altered. The fact that the OCG is able to understand English removes the “translator”, which means that the media texts received by them are “first-hand”. It is of significant importance for the study because it suggests that the meanings of the texts can be generated in the OCG’s encounter with the original texts rather than the processed ones by a third party.

Subjects, figures and messages from film and television entertainment that are relevant to education are found to generate strong response from the OCG. In many cases, such resonance is often found to be in connection with their discontent in real

¹¹⁹ Bian, Yongwei, “The More I learned, the Less I Found My Self”, in *China and English: Globalisation and the Dilemmas of Identity*, ed. by Joseph Lo Bianco et al. (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009), pp.155-165.

life education. Film *3 Idiots* (2009) aroused strong responses from the OCG. Many of the responses are linked with the film's accusation to the Indian education system which is considered by the OCG to be very similar to that of China. OCG audiences describe their feeling about the film as "familiar" and "it's like looking into a mirror". Particularly, the scene in which student Joy Lobo writes "I QUIT" on the wall then hangs him resonated strongly with the OCG. Regarding this particular scene, Cicis (Internet ID) writes, "Why don't we fight the education system? It's because we don't know how! We are taught to obey, not to stand up against. How sad it is! School shouldn't be a mass production factory and we shouldn't have been mass produced to the same standard. A person is a person because of personality!"¹²⁰ These remarks by Cicis on one hand expressed OCG's powerless in challenging the existing education system, on the other hand, also reveal their desire for a change. The OCG audiences also received inspiration from the film. The film's protagonist, Rancho, is a fighter who stands up and wins his combat against the way of education that he does not believe in. While acknowledging that the ending of the film (winning the combat against education) is idealised, the audiences still feel encouraged and see hope from it. It is described as a "cardiac stimulant" for the OCG audiences.¹²¹

Like the disappointments they experienced in their family life, the OCG's discontent for education is also an important factor to be considered in the meaning making of media texts. For audiences who do not have a similar experience in education as that displayed in the film, *3 Idiots* is probably just a very funny film, or at its best arouses sympathy to Indian students. The OCG audiences get much more meanings from the film than that. Sympathy, reflection, inspiration – it is all because

¹²⁰ Anon., "Sange shagua zouhong wangluo, pipan tianyashi jiaoyu (*Three Idiots* go popular, criticises 'force-fed education')" <<http://news.mtime.com/2010/08/30/1439666.html>> [accessed 30 September 2011].

¹²¹ Ibid.

of a comparable life experience. Besides resonating to the negative educational elements, the OCG also respond to the positive. A case study for *Harry Potter* film series will be presented in Chapter 5. It is a case in which both the positive and the negative are seen by the OCG.

Nostalgia: a Tribute to Childhood

On 23 February 2009, Xiaofan Bai published a post on Tianya Club (www.tianya.cn), one of the most popular Internet forums in China. The initial post was simple, in which she wrote about her memory about some films she had enjoyed in her childhood. To her great surprise, the post aroused strong reaction from the Internet community. Starting from films to almost everything that is related to their childhood, tens of thousands of people replied to this post to share their childhood memories. A great abundance of quotations and pictures were added to the post, many of which were re-posted or quoted by other websites. As of September 2011, the post had been viewed nearly 2 million times with over 27 thousand replies.¹²² Based on the post, in November 2010, Bai published her book *Back to the Days* which soon became a best-seller on Amazon.cn.

This is just one of the many Internet occurrences of the OCG's generational nostalgia. Back in as early as year 2006, a post titled "Han Meimei is married but the bridegroom is not Li Lei" brought about quite a stir to the Chinese Internet community. Han Meimei and Li Lei are two of the fictional student characters in the English language textbooks the OCG had used in their middle-school time. The textbooks were designed to teach English through the stories about the family and

¹²² Tianya, *Balinghou chengzhang jiniance (Post-80s memorial)*, <<http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/funinfo/1/1389620.shtml>> [accessed 30 September 2011].

school life of these characters. Li Lei and Han Meimei are carried forward to a new edition of the textbooks, and they have both grown up as the OCG does. What disappointed the author of the post is in the new story lines Han Meimei became married but not to Li Lei. Soon the disappointment was proved to not only happen to him. The post received heated discussion among the OCG. It turned out that most of the OCG that had used the textbooks had believed that Li Lei and Han Meimei would become a couple. Many assumptions and explanations to the complex underlying relationships among all the characters in the textbooks flooded the Internet. Business-sensitive people even started to sell Li Lei & Han Meimei theme products to play up to the occasion. In 2009, a song about Li Lei & Han Meimei was written and spread across the Internet. A stage play featuring these two characters was put up on show in Beijing in 2010.

Also in 2006, another topic related to the childhood memory of the OCG became very popular on the Internet. The topic was about the making and playing of paper airplanes and was initialised by a post on Baidu Zhidao (Wikipedia analogue in China) asking, “Why do you have to blow a warm breath of air to the head of the paper airplane before you fly it?” Many replied to the post saying they all did the same. Some suggest that it was their childish but beautiful wish for the plane to fly a bit longer. The reason why they did does not matter. What matters is that they all did it. The post developed into a nostalgic exchange among the OCG about their life experiences, the “silly” things they did in their childhood. One said, “I missed the days when I can happily play a paper plane for hours”, many agreed.¹²³

Popular Chinese internet catchphrase, “Your mum is calling you back home for dinner”, was also originated from the collective nostalgia of the OCG. The saying

¹²³Baidu Zhidao, *Weishenme diewan zhifeiji yao dui zhe feiji hakouqi? (Why to blow a warm breath of air to a paper plane?)* <<http://zhidao.baidu.com/question/2957820>> [30 September 2011].

precisely described a very frequent childhood life scene of the OCG. When they got back from school, they were often allowed very limited time to play outside while their parents were cooking for dinner. Once it was ready, the parents would call them back home to have dinner, at which time, they had to leave what they were playing and return their confined apartment home, often unwillingly. The first instance of this catchphrase was from an online gaming forum when someone posted an article titled “Jia Junpen, your mum is calling you back home for dinner!” on 16 July 2009. It post only contained to characters “RT”, a Chinese abbreviation to “as the title suggests”. Within 9 hours, the post received more than 400 thousand click. More than 17 thousand joined the discussion. It is referred to by the media as “Jia Junpen Incident”, “Jia Junpen Phenomenon” and is believed to be a result of a collective nostalgia of the Chinese Internet community. The catchphrase is now widely used on the Internet as well as in real life conversations in China as another way of saying “leave it”, to express disapproval, or that someone is not welcomed.

In recently year, from time to time, someone’s post relating to the childhood memory of the OCG would become popular. They are no longer standalone instances of a similar topic but a widespread social and cultural phenomenon, which has drawn attentions from both the media and the academia. On 18 July 2008, *China Youth* published a report of their survey on the nostalgic phenomenon.¹²⁴ About 2500 individuals took the survey, among which 89.4 per cent are from the OCG. According to the report, 43.7 per cent of the participants have nostalgia “sometimes”, 37.5 per cent “often” and 1.5 per cent “seldom or never”. The oldest OCG have just entered their 30s hence many question about why young adults like the OCG would

¹²⁴ Tian Guolei, “80 hou qingnian jinru jiasu huaijiu shidai (Chinese post-80s accelerating nostalgia)”, *China Youth*, <http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2008-07/18/content_2269746.htm> [accessed 30 September 2011].

have such strong nostalgic feeling which normally happens to old people. “There are two kinds of people who can get nostalgic. One is the real old people. The other is like us – who have just grown up but deep down inside our hearts do not want to be a grownup. We wish to be a child again. We want to, at least sometimes, treat ourselves as a child”, responded Bai, the author of *Back to the Days*.¹²⁵ Some sociologists believe that, such strong nostalgia is originated from the stark contrast between their childhood and adulthood life as a result of China’s fast pace in modernisation and urbanisation. Hai Yu, a Fudan University professor in sociology said, “Comparing to the stressful everyday life they are living nowadays, their childhood life starts to seem relatively wonderful.” He perceives the OCG’s nostalgia as their comparison between “now” and “then”, a reflection of their stress and frustration. He also attributed OCG’s nostalgia at a young age to the rapid social development of China. He said, “During their 30 years of life, the social status of China has gone through one era to another. They have enough life experiences to recollect.” He further addressed that the fact most of these nostalgic activities happen on the Internet demonstrates that the OCG individuals are very lonely in their real life. Nostalgia acts as a kind of “bond” among the lonely individuals and brings them together to form a virtual peer group on the Internet.

The OCG’s nostalgia is also reflected in their reception to entertainment products like films. In 2007, DreamWorks and Paramount Pictures in cooperation with Hasbro, the owner of the franchise, brought *Transformers* to the big screen. The original animated television series was one of the most popular television programmes among the OCG in the 1980s and was mentioned in a lot of OCG’s

¹²⁵Wang, Jingjing, “Kaonaxie jietou anhao 80 hou jiti huaijiu (Their secret language: post-80s go nostalgic together)”, <http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2010-11/30/content_3453281.htm> [accessed 30 September 2011].

nostalgic activities described above. The OCG's response to the film was very emotional. An audience named Tian Wu said to the reporter, "When Optimus Prime entered the scene in his iconic red and blue HGV form, then transformed into a giant robot and announced 'I am Optimus Prime, leader of the Autobots', I couldn't help but burst into tears."¹²⁶ It was not meant to be such an emotional scene but it was so for the OCG audiences. In 2010, another success of Hollywood film demonstrated the power of the OCG's nostalgia. *The Expendables*, starred by Sylvester Stallone and several other old-time action film icons, became a huge hit in the Chinese cinema. For the OCG, neither the plot nor the filming technology really matters. What matter are the actors. They are the reason for which many OCG audiences went to see the film. "Thank you very much, Stallon, for bring us this film. We are sitting in the modern cinema, letting the film take us back to the 1980s, to the dark, dirty and turbid video rooms where we saw the world.", wrote an audience member in his blog.¹²⁷

Memory matters as the representations of the past which influence the present.¹²⁸ Behind the wave and wave of nostalgia of the OCG is what can be described as the collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs in his pivotal work on this matter, *Collective Memory*, emphasise that in the construction of memory, even personal memory, group effect plays its role. In the view of Halbwachs, if the desire of the group trying to preserve the memory is strong enough, it could even transfigure how individual memory is shaped. For the OCG, whether the group's nostalgia strength has transfigured their personal memory is yet to be answered; however, evidence has

¹²⁶ Tian Guolei, "80 hou qingnian jinru jiasu huaijiu shidai (Chinese post-80s accelerating nostalgia)", *China Youth*, <http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2008-07/18/content_2269746.htm> [accessed 30 September 2011].

¹²⁷ Tianya, *Gansidui, yishou zhuyi 80 niandai de wange (The Expendables, a memory for the 1980s)*, <<http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/filmtv/1/303066.shtml>> [accessed 30 September 2011].

¹²⁸ Staiger, Janet, *Media Reception Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p.187.

shown that their collective memory and nostalgia do serve as a sentimental consolation from the past and influence their present, such as their reception to certain films.

The OCG emerged as a social creation, during which they received distinctive imprint from the events and situations of their childhood. The OCG are not “empty vessels” to be educated by whatever messages that flow into them. Neither are they powerless to decide the meanings of media texts that are sent to them. Instead, having developed their own attributes from the social context and emerged as a “generation” of the world, they place media as their mediated access to that world. In the process of meaning making, the OCG response to the world based on their contextual and personal sophistication developed.

In this chapter, schemata that can be used to understand the reception of the OCG to film and television entertainment are built through the study of objective matters, such as the social and political environment and the availability of entertainment products, and subjective matters, such as life experience and memory. Because the way they are formed, like collective memories, these schemata are public, which means individual meaning making may or may not fit into these schemata. The evidence of audience relationships with media texts or images is almost certainly personal. But such personal evidence is also almost certainly shared among individuals due to the fact that we are not completely isolated but somewhat socialised. It is the foundation of the social and collective conceptualisation as well as the formation of the schemata. The value of the schemata is to form a baseline against which reception can be evaluated and hence really understood.

Chapter 3 Disney, The Lion King and China's "Little Emperors"

Disney is undoubtedly an icon of American family entertainment. To many Chinese, the name *Disney* is almost synonymous with the word *cartoon*. It was among the first few foreign companies to make contact with Chinese authorities after the establishment of the Open Door Policy to seek opportunities to sell their products in China. Disney's *Mickey and Donald* was the most popular and influential cartoon TV series in China in the 1980s and was where the connection between Disney and the OCG started.¹²⁹ Hence, *The Lion King* (1994), a Disney animated feature, was given a high anticipation when it came to China. The reaction it got from the Chinese audiences was unprecedented. This chapter is a case study of Disney and *The Lion King* – its milestone hit in China. Through the examination of Disney's journey of development, this chapter first seeks to understand people's perception of Disney in China. It then goes to the study of *The Lion King* in relation to the OCG, which is more reception-oriented. The two parts of this case study supplement each other.

Disney's Image in China

Before the Open Door Policy, Chinese publications seldom talked about entertainment products from Western capitalist countries. The only article I found about Disney was published in the Chinese magazine *Film Art* in its second issue of 1956. It was a brief introduction to Walt Disney translated from the *Soviet*

¹²⁹ Cartoon TV series *Mickey and Donald* had been broadcast by CCTV since 1985.

Encyclopaedia. It described Disney's animations as 'vulgar'¹³⁰, a judgment which reflected political conflicts rather than aesthetic evaluations.¹³¹

Benefiting from the Open-Door Policy, the Disney Company started to work its way into China in the early 1980s when articles spoke of Disney with an attitude which was completely different from that of 1956. Disney and its products were universally greeted by newspapers and magazines with warm applause, which can be seen from the following examples. *Dushu* (Reading), a highly-rated Chinese magazine focused on discussions of ideological and cultural issues, in its second issue of 1980, published an article which explained to Chinese people why Mickey Mouse was so 'lovable' by quoting an article titled 'Mickey Mouse meets Konrad Lorenz' published in the American magazine *Natural History* in 1979.¹³² *Dushu*'s article commended Walt Disney as an artist who respect science and Disney's works as beneficial and enjoyable for both young and old.¹³³ The Chinese popular magazine *Movie Review* provided a more detailed introduction to Disney in 1982. It described Disney's animations as unsophisticated beauty and art with wisdom.¹³⁴ In 1984, *Parenting Science*, the first Chinese magazine on child rearing with a very large national circulation, explicitly recommended Disney's cartoon to young parents with the slogan 'Do you want your children to see a broader world? Let them meet Mickey, Donald and Goofy!'¹³⁵

In contrast to the definitely negative judgement before the Open-Door Policy and the uniformly positive remarks in the early 1980s, Chinese perceptions of Disney

¹³⁰ All the Chinese quotations in this chapter are translated by myself.

¹³¹ Anon., 'Walt Disney', *Film Art*, 2 (1956), 111-112 (p.112).

¹³² Gould, S.J., 'Mickey Mouse meets Konrad Lorenz', *Natural History*, May (1979), 30-36.

¹³³ Li, X.Y., 'Cong kexuejia shangshi milaoshu shuoqi' (Talking about why the scientists like Mickey), *Dushu (Reading)*, 02 (1980), 127-130 (p.129).

¹³⁴ Zhang, L., 'Mickey Mouse and Walt Disney', *Movie Review*, 12 (1982), 32-33 (p.32).

¹³⁵ Lian, J., 'Zhi nianqing fumu' (To Young Parents), *Parenting Science*, 10 (1984), 10 (p.10).

started to show diversity in the late 1980s. Discussions of Disney became more and more heated in publications. While acknowledging Disney's achievement in animation art, people also saw its advanced business operation in the international market. Disney's growing popularity and influence also brought about certain concern. Some commentators started to associate Disney with American cultural hegemony and suggested that China should have its own 'Disney' and 'Mickey Mouse'.¹³⁶ Furthermore, with excitement for novelty being replaced by the boredom of routine, some critics even felt watching Mickey Mouse was 'a waste of time'.¹³⁷ In the words of cultural commentators, Disney began to appear along the same lines as McDonald's and Coca Cola as representatives of America's fast-food culture with its characteristics being 'good-looking' but 'lacking nourishment'.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, voices could still be heard that supported Disney and recommended it to Chinese consumers. *Parenting Science* introduced Disneyland to young parents and their children by telling a story about two kids' joyful visit to Disneyland in Los Angeles.¹³⁹ On the other hand, a report on Disney suing some Chinese publishers for copyright infringement reminded people that no matter how innocent the contents that Disney provided, it was still a business.¹⁴⁰ After the opening of Hong Kong Disneyland in 2005, a survey conducted by SINA (a leading online media company based in China) and *China Newsweek* (a renowned newsweekly published by China News Service) showed that 37.71 percent of people who had been to Disneyland

¹³⁶ Yu, B.M., 'Zhongguo donghua mingxing zai nail?' (Where are the Chinese Cartoon Stars?), *Movie Review*, 06 (1992), 14 (p.14).

¹³⁷ J. Z.Z., 'Women xuyao zhongguo de Mickey' (We need our own Mickey), *Dangdai dianshi* (*Contemporary Television*), 01 (1988), 19-20 (p.19).

¹³⁸ Jin, L.P., 'Disney de zhongguo zhi dao' (Disney's strategy in China), *China Newsweek*, 38 (2005), 62-64 (p.64).

¹³⁹ Wu, J. P., 'Milaoshu tanglaoya de leyuan' (The Wonderland of Mickey and Donald), *Parenting Science*, 07 (1991), 43.

¹⁴⁰ B, J., 'Milaoshu jingcheng gaozhuang ji' (Mickey Suing in Beijing), *Business World*, 03 (1996), 21-24 (p.24).

indicated that what impressed them the most was the strong commercial atmosphere there while 22.36 percent found themselves caught up in the world of fantasy it created.¹⁴¹

A special report consisting of four articles talking about Disney in China was published in *China Newsweek*'s 38th issue of 2005. The first article entitled 'Disney, whose dream?' includes the following comment:

*"During the twenty-year period from the first episode of Mickey and Donald being broadcast by CCTV in 1985 to the opening of Hong Kong Disneyland this year, Disney as a cartoon brand has come to pervade many aspects of our people's life and their consumption. On the quiet, it is even changing the perception of life of more than one generation."*¹⁴²

The author, Yu Changjiang, a professor of sociology of Peking University, was invited to write this opening article which raised questions about Disney's impact in China. In answering his questions, one of the subsequent articles pointed out that in terms of understanding children and how their minds work, Chinese children's entertainment was no match for Disney. The article described Disney as the company that led a 'cultural fashion' for people born in the 1980s and led to the emergence of the Chinese 'kidult'.¹⁴³ 'Kidult' refers to a grownup who doesn't want to grow up (or at least act like an adult) and instead prefers so-called 'children's' stuff for entertainment.¹⁴⁴ The term was first used by Jim Ward-Nichols on the campus of

¹⁴¹ Jin, L.P., p.64.

¹⁴² Yu, C.J., 'Disney, Shei zhi meng?' (Disney, whose dream), *China Newsweek*, 38 (2005), 60-61 (p.60).

¹⁴³ Dai, J.T., 'Disney de zhongguo zhilü' (Disney's journey in China), *China Newsweek*, 38 (2005), 61-62 (p.62).

¹⁴⁴ Urban Dictionary, *Kidult*, <<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?defid=1260622&term=kidult>> [accessed 30 Sep. 2008]

Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey in the late 1980.¹⁴⁵ Twenty-five years later, it was borrowed by Chinese critics to describe a Chinese cultural phenomenon influenced by Disney.

Those who were born in the 1980s and actually involved in the ‘cultural fashion’ have their own opinions about Disney. Unlike those of the reviewers and the critics, comments of fans are generally available from online forums, among which DisneyBox.com (a Chinese Internet communication centre for Disney fans), Mtime (a popular Chinese online community of movie fans), Baidu TieBa (a popular Chinese online forum provided by the search engine Baidu) and Douban (a leading Chinese online community platform) are the most active ones. Comments below are from these forums and are considered to be representative. ‘Chuangyijietie’ (internet alias) claimed that Disney had a strong emotional appeal. As a girl born in the 1980s, she had a collection of Disney’s products in her handbag, including the handbag itself, and liked to wear clothes with Disney’s cartoon characters on them. For her, Disney made her ‘princess dream’ come true.¹⁴⁶ A mother who was born in the 1980s wrote in her post that Disney was a beautiful part of her childhood memory and she would like her child to have it too.¹⁴⁷ ‘Disney007’ looked at Disney from an aesthetic rather than an emotional perspective. What made him crazy about Disney was the power it created with two-dimensional animations which he believed were the true classics. To him, reading Disney magazines and watching videos amounted to an

¹⁴⁵ NationalMaster Encyclopedia, *Kidult*, <<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Kidult>> [accessed 30 Sep. 2008]

¹⁴⁶ Chuangyijietie (internet alias), post in Disney Bar, *Baidu TieBa*, 11 Jun. 2008, <<http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=405683235>> [accessed 10 Aug. 2008].

¹⁴⁷ Kailsonic (internet alias), post in Toy Story Bar, *Baidu TieBa*, 13 May 2008, <<http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=377219072>>; also posted on *BBS.QQBaobao.Com* (a Chinese online childcare forum), <<http://bbs.qqbaobao.com/archiver/tid-85405.html>> [accessed 26 Jul. 2008].

appreciation of art.¹⁴⁸ What appealed to ‘Jiaowoxiaoyang’ the most was Disney’s music. Also born in the 1980s, he had an impressive collection of twenty-one of Disney’s original soundtrack tapes. Some of them were more than twelve years old and he still listened to them from time to time.¹⁴⁹ ‘Annibaobei’ described herself as the ultimate Disney fan. She wrote a post in which she reviewed the development of Disney’s animation films since the 1920s from her particular perspective. The post provoked lively discussions about Disney on Mtime. At the end of her post, she wrote that ‘whatever Disney will be in the future, it has my guaranteed support. Thank you, Disney, my source of happiness.’¹⁵⁰

Generally, Chinese people’s attitude towards Disney experienced three distinctive stages, from the complete rejection before the open-door policy to the universal acceptance in the early 1980s, then to the wider spectrum of opinions since the late 1980s including the negative remarks generally from the critics and the positive comments mostly from the OCG fans. These shifts can be explained by going through the history of Disney’s operations in China, which is presented in the following section.

Disney’s Journey in China

Disney’s first entry into China can be dated back to the 1930s when its animated feature *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was screened in Beijing, Shanghai and

¹⁴⁸ Disney007 (internet alias), ‘Yige balinghou xinzhong de disney’ (Disney in the Heart of a Post-80s), *DisneyBox.com*, 8 November 2007, <<http://www.disneybox.com/bbs/viewtopic.php?p=19574>> [accessed 20 Jul. 2008].

¹⁴⁹ Jiaowoxiaoyang (internet alias), post in Disney Group, *Douban*, 4 May 2008, <<http://www.douban.com/group/topic/3106112/>>, [accessed 10 Aug. 2008].

¹⁵⁰ Annibabei (internet alias), post in Disney World, *Mtime*, 7 Jun. 2008, <<http://www.mtime.com/group/disney/discussion/230940/>> [accessed 12 Aug. 2008].

some other major cities.¹⁵¹ At that time, the release of Hollywood films in China was almost simultaneous with that in the US. But when the Chinese Communist Party established its political power in 1949, Disney's products were banned for political reasons. In the era when class struggle was taken as the central task, anything from capitalist countries was simply repelled by the system. Therefore, for almost three decades, Disney was completely absent from Chinese people's entertainment.

In 1978, China established the Open-Door Policy which made it possible for Disney to re-enter the Chinese market. In the early 1980s, as the world's most populated nation, China had about 340 million children under the age of 15.¹⁵² There was no doubt about China's great appeal for Disney's international ambitions. When Michael Eisner (Disney's CEO from 1984 to 2005) was asked what his biggest dream was, his answer was to enter the Chinese market.¹⁵³ As one of Hollywood's major film producers, Disney began to work its way back into China right after the Open-Door Policy. Instead of demanding its products to be allowed in the Chinese market, Disney started to bring 'China' into the US. At the beginning of the 1980s, the company developed a China Pavilion at EPCOT in Orlando. The show included *Wonders of China*, a film produced in cooperation with the Chinese government, which was shown on a 360-degree screen.¹⁵⁴ The filming was a massive undertaking but was also rewarding. The pavilion not only brought 'China' to central Florida but also put Disney's influence back to China as their connections with well-connected officials in Beijing were established through the co-operation.

¹⁵¹ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *The Walt Disney Company in China*, <<http://www.disneybox.com/wiki/%E8%BF%AA%E5%A3%AB%E5%B0%BC%E4%B8%AD%E5%9B%BD>> [accessed 20 Jul. 2008]

¹⁵² National Bureau of Statistics of China, *China Statistics Yearbook 1984* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 1984), p.97.

¹⁵³ Zhao, L.M., 'Disney shizuo zhongguo meng' (The Start of Disney's Chinese Dream), *Nanfeng Chuang* (The Window of South Wind), 09 (2005), 66-68 (p.66).

¹⁵⁴ Schweizer, P. and Schweizer, R., *Disney: The Mouse Betrayed* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1998), pp.255-256.

In 1985, Disney entered into official negotiations with several Chinese media groups regarding the distribution of its films and television programs. A year later, a historic agreement was finally signed. According to the agreement, Chinese Central Television (CCTV) got Disney's cartoons for free, including classics with Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and maintained complete editorial control of the cartoons to 'dub the programs and make adjustments for "ideological content", reworking dialogue if necessary',¹⁵⁵ while Disney also got what they wanted, that is, to get into the Chinese film and television market, which made its further business progression in China possible.

According to Dong Hao, who dubbed Mickey Mouse during the years (1985-1986) when it broadcast *Mickey and Donald*, CCTV would receive bags of letters every day from children all over the country, many of whom asked for repeat broadcast. He is still being called 'Uncle Mickey' nowadays everywhere he goes. 'Before *Mickey and Donald*, I had dubbed many other cartoons including the imported ones such as *Sesame Street* and *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, but none had achieved such success', said Dong Hao to a *China Newsweek* reporter.¹⁵⁶ Thus it can be seen that Disney, with its classic cartoon characters, quickly caught the eye of Chinese children and became an important part of their life. Products such as stationeries, toys and clothes with Disney's cartoon characters on them flooded the market and became very popular, even though such products were not authorized by Disney.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Schweizer, P. and Schweizer, R., p.257.

¹⁵⁶ Dai, J.T., p.61.

¹⁵⁷ Dai, J.T., p.61.

By the end of the 1980s, due to intellectual property rights disputes, Disney terminated its cooperation with CCTV and pulled out of China almost completely.¹⁵⁸ Despite the failure of its efforts, Disney was still eager to embrace the Chinese market. When it left China, it did not go very far. In 1988, Disney opened its Asia Pacific regional headquarters for Disney consumer products in Hong Kong.¹⁵⁹ At that time, Hong Kong was still a dependent territory of the United Kingdom, but an agreement had been reached between the Chinese government and the British government in 1984 (the Sino-British Joint Declaration) that its sovereignty would be transferred to the People's Republic of China in 1997. The location of Disney's Asia Pacific regional headquarters revealed its long-term strategy with regard to the Chinese market. Even after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, Erwin Okun, Disney's vice president for Corporate Communications, said 'Frankly, it's nothing to concern ourselves with',¹⁶⁰ when responding to a *Los Angeles Times*' survey of opinions on investments in China. For Disney, the Chinese market was clearly too attractive to be abandoned.

On entering the 1990s, Disney's business in China started to resume, but this time the company did not just bring its 'free' classics and did not only target television. In 1993, the first Chinese-language Disney cartoon magazine, the *Mickey Mouse Magazine*, was launched in China. It was published by TongQu (Children's Fun Publishing Co. Ltd.) which was a licensee of the Walt Disney Company and co-founded by the Post and Telecom Press of China and the Egmont Group of Denmark. Within a few months of its debut the company was selling 150,000 copies per

¹⁵⁸ Schweizer, P. and Schweizer, R., p.258.

¹⁵⁹ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *The Walt Disney Company in China*.

¹⁶⁰ Schweizer, P. and Schweizer, R., p. 258.

month.¹⁶¹ From 1994, China began to import the latest Hollywood blockbusters on a revenue-sharing basis. In 1995, *The Lion King* was brought to Chinese audiences. It was Disney's first and also Hollywood's first animation film that had been screened in China since the establishment of the Open-Door Policy. The film proved to be a great success not only at the box office but also in promoting the Disney brand among Chinese audiences. After acquiring ABC in 1996, Disney gained the *Dragon Club*, a well-received children's program which was created by ABC for Chinese local cable TV stations and initially aired in 1994.¹⁶² In two years' time, Disney successfully made this program a place to promote Disney's cartoons.¹⁶³ In 1996, Disney started to dabble in Chinese radio. Its deal with China National Radio (CNR) put a half-hour program called *It's a Small World* on the air. The show started at 3.30 pm every Saturday and featured Disney's cartoon stars from Mickey to the Lion King.¹⁶⁴ In the same year, Disney's skating show, *Disney on Ice*, was staged in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.¹⁶⁵ Meanwhile, Disney was allowed to open 'Mickey's Corner' stores to sell its merchandise, including clothes and accessories.¹⁶⁶ In 1998, an official announcement was made that China's first Disney theme park would be built in Hong Kong.¹⁶⁷ It was also since 1998 that video

¹⁶¹ Liu, W. and Liao L. P., 'Fang TongQu chuban youxian gongsi' (An Interview with Children's Fun Publishing Co. Ltd.), *Chuban cankao (Publishing World)*, 11 (2001).

¹⁶² Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *Dragon Club*, <<http://www.disneybox.com/wiki/%E5%B0%8F%E7%A5%9E%E9%BE%99%E4%BF%B1%E4%B9%90%E9%83%A8>> [accessed 20 Jul. 2008]

¹⁶³ Zhang, F. and Li, W., 'Dishini: Didiao de pinpai kuozhang' (Disney's Low-profile Brand Expansion), *Sanlian shenghuo zhouban (Sanlian life weekly)*, 2001, <<http://home.donews.com/donews/article/2/22472.html>> [accessed 18 Sep. 2008].

¹⁶⁴ Schweizer, P. and Schweizer, R., p.260.

¹⁶⁵ Disney Wikipedia from DisneyBox.com, *The Walt Disney Company in China*.

¹⁶⁶ Schweizer, P. and Schweizer, R., p.261.

¹⁶⁷ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *The Walt Disney Company in China*.

products, including DVDs, VCDs and videotapes of Disney's films and animation series started to be commercially distributed in China.¹⁶⁸

Compared to Disney's first re-entry into China in the early 1980s, its second re-entry at the beginning of the 1990s was much stronger. Disney made great efforts in several arenas, including publication, television, radio, film, stage performance and so on to achieve their ambitions in China. At that time, China had opened its gate wide enough to allow entertainment products from many other foreign providers to enter the Chinese market. With their options increasing day by day, Chinese people became more rational about the 'new' things. It was then that the third stage of Chinese perceptions on Disney discussed in previous section started, in which critics and consumers themselves started to have different opinions on Disney.

Disney had kept very good relations with Chinese authorities until Michael Ovitz became Disney's new president and brought the *Kundun* project to Disney in 1995.¹⁶⁹ It was a Disney-funded biography of the Dalai Lama, which the Chinese government considered politically provocative. They warned Disney that if the film proceeded its business in China would be at risk.¹⁷⁰ On 11 December 1996, Ovitz resigned from or was dismissed by Disney. Whatever the cause was, the result certainly pleased the Chinese government.¹⁷¹ The film *Kundun* was released in the US at the end of 1997, which, as it was expected, resulted in a ban on Disney products throughout China.¹⁷² The 'Kundun' event gave Chinese reviewers more to

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Schweizer, P. and Schweizer, R., p.261-262.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.262.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.264.

¹⁷² Groves, D., 'Disney hopes China will welcome "Mulan": "Kundun" flap may affect release', *Variety*, Wed., 5 Aug. 1998. Variety.com.
<<http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117479140.html?categoryid=13&cs=1&query=Mulan+china>>
[accessed 01 Feb. 2008].

criticize Disney about. The release of Disney's *Mulan* (1999)¹⁷³ in China marked the end of the ban which had been in effect for almost sixteen months¹⁷⁴, but the emotion lasted and effectively increased the volume of negative reviews for this Chinese-story adaptation, which will be discussed in the case study of *Mulan* presented later in this chapter.

Kundun damaged Disney's business in China, but the damage was not irreparable because fans continue to be supportive. In the new millennium, Disney kept its pace of expansion in China. On 26 August 2001, Disney's official Chinese website, Disney.com.cn, was launched. The website inherited Disney's 'family entertainment' spirit and featured some Chinese elements such as the use of Chinese traditional costume on the cartoon characters appearing on the website. The website aimed to build a platform for both entertainment and education that could be accepted by Chinese parents. By cooperating with Haihong (a leading provider of Chinese online games), Disney also entered the realm of online games.¹⁷⁵ In 2003, Disney in co-operation with INDEX (a Beijing based information service company) started to provide WAP (wireless application protocol) service to the booming Chinese mobile telecommunication business. The content they provided included ringtones, flash, multimedia messages, standby pictures and games that featured Disney's cartoon elements and music.¹⁷⁶ In 2005, Disney moved its regional headquarters for consumer products in Asia Pacific from Hong Kong to Shanghai to expand their presence in mainland China. In the same year, after seven years' preparation and construction, Hong Kong Disneyland was finally opened. In their

¹⁷³ The year given in this chapter is the year that the film was released in China.

¹⁷⁴ Waxman, S., 'China Bans Work with Film Studios', *The Washington Post*, 1 Nov. 1997, p.C1.

¹⁷⁵ Zhan, Y., 'Dishini zhongguo wangzhan benyue kaitong' (Disney China Website Launched this Month), *China Internet Weekly*, 29 (2001), 22.

¹⁷⁶ Mu, G., 'Kuaile Dishini wei zhongguo WAP yewu dailai qingxin zhi feng' (Disney, A Freshener in Chinese WAP Market), *Communications World*, 40 (2003), 42.

traditional realms such as television and film, Disney kept seeking new breakthroughs while maintaining their existing advantages. By 2005, Disney's TV program *Dragon Club* was broadcast by a total of forty-nine local television stations with 160 million viewers.¹⁷⁷ In addition to their own films being imported regularly, Disney also started to co-produce films with Chinese studios. In 2007, *The Secret of the Magic Gourd* was released, which was coproduced by Disney and the China Film Group.

Despite certain twists and turns, Disney's development since the beginning of the new millennium has been steady and vigorous. The connection between the company and the Chinese market got tightened as Disney progressed into more and more business lines. Its focus was still on younger customers, which can be seen from its efforts in business areas such as digital services which have a stronger appeal to the younger generation. In addition, its cooperation with the Chinese film industry on producing children's films, which brought new elements into the practice, not only proved its reputation and influence but also had them strengthened.

Looking at the history of Disney's development in China, we can clearly see its ambition and tendency of expansion in the Chinese market. By examine the historical events, it is also understood how Disney's image was shaped and varied throughout time. More importantly, what can be seen from the path that Disney has been through in China is unlike what is generally believed to be an overwhelming progression. There was progression as well as recession and for most of the time, it is not Disney but the Chinese government who has the power to control the importation and the Chinese market influenced by piracy that get to make the decision. Much of Disney's progression is found to be made in co-operation with Chinese entities such as film

¹⁷⁷Zhao, L.M., p.67.

studios, which reflects Disney’s difficulties to progress on its own in the Chinese market. Apart from the resistance Disney has met, we can also see its achievement. In the following section, by looking into detailed numbers, the company’s performance in Chinese film and television markets (including DVD/VCD sales) is examined.

Disney in Chinese Market

To investigate the performance of Disney’s film and television products in the Chinese market, three aspects, namely, box office performance, television ratings¹⁷⁸ and DVD/VCD sales which include both film and television programs, are examined.

From 1994 to 2007, China imported a total of 166 films (see Appendix A) on a revenue-sharing basis from the US. Twenty-seven of these films, that is about sixteen percent, were contributed by Disney and are shown in Table 3.1 below. Among these Disney films there were fifteen family films, making up about fifty-five percent, from which it can be seen that family films played an important role among Disney’s film exports to China.

Table 3.1 Disney Films Released on a Revenue-Sharing Basis in China (1994-2007)

Year	Title	Genre	Family Film	Production Company	Box Office in China (million Yuan)
1994					
1995	The Lion King	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	41.3
1996	The Rock	Action	No	Hollywood Pictures	47.7
	Toy Story	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	31.8

¹⁷⁸ Due to limited sources, Disney’s television programs and Disney’s films shown on TV are not discussed for now.

Year	Title	Genre	Family Film	Production Company	Box Office in China (million Yuan)
1997					
1998					
1999	Enemy of the State	Drama	No	Touchstone Pictures	22.0
	Mulan	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	11.0
	Tarzan	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	11.0
2000	Dinosaur	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	27.0
2001	Pearl Harbor	Romance	No	Touchstone Pictures	105.0
2002	The Princess Diaries	Comedy	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	-
	Bad Company	Action	No	Touchstone Pictures	-
2003	Finding Nemo	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	33.0
	Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl	Adventure Fantasy	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	27.0
	Sweet Home Alabama	Romance	No	Touchstone Pictures	-
	The Recruit	Action	No	Touchstone Pictures	-
2004	Cold Mountain	Romance	No	Miramax Films	26.5
	King Arthur	History	No	Touchstone Pictures	26.0
	Ladder 49	Action	No	Touchstone Pictures	-
2005	National Treasure	Adventure	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	35.92
	The Incredibles	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	21.0
2006	The Chronicles of Narnia : The Lion,the Witch and the Wardrobe	Adventure Fantasy	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	61.0
	Eight Below	Adventure	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	55.70
	Cars	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	21.45
	Goal!	Sport	No	Touchstone	6.0

Year	Title	Genre	Family Film	Production Company	Box Office in China (million Yuan)
				Pictures	
2007	Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	Adventure Fantasy	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	125.0
	D ẻ à vu	Action	No	Touchstone Pictures	28.0
	The Guardian	Adventure	No	Touchstone Pictures	25.0
	Ratatouille	Animation	Yes	Walt Disney Pictures	21.2

The total number of family films that China had imported during the same period was sixty-three (see Appendix A), almost a quarter of which were provided by Disney. Disney's *The Lion King* (1995), as its first animation films imported by China, achieved a total box office of 41.3 million yuan, ranking third among the six imported American films in 1995 and fifth among all films released that year. In 1996, imported films scored a resounding triumph in the Chinese market. Although *Toy Story* (1996) was not as successful as *The Lion King*, it still secured the ninth place among all the releases that year, earning more than the No. 1 domestic film which took the tenth place. In 1997 and 1998, when imported films kept harvesting at the Chinese box office, Disney was forced to be absent due to the Kundun incident.

When Disney regained its access to the Chinese market in 1999, its two releases encountered very tough market conditions. Although they managed to rank among the top ten films of that year, being the eighth and the ninth respectively, box office earnings were only about one-third of *Toy Story* (1996). From 2000 onwards, Disney kept a steady quota of film exportation to China, at least one film every year. Not all of them were family films, yet each of Disney's family films managed to achieve a box office that was no less than twenty million yuan. In 2000, Disney brought the

Chinese audience back to the Cretaceous period with its animation feature *Dinosaur* (2000) which took second place among the eleven imported US films with twenty-seven million yuan gained from the box office. Even in a year when domestic films seemed to out-perform imported blockbusters, it still ranked sixth among all releases.

Although no Disney family film was imported in 2001 and *The Princess Dairies* in 2002 was only a minor hit, Disney succeeded by moving its stage to the ocean. Its two films, *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003), took the fifth and the sixth position respectively against their US rivals (fifteen in totals), the seventh and the ninth among all films. After 2004, another year without Disney family films, Disney kept its strength in family film competition, with at least two (three in 2006) family films being put into the market every year. In the reviving Chinese film market, as of 2008, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2006) and *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2007) in particular, rounding up 61.0 million yuan and 125.0 million yuan in turn, were the top two Disney family films in China.

When talking about Disney in the Chinese market, there is an interesting phenomenon that is worth mentioning. The Chinese translation for the film title *Toy Story* (1996) was *Wanju Zongdongyuan*, where ‘Wanju’ means toys and ‘Zongdongyuan’ means general mobilization, describing a state of everybody joining in the same activity. From then on, there were five more Disney animation films whose titles were translated by their Chinese distributor using the format ‘X *Zongdongyuan*’, where ‘X’ represented the content of the film. All these films were Disney-Pixar 3D animations. For example, *Finding Nemo* (2003) was translated as *Haidi Zongdongyuan* in which ‘Haidi’ means under-water. The similarity in title made these animation features feel like a series of related films. The Chinese distributors made ‘Zongdongyuan’ a label which meant almost the same as ‘Disney’.

They managed to promote Disney’s animation films by embedding the ‘trademark’ into the titles without offending the audience. In recent years, some non-Disney animation films also used this format, including DreamWorks’ *Bee Movie* (2007)¹⁷⁹ and a Chinese animation film *Qianting Zongdongyuan* (2008), a story of two submarines and their adventure. A report from *The Beijing News* (the most popular city daily distributed in Beijing) considered that the accumulated credit of Disney-Pixar’s ‘Zongdongyuan’ series had made it the mark for quality animation and even a form of box office appeal.¹⁸⁰ No wonder that DreamWorks, Disney’s competitor, would let their distributor name their film with it.

Table 3.2 Film Title Translation of Disney’s Animation Films with “Zongdongyuan”

Year	English Title	Chinese Translation
1996	Toy Story	Wanju Zongdongyuan 玩具总动员 Wanju 玩具: toys.
2003	Finding Nemo	Haidi Zongdongyuan 海底总动员 Haidi 海底: under-ocean.
2004	The Incredibles	Chaoren Zongdongyuan 超人总动员 Chaoren 超人: supermen.
2006	Cars	Qiche Zongdongyuan 汽车总动员 Qiche 汽车: cars.
2007	Ratatouille	Meishi Zongdongyuan 美食总动员 Meishi 美食: delicious food.
2008	WALL-E	Jiqieen Zongdongyuan 机器人总动员 Jiqiren 机器人: robots.

In 1998, when Disney officially started DVD/VCD sales in China, it gave the rights to distribute its video products to CAV Thakral Home Entertainment, a joint venture of China Audio & Video Publishing House (CAVPH) and Singapore Thakral Corporation. The cooperation lasted from 1998 to 2006 during which time the

¹⁷⁹ The film has not been screened in China. Only VCDs and DVDs are available.

¹⁸⁰ Sun, L. L., ‘Meishi zongdongyuan: Yiran shihe quanjia zongdongyuan’ (Ratatouille, Call for Families), *The Beijing News*, 27 Oct. 2007. <<http://www.thebeijingnews.com/ent/ylzk/2007/10-27/014@005042.htm>> [accessed 10 Apr. 2008]

company also managed the DVD/VCD distribution of other Hollywood studios such as 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros and Paramount. In 2006, the CAV Thakral joint venture encountered significant business shrinkage because they did not manage to extend their contract with their previous clients including Disney. Since then, CAV Thakral Home Entertainment started to fade out of the market.¹⁸¹

In the same year, Excel Media, a Guangdong based company, became Disney's authorized distributor of DVD/VCD. Excel Media was acquired by Deltamac, a subsidiary of Taiwan CMC, a media storage company, in 2005 and now the leading agency for distributing audio and video products in mainland China.¹⁸² After taking over the distribution of Disney's DVD/CVD, Excel Media, in August 2007, started to re-release a selection of Disney's films, many of which had already been released by CAV Thakral Home Entertainment. The new versions used new cover designs which included Disney's castle logo with Chinese words stating 'Authentic Disney' against a blue background instead of CAV Thakral's red banner with the same words.¹⁸³ At the moment, genuine Disney video products distributed in the Chinese market are either of the two versions, although the products displayed on Disney's Chinese website are all from Excel Media.

With regards to the US materials, It is important to examine the video sales to verify the real performance of a film because it is considered one of the most significant sources of income for the major studios, especially if it is a family film. According to Robert Allen, videos purchased by parents for their children take up the

¹⁸¹ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *CAV Thakral Home Entertainment*, <<http://www.disneybox.com/wiki/%E4%B8%AD%E5%BD%95%E5%BE%B7%E5%8A%A0%E6%8B%89>> [accessed 10 Apr. 2008]

¹⁸² Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *Excel Media*, <<http://www.disneybox.com/wiki/%E6%B3%B0%E7%9B%9B%E6%96%87%E5%8C%96>> [accessed 10 Apr. 2008]

¹⁸³ Anon., 'Taisheng jiang tuichu xilie die' (Excel Media to Republish a Series of Disney's DVDs), SINA.com.cn, 15 Aug. 2007, <<http://ent.sina.com.cn/e/2007-08-15/13591677269.shtml>> [accessed 18 Nov. 2008].

largest portion of total video sales in US¹⁸⁴, which is why Disney's animation films are frequently found on the list of top selling video products including DVD and VHS. But the situation for video sales in China is different. In the Chinese market, the price of authentic DVDs and VCDs is much lower than it is in the US, usually lower than the film ticket price. The low price of DVD/VCD is partially due to the widely availability of pirated copies across the country. Take UME, Beijing Broadway Cinemas and Stellar International Cineplex, three popular movie theatres in Beijing for example; their ticket prices ranged from 30 to 120 yuan as of December 2008.¹⁸⁵ The price of an authentic DVD can go as low as 10 yuan. When CAV Thakral Home Entertainment started to sell Disney videos in 1998, the price of a DVD was set at 110 yuan which went down to 36 yuan in 2002.¹⁸⁶ When interviewed by *The New York Times*, a general manager of CAV Thakral Home Entertainment said: 'Chinese consumers don't want to pay 36 yuan for a VCD, see it once or twice and give it away. They would rather pay 6, 8 or 10 yuan to see a pirated copy and then throw it away.'¹⁸⁷ When Excel Media republished the new version of Disney's DVDs, it came with a commitment that from then on the Chinese consumers could enjoy authentic Disney DVDs for no more than 20 yuan each.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, in contrast to the video sales of family films in the US, on the list of all-time best-selling DVDs provided by Joyo (amazon.cn), Disney's animation films

¹⁸⁴ Allen, R.C., 'Home alone together: Hollywood and the "family film"', in *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*, ed. by M. Stokes and R. Maltby (London: BFI, 1999), pp. 116.

¹⁸⁵ UME, <<http://www.bjume.com>>, Beijing Broadway Cinemas, <<http://www.b-cinema.cn>>, Stellar International Cineplex, <<http://www.bjxingmei.com>>, [accessed 04 Dec. 2008].

¹⁸⁶ Li, S., 'CAV Thakral lingren shangxin de DVD' (The heartbreaking CAV Thakral DVDs), *Incomplete Handbook for DVD*, Mar. 2002, <http://www.mov8.com/dvd/freetalk_show.asp?id=3614> [accessed 18 Nov. 2008].

¹⁸⁷ Smith, C. S., 'A Tale of Piracy: How the Chinese Stole the Grinch', *The New York Times*, 12 Dec. 2000. <<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A01E0DD123FF931A25751C1A9669C8B63&sec=&spon=&pagewanted=1>> [accessed 18 Nov. 2008]

¹⁸⁸ Anon., 'Taisheng jiang tuichu xilie die' (Excel Media to Republish a Series of Disney's DVDs).

are rarely spotted. Because the information contained in the list is limited by only providing the rank rather than the actual number of copies sold for these DVDs/VCDs, the data of video sales in China should not be considered the same level of importance as that of the US.

However, since the price of DVDs is generally lower than the price of film tickets, people might be inclined to buy them as an alternative to going to cinemas. Hence, video sales in China still need to be taken into account, but should be considered in a different way. Their importance in the analysis should be deducted. According to the available data at the moment, DVDs and VCDs with Disney's content sell well in China among cartoons and animations. Table 4.3 is a chart of cartoon and animation DVD/VCD sale on Joyo (Amazon.cn), which shows Disney's dominance. An interesting thing to find is that some of the Disney animation films which did not do so well at the box office, such as *Ratatouille* and *Cars*, performed very well in video sales. This suggests that DVDs/VCDs are more likely to be purchased as cinema alternatives by Chinese consumers and video sales need to be considered to rectify the evaluation of a film's performance in Chinese market.

Table 3.3 Top 20 Best-Sellers of Cartoon & Animation DVD/VCD on Joyo

Rank	Title	Disney?
1	Ratatouille (DVD Region 6)	Yes
2	Mickey Mouse Clubhouse 1 (DVD plus Book)	Yes
3	Doggy Poo (Korea)	No
4	Mickey Mouse Clubhouse 2 (DVD plus Book)	Yes
5	Cars (DVD Region 6)	Yes
6	Transformers (TV Series, 15 DVD, Special Edition)	No
7	The Secret of the Magic Gourd	Yes
8	The Little Mermaid (DVD Free Region, Special Edition)	Yes
9	The Wild (DVD Region 6)	Yes
10	Finding Nemo (DVD Region 6)	Yes
11	Tom and Jerry: 50th Anniversary Treasure Edition (10 DVDs)	No
12	Open Season (DVD Region 6)	No
13	The Incredibles (DVD Region 6)	Yes
14	Piglet's Big Movie (DVD Free Region)	Yes

15	Brother Bear (DVD Region 6)	No
16	Mulan (DVD Region 6)	Yes
17	The Tigger Movie (DVD Free Region)	Yes
18	Doraemon (Japan, TV Series, 3 DVDs)	No
19	Tazan (DVD Region 6)	Yes
20	Disney Princess Stories Vol.1 (DVD Region 6)	Yes

In general, based on its performance at the box office and the video sales, Disney has a strong position in the Chinese market. Nevertheless, this position seems not as dominant as it is in the US. To see the influence of Disney in China clearly, examining its performance in the market through analysis of solid figures is not enough. Apart from all the above economic facts, some cultural aspects also need to be considered to achieve a more thorough understanding of Disney's influence and, more importantly, its reception among Chinese audience, which is why the following case study of *The Lion King* is conducted and presented.

The Lion King: a Legend of Disney in China

The Lion King, the 32nd animated feature film produced by Walt Disney Feature Animation, was released in the US on June 15, 1994. It was the worldwide yearly No. 1 of 1994 at the box office (768.2 million dollars). As of December 2008, it still ranks 24th on the list of all-time worldwide box office grosses with a total of 783.8 million dollars gained, being the first place of 2D animated features and the fourth among all animation films only after *Shrek 2* (2004), *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Shrek the Third* (2007).¹⁸⁹ Thanks to the change in film importation policy made by the Chinese government in 1994, *The Lion King* made its debut in Beijing on July 15, 1995. As the first Disney animation feature and also the first Hollywood family film

¹⁸⁹ Box Office Mojo, *The Lion King*, <<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=lionking.htm>> [accessed 2 Dec. 2008]

imported by China, it performed very well as previously stated.¹⁹⁰ The success of *The Lion King* at the Chinese box office was the continuance of its global appeal.

The Lion King was re-released on VHS and released on DVD for the first time on 7th October 2003 and sold more than 3 million copies (92 percent of which were DVD sales) in its first two days. At that time, it was already the best-selling home video which had sold a total of 32 million copies on VHS before the re-release.¹⁹¹ As a part of the global release, the DVD, under the title *The Lion King: Special Edition*, was released in China by CAV Thakral Home Entertainment at the end of 2003, before which a VCD version of the film had also been released by the same company in 1998.¹⁹² It is noteworthy that, after the film's theatre release in 1995 until its first video release (on VCD) in China, there was no authentic video product available in the Chinese market. Due to the impact of piracy, the data of *The Lion King*'s video sales become less convincing. However, according to the leading online shopping websites for authentic video products in China, including joyo.com (amazon.cn), dangdang.com and gouduo.com, the film is sold out on both VCDs and DVDs with customers requesting for restocking.¹⁹³ Because the CAV Thakral Home Entertainment no longer exists and the Excel Media that takes its place has not yet

¹⁹⁰ Please see page 15 -16.

¹⁹¹ Anon., 'Lion King DVD sells 3m', BBC, 10 Oct. 2003, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/3181780.stm>> [accessed 5 Dec. 2008].

¹⁹² Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *Disney Platinum Collection*, <<http://www.disneybox.com/wiki/%E8%BF%AA%E5%A3%AB%E5%B0%BC%E7%99%BD%E9%87%91%E5%85%B8%E8%97%8F%E7%B3%BB%E5%88%97>> [accessed 3 Dec. 2008]; Meisaidesi (internet alias), 'Shiziwang shoufaban VCD' (The First Edition VCD of The Lion King), *Guaishow.com*, 6 Jun. 2007, <<http://www.guaishow.com/u/wwwzamhx/g2137/>> [accessed 3 Dec. 2008].

¹⁹³ Joyo.com (amazon.cn), <<http://www.mov99.com/dvd/talk/713.html>>; Dangdang.com, <http://product.dangdang.com/product.aspx?product_id=9194003>; Gouduo.com, <http://www.gouduo.com/ware_3878.html> [accessed 4 Dec. 2008].

released any video products of the film, the restocking in China is currently impossible.¹⁹⁴

Other related products had also been active in the Chinese market. The original soundtracks of the 1994 film for Greater China area were first released by Rock Records Co. Ltd. and introduced to mainland China by Shanghai Sheng Xiang (Shanghai Audio-visual Publishing House) in 1996. In 2001, Meika Culture Audio & Video Co. Ltd. in cooperation with EMI (Electric & Musical Industries Ltd.) re-released the soundtracks on CD and VCD packs.¹⁹⁵ The spin-off television series titled *The Lion King's Timon and Pumbaa* was released in 1995 and its Mandarin version had been shown on Chinese television through Disney's *Dragon Club* TV program, the VCD of which was released by CAV Thakral in 1999.¹⁹⁶ The sequels, *The Lion King 2: Simba's Pride* and *The Lion King 3: Hakuna Matata* had also been released by CAV Thakral on both DVD and VCD in 1998 and 2004 and are still available.¹⁹⁷ These sequels and television spin-offs together with the original film were published as comic books in many versions by TongQu (Children's Fun Publishing Co. Ltd.).¹⁹⁸

In July 2006, Disney brought the Broadway stage musical of *The Lion King* to Shanghai. The musical was adapted from the original film in 1997 and received six 1998's Tony Awards. The show in Shanghai was its first show in English language in Asia and was very well received. During its three months in Shanghai, a total of 101 performances were given, which grossed 72 million yuan from the about 160

¹⁹⁴ Gouduo.com, <http://www.gouduo.com/ware_3878.html> [accessed 4 Dec. 2008].

¹⁹⁵ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *The Lion King*, <<http://www.disneybox.com/wiki/%E7%8B%AE%E5%AD%90%E7%8E%8B>> [accessed 2 Dec. 2008]

¹⁹⁶ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *The Lion King*.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ TongQu (Children's Fun Publishing Co. Ltd.), <<http://www.childrenfun.com.cn/>> [accessed 2 Dec. 2008]

thousand tickets sold. This achievement, according to *China Culture Daily*, created a record for stage show in China.¹⁹⁹ People Daily praised its visual and audio appeal and described it as ‘a truly moving feast of art’.²⁰⁰ Its soundtracks were also released in China in late 2006.²⁰¹

Comparing *The Lion King* with all the other Disney films in the Chinese market, the variety and time of continuance of its related products remains unmatched to this day. In this respect, it deserves the reputation as Disney’s legend in China. However, the reason why I claim this is not only because of its economic achievement but also for its profound and lasting influence in China.

The Lion King is regarded a landmark in animation.²⁰² In June 2008, the American Film Institute revealed its ‘10 Top 10’, that is, the best ten films in ten ‘classic’ American film genres. Based on votes from more than 1500 people from the creative community, *The Lion King* was acknowledged as the fourth best film in animation.²⁰³ This film receives an average rating of 8.1 out of 10 from 97,631 votes on IMDb and an approval rating of 92 percent based on 61 reviews collected at Rotten Tomatoes as of December 2008.²⁰⁴ The response from the Chinese audience to *The Lion King* was no less enthusiastic. On Chinese website Mtime, the film gets a rating of 9 out of 10 from 597 votes. Before the film was officially released in

¹⁹⁹ Kui, R.Y., ‘Shiziwang: Shiting shengyan dadong xinling’ (The Lion King: A Treat for both the Ears and Eyes), *China Culture Daily*, 24 Jul. 2006, p.001; ‘Shiziwang wanmei xiemu’ (The Perfect Ending of The Lion King), *China Culture Daily*, 16 Oct. 2006, p.001.

²⁰⁰ Li, W.Y., ‘Yong yishu lilian gandong guanzhong’ (Moving the Audience with the Power of Art), *People Daily*, 18 Jul. 2006, p.016.

²⁰¹ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *The Lion King*.

²⁰² DVDFILE.com, ‘*The Lion King* interview’, <http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special_report/in_the_round/lionking/1.html> [accessed 16 Oct. 2008]

²⁰³ American Film Institute, *AFI’s 10 Top 10*, 17 June 2008, <<http://www.afi.com/10top10/animation.html>> [accessed 16 Oct. 2008]

²⁰⁴ IMDb, *The Lion King*, <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110357/>> [accessed 5 Dec. 2008]; Rotten Tomatoes, *The Lion King*, <http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/lion_king/?name_order=asc> [accessed 5 Dec. 2008].

Chinese cinemas, China Film Group held a preview on 5 July, 1995 in Beijing.²⁰⁵

After the screening, a survey was conducted among one hundred audiences, of which 40 were from 6 to 15 years of age. In response to the question of whether they enjoyed the film, 98 percent gave 'yes' as the answer.²⁰⁶ Positive comments were also received from critics. Owen Gleiberman, film critic for *Entertainment Weekly*, believed that it 'has the resonance to stand not just as a terrific cartoon but as an emotionally pungent movie'.²⁰⁷ *Rolling Stone* film critic Peter Travers wrote in his review that it was 'a hugely entertaining blend of music, fun and eye-popping thrills, though it doesn't lack for heart'.²⁰⁸ After its release in China, *Dongfang yishu* (*Oriental Art*) praised the film and wrote that it 'was an emotionally beautiful film and an extraordinary integration of music and story'.²⁰⁹

The Lion King is Disney's first animation film that is not based on an existing story. However, its originality is considered to be strongly inspired by Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It tells the story of a young lion named Simba. He is tricked by his evil uncle, Scar, to believe that the death of his father, King Mufasa, is his fault and leaves his homeland with guilty. When he grows up and finally learns the truth, he takes the courage to return home, at which time the kingdom is being ruined under Scar's rule. By defeating his uncle, he saves the kingdom and gains the throne that is meant to be his. At the same time, some elements from the film are found to resemble a famous

²⁰⁵ Disney Wikipedia of DisneyBox.com, *The Lion King*, <<http://www.disneybox.com/wiki/%E7%8B%AE%E5%AD%90%E7%8E%8B>> [accessed 20 Oct. 2008]

²⁰⁶ TodayOnHistory.com, *15 July 1995 - The Lion King Released in China*, <<http://www.todayonhistory.com/7/15/d3716.htm>> [accessed 20 Oct. 2008]

²⁰⁷ Gleiberman, O., 'The Lion King movie review', *Entertainment Weekly*, 24 Jun. 1994. <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,302734~1~~,00.html>> [accessed 16 Oct. 2008]

²⁰⁸ Travers, P., 'The Lion King movie review', *Rolling Stone*, 14 Jul. 1994. <http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/5947315/review/5947316/the_lion_king> [accessed 16 Oct. 2008]

²⁰⁹ Yao, Y. M., 'Cong shiziwang tanqi' (Starting from *The Lion King*), *Dongfang yishu* (*Oriental Art*), 6 (1995), 51-52 (p.52).

1960s Japanese animation television series, *Kimba the White Lion*. Apart from the similarity in protagonist's name (Kimba and Simba), analogues also exist in story lines. Both the two lion princes are forced to flee from their home by their evil uncles after the death of their fathers, grow up, get back, prevail over the uncles and retake the kingship with the help of their friends. After the release of *The Lion King* in China, there was an article from *Dangdai Dianshi* (*Contemporary Television*, one of the most popular and representative television magazines in China) highlighted these similarities between *Kimba* and *The Lion King*.²¹⁰ In fact, this animation series had been broadcasted by CCTV in the early 1980s. In answering the request by the Chinese audiences, CCTV invited Tezuka Osamu, the author of *Kimba the White Lion*, to make the 26-episode television series into 6 comic books which were published in 1982 and became very popular among Chinese children.²¹¹

In Chinese children's films, there is a theme which I define as 'little hero in adventure'.²¹² It is about a 'young boy' growing into a 'young hero' through various adventures based on historical events or mystical legends. According to Stephanie Donald and Qing Li, a young boy who is naughty, passionate and brave is found travelling through many of the Chinese children's films, from *Sanmao the Ragged Shanghai Street Urchin* (1949) to *Lotus Lantern* (1999).²¹³ Gazi in *Xiao Bing Zhang Ga* (*Little Soldier Zhangga*, 1963), Sun Wukong in *Da Nao Tian Gong* (*The Monkey King*, 1965) and Nezha in *Nezha Nao Hai* (*Nezha Calms the Sea*, 1979) are all such

²¹⁰ Zhao, W. P., 'Shiziwang you piaoqie zhi xian' (The Lion King, The Plagiarism?), *Dangdai dianshi* (*Contemporary Television*), 5 (1995), 60.

²¹¹ Tezuka, O., *Sen Lin Da Di 6* (*Kimba the White Lion 6*), (Beijing: China Radio and Television Publication House, 1983), p.103.

²¹² By reviewing all the Chinese children's films since 1949, I have identified the three major narrative themes as 'little hero in adventure', 'good student at school' and 'story with science fiction plots'.

²¹³ Donald, S.H., *Little Friends: Children's Film and Media Culture in China* (Lanham: The Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2005), p.1; Li, Q., 'Xinzhongguo ertong dianying chengzhang zhuti tansuo' (Exploring the 'grow up' theme of New China Children's Film), *Fujian Tribune*, 5 (2007), 91-95 (p.91-92).

characters. Meanwhile, these Chinese children's films also belong to and are very representative in the 'little hero in adventure' category. *The Lion King* happened to fit into this tradition which is probably one of the reasons why it was well accepted by the Chinese audiences.

Following the release of *The Lion King* in China, *Zhongguo qingnian keji* (a Chinese magazine sponsored by the China Communist Youth League Central Committee and the China Youth Development foundation devoted to youth and science topics) in its one preface talked about the success of the film in China and generated discussions on the inspiration it brought to China. In the article it was written that 'it (*The Lion King*) can be easily appreciated by the populace, and meanwhile, maintains a high level of achievement in art, from which the Chinese film producers should learn'.²¹⁴ In the same year, President Jiang Zemin in his letter to Shanghai Animation Film Studio encouraged them to produce animations with high level of educational, artistic and entertaining standards.²¹⁵ Although no proof of direct connection between Jiang's instruction and *The Lion King* was found, the Chinese animated feature *Lotus Lantern* which started its production in 1995 was considered to be influenced by *The Lion King* in several aspects.

Lotus Lantern falls into the theme category of 'little hero in adventure' for Chinese children's films. Thus, as previously explained, similarities to *The Lion King* were also found in its narrative. *Lotus Lantern* is based on an ancient Chinese tale of a young boy named Chenxiang who embarks on a journey to free his mother from captivity by his evil uncle with the help of a magical lantern. Because of such similarity, borrowing ideas from *The Lion King* became handy. The production of

²¹⁴ Xi, J. Y., 'Donghuapian shiziwang qishilu' (Inspiration from The Lion King), *Zhongguo qingnian keji* (*China Youth and Science*), 5 (1995), 1(p.1).

²¹⁵ Peng, J.X., 'Xue qirou gengyao xue qihun — Bijiao Shiziwang he Baoliandeng' (Comparison of *The Lion King* and *Lotus Lantern*), *Movie Review*, Z1 (1999), 28-29 (p.28).

Lotus Lantern took four years with more than three hundred people involved in the drawing and consumed a record high budget of 12 million yuan in Chinese animation history. Computer-aided design and facture had never been as much used in Chinese animations as it was in *Lotus Lantern*. Besides, the amount of music and songs used and their importance in pushing forward the plot in this film was also an unusual occurrence.²¹⁶ The survey conducted by the China Film Group in *The Lion King*'s preview also asked the audiences to select what they liked about the film. Among all the options, cartoon design and music were chosen by 98 percent of the participants.²¹⁷ Considering this, it is understandable why the producer of *Lotus Lantern*, Shanghai Animation Film Studio, made such effort in these two aspects.

As a domestic Children's film, *Lotus Lantern* performed well in the Chinese box office by taking in 29 million yuan, ranking the third among all domestic films in the Chinese market that year. It also outperformed Disney's *Mulan* which is also an animation film.²¹⁸ Despite *Lotus Lantern*'s box office achievement, some Chinese researchers still criticized it for only learning from the surface of *The Lion King* without capturing the spirit. They pointed out that the characteristics of the protagonist Chenxiang were flat throughout the film without being linked to the adventure he experienced. The film also added some characters which do not belong to the original story. One of them is a female character named Gamei who resemble the position of the female lion Nala, Simba's childhood playmate with whom he falls in love when he grows up.²¹⁹ Because romance used to be avoided in Chinese children's films, although the film made such an attempt to learn from *The Lion King*,

²¹⁶ Peng, J.X., p.28.

²¹⁷ TodayOnHistory.com, *15 July 1995 - The Lion King Released in China*.

²¹⁸ Editorial group of China Film Yearbook. *China Film Yearbook(volume 2000)* (Beijing: Publishing Group of China Film Yearbook, 2000), p.150.

²¹⁹ Peng, J.X., p.28.

the resulting character was not considered a success. The relation between Gamei and Chenxiang is more like comrades in arms, which appears to the audience to be too naive and affected.

The later film *The Secret of the Magic Gourd* (2007), which is a live-action movie made by Walt Disney in co-operation with The China Film Group and Centro Digital Pictures, made some breakthrough in characterization. It is an adaptation of a local children's book written by Zhang Tianyi, which was first published in 1958. Like *The Lion King*, it is also about the growing up of a naughty boy through adventures. In *The Lion King*, there are two supporting characters Timon and Pumbaa who accompanied Simba's journey. They add a lot of humor to the story and are very liked by the audiences. In China Film Group's survey, Timon is neck and neck with Simba as the most favored characters in *The Lion King*.²²⁰ In the case of this Chinese film, it is the magic gourd. In fact, there was a Chinese black-white film of this story made in 1963. In that film, the magic gourd was personalized into an old man with white beard who acted as a mentor of the protagonist rather than a companion. The remake rewrote the original story by adding in modern culture elements. The most eye-catching change is the brand-new, 3D animated character of the magic gourd. It is also a personalized character in the shape of a gourd. It has a very lovely design with mouth on the belly, sparkling eyes and a cluster of curly hair on the head. More importantly, the personality of the gourd is enriched with many humorous elements. It becomes a character who can really interact with the boy with comparable effect of Timon and Pumbaa in *The Lion King*.

²²⁰ TodayOnHistory.com, 15 July 1995 - *The Lion King Released in China*.

Chicago Sun-Times film critic Roger Ebert praised *The Lion King* ‘a learning experience as well as an entertainment.’²²¹ It is also true for the Chinese audiences, although the ‘learning experience’ appears different in some ways. *The Lion King*, as a family film, attracted the Chinese audiences, the OCG in particular, by giving them something they had not experienced from Chinese children’s films. The resulting relation between this film and the OCG is more complex.

The reception is not unexpected to Disney. In some measure, Disney had deliberately tried to engage with this particular generation. To draw attention, Disney with China Film Group donated their premier box office revenue in Beijing to Zhonghua aizi yingshi jiaoyu cujin hui (an active Chinese nongovernmental organization supported by the Ministry of Culture to promote film and television as media for children education and to increase awareness of film and television amongst children and parents), which aroused strong echoes in the Chinese media.²²²

Since the screening of *The Lion King* in China, it has been frequently used in English language education for Chinese students from classrooms to instructional publications.²²³ In 2002, Beijing Foreign Language Audiovisual Press published a series of multimedia books for English language education. Titled *Studying English with Films*, the series was edited by Professor Zhu Weifang from Beijing Foreign Studies University aiming to help the reader to learn practical English by reading and listening English language films. One of the books from the series is based on *The Lion King*. From 2003 and onwards, more materials that were extracted or based on

²²¹ Ebert, R., ‘The Lion King review’, *Chicago Sun Times*, 24 Jun. 1994.
<<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19940624/REVIEWS/406240301/1023>>
[accessed 16 Oct. 2008]

²²² Wang, Z. Q., ‘Jinkou yingpian shichang zongshu’ (The Review of Imported Films in 1995), *China Film Yearbook 1996*, ed. by Editorial Group of China Film Yearbook. (Beijing: Publishing Group of China Film Yearbook, 1996), pp. 204.

²²³ Materials from 1995 to 2001 are currently not available due to limited access. They will be added after field work in China.

The Lion King started to appear in Chinese magazines in English language education purpose. Examples of these magazines include *Chuzhongsheng xuexi* (a Chinese magazine for junior middle school students to help with their studies in all subjects by providing tips and exercises), *Zhongxuesheng yingyu* (*English Journal for Middle School Students: High School Edition*, a leading Chinese magazine supervised by the Ministry of Education, sponsored by Huazhong Normal University and devoted to assisting middle school students with their English study) and *Ketang neiwai* (*Open Class*, a very popular Chinese magazine among students that provides contents outside of the textbooks).²²⁴ In practice, *The Lion King* is considered and used by many middle school teachers as a very good source for idiomatic English.²²⁵ From 1999, English language education in China started in elementary school level. Teachers found that using materials from *The Lion King* is very effective in getting the attention of pupils and fostering their inquisitiveness of English.²²⁶

The English column of *Xiaozuojia xuankan* (a Chinese magazine to promote works by young Chinese authors and also provide reading materials from selected works) throughout its twelve issues of 2004 was dedicated to reacquaint its readers with the contents of the film from lyrics to classic lines with pictures snapped from the film as illustration. The aim was to increase the readers' interest in reading English classics such as *Hamlet*. In fact, some people from the OCG believe that it was *The Lion King* that helped them to open the gate to Western culture. 'Heizuo

²²⁴ Chun, Y. and Yong, Q., 'The Lion King I & II', *Chuzhongsheng xuexi* (*Junior Middle School Study*), 09&10 (2003), p.4-5; Song, F.W., 'From Hamlet to the King of the Lion', *Zhongxuesheng yingyu: gaozhongban* (*English Journal for Middle School Students: High School Edition*), 12(2003), p.11-12; The lyrics of 'I Just Can't Wait to be King', *Ketang neiwai* (*Open Class*), Z1 (2003), p.11-12.

²²⁵ Pang, Y.M., 'Tan dianjiaomeiti zai yingyujiaoxue zhong de yingyong' (The Application of Multimedia in English Language Education), *Journal of Puyang Vocational and Technical College*, 01(2006), p.145.

²²⁶ Tian, A.K., etc., 'Xiaoxue yingyujiaoxue youxi de sheji yu shixian' (The Design and Implementation of Games in Assisting English Language Education in Elementary School Level), *China Education Info*, 06 (2007), p.60-61.

dongyi' from Beijing in his article titled 'If there were no *The Lion King*' expressed how the film had changed his life. He claimed that *The Lion King* introduced him to Western literature and also fostered his interest in Western music.²²⁷

Apart from being a supplement to their text books, *The Lion King* means more to the OCG by bringing its influence to a different level, especially for the OCG. The Chinese children's films were in their prosperous age in the OCG's childhood. Characters such as Sung Wukong and Nezha are the heroes in their childhood memories. The tradition in Chinese children's films and the characters from the films that the OCG are already familiar with make *The Lion King* easily acceptable to them. In addition, memory of *Kimba the White Lion* might make them want to compare *The Lion King* with it. 'Longxiaoge', whose opinion was very representative, wrote online to indicate that it was the nostalgia for *Kimba the White Lion* that made them want to see *The Lion King* in the first place.²²⁸

Nostalgia was not the only thing that *The Lion King* had given the OCG. To some people from the OCG, the relation and connection between Simba and his father Mufasa in the film made them realize what was missing in their family life and to a certain extent had the void filled. On the BBS of DisneyBox.com, a post titled 'Dishini laoba paihangbang' (The Billboard for Disney Fathers) proposed Mufasa as 'the most competent father' which was supported by many Disney fans.²²⁹ In a focus group I organized in Beijing in Spring 2009, several post-80s Disney fans recalled a scene as one of the most significant ones for them. The scene started after Mufasa,

²²⁷ Heizuo dongyi (internet alias), post in *The Lion King*, *Douban*, 26 Oct. 2005, <<http://www.douban.com/review/1008552/>> [accessed 26 Nov. 2008]

²²⁸ Longxiaoge (internet alias), post in *Kimba the White Lion Bar*, *Baidu TieBa*, 12 Apr. 2008, <<http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kz=354524385>> [accessed 26 Nov. 2008]

²²⁹ Muxu (internet alias), 'Dishini laoba paihangbang' (The Billboard for Disney Fathers), *DisneyBox.com*, 11 Jan. 2006, <<http://www.disneybox.com/bbs/viewtopic.php?t=117&highlight=%E7%8B%AE%E5%AD%90%E7%8E%8B>> [accessed 20 Dec. 2008].

the father, rescued Simba, the son, and his accompany Nala from the hyenas. Mufasa told Simba how very disappointed he was because what Simba did had put both Nala and Simba himself in danger. He further explained that being brave did not mean that one should go looking for danger, and confessed that he was scared because he thought he might have lost his son. They finally reached an understanding and played together in the fields. According to the focus group, the reason why this scene was so important to them was that they recognized that what Mufasa did there to his son was very different from what their parents might have done. All of them agreed that Mufasa did not only show his strictness by telling his son what he did was wrong and explaining why, but more importantly, he let his son know how important he is to him and that he loves him. What the participants of the focus group would get from their parents, on the other hand, would simply be instructions to obey their parents. They wished that their parents could communicate them like the way Mufasa communicated with Simba. On *Douban*, a user with ID '777' admired Mufasa and recommended him as the standard for a good father who understood his son and knew how to 'teach his son a lesson'.²³⁰ The focus group discussion revealed that what Simba got from his father was what the OCG audiences had wanted to receive from their parents. I believe many OCG audience would have had Mufasa as their imaginary father when watching the film and have enjoyed the imaginary father-son relationship, which is why the death of Mufasa is referred to by many OCG audiences as one of the saddest moments they have experienced in all films.

The father-son relationships they appreciate and desire may be one of the reasons why the OCG audiences make Simba the imaginary self when they watch the film. More importantly, the character does reflect the OCG's true selves. Ever since

²³⁰ 777 (internet alias), post in *The Lion King*, *Douban*, 20 Apr. 2008, <<http://www.douban.com/review/1357909/>> [accessed 26 Nov. 2008]

they were born, they have been given many titles – ‘little emperor’, ‘the rising sun’, ‘successor of the 21st century’ – which grant them with special positions in the family and the society, and also, as a string attached, put heavy expectation on their shoulders. The participants of the focus group in Beijing also had a heated discussion on this. Some of them agreed that hearing young Simba sings ‘I Just Can’t Wait to Be King’ reminded them that they did not understand what responsibility means when they were children. However, they did understand they were expected to be good kids who were not supposed to make mistakes. So when they saw Simba felt guilty over his father’s death, they understood him or even deem it as their own suffering. Also on *Douban*, ‘Qinjiu’ gave a very representative remark of *The Lion King*, in which he wrote that ‘(from the film) I see the path of my own growth’.²³¹

The life of Simba with Timon and Pumbaa, the time of no restrictions, their worry-free philosophy ‘Hakuna Matata’ also appealed to the OCG audiences. ‘Muxu’ in his ‘Nanzihan chengzhang bibeishou’ (A Must Read for Men) suggested that Simba set a good example for young men who learnt how to get rid of the sense of frustration and to stand up against the challenge.²³² The film does not end here. Simba returns his homeland and confronts his evil uncle as well as his guilt. He finally takes back the throne and becomes what his father Mufasa had hoped he would be, to take his position in the circle of life, which shows the OCG audiences what responsibility really means. It is claimed by ‘Shagongdaluo’ that, thinking back in time, it was *The Lion King* that taught him love and responsibility in the first place,

²³¹ Qinjiu (internet alias), post in *The Lion King*, *Douban*, 3 Jan. 2009, <<http://www.douban.com/review/1605857/>> [accessed 20 Jan. 2009].

²³² Muxu (internet alias), ‘Nanzihan chengzhang bibeishou’ (A Must Read for Men), *DisneyBox.com*, 11 Jan. 2006, <<http://www.disneybox.com/bbs/viewtopic.php?t=117&highlight=%E7%8B%AE%E5%AD%90%E7%8E%8B>> [accessed 20 Dec. 2008].

which is also a very representative point of view among the OCG.²³³ Nowadays, some of the OCG have become parents themselves. ‘Huairen’ in his post on Douban considered *The Lion King* as a textbook for young boys and it is one of the best presents they can give to their children, which was agreed by many of his peers.²³⁴

As a Disney family film, *The Lion King* reflects the attempt of cross-generational appeal that the Chinese children’s films are not good at providing. It is approved not only by Chinese critics and general audiences as a good film but also by educationists and many others as a good source for education purpose. In terms of both longevity and extent, the influence of *The Lion King* in China is very remarkable, which makes it a Disney legend in China and also an excellent case to study the relation between the OCG and the American entertainment.

Disney is very representative in imported family entertainment in China. Its products often have aroused strong interest among Chinese audiences and become subjects of discussion of Chinese researchers. These imported products were different from the domestic ones which they were familiar with in many aspects and the differences were often easy to observe, which is why most studies by Chinese researchers on imported entertainment emphasized their influence on the domestic industries and the consumers. This chapter, as a case study of Disney in contemporary urban China, investigated the subject from a more objective point of view. By going through the change in Disney’s image and also the company’s development in China, it is shown that the influence of its products does exist in many aspects. More importantly, interaction was observed between Disney’s products and the Chinese domestic

²³³ Shagongdaluo (internet alias), post in *The Lion King*, *Douban*, 2 Nov. 2005, <<http://www.douban.com/review/1009235/>> [accessed 26 Nov. 2008].

²³⁴ Huairen (internet alias), post in *The Lion King*, *Douban*, 7 May 2006, <<http://www.douban.com/review/1043283/>> [accessed 26 Nov. 2008].

players such as the film industry and audience without overlooking the domestic entertainment products that represents tradition.

Case study of *The Lion King* revealed the reception of Disney family films in more details. On the one hand, the important role that the Chinese children's films had played in forging the preference of the young Chinese audience like the OCG influenced the reception of these imported films. In other words, there are traditions for Disney's family films to fit in when they come into the Chinese market and not every attempt guarantees good reception. On the other hand, there are Disney's family entertainment products or certain aspects of them that hold appeal for the Chinese consumers. On seeing the advantage of such appeal, Chinese children's films makers for example started to see OCG preferences and demands as very important and made effort to learn from the imported family films to bring change into their own productions.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the Only Child Generation in China is a special, interesting and important audience group to study. As a film of significant importance for the OCG, *The Lion King* makes an excellent medium to study this audience group. In terms of both longevity and extent, the influence of *The Lion King* in China is very remarkable. As a Disney family film, *The Lion King* not only fits well in the tradition of the Chinese children's films but also reflects the attempt of cross-generational appeal that the Chinese children's films are not good at providing. It is approved by Chinese media, film critics and general audiences as a good film. Furthermore, it had a strong appeal for the OCG, which makes it a very good case to study this special audience group and the relation between them and the imported American entertainment.

As also revealed in this chapter, the connection between the OCG and *The Lion King* does not only reside at an entertainment level. It is considered by many, including the OCG themselves, as an excellent source for education. It is observed that the OCG received the influence of the film not only in school education such as English language education, but also in relation to emotion and ideology. Firstly, the OCG audiences perceived the film's characters and story as a reflection on their own growth. The resonance that the OCG found in *The Lion King* awards the film a very importance position in the hearts of many OCG audiences. Furthermore, they detected in the film solutions or at least consolations to problems in their own lives. For example, the father-son relationship in the film somewhat compensated what the OCG missed in their lives.

The Only Child Generation grew up in a period of dramatic social change in China. In fact, the change was so dramatic that it was so hard for the OCG's parent generation who were trying to adapt to the situation themselves to provide them with experience-based guidance. For most of the time, the OCG had to make judgement and decision on what to accept and what to reject by themselves. As I argued and proved in this chapter, the OCG audiences found help in *The Lion King*, an American family film. In my opinion, this is a very high degree of acceptance.

Chapter 4 Mulan: Disney's Chinese

Heroine

Mulan, as the 36th animated feature in the Disney animated features canon, is its first film that is based on an ancient Chinese folk tale. This film took 140 million US dollars and four years to make with more than two thousand people being involved in the production.²³⁵ The team also sent a group of art supervisors to China who brought back more than 9600 photographs and roughly 48 hours' video material for as a source of inspiration to soak up the Chinese culture.²³⁶ On 19th June 1998, *Mulan* was released in the US. By the end of 1998, it had grossed about 120.6 million US dollars in the domestic box office, ranking at the second place among all G-rated releases of the year.

In China, as one of the seven imported Hollywood blockbusters of year 1999, *Mulan* made its debut in February. In contrast to its general success across the foreign markets with a total gross of 183.7 million US dollars, it only took in 11 million yuan (1.3 million US dollars) in the Chinese box office. The “Chinese card” that Disney played failed to achieve its anticipated effect, at least in China where the story originates. Compared to *The Lion King* (41.3 million yuan) and *Toy Story* (31.8 million yuan), and even *Tarzan* (11 million yuan) of the same year which was not

²³⁵ Fessler, K., ‘Big-budget films raise standard of profitability’, *Bloomberg News, Journal Record, The (Oklahoma City)*, 22 May. 1998, [FindArticles.com](http://findarticles.com).

<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4182/is_19980522/ai_n10119492> [accessed 01 Feb. 2008].

²³⁶ Zhu, H., ‘Disney mianlin tiaozhan (Disney faces challenges)’, *Beijing Daily*, 04 April. 1999, [Sina.com.cn](http://news.sina.com.cn/richtalk/news/movie/9904/040311.html). <<http://news.sina.com.cn/richtalk/news/movie/9904/040311.html>> [accessed 01 Feb. 2008].

given such anticipation, it can be clearly seen that why *Mulan* is considered to be a flop in the Chinese cinema.²³⁷

Hollywood's blockbusters are expected to draw big in the Chinese film market seen by many Hollywood studios as their rising star. *Mulan* certainly did not manage to match such expectation. Why did the Chinese heroine receive a cold shoulder in her home country? After its release in China, negative reviews and criticisms from Chinese side came one after another, but none really explored the reception of *Mulan* among the Chinese audiences. "It failed to resonate there (China), because the narrative had been customised for the US," claimed Ting Wang in *Global Hollywood 2*.²³⁸ Their arguments basically follow this logic: they assume the cultural misinterpretation of Disney to the original story lead to unfavourable reception from the Chinese audiences and unfavourable reception lead to unsatisfactory box office. So they conclude that the Hollywood adaptation of Chinese cultural elements is the reason behind *Mulan*'s box office performance.

There are flaws in the above assumption. First, unsatisfactory box office performance does not necessarily come from a bad reception. They overlooked the fact that *Mulan* is released in China under some very unfavourable conditions which, as discussed earlier, resulted in a negative impact on its box office performance. Second, although culture is an importance factor to be considered to analyse the reception of a film, a cultural difference to the audience origin does not necessarily cause a negative reception. Of course, if the audiences are shown an apple but told a pear, they will probably not accept the idea. But the cultural discount in *Mulan* is by no means as strong as the apple to pear situation. As will be proved in this chapter,

²³⁷The box office data come from: [Box Office Mojo, *Mulan*, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=mulan.htm>](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=mulan.htm) [accessed 01 Feb. 2008] and Rosen, Stanley.

²³⁸ Miller, Toby, et al., *Global Hollywood 2* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005), p.322.

the difference in cultural presentation of *Mulan* does not violate the audiences; quite to the contrary, it is appreciated and favourably received, especially by the OCG female audiences.

One thing that is significant about *Mulan* is its female protagonist. The reception of this film among the OCG, female OCG in particular, is largely related to the representation of this heroine. To study the reception of *Mulan* among the OCG, the chapter will start with the examination of Disney's reconstruction of this media image – how the original cultural elements are modified and rearranged to form the new package. Then, the chapter will set out in search for evidence of audience relationships with this Disney-encoded image, focusing on the OCG's, especially the female OCG's reception to *Mulan*, the Disney incarnation of the Chinese heroine. Drawing from the findings of the reception study, the final part of the chapter will dig into the depth of the cultural enrichment exemplified in the film and discuss its implications in audience reception.

Disney's Reconstruction of *Mulan*

The story of *Mulan*, known in Chinese literature as *Ode to Mulan* or *Ballad of Mulan*, was first transcribed in the *Musical Records of Old and New* in the 6th century AD and later compiled into the *Music Bureau Collection* by Guo Maoqian during the 11th or 12th century. The story is widely believed to happen in Northern Wei Dynasty during which the empire was under nomadic invasions from Rouran, a Mongolian confederation.

The story in its original form is told in a very concise manner of wording. With 332 Chinese characters, it tells a story about a woman named *Mulan* taking her father's place to join the army against invaders, during which he disguised herself

into a man. At the end of her 12 years' war time, she turned down the emperor's title offer and returned home, very much welcomed and back to her life as a woman. The following translation of the ode is taken from *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry* by Hans Frankel of Yale University.²³⁹

Ode of Mulan

*Tsiek tsiek and again tsiek tsiek,
Mu-lan weaves, facing the door.
You don't hear the shuttle's sound,
You only hear Daughter's sighs.
They ask Daughter who's in her heart,
They ask Daughter who's on her mind.
"No one is on Daughter's heart,
No one is on Daughter's mind.
Last night I saw the draft posters,
The Khan is calling many troops,
The army list is in twelve scrolls,
On every scroll there's Father's name.
Father has no grown-up son,
Mu-lan has no elder brother.
I want to buy a saddle and horse,
And serve in the army in Father's place."*

*In the East Market she buys a spirited horse,
In the West Market she buys a saddle,
In the South Market she buys a bridle,
In the North Market she buys a long whip.
At dawn she takes leave of Father and Mother,
In the evening camps on the Yellow River's bank.
She doesn't hear the sound of Father and Mother calling,
She only hears the Yellow River's flowing water cry tsien tsien.*

²³⁹ Frankel, Hans, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady: Interpretations of Chinese Poetry*, (Yale University Press, 1978).

*At dawn she takes leave of the Yellow River,
In the evening she arrives at Black Mountain.
She doesn't hear the sound of Father and Mother calling,
She only hears Mount Yen's nomad horses cry tsiu tsiu.
She goes ten thousand miles on the business of war,
She crosses passes and mountains like flying.
Northern gusts carry the rattle of army pots,
Chilly light shines on iron armour.
Generals die in a hundred battles,
Stout soldiers return after ten years.*

*On her return she sees the Son of Heaven,
The Son of Heaven sits in the Splendid Hall.
He gives out promotions in twelve ranks
And prizes of a hundred thousand and more.
The Khan asks her what she desires.
"Mu-lan has no use for a minister's post.
I wish to ride a swift mount
To take me back to my home."*

*When Father and Mother hear Daughter is coming
They go outside the wall to meet her, leaning on each other.
When Elder Sister hears Younger Sister is coming
She fixes her rouge, facing the door.
When Little Brother hears Elder Sister is coming
He whets the knife, quick quick, for pig and sheep.
"I open the door to my east chamber,
I sit on my couch in the west room,
I take off my wartime gown
And put on my old-time clothes."
Facing the window she fixes her cloudlike hair,
Hanging up a mirror she dabs on yellow flower powder
She goes out the door and sees her comrades.
Her comrades are all amazed and perplexed.*

*Traveling together for twelve years
They didn't know Mu-lan was a girl.
"The he-hare's feet go hop and skip,
The she-hare's eyes are muddled and fuddled.
Two hares running side by side close to the ground,
How can they tell if I am he or she?"*

What Frankel offers is a line-by-line interpretation which sticks well to the original storyline. The story emphasises three things. The first is Mulan's act to take her father's place to join the army. From the lines it can be seen that Mulan made this decision to protect her father and family spontaneously. The key point here is "spontaneous". Mulan did worry (about her father) and ponder (other possibilities), but she did not struggle. She believed it was the right thing to do, then off she goes. She took the initiative to carry out filial piety, which is highly commendable based on traditional Chinese values. The second is her being welcomed when she returned home. The ode described how family members greeted her return in details. Again, it reinforces that what Mulan had done is good and should be praised. Finally, the ode amply tells how Mulan turned back into her female appearance and emphasises her quality as a traditional Chinese woman. The storyline of *Ode of Mulan* is not an ordinary one in Chinese folk tale, but what the ode emphasises is ordinary, that is, the traditional Confucius ideology – filial piety and female virtues.

Disney needed to transform a folk tale that is built around ancient Chinese ideology into an internationally acceptable modern animation feature. A Chinese woman dons the disguise of a male soldier and runs away to join the army in an effort to save her family is not an ordinary storyline. Disney saw the potential from the storyline, the character and the ancient Chinese background. However, the original tale was by no means rich enough to fit the big screen – there were embellishments to do. "The main thing that we wanted was to be honourable to

Chinese culture and honourable to the person of Mulan,” said Tony Bancroft, co-director of the film. “We felt that as long as we were heading in that direction, embellishing things would be okay.”²⁴⁰

In order to fit into the global market, Disney put a lot of effort in adapting this Chinese ancient story. Disney made two major embellishments – the story setup, meaning the characters and storyline, and animation of the both. Starting with the story setup, Mulan is of course the main character. In the original tale, Mulan went through her adventure all alone, other characters like family members and comrades only appeared to the end of the story. In Disney’s opinion, a hero/heroine should not be lonely; there should be companion(s). From Abu in *Aladdin* (1992), to Timon and Pumbaa in *The Lion King* (1994), Flit and Meeko in *Pocahontas* (1995), and the recent Pascal in *Tangled* (2010), these little creatures had accompanied their friends through different adventures. This was one of Disney’s set models and was also applied to *Mulan*. In the embellished story, Mulan was given two companions, Mushu and Cri-Kee. Like the other companions, the two fast-paced, mercurial characters were created to bring crowd-pleasing and hilarious elements into the story.

Of significant modification to the original storyline was the emphasis of Mulan’s adventure in the army against the intruders by which she managed to bring glory and honour to her family. In the original ode, only 6 lines were used to describe Mulan’s war life. Disney created enough allies and opponents to support an encounter-rich adventure for Mulan, in which romance was also involved. The leader of the invaders, Shanyu was given a quietly powerful demeanour which was not often seen in Disney’s bad guys. Mulan and General Lee’s romance fell into another Disney’s set model – prince and princess.

²⁴⁰ Lyons, Mike, “Mulan: Disney animates the epic folk tale of an ancient warrior woman”, *Cinefantastique*, 30(3), July 1998, pp.18-30.

One important character that is often overlooked is Mulan's granny. In the personality settings, Mulan was designed to take more after her, the unconventional member of the family. "She (Granny) speaks her mind and says what she feels," said Ruben Aquino, animator of Granny.²⁴¹ While her mother, Fali, was designed to represent what Disney understood as the ideal woman-wife-mother of that period. This setup actually preserved the Chinese traditional woman image represented by Mulan in the original ode and transferred it to Mulan's mother in the film. And the characterisation of Granny made the uniqueness and specialness of Mulan reasonable. "You feel that, stoically, mom and dad are playing out their roles traditionally, where Granny somehow cut through a little bit of that."²⁴²

In the film, Mulan is given a very independent and adventurous personality. The way she talks and behaves is more like an American-styled tomboy. When talking about the uniqueness of Mulan, Chris Sanders said, "The key to Mulan was the unique main character and the unique position she's put in. She's in a no-win situation. She dishonours her father taking his place, or she loses him."²⁴³ This was probably the most important input that made Disney's Mulan differ the original. There was no easy choice for Disney's Mulan who confused, struggled, even devastated at some point. To make Mulan's motive for joining the army more reasonable, Mulan's father, who in the original story was too old and has no son to take his place to join the army, was also set up to have an injured leg. Mulan in the film was no more a woman who spontaneously adhered to the traditional values of the society. Her embarrassing interview with the match maker had told the audiences that she was not a traditional girl that the society wanted her to be. "She's caught in

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

between a lot of things. Caught in between her own feelings and heart, who she really is versus who society expects her to be,” said Mark Henn, supervising animator of *Mulan*.²⁴⁴

Also differed from the original is the revelation of Mulan’s true gender. Instead of leaving it to the very end, Disney decided to reveal to the audiences that Mulan was a woman before her final face-to-face battle against Shanyu in the Palace, in which way Mulan finished the highest part of her journey with the true self. It was Disney’s effort to praise Mulan as a true, clever and brave woman, not someone in disguise, not someone who was still unsure about herself. Compare to the original ode, the film had its real emphasis on feminism.

From the storyline to character setup, Disney aimed to reconstruct a Chinese heroine whose character and adventure were originated from a Chinese cultural background and, at the same time, were more reasonable and appealing to the general audiences. Apparently, serving in the army in his father’s place for 12 years without struggling was not reasonable. In the reconstruction of *Mulan*, Disney made its cultural input. It is the cultural input that imbued the character with a much richer personality than the Chinese original.

Needless to say, the animation of *Mulan* was another embellishment that Disney made to the original text-based story. Production designer Hans Bacher gave two words to the team about what the film should like – “Poetic simplicity”²⁴⁵ which greatly influenced almost every aspect of the film’s design. The artists decided to go without tone mattes which were used in animation to lend shadows and depth to the character. Going for such a “flat” look was considered a bold and drastic move in times when most animation works, including those by Disney itself, went for the

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

more high-tech style. Disney got a lot of inspiration from the work of classic Chinese artists. “In Chinese art, everything is very balanced. It’s like Yin and Yang. You have positive and negative space,” said Bacher. Disney wanted to put the story into an animated environment that made senses, an environment that fit the story. They wanted something “more spontaneous”. “We fought really hard to prove to them that we could put these characters on a background with atmosphere and no tone mattes,” said Ric Sluiter, art director of *Mulan*.²⁴⁶

Not only did Disney put a lot of efforts in setting the tone of the film but also in the design of the look of the characters. Disney clearly wanted to make them look like Chinese, from their physical characteristics to the costumes they wear. It is arguable whether Disney’s symbolic presentation of the Chinese look is perceived as beauty in Chinese eyes; it did make believe that they were Chinese characters.

Disney wanted to tell this ancient folk tale to a broader audience of different cultural backgrounds including that where it originated. They reconfigured Mulan to make her a heroine that was more lovable and admirable to the modern standard. The artists and producers knew the importance of adopting proper media to carry and covey the messages to the audiences, especially for the embellishments they made to the original texts – things had to work together to work the best. Disney had certainly hoped the new Mulan would resonate with the Chinese audiences and bring profit to the table. Unfortunately, *Mulan*’s money-making mission had largely failed in China. As discussed in Chapter 1, due to the extreme situation in which Mulan was in release in the Chinese cinema, its box office performance is not a proper indicator for the film’s reception. Question as to how Chinese audiences, especially the audiences that I am concerned with, respond to Disney’s interpretation and representation of

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

Mulan is still to be answered. In the next section, the OCG's reception to *Mulan* will be examined.

Who Is that Girl I See

According to non-Chinese resources, the reception of *Mulan* is mostly positive, with a 90 per cent “freshness” on Rotten Tomatoes and an average score of 7.9 out of 10.²⁴⁷ IMDB also gives an average of 7.1 out of 10 based on 21,309 votes.²⁴⁸ Stephen Wong in his review suggested that *Mulan* is unlike an ordinary Disney style heroine; she is independent and brave without being overtly glamorous.²⁴⁹ Roger Ebert also gave *Mulan* positive comments, saying that “*Mulan* is an impressive achievement, with a story and treatment ranking with *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*”.²⁵⁰ There are also positive reviews, although in a small number, from Chinese film scholars and critics. They accepted that Disney's understanding of Chinese culture in *Mulan* is no longer restrained by the “orientalism” defined by Edward Said and acknowledged the effort that Disney had put into the production of *Mulan*, which had shown its sincerity to understand the Chinese culture in a more equitable way.²⁵¹ Jian Qi in his review of *Mulan* stated that, the Chinese image in *Mulan* had been improved comparing to that was found in most western works, which had a positive influence in promoting Chinese culture and image to the world.²⁵² He also

²⁴⁷ [Rotten Tomatoes, *Mulan*](http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/mulan/), <<http://uk.rottentomatoes.com/m/mulan/>>[accessed 25 Jan 2008].

²⁴⁸ [IMDb, *Mulan*](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120762/), <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120762/>>[accessed 25 Jan 2008].

²⁴⁹ Wong, S., ‘History? Close enough...’, [Entertainment Insiders](http://www.ents.com/entertainment/insiders). (1998), <<http://www.ents.com/entertainment/insiders>>[accessed 05 Feb 2008]

²⁵⁰ Ebert, R., ‘*Mulan*’, [Rogerebert.com](http://rogerebert.com), 19 June. 1998, <<http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19980619/REVIEWS/806190302/1023>> [accessed 05 Feb 2008]

²⁵¹ Li, Y.S., ‘Dangdai donghuapian yishu de wenhua chanshi (Cultural Interpretation of the Contemporary Animation Film Art)’, *Film Art.*, 03(2001), 87-90 (p.90).

²⁵² Qi, J., ‘Hua *Mulan* geile women shenme? (What has *Mulan* given us?)’, *The World of Music*, 03(1999), 9 (p.9).

complimented *Mulan*'s achievement in using Chinese watercolor painting effect in the film. "The artwork of *Mulan* successfully adopted Chinese aesthetics," he said, adding "Instead of using the so-called technology to increase the depth of the picture, *Mulan*'s use of the Chinese watercolour painting style with concise yet vivid curves, created a classical and believable ancient Chinese atmosphere."

In contrast, more negative responses were found in Chinese sources, most of which regarded the adaptation as improper and criticised its misunderstanding of Chinese culture and elements as previously discussed. The Chinese magazine *Popular Cinema* published its review for *Mulan* not long after its release, claiming that the Disney's interpretation of Chinese culture was superficial and in some sense unacceptable.²⁵³ As described in the previous section, in order to reconstruct an ancient Chinese environment, Disney borrowed a lot of Chinese elements. According to Linyu Zhou, some of the Chinese elements were not properly used, making it an inaccurate Chinese image: in the eyes of an American, it might be very Chinese; in the eyes of a Chinese, it was too American.²⁵⁴ In *Mulan*, "Jiao zi" (Chinese dumplings) are barbecued, which the Chinese people have never done. Long (Chinese dragon), worshipped by the Chinese for thousands of years as the representation of power and dignity, becomes a lizard-like rap-talking creature.²⁵⁵ The name that Mulan uses in the army, "Ping", is also considered as an inappropriate usage by Disney. "Ping", used in connection with Mulan's family name "Hua" is a homophony to the Chinese word that means "vase". "Some might find these

²⁵³ Zhang, R.J., 'Mulanci: kan donghuapian Hua Mulan (Ode of Mulan: Review of Animation *Mulan*)', *Popular Cinema*, 08(1999), 15 (p.15).

²⁵⁴ Zhou, L.Y., "The Cultural Identity Rewriting of 'the Other' by Disney's Production Formula in Animated Feature *Mulan*", *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University*, 05(2006), 62-65 (p.64).

²⁵⁵ Zhou, F., 'Meiguo Hua Mulan zai zhongguo canbai (American *Mulan* met its Waterloo in China)', *Guangzhou Daily*, 18 May, 1999. [Sina.com.cn.< http://eladies.sina.com.cn/movie/movie/1999-05-18/1180.shtml>](http://eladies.sina.com.cn/movie/movie/1999-05-18/1180.shtml)[accessed 01 Feb. 2008].

elements to be amusing but others might feel uncomfortable,” claimed Lin, a Chinese film critic.²⁵⁶

The traditional Chinese regard Mulan as a heroine because she represents their most cherished personality of being “xiaoshun” (filial piety) which, in contemporary Chinese culture, is explained as the attitude of being respectful, thankful and caring to the elder family members. According to the work by Zhixi Qin and Jing Huo, the Disney version of Mulan weakened her “xiaoshun” and redefined Mulan as an American icon of individualism and feminism. It was not a bad story, nor the one that the Chinese audience had expected to see.²⁵⁷ Also criticised is Disney’s romance element added to the film. Love story is usually absent in Chinese animated films.²⁵⁸ Disney has the tradition of telling love stories of princesses, and Mulan has been made into another Disney-type princess. The romance made it a bit too far from what Mulan should be in the eyes of most Chinese audience – a traditional Chinese woman with self-restraint.²⁵⁹

To sum up, in the eyes of the above mentioned Chinese scholars and film critics, in Disney’s adaptation, the original Chinese culture of the story had been chopped up and displaced with Disney’s crowd-pleasing elements such as love story, humorous animal characters and etc. Although the hybrid culture may lead to a better acceptance of the audiences who are not familiar with Chinese culture, the “Disney-ised” version of *Mulan* failed to appeal to the Chinese audiences. As discussed at the

²⁵⁶ Lin, D.R., ‘Tan donghuapian Hua Mulan de xieyin wenti (The homonym problem in *Mulan*)’, *Rhetoric Learning*, 06(1999), 8 (p.8).

²⁵⁷ Qin, Z.X. and Huo, J., ‘Cong Disney Hua Mulan kan quanqiu hua yujing xia de kuawenhua chuanbo (Thinking of the Transcultural Communication in the Globalization Context from Disney’s *Mulan*)’, *Contemporary Communications*, 02(2002), 24-27 (p.24-25).

²⁵⁸ Ding, L.F., “Qiantan aiqing zai guochan donghuapian zhong de quexi (The Absence of ‘Love Story’ in Domestic Animation Film)”, *Chinese TV*, 01(2001), 12-14 (p.12).

²⁵⁹ Li, S.Y., ‘Wenhua jiedu Mulanci yu Disney *Mulan* (Cultural Analysis of the difference between Ode of Mulan and Disney’s *Mulan*)’, *Journal of Huaibei Coal Industry Teachers' College (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 04(2006), 134-135 (p.135).

beginning of this chapter, such arguments are flawed. Also taking into consideration of the tension between China and the US at the time, these reviews and criticism contained, more or less, a sense of playing up to the political agenda of Chinese government. Nevertheless, the above views still represent part of the film's reception in China; however, in this study, I am more concerned with the audience groups who do not have such bias and their relationships to the film.

As a Hollywood family film, one important audience group that *Mulan* tries to engage with is the children. The Chinese children who had seen the film could easily recognize the differences between Disney's *Mulan* and what they learned from the textbooks but they seem to accept the difference quite well.²⁶⁰ In Fanghua Du's composition titled *My Desk-mate 'Hua Mulan'*, he metaphorically referred to his classmate to whom he shared a desk with as 'Mulan'. Du's description to his tomboy school friend seems to agree to Disney's definition of *Mulan* more than to the original one.²⁶¹ In the work of Zongyu Li etc, *Mulan* was used as an example of divergent thinking in child education.²⁶² In the "Mulan Theme Activities" they organized, children were encouraged to express their understanding of *Mulan* based on their appreciation of the film.

The above example shows that, not only there were Chinese audiences who accepted the Disney's interpretation of *Mulan*, but also audiences who applied the messages they received from the film to their real life. Student Du made connection between the fictional *Mulan* character and his real-life friend. The Chinese teachers mentioned above also considered that the film presented something of constructive

²⁶⁰ Zhou, Y.X., "Miaoyin huoshui ru gushi Hua Mulan jiaoxue pianduan (A Report of teaching 'Ode of Mulan')", *Language Planning*, 03(2005), 40 (p.40).

²⁶¹ Du, F.H., "Wo de tongzhuo Hua Mulan (My Deskmate 'Hua Mulan')", *Yuwen tiandi (Chinese World)*, 04(2005), 34 (p.34).

²⁶² Li, Z.Y., Bian, X. and Ying, Q., "Hua Mulan zhuti huodong de sheji yu shishi (The Design and Implementation of 'Mulan Theme Activities')", *Children Education*, 11(2006), 6-7(p.6).

use in education. Although these pieces of evidence of audience relationships with *Mulan* are not obtained from the OCG, they at least show that cultural differences do not necessarily result in negative reception from Chinese audiences. For the rest of the section, evidence obtained from the OCG, especially from the female audiences of the OCG, will be examined to study their reception to the film *Mulan*.

In OCG's writing about *Mulan*, there are many occurrences of one particular object in the film, that is, one of the film's original soundtracks, the song *Reflection* performed by Lea Salonga. The soundtracks received very positive responses from Chinese audiences. On Douban, over 78 per cent of audiences would recommend the album.²⁶³ Many of them specifically mentioned *Reflection* which sings,

Look at me
I will never pass for a perfect bride
Or a perfect daughter
Can it be I'm not meant to play this part?
Now I see that if I were truly to be myself
I would break my family's heart

Who is that girl I see
Staring straight back at me?
Why is my reflection someone I don't know?
Somehow I cannot hide who I am
Though I've tried
When will my reflection show who I am inside?

In the film, *Mulan* sang the song when returned home after failing an embarrassing interview with the match-maker, frustrated for not being able to match the expectation of her family. The song precisely corresponded to the state of mind of the OCG females. From line to line, the song reminds them what their family and the

²⁶³ Douban, *Mulan OST*, <<http://music.douban.com/subject/2156006/collections?start=60>> [accessed 30 July 2011].

society expect them to be and exactly how they feel about it. Many texts written by female audiences about this song mentioned “emotional”, “moving”, “a song for us”.²⁶⁴ In the film, the song expressed Mulan’s struggle when she found herself caught in between what she really want to be and what the others want her to be. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is also one of the frustrations for the OCG females. This similarity in life experience generated an emotional correspondence between the audiences and the protagonist.

On Mtime, one of China’s biggest online movie fan community, a female OCG audience wrote her own review of Mulan titled *Zhen Qing de Zi Wo*, the name of the Chinese version of the song. In her review which should probably be better described as her emotion and feeling about the Mulan character, she saw Mulan as a role model who pursued her true self. While considering Mulan as an inspiration, she also expressed her feeling powerless to change. She wrote,

*“During our growing up, we’ve spent too much time doing things that we’re not interested in at all; however, I doubt I have to courage to do what Mulan did, to go for myself, especially in the current education system.”*²⁶⁵

Another female OCG audience agreed and wrote in reply,

“Well said! Mulan is the role model who breaks the shackle of tradition. I feel somewhere in my mind live a girl like her. I dislike the traditional way of my life, really want to break away. But like you said, it needs a great deal of

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Mtime, *Zhenqing de ziwo (Reflection)*, <<http://i.mtime.com/963122/blog/1550173/>> [accessed 30 July 2011].

courage. ... Born here, grown up here, it seems that I'm too traditional anyway.”²⁶⁶

This was a typical reaction from the female OCG audiences: they received the Mulan image, approved her rightfulness, felt sympathy for her and introspected themselves. However, they perceived Mulan’s experience as ideal and difficult to realise in their life. In both of the above two pieces of texts, “courage” is mentioned. It is what they admire Mulan of and also what they feel they are lack of. Although the resonance was not strong enough to have immediate influence on their behaviour, it certainly did make them think about their own life. This level of reception was only observed from the female audiences. The male audiences, on the other side, were found to be distracted by other elements of the film. In reply to the above post on Mtime, a male OCG audience wrote,

*“What impressed me the most was the little dragon, Mushu. I think I watched the film solely for fun. I admire your deep thought into the film.”*²⁶⁷

The lack of evidence about the Mulan character from male OCG audiences and the above texts shows that the male audience relationship with the film differs from that of the female. The male OCG audiences were more likely to be attracted to the action and humorous part of the film. Being constrained within two positions of their gender difference, male and female audiences could easily give different reception to certain messages from the media.

A female OCG compared Mulan with the other Disney’s princess and wrote,

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

*“Mulan is the kind of girl that I can like without any jealousy.”*²⁶⁸

What is shown by the above texts is true adoration. For the OCG females, their intimacy with Mulan not only came from the similar experience they shared, but also because Mulan represented their ideal self, which is why tomboy characters like Mulan are rarely found in Chinese children’s films that they used to see. Most female protagonists in Chinese children’s films are found to be well-behaved and have the attributes of being a good girl. Yongli in *Flowers of the Motherland (Zu Guo De Hua Duo, 1955)*, Ximeizi in *Children of the Red Army (Hong Hai Zi, 1958)*, Xiaojia in *Little Wooden Head (Xiao Ling Dang, 1963)* and Yingzi in *My Memory of Old Beijing (Cheng Nan Jiu Shi, 1983)* all have the similar characteristics.²⁶⁹ The problem is that, what is “well-behaved” or what is “being a good girl” is defined by the society. The OCG females know it is what the society wants them to be, but unfortunately, it is not what they want to be. These female characters failed to generate an emotional connection with the female OCG audiences like Mulan did. Mulan is also a heroine. In Chinese films, heroines often appear as propaganda images, emphasising their scarification for the country. A female OCG audience wrote when comparing Mulan with these heroines,

*“Mulan is a real woman, a real heroine. Unlike those in Chinese (propaganda) films, she has feelings.”*²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Douban, *Tayi wuning shengshang de fangshi zuodao le zuida de xiaoshun (She achieved the ultimate filial piety by disobeying the emperor)*, <<http://movie.douban.com/review/2612563/>> [accessed 30 July 2011].

²⁶⁹ Zhang, Z.L., ‘Appendix II: Zhongguo shaonian ertong dianying jingdian xingxiang (The Classical Images of Chinese Children’s Film)’, *Zhongguo shaonian ertong dianying shilun (Historical Study of Chinese Children’s Film)* (Beijing: Chinese Film Press, 2005), pp.278-283.

²⁷⁰ Douban, *Mulan*, <<http://movie.douban.com/subject/1294833/>> [accessed 30 July 2011].

Many also mentioned Mulan's romance with General Lee, they liked this addition made by Disney to the original folk tale. In their opinion, Mulan deserved love. It only made the heroine more lovable.

In the texts made by female OCG audiences, the most frequently used meaningful words are all related to emotions and one of them is "moved". They recalled two scenes in the film as being the most moving ones. One is the scene in which Mulan cut her hair before donning her father's armour and running away to join the army. The other one is when Mulan got expelled after her ruse failed. These two scenes correspond to two emotional transitions that the OCG females have also experienced in their own life. In the film, the first scene happened after Mulan's first "reflection" (introspection), a moment in which Mulan's social position was about to change. As described by Eliot Schrefer, it is "a moment when acceleration in one direction slows to a standstill before the direction is reversed."²⁷¹ When Mulan cut her hair, she had made her decision to give up one direction and to for another. It is where the acceleration to the new direction happens. It had happened to the OCG females as well. Hair cutting represents Mulan's abandonment of her female identity. As the only child in their family, the OCG females had to, in a way, do the same as what Mulan did. They had to accept the responsibilities to take care of their family like a man. In the second scene, Mulan made her introspection for the second time. Mulan made her decision to go for this direction, but was it what she really wanted? The OCG females would ask themselves the same question. The decision had been made, but the struggling in their mind still existed. Such struggling characterised the OCG females' social position just like where Mulan found herself in the film. The difference was, in the film, in an ideal world, Mulan finally decided to live for

²⁷¹ Schrefer, Eliot, "Donning her father's armor: introspection and gender disjunction in Disney's *Mulan*", *Animation Journal*, 10(2002), p.9.

herself and was approved by her family and the society; in real life, the OCG females deemed it as unable to achieve.

The evidence obtained from female OCG audiences demonstrated their emotional relationships with the film *Mulan*. The embellishments that Disney made to enrich the Mulan character fit into the OCG females' experience and their position in the society, generating emotional correspondences between the audiences and the character, which could be hardly achieved by the original Mulan character in the folk tale. Disney successfully delivered their version of Mulan, their understanding to this ancient Chinese heroine, to the female OCG audiences – the message was well received. In response to the message, the OCG females incorporated their own sophistication generated during their social process of emergence which was why they deemed the message as ideal but not something achievable in reality.

Cultural Enrichment and its Implications in Reception

What Disney embellished in their reconstruction of the Mulan image can be best described as “cultural enrichment”. Unlike the “cultural discount” resulted from the so-called “cultural barrier” to which its box office disappointment is often attributed, it can be justified by the reception of the OCG to the film.

In Disney's decoding and encoding of this ancient Chinese folk tale, traditional Chinese values are honourably displayed. These values are preserved in different supporting characters that Disney has carefully designed. For example, the Mother character is a true embodiment of the woman-wife-mother of that period. By doing this, Disney lays out an honest presentation of the social environment of ancient China, a believable stage for the story to happen. As to the main character Mulan, it is undoubtedly different to that told by the original ode and is where Disney's

cultural input happens. What Disney needs is to present a heroine to the audiences, a heroine that matches the contemporary values. It does differ from the ancient Chinese values, but it is not being dishonourable to the person of Mulan. What Mulan did does not really matter. What matters is that she did something extraordinary, something people should admire her of. What matters even more is her spirit, her bravery – Disney did not change any of that. The confusion, the struggling and the romance that Disney injected into the character has enriched her personality, making her a more believable, lovable and admirable person to the contemporary film audiences.

Disney's cultural enrichment in the case of *Mulan* is well received by the OCG, especially the females of the OCG. The OCG is by no means traditional. This is not to say that they received no imprint from the Chinese traditional values and ideology. Quite to the contrary, in their social process of emerging as a unique generation, they have to intake and digest a lot of the indigenous ideas and beliefs. The cultural legacy is passed down generation by generation from their ancestors and is in every part of their life, the textbooks they read, the films they watch, the food they eat, the air they breathe. But unlike their parental generation who suffered from a society that was closed to the outside world, they grew up in an opening up era, an era in which all sorts of new things keep flowing into their life. From time to time they get something new to add to their systems. From time to time they have to let something slip. The society is the same. The whole of their growing up is a process of redefining and retuning themselves. As long as it does not violate their fundamental beliefs, addition or alteration to what they used to know is perfectly fine. They are culturally flexible – it is how they are built by the society. Being flexible does not mean they are indifferent or unconcerned. The OCG females' reception to *Mulan*

exemplifies that they have their judgement and dare to appreciate something that others despise.

Perhaps Chinese film producers saw the appeal of cultural enrichment to the audiences presented in *Mulan*, despite of all the negative opinions that flooded the film's reviews. In 2004, Shanghai Animation Film Studio in cooperation with Taiwan Central Motion Pictures Corporation produced the film *The Butterfly Lovers* which is also based on an ancient Chinese folk tale. The story is about the tragic romance between Yingtai and Shanbo. Yingtai, the female protagonist, has something in common with Mulan. She also had to disguise herself into a man to do something that woman was not allowed to do at the time – education. *The Butterfly Lovers* is considered by some Chinese film researchers as an example of Chinese animation films that learns from *Mulan*.²⁷² The modelling of Yingtai looks a lot like Disney's *Mulan*. The narrative of the film also emphasised Yingtai, the female protagonist, while in the original story both of them were of the same importance. Similarity in music usage was also observed.²⁷³ Before *The Butterfly Lovers*, the emphasis of female protagonists or romantic storylines had never been found in Chinese animated films because it was considered inappropriate for the young audiences like children.

One culture borrowing ideas from another is not a rare occurrence. If cultural barrier is such a serious problem for the Chinese audiences, it is probably very hard to understand the motivation behind China's localisation of *High School Musical*, or to explain the popularity of the martial art panda named Po in *Kong Fu Panda* (2008).

²⁷² Zhu, M.Q. and Li, B., 'Xiang xifang weizao de dongfang nvxing —— Ping Zhongguo donghuapian (Fake Oriental Female Protagonist from Western Culture: A Review of Chinese Animation Film)', *Journal of Kangding Nationality Teachers College*, 05(2006), 68-71 (p.69-70).

²⁷³ Lu, J.Y., 'Donghuapian Liangzhu Hua Mulan gaibian duibi (Comparison of the Adaption of *Mulan* and *The Butterfly Lovers*)', *Fujian Arts*, 04(2005), 47-49 (p.49).

Entertainment often requires novelty, and the novelty has to be delivered to the audiences. Pure novelty in entertainment can be intimidating without a certain level of intimacy with the audiences. From *Mulan*, to *Kong Fu Panda* and *High School Musical China*, different cultures have been enriching each other and generating both cultural novelty and cultural intimacy.

Disney's *Mulan* was not the first, certainly not the only, film version of the tale. The character and tale of Mulan evolved in Chinese cinema as well. The first notable example is *Mulan Joins the Army*. The film was released in 1939 in Japanese-occupied Shanghai. Clearly suggested by its title, the film carried political messages that could be easily conveyed to the audiences who lived at a turbulent time in the nation's history. After the Communist Party took power, a state funded Honan-opera film, *Hua Mulan* was released in 1956. This time, the film emphasised gender equity which corresponded to the egalitarian gender policy put forward by the government. In 1963, Shaw Brothers Studio in Hong Kong presented *The Lady General Hua Mulan*, in which the movie producers gave the overseas Chinese audiences, many of whom were fugitives of the communist-controlled country, a vision of a unified China. The most recent version of the story is Hong Kong director Jingle Ma's *Mulan* (2009). On the outside, it is an action film with a touch of romance. On the inside, it emphasised the cruelty of war which played up to "harmony", the new propaganda slogan of the Chinese government.

Each of these versions interpreted the tale of Mulan differently. But all of them did the same thing – to inject into the film their own messages to the audiences. The audiences are changing. Films, as the carriers of the messages, the media between the messages and the audiences, also need to change. Honan-opera may work for the audiences in the 1950s but probably hardly for the OCG. It is not just about the

artistic form. Narrative, characters, music, costumes – everything about films matters. For the world's messages to be successfully conveyed to the audiences, proper media have to be used. Looking back in time to the evolvement of *Mulan* in the Chinese cinema, it is all about enriching the original tale based on the current cultural and social context.

Presented in this chapter is the reception study of Disney's animation feature *Mulan*. Evidence about the OCG audience relationships with the film was collected and analysed. Unlike what was suggested by the negative Chinese reviews, the film was in fact well received among the OCG audiences, especially the OCG females. The embellishment that Disney made to the person of *Mulan* happened to resonate with the OCG females' life experience and social position.

Chapter 5 Harry Potter: Tailored

Education vs. Mass Education

One day this August, in a screening room of China Science & Technology Museum Cinema, the final episode of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* had just ended. Right before any audiences managed to get out of the cinema, a young man went onto the stage, grabbed the microphone and said, “Hello, everybody! I assume we’re all Harry Potter fans. I am and so is my girlfriend. Today, I’m here to ask her to marry me!” He opened his *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* book, the ring was hidden before page 236, the first page of Chapter 15 – The Unbreakable Vow.²⁷⁴

Harry Potter film saga had finally come to an end in 2011. Starting from its first novel release in China, over the course of more than a decade, Harry Potter franchise had been with the OCG for a good third of their life. Both of the books and the films series are considered commercially successful in China. A huge fandom exists in the OCG. This case study sets out to examine the relationships between the OCG and the Harry Potter franchise, covering the novels, film industry performance and OCG’s reception to the films. By doing this, the chapter aims to reveal the special connection that the OCG made with Harry Potter and the reason behind it.

²⁷⁴ Wang, Jingjing, “Wode pengyou hali bote (My friend Harry Potter)”, *China Youth Daily*, 10 August 2011, p.10.

Reading Harry Potter in Urban China

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, the first book of *Harry Potter* novel series, was published by Bloomsbury in the United Kingdom in June 1997. But it was not until October 2000 that the Chinese version of this book together with the second and the third book of the series was released in China. In November 2000, the English versions of the first four books were imported to China all together. After year 2000, the Chinese translated versions had gradually caught up with the novels' publishing in the UK by reducing the gap to three months from the fifth book and onwards, and the release of the English versions in China had been synchronous to that in the UK, which is shown in the table below.

Table 1. Release dates of Harry Potter novels in UK and China²⁷⁵

Book Title	UK	China (Chinese version)	China (English version)
<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone</i>	Jun 1997	Oct 2000	Nov 2000
<i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets</i>	Jul 1998	Oct 2000	Nov 2000
<i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban</i>	Sep 1999	Oct 2000	Nov 2000
<i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire</i>	Jul 2000	May 2001	Nov 2000
<i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix</i>	Jun 2003	Sep 2003	Jun 2003
<i>Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince</i>	Jul 2005	Oct 2005	Jul 2005
<i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows</i>	Jul 2007	Oct 2007	Jul 2007

Before *Harry Potter* came to China, the novels had already established their worldwide popularity. The competition for the right of publishing its translated versions in China was foreseeably intense. At last, People's Literature Publishing House (PLPH), as a state-owned publisher with 50-year experience and good reputation in publishing Western literature, stood out from many strong competitors

²⁷⁵ Dates for UK release are from Bloomsbury website, dates for China release are obtained from PLPH.

including China Children's Publishing, Shanghai Children's Publishing and Yilin Publishing²⁷⁶.

In fact, as early as July 2000, news reports of *Harry Potter* had already appeared in Chinese media before its debut. *Guangming Daily* first introduced *Harry Potter* to the Chinese readers in its 14th July issue followed by the translated reprint of *Newsweek's* exclusive interview with J.K. Rowling, the author.²⁷⁷ In August, *China Book Business Report* published a summary of *Harry Potter* reviews from worldwide, including both positive and negative points, and raised a question as to whether or not *Harry Potter* should be recognized as literature of high standard.²⁷⁸ In September, *Wen Hui Bao* of Shanghai published its own review of the novel, in which it pointed out that *Harry Potter* would remind the readers of many Chinese novels about school life.²⁷⁹ With the Chinese versions of *Harry Potter* finally arrived at Chinese bookstores, reports and discussions about it started to become even more heated. "Translated into 35 different languages, published in 115 countries and regions with a total of 35 million copies sold and revenue of 480 million US dollars"²⁸⁰ is the set of numbers that appeared many times in these reports. "Harry Potter" had definitely become one of the hottest keywords in Chinese media of that year.

People's Literature Publishing House put in a great deal of effort to promote *Harry Potter* to Chinese readers. The publisher adopted a very polished finish for the print and added a specially designed bookmark inside each of the books as a gift. The

²⁷⁶ A Nanjing based publishing press that focuses on translating and publishing foreign works of literature. It is one of the most influential professional translation press in China.

²⁷⁷ Xiao, Y. translated, 'Ha Li Bo Te Zuo Zhe Luo Lin Fang Tan Lu' (An interview with J.K. Rowling), *Guangming Daily*, 21 Jul. 2000, p.C02.

²⁷⁸ Anon., 'Ha Li Bo Te Shi Jing Dian Zhi Zuo Ma?' (Is Harry Potter work of classics?), *China Book Business Report*, 25 Aug. 2000, p. 035.

²⁷⁹ Mu, M., 'Mo Huan + Chuan Tong + Xian Shi = "Ha Li Bo Te"' (Fantasy + tradition + reality = Harry Potter), *Wen Hui Bao*, 2 Sep. 2000, p. 006.

²⁸⁰ Anon., 'Ha Li Bo Te Rang Shi Jie Feng Kuang' (The Harry Potter that the world is crazy about), *China Business*, 7 Nov. 2000, p. 003.

first print of the first three books produced a total of 600,000 copies, which hit a record high in the history of the publishing house.²⁸¹ At 10 o'clock on 6th October 2000 which was during the long national holiday break, the Chinese version of the first three books released as a box set were finally made available across 300 bookstores in 20 major cities nationwide.²⁸² At the same time, online purchasing of *Harry Potter* was also made available at Book800, Dangdang and Joyo. In the advertisement which could be found at almost every bookstore that was selling these box sets, *Harry Potter* was described as “suitable for readers from age 9 to 99”²⁸³ and “a wizard that will jump out of your schoolbag”²⁸⁴. At Xinhua Bookstore located at Wangfujing in Beijing, one of the busiest bookstores in China, People’s Literature Publishing House held the publication ceremony and invited professional performers from China Children’s Art Theatre to play some of the characters from *Harry Potter*, all of whom were dressed up as described in the novels. During the ceremony, free gifts, such as stationeries featured with Harry Potter images, were given away to the customers.

The sale of the Chinese versions of *Harry Potter* was remarkable. By 10th October 2000, online bookstore Book800 had already sold 1000 sets of the first three books.²⁸⁵ Also as online bookstores, Dangdang and Joyo were selling about 50 sets a day.²⁸⁶ By 20th October 2000, which was two weeks after the release, the 600,000 copies of the first print had almost sold out with only about 6,000 left on the

²⁸¹ Yan, W., ‘Ha Li Bo Te Hui Bu Hui Shui Tu Bu Fu?’ (Will Harry Potter adapt to Chinese market?), *China Business Times*, 18 Oct. 2000, p. A08.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Guo, X. H., ‘Zou Jin Ha Li Bo Te De Shen Chu’ (Go deep into Harry Potter), *China Press and Publishing Journal*, 24 Nov. 2000, p. 006.

²⁸⁴ Yang, J., ‘Ha Li Bo Te: Xin Shu Shang Shi San Ba Huo’ (Harry Potter: New arrival), *China Publishing Journal*, 12(2000), 121 (p.121).

²⁸⁵ Yu, H. M., ‘Ha Li Bo Te Mo Li Wu Bian’ (Harry Potter full of Magic), *China Book Business Report*, 20 Oct. 2000, p. 004.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

shelves.²⁸⁷ Meanwhile, *Harry Potter* had topped almost every bestselling chart under the category of children's book of the major high-street and online bookstores. Compared to the sale of its Chinese versions in China, the sale of the English versions had not been as good because they were more expensive and had a limited group of potential readers. However, the English versions still had their market in China, which was mostly formed by the demand from students and their parents. One month after the release of the Chinese versions, China International Book Trading Corporation imported the original UK versions of the first four books. Compared to the Chinese version book set which only cost 63 yuan in total, the UK versions of the first three books were sold for from 130 to 140 yuan each and the fourth was from 280 to 300 yuan depending on store pricing.²⁸⁸ In December 2000, Beijing Publication Import & Export Corporation imported the US versions of the first three books which were sold at a much lower price for 58 yuan each and were only available in Beijing Foreign Language Bookstore. By October 2001, the imported first 1,000 copies of the US versions had been sold out. At the same time, the UK versions had sold about 300 copies at Wangfujing Xinhua Bookstore.²⁸⁹ The English versions of *Harry Potter* were only available in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. According to the bookstores, those who purchased the English versions were mostly high school and university students.²⁹⁰

It did not take long before the first 600,000 copies of Chinese version *Harry Potter* were sold out. On 9th November 2000, to bring the promotion and publicity to another level, PLPH organized a forum for *Harry Potter* in Shanghai allowing

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Anon., 'Ying Wen Ban Ha Li Bo Te Re Le!' (The English version of Harry Potter books sell fast!), *Yi Wen Wang*, 22 Oct. 2001, <<http://www.ewen.cc/books/bkview.asp?bkid=7121&cid=12027>> [accessed 26 Jan. 2010].

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

discussions from different perspectives.²⁹¹ Those who were invited to the forum included writers of children's literature, literature critics and even cultural celebrities. Xiaosong Gao, a famous pop song writer and a pioneer of university culture, pointed out that, "reading *Harry Potter* is like watching motion pictures", "there is Hollywood techniques of motion pictures in the writing" and "they (the books) have strong appeal to youngsters who grew up watching television and Hollywood blockbusters"²⁹². The power of imagination represented in *Harry Potter* was also complimented. Peng Yang, a well-known writer of children's literature, acclaimed that "the success of *Harry Potter* is the victory of imagination"²⁹³. Da Lei, an influential literature critic in China, believed that "the fantasies provided in *Harry Potter* are valuable complement to Chinese children's literature (which is mostly documentary and realistic)"²⁹⁴. The educational significance of *Harry Potter* and its difference to Chinese children's literature were also recognized. Professor Quangen Wang from Beijing Normal University said that "the way *Harry Potter* teaches children love and goodness should be learnt by Chinese children's literature"²⁹⁵. He claimed that, instead of moralizing our children what not to do, we should try to show them what is right in a way that can be more easily accepted by them. It was also pointed out by some that the use of modern elements in *Harry Potter* infused new vigour to a traditional theme, which was also considered to be what Chinese children's literature lacked.

²⁹¹ Lu, M., 'Ha Li Bo Te Gei Zhong Guo Er Tong Wen Xue De Qi Shi' (Inspiration of *Harry Potter* to Chinese children's literature), *Wen Xue Bao (Literature News)*, 23 Nov. 2000, p. 001.

²⁹² Anon., 'Hai Zi Yin Ling Le Wo Men' (Led by the children), *Guangming Daily*, 23 Nov. 2000, p.C01.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

Besides the reviews from the critics, writers and celebrities, discussions among the general readers were also very heated. According to a report of *China Publishing Journal*, PLPH targeted young readers of ages nine to eighteen as their focus of the publicity, which explains the popularity of *Harry Potter* in schools. A student from Beijing No.2 Middle School said, “I can see broomsticks flying when I turn off the light and close my eyes. I wish I could receive an admission to Hogwards one day!”²⁹⁶ Middle school student Yang Zhang said that Harry Potter let him know the pleasure of reading literature, which he had never experienced before.²⁹⁷ When asked by a reporter about what he thought about *Harry Potter*, Tao, a twelve years old school boy, said that he liked the story of school lives, which was friendly and was also different because of the magic.²⁹⁸ In the opinion of Muran, a school girl aged eleven, the story of *Harry Potter* was fascinating and exciting, which always brought about pictures in her mind. She often imagined herself as Harry, Ron or Hermione. She also said that no book had ever attracted her as much as *Harry Potter*.²⁹⁹

Both experts and young readers had pointed out that Harry Potter had better appeal than what Chinese children’s literature could offer for their readers. As a matter of fact, there are over 130 publishers in China that are able to publish children’s books; more than 30 of them are specialized in children’s book publishing. More than 6000 new titles are made available to Chinese children by them every year. But most of these books were reference books for schoolwork and those of

²⁹⁶ Anon., ‘Ha Li Bo Te Rang Shi Jie Feng Kuang’ (The Harry Potter that the world is crazy about), *China Business*, 7 Nov. 2000, p. 003.

²⁹⁷ Anon., ‘Hai Zi Yin Ling Le Wo Men’ (Led by the children), *Guangming Daily*, 23 Nov. 2000, p.C01.

²⁹⁸ Yu, H. M., ‘Ha Li Bo Te Mo Li Wu Bian’ (Harry Potter full of Magic), *China Book Business Report*, 20 Oct. 2000, p. 004.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

intellectual topics to help students to acquire knowledge.³⁰⁰ Among the very limited titles of children's literature, there were some Western works, such as Anderson's and Grimm's fairy tale collections. As for contemporary Chinese children's literature, only a few of them could be considered to have some level of influence, such as *Pipilu and Luxixi* and *The Adventure of Shuke and Beita* by Yuanjie Zheng and *Boy Student Jia Li* and *Girl Student Jia Mei* by Wenjun Qin. There were also some story books about famous characters in Chinese legend, such as Monkey King and Nezha, but these stories were based on ancient Chinese novels that were not originally written for children.

Seeing the advantage of Harry Potter novel series in China, PLPH was not satisfied by just selling the novel itself and started to treat 'Harry Potter' as a business brand. In September 2001, the Chinese version of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (a required textbook for first-year Hogwarts students) and *Quidditch Through the Ages* (Harry Potter's favourite book) which were also written by J. K. Rowling were released in China only six months after their debut in the UK.³⁰¹ Although the earnings of both the Chinese version and the English version of these two books went directly to support poor children around the world as a charity activity of Comic Relief, the importation of these two books by PLPH was still considered to be the initial step of developing merchandising on 'Harry Potter' brand in China.

The novel's appeal to children and its remarkable sales record in the book market made Chinese people start to reflect on the influence that *Harry Potter* had on education. Following all the positive reviews, *Shenzhen Economic Daily* published

³⁰⁰ Gao, Y. J., 'Ying Guo Ma Gua Jin Lai Zhong Shuo Fen Yun' (The discussion introduced by Harry Potter), *Sichuan Daily*, 21 Nov. 2000, P. 005.

³⁰¹ Li, S. L., 'Ha Li Bo Te Yan Sheng Xin Du Wu' (New arrivals of Harry Potter related books), *China Reading Weekly*, 29 Aug. 2001, p. 001.

an article on 7th January 2001, questioning the negative influence that *Harry Potter* might have on children.³⁰² The writer, by referring to an article of *New York Post* which reported that *Harry Potter* had popped up on a list of books people would most like to see banned from libraries and had been complained by some American parents for its disturbing contents, claimed that the novels were only a success of the publishing business and may not be suitable for Chinese children as well because they might get lost in the unreal world of witches and wizards. However, opposing this only negative review at that time, there were vast comments and opinions that highlighted the imagination as an advantage of *Harry Potter* which brought inspiration to children's education in China. When *Harry Potter* was released in China, a mother said when being interviewed that she had been waiting for an excellent book like this for her child for a long time and that reading it stimulated the imagination of both her child and herself.³⁰³ Yufeng Huang, a middle school teacher of Chinese language and literature believed that *Harry Potter*, as a great work of literature, challenged the existing materials that they provided the student to read in class which lacked of the spirit of creativity and imagination.³⁰⁴ On 20th November 2001, *Workers' Daily* published a commentary titled *The Inspiration of Harry Potter* emphasized the influence that *Harry Potter* might have on Chinese children education. Again, imagination, which was well illustrated by *Harry Potter*, was claimed to be the most effective way to attract children to read, to think and to learn actively by themselves.³⁰⁵

³⁰² Xiao, X. L., 'Su Xiu De Ha Li Bo Te' (Harry Potter did not last long), *Shenzhen Economic Daily*, 7 Jan. 2001, p. B04.

³⁰³ Anon., 'Hai Zi Yin Ling Le Wo Men' (Led by the children), *Guangming Daily*, 23 Nov. 2000, p.C01.

³⁰⁴ Xing, X. F., 'Ha Li Bo Te Dai Lai Chong Ji Bo' (The shock wave produced by Harry Potter), *Wenhui News*, 18 Nov. 2000, p. 003.

³⁰⁵ Zhang, J. R., 'Ha Li Bo Te Dai Gei Wo Man De Qi Shi' (The inspiration of Harry Potter), *Workers' Daily*, 20 Nov. 2001, p. 003.

To sum up, both the sales achievement of the novel series in the Chinese book market and the widespread concerns about the books from the society showed that *Harry Potter* had become a very influential Western product in China. It is worth noting that, as an imported Western popular novel series, it brought about reflection and introspection of the Chinese on their children's literature and even their education for the young generation, which was not a common occurrence. Being considered to have a strong appeal to Chinese people who grew up watching television and Hollywood blockbusters and, being regarded by the young readers as a novel that no previous ones could match had both shown that *Harry Potter* had well engaged with the Chinese young generation. Full of imagination, the content that *Harry Potter* provided satisfied the youngsters' craving for creative and innovative things. Apart from being an enjoyable reading experience, the novel's English version also made an excellent resource for learning English language. All these made the Chinese young generation engage with the novel readily. The success and influence of "Harry Potter" in China did not stop here. From the moment that Warner Bros. decided to put it on the screen, "Harry Potter", which was not just a series of novels but was more reasonable to be considered as a merchandising brand, was bound to extend its success and influence in China to a new level.

Harry Potter Films in Chinese Market

Considering "Harry Potter" as business of great potential, in the autumn of year 2001, People's Literature Publishing House (PLPH) promptly approached Warner Bros. Company to acquire the exclusive right to develop products of Harry Potter films in China, even before the first films of the series was released worldwide. The deal was made on 1 October of the same year, by which PLPH is entitled to produce and sell

printing merchandise containing concept arts, characters and scenes from all the coming Harry Potter films.³⁰⁶ Two and a half months later on 16 December, the first line of products, a collection of postcards designed by Warner Bros., produced in cooperation between PLPH and Beijing Postal Service & Management, were released in Beijing. The release timed the high demand of postcards before the New Year and the Chinese New Year and was believed to be a very good selling.³⁰⁷ Although the postcards were only available for purchasing in Beijing, the nature of this kind of product had decided that their influence would hardly be restricted to where they were purchased. They had served not only as a line of “Harry Potter” products but also as an excellent way to promote all the related products, especially the coming release of the first Harry Potter film – *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* imported and released in China by China Film Group in early 2002.

By the time the film was released in China, PLPH had also produced several other lines of printing products that were related to “Harry Potter”, including colouring books, pop-up books, poster books, calendars and etc.³⁰⁸ These products had created anticipation that was so great that China Film Group did not even bother to do much publicity for the film. As a matter of fact, there was not an intended cooperation between PLPH and China Film Group; however, the de facto cooperative effect was formed since China Film Group put a line of text saying “Harry Potter book series are published by People’s Literature Publishing House in China” on the posters that they put on in the cinemas. China Film Group also allowed PLPH to set up sales counters at selected cinemas in Beijing and Shanghai to

³⁰⁶ Li, S. L., ‘Ren Wen She Huo Zhun Shen Wa Ha Li Bo Te’ (People’s Literature Publishing House to develop Harry Potter printing products in China), *China Reading Weekly*, 26 Sep. 2001, p. 001.

³⁰⁷ Meng, Y., ‘Ha Li Bo Te Da Bian Shen’ (Transforming Harry Potter), *China Book Business Report*, 11 Dec. 2001, p. 003.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

sell Harry Potter books to the audiences. The sales of Harry Potter novels and related books had prepared a good environment for the release of the film in China. The film's release had, in return, stimulated the sales of Harry Potter books of another round.

On 26 January 2002, the premiere of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (*Harry Potter I*) in China was held in Shanghai at Shanghai Film Art Centre. The premiere, featuring in the reception hall a gigantic Harry Potter poster, cosplay show by Harry Potter fans, magic show and sales of Harry Potter products such as the novels, was described by *Guangming Daily* as "a carnival for the children".³⁰⁹ Ellen Eliasoph, executive vice president and general counsel of Warner Bros. in Asia-Pacific region commended that it was one of the most joyful and lively premieres she had ever been to.³¹⁰ Before the movie, a video clip featuring some of the main characters from the film wishing Chinese audiences a happy Chinese New Year was shown twice, which aroused applause and excitement among the audiences. One day later, the film was premiered in Beijing at China Film Cinema. The media predicted that a "Harry Potter storm" was coming, which soon turned out to be a fact as the film's box office, in Beijing alone, had hit 2 million yuan mark in just two days after its official release to public cinemas.^{311,312} Yubin Yang, vice president of Shanghai Film Group, indicated that the popularity of *Harry Potter I* was even greater than *Pearl Harbour* (2001) which was the No. 1 imported film in Chinese box office the

³⁰⁹ Sun, L. P., 'Mu Ji Ha Li Bo Te Deng Lu Zhong Guo' (Witnessing the arrival of Harry Potter at Chinese cinemas), *Guangming Daily*, 28 Jan. 2002, p. A02.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Shi, C., 'Ha Li Bo Te Yu Mo Fa Shi Xuan Feng Jiang Qi' (Harry Potter storm is coming), *China Woman*, 29 Jan. 2002, p. 004.

³¹² Li, J., 'Ha Li Bo Te Jiu Jing You Shen Me Mo Fa' (What is so magical about Harry Potter?), *Workers' Daily*, 13 Feb. 2002, p. 001.

previous year.³¹³ The competition among local cinemas for the limited film copies was heated. In certain regions, cinemas had to bid as there were simply not enough film copies for rotation. In Guangzhou alone, bids were received from twenty cinemas.³¹⁴ A film distributor from Guangdong suggested that the film came at a right time as it was released almost right before the Chinese New Year and spontaneously became a New Year hit for Chinese children and their families.³¹⁵

The box office performance of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* in China was remarkable. Gathering a total of 59 million yuan in cinemas around China, it ranked the first among all imported films of the year 2002. List of defeated included *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* and *Spider-Man*. Among all the films that were released in China in 2002, it was only beaten by Zhang Yimou's *Hero*. Looking at the genre of family adventure, no domestic film of the year was even comparable to it in terms of box office success.³¹⁶

Up until now, China Film Group had imported all the Harry Potter films. In general, China premieres of Harry Potter films were later than their world premieres, the time of delay ranging from several months to several days, as indicated in Table 2. The longest one was with *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* which was delayed by 102 days from its world premiere in UK. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1* was delayed the least, which was only 8 days later than its world premiere in the UK.

Table 2. World and China premiere of Harry Potter films³¹⁷

³¹³ Sun, L. P., 'Mu Ji Ha Li Bo Te Deng Lu Zhong Guo' (Witnessing the arrival of Harry Potter at Chinese cinemas), *Guangming Daily*, 28 Jan. 2002, p. A02.

³¹⁴ Li, J., *Workers' Daily*, 13 Feb. 2002, p. 001.

³¹⁵ Sun, L. P., *Guangming Daily*, 28 Jan. 2002, p. A02.

³¹⁶ See appendix A

³¹⁷ Data gathered from IMDb and Box Office Mojo.

Film Title	World Premiere	China Premiere	Delay
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	UK: 4 Nov 2001	26 Jan 2002	83 days
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	UK: 3 Nov 2002	24 Jan 2003	51 days
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	UK: 31 May 2004	10 Sep 2004	102 days
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	UK: 6 Nov 2005	18 Nov 2005	12 days
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	Japan: 28 Jun 2007	10 Aug 2007	43 days
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Japan: 6 Jul 2009	15 Jul 2009	9 days
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1	UK: 11 Nov 2010	19 Nov 2010	8 days
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2	UK: 7 July 2011	4 Aug 2011	28 days

In box office, as of 27 September 2011, the six Harry Potter films that had been released had gathered around 1.2 billion yuan in total in Chinese cinemas. The box office for each of the eight films in China and worldwide is listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Box office for Harry Potter films in China and worldwide (as of 27 Sep 2011)³¹⁸

Film Title	China	Worldwide		
	Box Office (Million Yuan)	Yearly Rank		
		Box Office		
		Yearly Rank		
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	59.0 (\$7,125,604) ¥8.28 = \$1	2 (2002)	\$974,733,550	1 (2001)
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets	52.0 (\$6,280,193) ¥8.28 = \$1	2 (2003)	\$878,643,482	2 (2002)
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban	36.6 (\$4,420,289) ¥8.28 = \$1	10 (2004)	\$795,634,069	2 (2004)
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	94.9 (\$11,745,050) ¥8.08 = \$1	3 (2005)	\$895,921,036	1 (2005)

³¹⁸ See appendix A

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix	143.0 (\$18,890,357) ¥7.57 = \$1	5 (2007)	\$938,212,738	2 (2007)
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	157.0 (\$22,986,823) ¥6.83 = \$1	9 (2009)	\$933,959,197	2 (2009)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1	221.10 (\$33,148,425) ¥6.67 = \$1	9(2010)	\$955,417,476	3 (2010)
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2	407.95 (\$60,526,706) ¥6.37 = \$1	-	\$1,325,558,898	1 (2011)

As is shown, the second one in the series, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, had continued the success of its previous one in China. It ranked the first among all imported films beating *The Matrix Reloaded*, *Finding Nemo* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, and only seconded to one domestic film, Feng Xiaogang's *Cell Phone* which won narrowly by only 4 million yuan.

In 2004, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, the third in the series, was released in China. Comparing to the success of the first two films, its box office in China failed to match the anticipation by only receiving 36.6 million yuan while the predicted figure was at least 50 million.³¹⁹ Although it ranked the fifth among imported films and the tenth among all films released in Chinese cinemas of the same year, as an imported blockbuster which was the second in the year's worldwide box office chart, this outcome was far from being satisfactory. Delayed release was considered as the main cause that led to the unsatisfying box office result.³²⁰ Forced to give way to Zhang Yimo's *House of Flying Daggers* which was a domestic film, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* missed the precious summer holiday season. When the film was finally released to Chinese cinemas in September, term

³¹⁹ Gao, H. J., 'Ha Li Bo Te 3: Huang Ji Zhou Piao Fang Lue You Fan Tan' (Harry Potter 3: picking up with the box office during national holidays), *China Film News*, 14 Oct. 2004, p. 005.

³²⁰ Ibid.

time for students had already started. In addition, the release time across Chinese cinemas were not synchronous, even among major cities. For example, the film's release in Beijing was one week later than its general national release. According to a report from *China Film News*, the delay and asynchrony in release also encouraged piracy, from which the cinemas lost a proportion of audiences who could not wait. Although the screening lasted to the National Day holiday week, the release of several domestic films including *New Police Story* starring Jackie Chan, Chinese propaganda film *Zhang Si De* and Wang Kar-Wai's *2046* had left *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* with very limited space to bounce up in the box office chart, as suggested by Li Weng, deputy director of distribution and exhibition of China Film Group.³²¹

From the fourth Harry Potter film, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, which gathered a decent amount of 94.9 million yuan in box office, each of the following sequels outperformed its previous ones. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, although released in China almost one and a half months later than its world premiere, still stormed the Chinese cinemas by gaining a record-breaking box office for Harry Potter series of 143 million yuan. The next sequel, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, did even better and wrapped up 157 million yuan in the Chinese box office. The final two films together, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1 & Part 2*, drew a satisfactory conclusion to the box office performance of Harry Potter films in China by gaining nearly 630 million yuan, more than that of the previous six films adding up together.

Examining the box office data of Harry Potter films in China chronologically, it can be seen that, with only one exception in 2004, that is, *Harry Potter and the*

³²¹ Ibid.

Prisoner of Azkaban, the box office performance of Harry Potter films was getting better and better. Although the Chinese box numbers are only a small percentage of their worldwide ones, it can be seen that this percentage is increasing. In recent years, imported blockbusters have received strong challenge from the prosperous development of Chinese domestic films. Take year 2009 for example, among the top ten grossed films in Chinese cinemas, six of them were domestic ones. Noting this, the box office performance of Harry Potter series in China should be considered as satisfactory.³²²

Authentic DVDs/VCDs of Harry Potter films are also available in China. CAV Thakral Home Entertainment, a joint venture of China Audio & Video Publishing House (CAV), the main DVD/VCD distribution agent for Western film studios in China, and Singapore Thakral Corporation imported and distributed the first two Harry Potter films on DVD/CVD in 2002 and 2003.³²³ In 2004, Beijing CAV Tongfang Audio-visual Publishing House, a joint venture between CAV and Tsinghua Tongfang Company imported and distributed the DVDs/VCDs of the third film. In February 2005, CAV Warner Home Entertainment Company, a Shanghai based joint venture between CAV and Warner Home Video was formed and became the distributor of Warner Home Video products to leading consumer retail and video outlets throughout China.³²⁴ As a matter of fact, before the formation of the joint venture, CAV and Warner Bros. had worked together and republished the DVDs and VCDs for the first two films in December 2004. These DVDs and VCDs, as the joint venture between CAV and Thakral ceased in 2006, had replaced those by CAV

³²² See appendix A.

³²³ Anon., 'Ha Li Bo Te Zheng Ban DVD/VCD' (Authentic Harry Potter DVD/VCD), *Practical Audio-visual Technology*, 5(2002), 22(p. 22).

³²⁴ Anon., 'CAV Warner Home Entertainment Co.', <<http://www.timewarner.com/corp/newsroom/pr/0,20812,1030960,00.html>> [accessed 16 Feb 2010]

Thakral Home Entertainment and become the authorized DVD/VCD versions for the first two films distributed in the Chinese market. It should be noted that, Warner Home Video is the first U.S. studio to establish in-country DVD/VCD operation in China. From then on, all DVDs/VCDs of Harry Potter films in China, including DVD/VCD collections, are all distributed by CAV Warner Home Entertainment Company. The release of the DVDs/VCDs for *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (released in 2006) and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (released in 2007) in China were both the earliest around the world. The sixth film's DVDs, although not being world's first release, had much improved content and quality. The limited "Death Eater Mask Edition" for collectors was also available for purchasing in Chinese market.

There is no published official figure for the sales of DVDs and VCDs of Harry Potter films in China; however, charts provided by online retailers proved their popularity. According to Joyo (amazon.cn, the major online DVD retailer in China and also the appointed online retailer for CAV Warner Home Entertainment Co.), as of 10 March 2010, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (5th in the chart), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (16th in the chart) and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (27th in the chart) were still among the top 30 best selling DVDs under the family film category.³²⁵ Besides, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, the DVD set of the first five Harry Potter films and *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* were listed as the No. 4, 9 and 10 by customer rating in the same category (Table 4).

³²⁵ Joyo (amazon.cn), *Family film DVD sales ranking*, <http://www.amazon.cn/s/qid=1276075824/ref=sr_st?__mk_zh_CN=%E4%BA%9A%E9%A9%AC%E9%80%8A%E7%BD%91%E7%AB%99&page=1&rh=n:811074051,n:811109051,n:811341051&bbn=811341051&sort=salesrank> [accessed 10 Mar 2010].

Table 4. Family film DVD ranking based on customer rating on Joyo (10 March 2010)³²⁶

Rank	Film	Film released in China ³²⁷
1	Enchanted (2007)	-
2	Alvin and the Chipmunks (2007)	-
3	Bridge to Terabithia (2007)	2009
4	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (2001)	2002
5	Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs (2009)	2009
6	Home Alone (1990)	-
7	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005)	-
8	Chicken Run (2000)	2001
9	Harry Potter 1-5 collection set	2007
10	Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002)	2003

Warner Bros. who produced the films, China Film Group who imported and distributed the films, CAV Warner Bros. Home Entertainment Company and the other companies who imported and distributed the films' video products should all fell happy about the market performance of the Harry Potter films in China. The box office of the films, without taking into account the DVD/VCD sales, had already gathered about 1.2 billion yuan. Their popularity has lasted a span of more than a decade and is still continuing. As an imported film series, this is unprecedented.

Harry Potter novel and film series are both commercially successful in China. It has generated a huge fandom in the OCG. Their fantasy adventure with Harry Potter may have started from the novels, but it was visually materialised on the big screens. What I am concerned is what the OCG audiences see in these films. Compare to the

³²⁶ Joyo (amazon.cn), *Family film DVD ranking based on customer rating*, <http://www.amazon.cn/s/qid=1276075808/ref=sr_st?__mk_zh_CN=%E4%BA%9A%E9%A9%AC%E9%80%8A%E7%BD%91%E7%AB%99&page=1&bbn=811341051&rh=n:811074051,n:811109051,n:811341051&sort=reviewrank_authority> [accessed 10 Mar 2010]

³²⁷ “-” indicates that the film has not been released in cinemas of mainland China.

general audiences, do they see anything special? Has anything they see influenced them in any way? In the next section, this case study of Harry Potter will move on to the study of OCG audiences' reception to Harry Potter film series.

Why Didn't I Go to a School Like That?

As discussed earlier, the first instalment of Harry Potter saga, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, performed well in the Chinese box office. Although it did not earn as much as the later sequels, considering the Chinese market conditions at the time and that fact that it ranked at the second place among all films released that year, the 59 million yuan box office should be considered a remarkable achievement. A few days after its national release, *People Daily* published its review for the film on 6 February 2002, in which film critic Chun Miao praised the film's imagination in visualising the story. Miao wrote, "The novel is full of imagination, the film is even better thanks to the modern film technologies and the crew's fascinating re-creation."³²⁸ Also on *People's Daily*, on 1 March 2002, another review was published, which obviously hold a different opinion about the film. Critic Weiping Ge warned that the overly exaggerated magic scenes might have negative influence on children. In the review, Ge also called on Chinese film producers to actively work on bringing the Chinese children with proper and healthy fantasy films that were based on the local culture and ideology.³²⁹ Similar dispute took place between two reviews published on the same issue of *Culture Monthly*. In the first review, film critic Wei Bing referred to the film as "Hollywood fast-food film" and criticised it

³²⁸ Miao, Chun, "Ha li bo te de xiang xiang li (The Power of Imagination in Harry Potter)", *People's Daily*, 6 February 2002, p.7

³²⁹ Ge, Weiping, "Gei ha li bo te po dian leng shui (To Pour Some Cold Water on the Enthusiasm on Harry Potter)", *People's Daily*, 1 March 2002, p.12

for its overly relying on special effects and its indifference to narrative.³³⁰ While in the second review by Xiaobo Yuan, the critic called the film “an outstanding brilliance” which brought to the audiences a well-told story and an authentic sense of the Britain.³³¹ Despite of its obvious satisfactory box office and its popularity among the Chinese audiences, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* had received both positive and negative reviews from Chinese critics and media. Opposed views were even found on the same magazine or newspaper. From then on to the last episode, Chinese public media had generally maintained a rational balance between the negative and the positive attitude and reaction to the Harry Potter film saga.

In the Chinese box office, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, as the third instalment of the series, was considered a flop surrounded by the success of the other films. However, Chinese film critics did not make use of its box office failure to criticise the film (recall what happened to *Mulan*). Many of them actually gave the film rather positive reviews and praised the film’s artistic achievement. “The best Harry Potter film so far,” claimed by Chinese film critic Songluo Han in his review published in *Popular Cinema*. He added, “From the colours, the scenes to atmosphere generated, this episode brought the audiences much better visual and spiritual experiences than the previous two films.”³³² Regarding the production of the film, positive responses were also received from general Chinese audiences. Many Harry Potter fans considered *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* as the most delicate interpretation of the original novel.³³³ An audience member wrote in her

³³⁰ Bing, Wei, “Hali bote remai mei shihuo (Harry Potter: Popular yet Empty)”, *Cultural Monthly*, Z1, 2002, pp.98-99

³³¹ Yuan, Xiaobo, “Juebu jiandan de jingcai (Outstanding Brilliance)”, *Cultural Monthly*, Z1, 2002, p.100

³³² Han, Songluo, “Hali bote: mohuan shijieli de qingcong suiyue (Harry Potter: the Early Years of the Magic World)”, *Popular Cinema*, 18 (2004), pp.38-39

³³³ Mtime, *Harry Potter and Prisoner of Azkaban (2004)*, <<http://movie.mtime.com/13773/>>, [accessed 28 September 2011].

blog after seeing the final episode of the series, “Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban is still my favourite. Alfonso Cuarón (director of this sequel) is the most attentive director in all Harry Potter films. His attention to details made the film worth seeing many times.”³³⁴

From then on, more and more Chinese journal and newspaper writings about Harry Potter film series were published, many of them were found to focus on discussing its characteristics as merchandise, its commercial operation and its implications for the local entertainment industry. For example, “A Study on the Propagation of Harry Potter” published in *Contemporary Cinema* took a close look at how the Harry Potter films were marketed internationally.³³⁵ “The Ponders Brought by Good Selling of Harry Potter Series Products” published in *Toys World* emphasised the implications of Harry Potter merchandising to the local toy productions.³³⁶

After a few releases, as the excitement for the fantasy world visualised in the films gradually settled down, researchers and critics started to explore the ideology world that the films presented to the audiences. On seeing its influence over time, their works also had a tendency to examine the Harry Potter film series instead of a particular film. Jianhua Chen emphasised the positive humanity influence of the films. He said, “What Harry Potter films had promoted to the audiences is the sacrifice for justice, the greatness of humanity. Although Harry’s life mission was to destroy Voldemort who was the killer of his parents, what we saw the most in the

³³⁴ Mtime – Jiuyue Shuangsheng’s Blog, “Hali bote yu azi kaban qiutu zhong shanshan faguang de xiao xiejie (The Shinning Details in the Film Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban)”, <<http://i.mtime.com/margaret1028/blog/6400392/>>, [accessed 28 September 2011].

³³⁵ Xiao, Jing, “Hali bote chuanbo xianxiang tanxi (A Study on the Propagation of Harry Potter)”, *Contemporary Cinema*, 3 (2005), pp.104-107

³³⁶ Wang, Danjing, “The Ponders Brought by Good Selling of Harry Potter Series Products”, *Toy World*, 9 (2007), pp.39-43

film was not hatred but love.”³³⁷ Similarly, Xiaowei Wang claimed that, Harry Potter films were destined to influence a generation of people. Unlike the dazzling but fleeting spectacles of magic, the imprint of humanity that the audiences received from the films would only grow stronger and stronger over one episode after another.³³⁸

Also focussing on the humanity messages in the films, Ji Chen in her work set out to tackle some issues about the film’s adaptation and interpretation of the novels.³³⁹ She argued that, the sex difference between the female writer (J. K Rowling) and the male film directors (from Chris Columbus to David Yates) had an impact on the film series’ narrative and its visualisation of the novels. In her work, she highlighted the differences in both plot character between the films and the novels. She pointed out that, as a female writer, Rowling had put a lot of effort in depicting family life and female protagonists. However, this feminine family sentiment was significantly weakened by male directors whose cognition was dominated by their sense of social responsibilities. In the films, Harry Potter as the main male protagonist, his courage and bravery were sufficiently portrayed through intensive action scenes; however, the concerns of family and female were somehow lost between the scenes.

On seeing the particular popularity of the series among the young people, film researchers started to seek for the explanations for its appeal. In the work by Guifeng Luo and Guihua Liu, they linked the school background of the Harry Potter story with the real life experience of the audiences. They pointed out that, although it

³³⁷ Chen, Jianhua, “Qihuan yu tongzhen zaojiu de qiji – ping dianying hali bote xilie (The Miracle of Magic and Humanity – a Review of Harry Potter Film Series)”, *Writing*, 1 (2006), pp.23-26.

³³⁸ Wang, Xiaowei, “Renxing de benzhen zhanxian – hali bote xilie dianying fenxi(The True Humanity – an analysis of Harry Potter Film Series)”, *Movie Review*, 2 (2007), pp.50-51.

³³⁹ Chen, Ji, “Cong xingbie jiaodu tan chuanguo (Gender and Its Impact on Creative Work)”, *Reviews and research on Chinese Literature*, 1 (2008), pp.64-67.

happened in a magical world, young audiences were familiar with the school image and the education system described in the story.³⁴⁰ Furthermore, Zhongping Lou and Wei Zhao in their review of Harry Potter film series suggested that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry represented an ideal education system where students were encouraged to think independently and taught with real problem solving skills.³⁴¹

I agree that school life was indeed an interface through which audiences were connected with the Harry Potter films. During my research, I found that the OCG audiences have a special bond with the films through this channel. However, what I would like to argue is that, the bond was not only formed by the similarity between what was presented in the film and what the OCG audiences had experienced in their life, but also formed by the differences, the differences between the tailored education represented by Hogwarts and the mass education that the OCG was given.

Probably everyone who loves Harry Potter loves Hogwarts. To celebrate the final instalment in the Harry Potter film saga, the UK network ITV initialised a voting on their facebook page for the “50 greatest Harry Potter Moments” in June 2011. The resultant programme, in the form of a countdown, was aired on ITV1 on 27 July 2011, 20 days into the film’s release in the UK. Featuring interviews with J. K. Rowling and the casting group, the programme revealed the number one greatest moment voted by the public – first sight of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The OCG audiences did not participate in the voting because facebook is banned in China, but they did see the result which was posted on Douban and many

³⁴⁰ Luo, Guifeng and Liu, Guihua, “The Analysis of ‘Harry Potter’ Cultural Phenomena”, *Journal of Hubei TV University*, 5(2008), pp.67-68.

³⁴¹ Lou, Zhongping and Zhao, Wei, “Cong kuawanhua shiye kan hali bote dianying xilie (Looking at the Harry Potter film series from a transnational aspect)”, *Film Literature*, 8 (2007), p.52.

other online forums.³⁴² Although they challenged the rankings of some particular moments, none seemed to complain about “first sight of Hogwarts” being the greatest of the greatest. Many replied to the post on Douban by quoting what J. K. Rowling said in the video,

“The stories we love best do live in us forever. So whether you come back by page or by the big screen, Hogwarts will always be there to welcome you home.”

It is not hard to believe that Harry Potter audiences had considered Hogwarts as their spiritual home. For so many years, it had been the place where all the adventure started and also the place for them to end. Evidence shows that, their love for Hogwarts was not only because of the time or the importance of this place in the storyline; it is also because Hogwarts represented something they had had or missed in their life.

In the story, Hogwarts is a school for magic. No matter how fancy it is, essentially, it is a school. People who attended it had to go to classes, do their homework, take exams and, for those who broke the rules, to be punished in some ways. This arrangement formed a connection between the world of magic and the OCG audiences who, as students, had also been doing the same things every day. Because of this connection, the OCG audiences could easily observe the similarities as well as the differences as they were constantly making comparisons between the fantasy world and their own life. This connection formed the basic OCG audiences’ relationships with the films – a mapping between the films and the real life experience of the OCG.

³⁴² Douban, *50 Greatest Harry Potter Moments*, <<http://movie.douban.com/subject/6758119/>> [accessed 28 September 2011].

In a post titled “Four Colleges of Fudan University vs. Four Schools of Hogwarts” by a male OCG blogger, each of the four Fudan colleges was matched with a corresponding Hogwarts school based on their similarities in values.³⁴³ Fudan University is one of the oldest universities in China founded in 1905 when the nation was still under the government of the Qing Dynasty. The owner of the blog graduated from this university. This is one of the examples where OCG audiences actively make connections between their experiences in education with Hogwarts.

While some made connections based on similarities, others did the same based on differences. In an article by Miao Wang, a reporter of *The Economic Observer*, Hogwarts was used as a baseline to evaluate China’s education system. By comparing the ideological differences in education between the two, Wang explained why Hogwarts was considered the dream school by Chinese students.³⁴⁴ To emphasise the “treatments received by Harry Potter in education that are different to those by Chinese students”, he started with the “Sorting Hat”, a magical item to sort pupils to different school, and wrote,

“At Hogwarts, you don’t get sorted based on your social position or your exam mark but your aptitude, your talent. In China, you don’t get a chance like this.”

What Hogwarts provided was tailored education as opposed to the untailed, mass education that was offered to the OCG. As discussed in Chapter 2, the system’s indifference to individuality is one of OCG’s frustrations in education. Another OCG audience wrote,

³⁴³Baidu-Hi, *Four Colleges of Fudan University vs. Four Schools of Hogwarts*, <<http://hi.baidu.com/drog1000/blog/item/495f2c82e3c1fc94f703a66a.html>> [accessed 28 September 2011].

³⁴⁴The Economic Observer, *A Replicable Harry Potter*, <<http://www.eeo.com.cn/bookreview/mybooks/2011/03/14/196148.shtml>> [accessed 28 September 2011].

*“How I wish that there is a ‘sorting hat’ in the real world. From primary school to middle school, from middle school to high school, from high school to university, has anyone cared about what’s actually in our head?”*³⁴⁵

From Hogwarts, the OCG saw the ideal education but they know the difference between fantasy and reality. As can be seen from the above texts, the author emphasised the reality by using “real word” and “actually”. The author appeared to be more inclined to criticise the reality than to fancy the imaginary world. But still, being able to have a pet legally, to play “quiddich” freely and to have a “room of requirement” when require – all these magical elements were admired by the OCG audiences because they all represented something that the OCG audiences lacked in their real life. Their fancy for a “pet” originated from their loneliness of being an only child. “Quiddich” was their squeezed play time at school while “room of requirement” represented their need for a space for themselves.

If the concepts and elements represented the OCG audiences’ desire, they would naturally arouse their admiring emotion to the film. If it represented something negative in the audiences’ life, it would lead to a completely different response. The most suitable example for this is the fifth instalment of the series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. The villain of this episode, Dolores Umbridge, was considered by the OCG audiences as the “true reflection of the executioner of China’s mass education”. In the film, Umbridge was installed at Hogwarts as Defence Against the Dark Arts professor and “High Inquisitor” by order of the Ministry of Magic.

Xiaoliang Li, an OCG audience, wrote in his article,

³⁴⁵ Baidu, *Sorting Hat Bar*, <<http://tieba.baidu.com/p/9187006>>, [accessed 28 September 2011].

*“What excited me the most in this film was not magic or combating Voldemort, but the victory against Umbridge. I believe everyone who suffered the exam-oriented mass education would agree.”*³⁴⁶

“Suffer”, “victory” and “exciting” – these three words summarised the OCG audiences’ emotional response while watching the film. Almost everything Umbridge did during her stay at Hogwarts had reminded the OCG about what they had gone through in their school life. “No physical contact between boys and girls”, “reporting on other students”, “theory is more important than practice”, “studying is for passing the exam”, “numerous rules hanging on the wall”, “abusive punishments” – everything was just so similar to China’s education practice that Li described it as a “mind-blowing familiarity”.

The same suffering resulted in the OCG audiences’ intimacy with the characters in the film. Emotionally, the audiences joined the students of Hogwarts and became their allies. Hence when the students won the “victory” against Umbridge – the representative of the education system – OCG also felt the “excitement”, the excitement they probably never had. What came after the excitement was reflection. To the end of the article, Li wrote,

*“We could imagine ourselves being in the fantasised world, playing with magic and doing whatever we want without worrying about the consequences. Back to the reality, under the current education system, what can we do?”*³⁴⁷

³⁴⁶ Qzone, *Mofa shijie yu yingshi jiaoyu (World of magic and China’s exam-oriented education)*, <<http://qzone.blog.qq.com/622005054/blog/36.htm>> [accessed 28 September 2011]

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

Again, the OCG audiences clearly distinguished the fantasy and the reality. Based on their judgement of the society and the social position they were at, although not completely refuse the possibility, they questioned their power to make a change. In this chapter, a study of the Harry Potter franchise had been carried out. Issues relating the reading of Harry Potter novels in urban China were discussed first, which provided a baseline of the popularity and reception to the franchise. The chapter then examined the industrial performance of Harry Potter film saga. The overall satisfactory box office performance of the entire series indicated its strong appeal to the general Chinese audiences as family film. Then the study was focussed on the reception of OCG audiences to the Harry Potter films, which revealed the special connection between the OCG and the films.

Neither what J. K. Rowling presented in the novels to the readers nor what the directors of Harry Potter films presented to the audiences is hardly based on the life of the OCG. However, these films managed to resonate with the OCG audiences because something about the film fit into their education and school life experiences, into the media reception schemata generated during their social process of emerging as a generation.

Chapter 6 Transformers: the Power of

Memories

The success of *Transformers* (2007) in China was one of the inspirations of this thesis. It drew my attention to a group of OCG audience – the Transformers fans. A connection between the group and the film was observed, so was a connection between the group's collective memories and their reception to the film. The collective memories of the group had led to the nostalgia which, as discussed in Chapter 2, had led to a series of nostalgic activities within the group in recent years. From the initial air of the Transformers TV cartoon series in 1987 to the most recent feature film *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011), the influence of the franchise in China had been in play for more than two decades. Unlike that of the Harry Potter which had appeared to be a continuous force, the influence Transformers had followed a distinctively different pattern: imprint, hibernate, revive and strengthen.

In this chapter, a case study of the Transformers franchise is presented. The study is focussed on how the collective memories and nostalgia of the group had been constructed and their effects on their reception to the film *Transformers* (2007). The chapter will first look into the history of Transformers from its first appearance on Chinese television as a cartoon series to its most recent feature film released in 2011. The chapter will then look into the status of science-fiction entertainment for Chinese children back to the day when the cartoon first came to China in order to explain how the cartoon series on its own had left a strong impression in the memories of the group. Third, as a significant part of the Transformers franchise, the toys and the role they played in shaping the memories and identities of the group

individuals will be discussed. Finally, memories and nostalgia, on both individual and collective levels, will be linked to the reception of the film through the analysis of media and audience generated text.

Transformers – from TV to the Cinema

The OCG audiences' memory for Transformers started from the franchise's television cartoon series aired in China in the 1980s. The cartoon and the film series were independent in plot, but they were both based on the characters of the toy line created by Hasbro. The idea was that an individual toy's parts can be shifted about to change it from one form such as a vehicle, a device or an animal into an anthropomorphic robot action figure which can be shifted back again. The toy line was designed with two opposing factions: the heroic Autobots and the evil Decepticons. To help promoting the toys, Claster Television, a television production company owned by Hasbro, produced the Transformers television series. The first series was aired in the US in 1984 when the first generation of the toy line became available in the market followed by a number of spin-offs including the three featured films.

To promote their toys to Chinese consumers, in 1987, after being turned down by China Central Television (CCTV) due to the programme's "excessively violent content", Hasbro approached Shanghai Television, the local television station of Shanghai. Hasbro offered the cartoon series, later known as the *Transformers: Generation One*, to Shanghai Television for free.³⁴⁸ The dubbed version of the programme started to air in May 1988 and, not at all to the surprise of Hasbro,

³⁴⁸ Shang, Jin, "Bianxing jingang ershi nian (Twenty years of Transformers)", *Sanlian Lifeweek*, 25 August 2003, <<http://lifeweek.com.cn/2003-08-26/000046470.shtml>>, [6 May 2008].

immediately grabbed the attention of young Chinese (the OCG). Only five months later, Guangzhou Television, another local television station of China, had to pay Hasbro to get the series.³⁴⁹ The reaction of the Chinese children towards the cartoon was unprecedented and greatly promoted the sale of the toys. The cartoon series was once banned by the government because “children have become obsessed” and “(the obsession) started to cause financial burdens to families”.³⁵⁰ The toys were rather expensive for an ordinary Chinese family to purchase at that time. Later in the 1990s, China imported a few sequels of the cartoon series. They were also very popular but not as much as the first series among the OCG.

Twenty years after the franchise’s cartoon television series was first aired in China, the Paramount’s film *Transformers* (2007), set off an upsurge of enthusiasm towards these transformable robots in the nation once again. Its two sequels, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009) and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011) received even stronger response in the box office. Table 6.1 lists the worldwide and Chinese box office of the three films.

Table 6.1 Box Office of Transformers Series (as of 29 September 2011)³⁵¹

Film Title	World Gross	World Yearly Ranking	China Gross	Local Yearly Ranking
Transformers	\$709,709,780	5	\$37,218,823	1
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	\$836,303,693	4	\$65,837,290	2
Transformers: Dark of the Moon	\$1,118,632,811	2	\$172,944,444*	1

* This box office figure is obtained from Engroup.

³⁴⁹ Wan, Jing, “Jinggang zhongguo bianxing ji (Transformers transformed in China)”, *Southern Weekend*, 18 July 2007, <<http://www.infzm.com/content/trs/raw/22047>>, [6 May 2008].

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Box Office Mojo, *Transformers*, <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=transformers06.htm>>; *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=transformers2.htm>>; *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=transformers3.htm>> [accessed 29 September 2011].

The film sent the Chinese box office sales right through the roof by grossing 37.2 million US dollars, which made a strong contribution to its worldwide gross of 709.7 million and nearly broke the record kept by the 1998 film *Titanic* (40.00 million US dollars in Chinese box office).³⁵² The film was released in the Chinese cinemas with 540 copies nationwide, more than any blockbuster China had previously imported.³⁵³ The film immediately refreshed the record of the fastest-grossing blockbuster in the Chinese film market by reaching the milestone of 100 million yuan within only 5 days, followed by *Spider-Man III* (2007) (12 days) and *King Kong* (2006) (14 days).³⁵⁴ The box office performance of the film is given in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Weekly Chinese Box Office of *Transformers* (2007)³⁵⁵

Date	Rank	Weekend Gross	Gross-to-Date*
Jul. 9–15	1	\$12,797,171	\$12,797,171
Jul. 16–22	1	\$10,961,292	\$24,167,668
Jul. 23–29	1	\$6,340,819	\$31,043,593
Jul. 30–Aug. 5	1	\$3,299,894	\$34,318,902
Aug. 6–12	3	\$1,384,366	\$35,663,902
Aug. 13–19	6	\$486,522	\$36,055,227
Aug. 20–26	7	\$197,941	\$36,381,631

* Not include IMAX.

Audience, which will be discussed in the later sections of this chapter, was an important factor that contributed to the success of the film. Other than that, there were still a few others that were worth mentioning. The film was released in July, right at the beginning of the Summer Holiday Season which was regarded as one of the most profitable periods of Chinese film market, the other one being the Chinese

³⁵² Box Office Mojo, *Transformers*, <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=transformers06.htm>>, [accessed 29 September 2011].

³⁵³ Ding, Yilan, “Benzhou yinbao bianxing jingang (Transformers to be released this week)”, *China Film News*, 12 July 2007, p.017.

³⁵⁴ Jiao, Yuqing, “Bianxing jingang reyinghou de lengsikao (Some thoughts about Transformers’ popularity)”, *People’s Daily International*, 27 July 2007, p.013.

³⁵⁵ Box Office Mojo, *Transformers*, <<http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=transformers06.htm>>, [accessed 29 September 2011].

New Year Season. The release was only one week later than that of the US, thus reduced the impact of piracy. The objectives of publicity for the film were also very well achieved. News about the film started to come up almost as soon as the plan to produce the film was revealed. The discussions became heated as time approached its release and even more so afterwards. Shows that talked about the film flooded the media as many celebrities, including acts from *Super Girl* (Chinese equivalent of American Idol), were invited to talk about their anticipations about the film on TV. In the cinemas, the film's posters and action figures were often placed at the most noticeable positions. Above all, the film itself was well worth the passion and anticipation. Apart from the film's stunning visual/audio achievement being promoted through the media, Director Michael Bay together with Paramount and DreamWorks were good enough to draw the attention from the Chinese audiences. Also, sci-fi films had always had their market in China (e.g. *The Matrix* (1999), *Spider-Man* (2002) and their sequels).

In 2009, the first sequel of the film, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009), hit the Chinese cinema. Chinese audiences responded with an even greater enthusiasm than the first film. On 24 Jun, major cinemas across China arranged mid-night release for the Transformers fans and received favourable results: the national box office gained 3.5 million yuan on the night with nearly 100,000 attendances, which was the best mid-night result in history. The release day box office reached a total of 33.7 million yuan, almost 50 per cent higher than that of the first film in 2007. Five days into the release to the end of the first week, the Chinese box office of the film ranked at the fourth place internationally, after the US, the UK and Japan, with a

satisfactory 165 million yuan.³⁵⁶ In 18 days, the film managed to take in 377 million yuan, which was a remarkable achievement comparing to the 359 million that *Titanic* (1998) received in its 70 days of release. At the end of its fourth week in release, with a record breaking 408 million yuan, it became the first in Chinese film history to reach the 400 million yuan milestone.³⁵⁷ The final box office was 455 million yuan. Table 6.3 provides the box office performance of the film in China by week. The box office figures have been converted to US dollars based on an exchange rate of 6.83:1.

Table 6.3: Weekly Chinese Box Office of *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009)³⁵⁸

Date	Rank	Weekend Gross	Gross-to-Date
Jun. 24–28	1	\$24,158,126	\$24,158,126
Jun. 29–Jul. 5	1	\$20,204,978	\$44,363,104
Jul. 6-12	1	\$10,834,553	\$55,197,657
Jul. 13-19	3	\$4,582,723	\$59,780,381
Jul. 20-26	3	\$2,196,193	\$61,976,574
Jul. 27-Aug. 2	3	\$673,499	\$62,650,073
Aug. 3–Aug. 9	-	\$307,467	\$62,957,540

Two years later, the second sequel of the series, *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011), became another legend in the Chinese box office. In its 40 days of release, the film had wrapped up 1.08 billion yuan from the Chinese cinemas. It was the new fastest grossing film in the history of Chinese film market. Its mid-night release box office of 12 million yuan,³⁵⁹ release day box office of 102 million yuan, highest daily box office of 112 million yuan and release week box office of 401 million yuan had all become the new records in the Chinese box office.³⁶⁰ Table 6.4

³⁵⁶ Liu, Jia, “Weekly report of the national film market (22/06/09 – 28/06/09)”, *Taipingyang Cinema*, <<http://www.cinema.com.cn/show.aspx?id=3005&cid=21>> [accessed 29 August 2011]

³⁵⁷ Liu, Jia, “Weekly report of the national film market (13/07/09 – 19/07/09)”, *Taipingyang Cinema*, <<http://www.cinema.com.cn/show.aspx?id=3005&cid=21>> [accessed 29 August 2011]

³⁵⁸ Entgroup, *Chinese Domestic Box Office*, <<http://m.entgroup.cn/boxoffice/cn/>> [accessed 16 January 2010]

³⁵⁹ Sun, Linlin, “Bian 3 po wuyechang jilu (Transformer 3 set new mid-night record)”, *The Beijing News*, 22 July 2011, p.A48.

³⁶⁰ Mtime, *Chinese Domestic Film All-time Grosses*, <<http://group.mtime.com/12781/discussion/253526/>> [accessed 29 September 2011].

provides the box office performance of the film in China by week. The box office figures have been converted to US dollars based on an exchange rate of 6.37:1.

Table 6.4: Weekly Chinese Box Office of *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011)³⁶¹

Date	Rank	Weekend Gross	Gross-to-Date
Jul. 21–24	1	\$62,951,334	\$62,951,334
Jul. 25–31	1	\$58,037,677	\$120,989,011
Aug. 1–7	2	\$26,499,215	\$147,488,226
Aug. 8–14	3	\$12,307,692	\$159,795,918
Aug. 15–21	4	\$6,593,407	\$166,389,325
Aug. 22–28	5	\$3,218,210	\$169,607,535
Aug. 29–Sep. 4	6	\$1,436,421	\$171,043,956

There was an important characteristic of the box office performance of the three Transformers films: fast-grossing. The large majority of box office and cinema attendances happened within the first 2-3 weeks. It is reasonable to assume that such a characteristic had something to do with the Transformers fandom because fans have the tendency to see the film as soon as they can possibly do. It explains the success of mid-night release of the two sequels. As I observed, those who were the most zealous for Transformers were none other than the OCG. In their nostalgic activities described in Chapter 2, Transformers and relevant topics were of important components. In fact, the Chinese media had already sense the significant role that a group of OCG audiences, the Transformer fans, played in the box office spectacle of the Transformers series when the first film became a hit in the Chinese cinema. An article from *China Film News* emphasised that most of the film’s audiences were people around their 30s.³⁶² Further, a news report on *People’s Daily International* also pointed out that the OCG contributed a lot to the cinema attendances of

³⁶¹ Entgroup, *Chinese Domestic Box Office*, <<http://m.entgroup.cn/boxoffice/cn/>> [accessed 29 September 2011].

³⁶² Ding, Yilan, “Benzhou yinbao bianxing jingang (Transformers to be released this week)”, *China Film News*, 12 July 2007, p.017.

Transformers (2007).³⁶³ The box office explosion of the two sequels was considered by the media as a result of the audiences' irrational spending on film entertainment.³⁶⁴

The success of *Transformers* was a worldwide phenomenon. In this chapter I argue that, the film's success in China was not a simple replication of that from elsewhere. The root of the success can be traced back to the days when the TV cartoon series was brought to China and a special audience group that had been fostered since then.

Science Fiction in Chinese Cinema

In Chapter 2, Chinese children's films are introduced and categorised into three distinct types – “little heroes in war”, “good student at school” and science-fiction films. In previous case studies I compared Chinese children's films from the first two categories with selected Hollywood family films. In this chapter, I will elaborate on Chinese children's films that involve science fiction. I will explain, from this particular aspect, the origin and foundation of the OCG's nostalgia for *Transformers* and why the franchise, from its initial TV series to the more recent features films, is so popular among the OCG audience.

In academia, there have been a lot of attempts to define science-fiction as a genre. As a matter of fact, the definition is never fixed and unchanging. Keith M. Johnston in *Science Fiction Film* (2011) suggests treating science-fiction as “a popular fictional genre that engages with (and visualises) cultural debates around one

³⁶³ Jiao, Yuqing, “Bianxing jingang reyinghou de lingsikao (Some thoughts about *Transformers*' popularity)”, *People's Daily International*, 27 July 2007, p.013

³⁶⁴ Liu, Jia, “Weekly report of the national film market (22/06/09 – 28/06/09)”, *Taipingyang Cinema*, <<http://www.cinema.com.cn/show.aspx?id=3005&cid=21>> [accessed 29 August 2011]

or more of the following: the future, artificial creation, technological invention, extraterrestrial contact, time travel, physical or mental mutation, scientific experimentation, or fantastic natural disaster”.³⁶⁵ In a way, science-fiction films are often found to present new or expanded world view through dramas of the above topics which are often spiced with thrilling or romantic elements. In this thesis, I will adopt Johnston’s above definition which is more of a description for science-fiction films.

In recent years, science-fiction films are showing dominance in Hollywood blockbusters. *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011), *Iron Man 2* (2010), *Avatar* (2009), *The Dark Knight* (2008) are among the top grossed films in the world’s box office. What about Chinese science-fiction films? A more interesting question is: what it was like back to the days when Transformers TV series first came to China? For the OCG audience group, only the Chinese children’s science-fiction films are relevant to the study. To have a more comprehensive understanding of Chinese children’s science fiction films, it is worth mentioning a number of additional titles. The list is rather short. From 1949 (the foundation of People’s Republic of China) to 1990, only three science-fiction films had been produced for Chinese children audience. See table 6-1.

Table 6 -1 Chinese Children’s Films with Fantasy Elements

Year	Title
1980	珊瑚岛上的死光 The Death Ray on the Coral Island
1988	霹雳贝贝 Pi Li Bei Bei
1990	大气层消失 The Ozone Layer Vanishes

³⁶⁵ Johnston, K.M., *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Berg, 2011), p.1.

What is immediately clear is that, in Chinese cinema, given the total amount of children's films produced (see Chapter 2), the number of children's science-fiction films is extremely small. Among Chinese film researchers, scholars and practitioners, there have been discussions about the lack of science fiction, not only in Children's films, but in Chinese films in general. Practitioners, such as directors and producers, often blame the financial and technical difficulties. According to Chinese director Zhang Yimo, there is hardly any Chinese science-fiction film nowadays because neither the money nor the special effect technologies are in place to support the production of such a film.³⁶⁶ Zhang Yimo's remark does not lack truth in it, but it is only one aspect of the issue. Film scholar Zhang Zhilu, the author of *Pi Li Bei Bei* (1988) and the book *History of Chinese Children's Films*, took a step further. He pointed out two reasons for the lack of science fiction in Chinese films. First, there is a lack of scientific imagination in the spirit and atmosphere of modern Chinese literature. Realism is the absolute main stream in the writing of Chinese films and televisions. Second, Chinese film practitioners in general are lack of appreciation for science fiction and relevant trainings in the production of science-fiction films.³⁶⁷ It is the combined effect of insufficient support from the outside and unwillingness from the inside to pursue a more challenging topic that resulted in the current gloomy status of science-fiction film productions in the Chinese film industry.

I concur with both Zhang Yimo and Zhang Zhilu in this matter because none of their arguments is untrue. However, perhaps restricted by their profession-oriented concerns and political position, neither of them has touched the core of the issue. As

³⁶⁶ Zhuanfang Zhangyimou (Exclusive Interview of Zhangyimou), *Sina Entertainment*, <<http://ent.sina.com.cn/r/2009-12-15/ba2811360.shtml>> [accessed 21 Nov. 2011].

³⁶⁷ Zhang, Z.L., 'Zhongguo haiyoumeiyou kehuandianying (Is there still Science Fiction in Chinese Film?)', *851M: Women de Kexuewenhua(Our Science and Culture)*, 1(2007), <<http://shc2000.sjtu.edu.cn/0712/zghaiyoumeiyouke.htm>> [accessed 10 Dec. 2011].

a matter of fact, there is a strong drive in Chinese film production. Politics, being the said drive, are still non-negligible nowadays and were even more so in the past when most film studios were state-owned. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, most Chinese children's films were funded by the government. By examining the films from "little heroes in war" and "good students at school", it can be seen that all of them carry political messages which follows the Party's propaganda. It is understandable why the Party chose realistic over fictional stories to deliver these messages, although it is arguable that the later would have done an equally good if not better job. As a result, children's films with clear political purposes were massively produced. On the contrary, science-fiction films which were not seen as the appropriate agents to serve the Party's agenda were only produced in a less supported and non-scheduled way.

Interestingly enough, despite the extreme shortage in supply, the above listed children's science-fiction films were all very well received by the audience.

The Death Ray on the Coral Island (1980) was the first Chinese film that embraced the science-fiction genre. It was based on a Chinese teen novel of the same title and was considered the first Chinese "cult film".³⁶⁸ Film viewer Fangyunan (internet ID) praises the film "a genuine and sincere attempt". He also comments that the setting of the scene was almost at the same level in quality as that of the contemporary Japanese science-fiction films, if not in scale.³⁶⁹ Viewer Huanxi (internet ID) writes when recalls the film, "The colours and scene of the 1980s in the film were like my best childhood dream."³⁷⁰ Many who have seen the film share the

³⁶⁸ *The Death Ray on the Coral Island* (1980), *Douban*, <<http://movie.douban.com/subject/1498657/>> [accessed 11 Dec. 2011].

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

view that the film has made a strong impression in their childhood. On the other side, many also share another view that the film shows that Chinese science-fiction film at the time was still very immature.

In Chinese film academia, *Pi Li Bei Bei* (1988) is considered the first successful Chinese children's science-fiction film.³⁷¹ Researcher Lin Xuefei gives four factors for the success of the film: excellent imagination, real fun, implicit education and quality production. She points out that the power of imagination displayed by the film is unparalleled among the contemporary Chinese films; on the storytelling, the writers of the film are able to think from a child's point view about what would really entertain the young audience; in terms of education, there is no shouting about right or wrong in the film but wisdom embedded in the fun; and last but not the least, the production of the film is of high quality, given that the budget of the film is only 540,000 yuan (less than 70,000 US dollars at the time). The reaction from the audience supports the view of the academia. On Douban, OCG audience have written a lot of reviews about the film. "So many years later, I can still totally and completely remember every scene of the film", writes Zhuyi (internet ID) in 2010.³⁷² Viewer Liuxiaoqing (internet ID) praises the imagination of the film, saying that it is even better than many Chinese productions nowadays (posted on 5th July 2010).³⁷³ Many viewers give credit to the writers, the directors and the producers for creating a children's film that feels ahead of its time in Chinese cinema.

³⁷¹ Lin, X.F., 'Zhongguo ertong kehuan dianying de diyibu chenggong zhi zuo (The first successful Chinese children's science-fiction film)', *Journal of Liaoning Educational Administration Institute*, 1(2008), 140-142(p.140).

³⁷² Review of *Pi Li Bei Bei*, *Douban*,
<http://movie.douban.com/subject/1440283/comments?start=21&limit=20&sort=new_score>
[accessed 11 Dec. 2011]

³⁷³ Review of *Pi Li Bei Bei*, *Douban*,
<http://movie.douban.com/subject/1440283/comments?start=106&limit=20&sort=new_score> >
[accessed 11 Dec. 2011]

Two years later, Feng Xiaoning, the director of *Pi Li Bei Bei* (1988), wrote and directed *The Ozone Layer Vanishes* (1990). This film received a Special Award from the Golden Rooster Awards – the highest academe level recognition in the Chinese film industry. Similar to the previous two films, it was also very popular among the OCG audience. Apart from a few number of references to overly thrilling scenes, most reviews posted on Douban are positive.³⁷⁴ Many mentioned that it was the first film they watched that promoted environmental awareness and the film taught them the importance to protect the environment.

Two important facts can be learnt by studying the reviews of OCG audience for the three science-fiction films mentioned above. First, the OCG audience enjoyed the imaginative elements delivered by science-fictional storylines of the films. Second, the Chinese children's science-fiction film made strong impression on the OCG audience. In a normal film market, there supposed to be a certain level of balance between the demand and the supply for a certain kind of film. It was not the case for science-fiction films, or any kind of multimedia entertainment involving science-fiction elements, in China in the 1980s. On one hand, the craving for science-fiction films/TVs from the OCG audience was very strong. On the other hand, the supply of science-fiction multimedia products was extremely inadequate. It was in such circumstances the Transformer TV series first came to China, to the OCG audience. Since then, only two additional children's science-fiction titles have been produced: *Crazy Rabbit* (1997) and *Dangerous Intelligence* (2003). Science-fiction in Chinese children's film stayed gloomy until today.

³⁷⁴ *The Ozone Layer Vanishes* (1990), *Douban*, <<http://movie.douban.com/subject/1528848/>> [accessed 11 Dec. 2011]

At this point, the question about Transformers and the OCG can at least be partially answered. The initial Transformer TV series had strong appeal to the young OCG due to its science-fictional nature. The void in Chinese children's science-fiction entertainment also amplified its appeal. The reason behind the OCG's nostalgia for Transformers has also started to become evident. Nostalgia, although often understood as an emotional state, is also linked to memories. From the OCG audience reception for children's science-fiction films, it is reasonable to believe that the impression of the Transformers TV series on the OCG had been strong. Apart from being science-fiction, the Transformers series has its own uniqueness. In the next section, another important point that makes Transformers special to the OCG will be discussed.

Transformers Toys: Memories and Self-Fashioned Identities

As described earlier, the purpose of Hasbro's original Transformers TV series was to promote the related toy franchise. For Hasbro, the focus was clearly on the toy's side. As a result, the aesthetic and cultural achievement of TV series, restricted by the purpose, was in doubt. For several cultural critics, as quoted by Lincoln Geraghty in his paper discussing the Transformers fandom, "most animated programs were little more than poorly drawn, glorified half-hour commercials for action figures and video games" flooding the children's toy market in the early part of the 1980s. The Transformers TV series itself was regarded "characterised by animation which was uninspired and aesthetically redundant".³⁷⁵ Here in this thesis, I will not give an

³⁷⁵ Lincoln, G., 'Repackaging Generation One: Genre, Fandom, and The Transformere as Adult/Children's Television', in *The Shifting definitions of Genre: Essays on Labling Films*,

artistic evaluation of the series or, from a cultural and social aspect, investigate its contribution to the increased commercialisation of childhood. What is important is that, despite of its seemingly banal storyline and poor animation, the TV series has its fans in China – the OCG. The OCG are also fans of the toys. Playing with and collecting the related toys has been a part of the Transformers fandom. More importantly, it has played an irreplaceable role in shaping the memories and identities of the OCG. As Geraghty pointed out, “children who grew up watching and collecting continue to watch and collect them as adults.”³⁷⁶

In the previous section, I discussed the condition in which the Transformers TV series was brought to China. Given the near barrenness of Chinese science-fiction films and TV, the “banal storyline and poor animation” as seen by the critics could well be seen as exciting and excellent for the young Chinese audience as they were immediately glued to their seats. What happened next was in no one’s surprise – the Transformers toys sale broke the silence of Chinese toy market. According to an insider from Chinese toy industry, the effect that Hasbro’s Transformers toy brought to the Chinese toy market was “explosive”.³⁷⁷ Firstly, authentic toys were constantly sold out in almost all market regions, which was rather impressive due to the fact that the average Chinese family income at that time was still in 3 digits. Secondly, the high price band and good sale of the authentic toys encouraged piracy. A market structure comprised of the genuine toys and counterfeits from high-end to low-end was formed. Directly resulted from the prosper piracy market, the availability and

Television Shows and Media, ed. by G. Lincoln and M. Jancovich (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publisher, 2008), pp.181-200.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Bianxingjingang zai zhongguo: Wanju shichang de shouci baopeng (Transformer in China: The first rise of the toy market) , *China Toy Industry Blog*, <http://blog.tianya.cn/blogger/post_read.asp?BlogID=3749334&PostID=34426652> [accessed 20 Dec. 2011].

affordability of “Transformers toys” were greatly increased. More children were able to get their hands on one of the most popular toys among their peers.

Children who watched the Transformers TV series would naturally imagine themselves part of the fictional universe. For them, the toys were a materialised link between them and the Transformers world and integrally supported the make-believe system. In a short focus group I organised in Beijing, an open discussion about the Transformer toys became the ice-breaker as resonance arose immediately among the participants. In the discussion, all the participants mentioned that they played the toys and watched the TV at the same time and tried to transform their toys together with the cartoon characters on TV. Based on the response of the focus group, their childhood toys genuine or not, the OCG’s affection for the toys was genuine. “We only child generation were lonely in our childhood,” said focus group participant Xiaopan (alias). “In a very long period, the Transformers toys had been my best friends.”

The toys were not just something to connect the children to the imagined world but also something that affected their players in real life. Sweetibm (internet alias) recalled “having a Transformers toy would definitely make you popular among the other kids”.³⁷⁸ Even with the cheaper counterfeit flooding the market, for most Chinese children in the 1980s, a Transformers toy, especially a set, was still a luxury. For those who had one or two individual toys but could not afford the entire set, often the solution was to play with the other children who have the other individual toys from the set. “By playing together we could play with more,” Jiongshu (internet alias) said. “And having a limited edition Transformers toy had sent me to the high

³⁷⁸Bianxingjingang wanju: Tongnian jiyi zhong de wanju (Transformer Toys: The Toys in Our Childhood Memories), *Douban*, <<http://www.douban.com/group/topic/23918069>> [accessed 21 Dec.2011].

place in our circle.”³⁷⁹ During the focus group, participant Suifeng (alias) recalled, in their little play group, children were ranked the same way as their toys were ranked in the set. For example, the child who had the “big brother” character toy would play the big brother of all. “I think we all knew it was pretend play but everyone was very happy to play along,” said Suifeng. Clearly, these toys were not just toys anymore. They were not just their link to the fictional world but also an agent in real-world social activities. For the OCG, the toys had become an active part of their lives. Maybe they had not yet realised it, but these toys had also been a remedy to the OCG’s social problems.

Transformers toy playing was a significant part of the childhood memories of a large number of the OCG. As a matter of fact, “memory” is the keyword of almost all Transformers related articles written by OCG writers. “A vivid memory”, “the best childhood memory”, “memories of a generation” frequently appear in these articles. On a different level, the OCG also found their social attachment through the toys. As the only child in their families, the OCG’s childhood had been lonely. The toys had given them a means to connect to the others, which was hardly done in any other ways. Through the forming of peer groups, perhaps for the first time in their life, toy playing helped them to find a place in their little society. “Transformer toys are a spiritual totem that belongs to our generation,” Sweetibm (internet alias) claimed.³⁸⁰ As time went by, these memories and childhood identities might have subsided but not gone forever. The recent nationwide nostalgia for the 1980s led by the OCG was built on these memories and self-fashioned identities. At the focus

³⁷⁹ Women congwei likai: Ershi de bianxingjingang pengyou (We have never left: Transformers, Our Childhood Friends), *Micro Sci-fi*, <<http://www.guokr.com/article/51600>> [accessed 21Dec. 2011].

³⁸⁰ Bianxingjingang wanju: Tongnian jiyi zhong de wanju (Transformer Toys: The Toys in Our Childhood Memories), Douban, <<http://www.douban.com/group/topic/23918069>> [accessed 21 Dec.2011].

group, most participants acknowledge that they were under pressure in their lives, and the toys and the original TV series would remind them the time when “life was much simpler”. When talking about their motive to go to the Transformers film Suifeng (alias) said, “I didn’t need a motive; just felt that I should go. It was a film for us.”

Having understood the origin of the OCG’s nostalgia for the Transformers and how they were driven to the cinema for the Transformer films, it is time to look into how they have received the films and how the reception have been influenced by their nostalgia.

Memories, Nostalgia and Reception

The word *nostalgia* was invented by Johannes Hofer in 1678 using a Greek compound consisting of *nóstos*, meaning “homecoming”, and *algos*, meaning “pain, ache”. The word was initially used to describe media symptoms displayed by Swiss mercenaries fighting away from home. The modern meaning of the word, “sentimental longing for things that are past” as defined in Oxford Dictionary of English 3rd edition (19 Aug 2010), was first recorded 1920.³⁸¹ In this thesis, the use of the term is strictly confined to its modern definition.

Studies on nostalgia are actively conducted with different objectives in different domains, such as psychological, social, cultural and media studies. Works from different domains are seldom self-contained but are often found to be related.

Psychologists usually concern themselves with nostalgia seeing it as psychological

³⁸¹ Nostalgia, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=nostalgia&allowed_in_frame=0> [accessed 3rd April 2012]

activities. They seek to answer what they are (contents), when they happen (triggers) and why they happen (functions, if there is any). In a series of experiments, Tim Wildschut and colleagues found that the contents of nostalgia contain more expressions of positive than negative affect; nostalgia occurs in response to negative mood and the discrete affective state of loneliness; nostalgia bolsters social bonds, increases positive self-regard, and generates positive affect. In media studies, the studies of nostalgia are often linked to the uses of nostalgia in media forms, such as films. In *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia*, the author Vera Dika, building on the work by Fredric Jamesons on nostalgia films, studies the works of film that use past images and genre in oppositional ways, which effects a form of resistance to the pull of past in relation to Postmodernism.³⁸² In the work by Andreas Bohn, nostalgia in media is seen as a means of preserving cultural memories including media themselves to counterbalance the hype of progress caused by new media.³⁸³ This thesis discusses the effect of nostalgia, in the context of media studies, from a different perspective to the above two studies by studying the nostalgia of a particular audience group – the OCG Transformers fans – and how it influences their reception to the film *Transformers* (2007).

Nostalgia is always linked to memory in respect to both the power of the mind by which facts can be remembered and the thing, the event etc. that is remembered. In this thesis, as briefly discussed in Chapter 2, the meanings of memory are twofold – individual and collective – for both of the above two aspects of memory. On the individual level, one can create memories by remembering his/her own experience.

³⁸² Dika, V., *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.1-23.

³⁸³ Bohn, A., 'Nostalgia of the media/in the media', in *Self-reference in the Media*, ed. by W. Nöh and N. Bishara (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007), pp.143-153.

According to Edmund Husserl (German, philosopher, 1859 – 1938) and as referenced by Bohn, this is achieved by maintaining a continuous stream of consciousness consisting of states of mind that are linked to each other.³⁸⁴ For works in media research, including Janet Staiger's *Media Reception Studies*, the discussion of memories is largely focussed on individual/personal memories. In this section, I will extend the study of memories to both its individual and social/collective levels and draw from the analysis of internet texts and the observations of a focus group how the memories of OCG individuals and furthermore, the collective memories of the group influenced their reception of the film *Transformers* (2007).

The media in China already sensed the connection between the film's success and the popularity of the Transformers franchise in the 1980s. *New Century Weekly* published two featured articles in this regard. One of them gave an historical review on Transformers franchise, including the toys and cartoon series.³⁸⁵ The other one emphasised the significance of the franchise to Chinese people born in the 1980s (effectively the OCG), pointing out that, it was the Transformers that introduced to the children about automobiles when cars were still not widely owned, even for affluent urban families in China in the 1980s. The article also described several common situations back to the days. The children were always in front of the television before 6.30pm every day to get ready for the cartoon. "If you want a Transformer, you have to study hard to get a good mark in you exam." Many children had made deals like this with their parents in the hope of a Transformers toy.³⁸⁶ More discussions emphasising the connection are found in Chinese movie

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Mei, Qian, "Bianxing jingang chengzhangji (The development of Transformers franchise)", *New Century Weekly*, 17 (2007), pp.38-39.

³⁸⁶ Tang, Yong, "Zhonguoren weishenme xihuan bianxing jingang (Why do Chinese love the Transformers)", *New Century Weekly*, 17 (2007), pp.42-43.

magazines. *Movie Review* attributed *Transformers*' success to its huge fandom of the franchise in China. It claimed that, the marketing campaign of the cartoon series, the toys and the other related products of the Transformers franchise was very successful and greatly influenced the Chinese children in the 1980s. Another article from *Popular Cinema* examined the popularity of the Transformers franchise back to the 1980s. It claimed that watching Transformers cartoons and collecting Transformers toys and other related products from the franchise were among the favourite activities of children at the time. The review described Transformers as the "miraculous food" that fed the soul and accompanied the growing up of a generation.³⁸⁷ *Movie View*'s article titled "Everybody Has a Companion Made of Steel" claimed that, it was the Transformers who brought the modern culture of automobiles to the Chinese children.³⁸⁸ *Movie Literature* used "yesterday once more" to describe the film. It observed that when "Autobots, transform, and roll out" was said once again by Optimus Prime in the film, many of the audience could not help but burst into tears.³⁸⁹

The media text above provided some very interesting observations which indicated a connection between the overwhelmingly positive reception of the film and the popularity of the original cartoon and related products in China back to the 1980s. However, the discussions based on these observations lacked insights to this matter by overlooking the fact that it was actually the memories of the cartoons/toys and the nostalgic feelings of bringing back these memories that played a central part in the phenomenon. More importantly, the memories and nostalgia had evolved to

³⁸⁷ Yiduo, 'Renxing liangxiang bianxingjingang (Transformers Film)', *Popular Cinema*, 14(2007), 54-55(p.55).

³⁸⁸ Anon., 'Meigeren douyou yige gangtie huoban (Everybody Has a Companion Made of Steel)', *Movie View*, 339(2007), 20-21(p.20).

³⁸⁹ Qi, Y., 'Mengjing chongxian! Qicheren, bianxing, chufa! (Review of Transformers)', *Movie Literature*, 18(2007), 36-37(p.36).

the social/collective memories and nostalgia of a group, which in return, influenced the reception of individual group members. The said group consists of Transformers fans from the OCG. In order to study how the group memories and nostalgia had influenced their receptions to the film, I conducted analysis of text obtained from online forums/blogs. A focus group was also organised, which provided first-hand text as well as observations.

The largest two online communities for Transformers fans in China, TFCLUB³⁹⁰ and TFG2³⁹¹, both had their forums extended with new sections dedicated to the discussions of the 2007 Transformers film. Some other popular Chinese online communities, including Mtime³⁹², Douban³⁹³, Tieba (Baidu)³⁹⁴, also added special sections for the film. As a matter of fact, discussions about the film on these platforms started well before the film was released and were still on going as of July 2011.

Many keywords in the audience generated text are “memory-related”, such as “memory” itself, “remember/remembrance”, “recall” and etc. It can be seen clearly from the text that the impression that the 1980s cartoon left in the memory of these individuals is very strong.

“I can’t remember when I saw Hei Mao Jing Zhang (Captain Black-Cat, classic Chinese cartoon series) or Saint Saiya (Japanese cartoon series with high popularity in China) for the first time, but the night I first saw Transformers on TV – the not-so-

³⁹⁰ TFClub, <<http://www.tfclub.com/>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

³⁹¹ TFG2, <<http://www.tfg2.com/>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

³⁹² Mtime, *Transformers*, <http://www.mtime.com/group/transformers/discussion_32/new/> [accessed 12 October 2010].

³⁹³ Douban, *Transformers*, <<http://www.douban.com/subject/1794171/>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

³⁹⁴ Baidu Tieba, *Transformers*, <<http://tieba.baidu.com/f?kw=%B1%E4%D0%CE%BD%F0%B8%D5>> [accessed 12 October 2010].

spacious living room, the 14-inch television and the small green stool – is still so vivid in my memory just like it was yesterday.” – Aslan (internet alias)³⁹⁵

The text above by Aslan shows: first, the strength of the memory (like it was yesterday); second, that the cartoon held a special position in his/her memory (by comparing it with the other similar entities); last but not the least, that the memory was given a mark of an era. The memory of Aslan for the Transformer cartoon is expanded to a cultural and social snapshot of a particular period of time in his/her childhood.

“Going to the cinema? For me it felt more like going back to the good old days!”
– Biaoge (alias, focus group participant)

The text above by Biaoge is very representative among his/her peers. When describing these memories that they have about the Transformers cartoons, their expressions were almost entirely positive. Although these memories reminded them of the time when their families were not as affluent as nowadays, on some level, these memories were from the simpler and better days. There was a sentimental moment during the focus group after Biaoge gave the above remarks. “I miss the days when watching a 30-minute cartoon could make me as happy as I could be”, said another focus group participant Suifeng (alias).

Memories of individuals are the foundation of collective memories. The text by these individuals displays strong group characteristics. An OCG audience, Viennavirus (internet alias) said, “**We** see the Transformers as an assembly of memories, memories that belong to **our** generation.”³⁹⁶ First-person plural forms

³⁹⁵ Feihui guoqu: ping bianxingjingang (To the past: review of Transformers), *Baidu*, <<http://hi.baidu.com/fwastsggubvguzq/item/212658d23b17dfef3dc2cbbf>> [accessed on 4th Mar. 2009]

³⁹⁶ Mai dian huiyi (Buy some memories), *Douban*, <<http://movie.douban.com/review/1180362/>> [accessed on 4th Mar. 2009]

such as “we”, “us” and “our(s)” are frequently found in an individual’s text. Putting it into context, the “we” used in the above text is not a “royal we” but a display of strong sense of attachment to the group. Unlike individual memories, there is no such functioning body part like the brain for a group to store and process their collective memories. A group has to rely on a strategy to maintain the continuity of its social states and hence the memories. “Glorification” of the past, as such a strategy, is widely observed in the text generated by OCG Transformers fans. Deeming the past “the better days”, the 1980s Transformers cartoon the “classics” are both embodiment of this strategy. A friend of mine who went to the cinema to watch the film told me, when Optimus Prime (leader of Autobots) entered the scene, the whole cinema stood up and applauded. Through the glorification of the group hero, the group existence and its memories are strengthened, so is the sense of belonging of the group members. Being nostalgic has also become a glorified characteristic of the OCG. Text like “OCG only”, “re-post if you are post-80s” has become a catch phrase and often appears in the nostalgic articles and posts on the internet.

Driven by the glorified memories, their reception of *Transformers* (2007) was no longer as simple as responding to any other media text. The film was decoded by the fans into cultural and social symbols that mapped into their own memories and identities. Modern techniques of film production including special effect are not the focus of their reviews. For the fans, the most important aspect of the film was the fact that it was there rather than how it was presented in term of film making.

“My eyes went wet during the scene in which Bumblebee talked to the boy for the first time.” – Heitaoer (alias, focus group participant)

Similar to what is suggested by the other audience-generated text I referenced in this section, the impact of the film on the fans was mostly emotional, despite of the

apparent visual-audio achievement of the film. It is not difficult to speculate the reason for Heitaoer's emotional outburst for that scene: had she not been lonely as the only child of the family? Had she, as a child, not wished the plastic toy could become real and talk to her? Had she not been longing for a real companion with whom he/she could communicate? What Heitaoer saw was a scene in which a robot attempted to communicate with a human being but subconsciously, the scene was decoded into symbols of "loneliness", "companion" and "communication" which agreed with her state of mind as a child and brought the state to the front of her consciousness. One may argue that the text above was a negative expression because it brought back bad memories. In my opinion, the effect of the recall was mostly positive because it provided a release from these negative feelings, which was made evident by Heitaoer's overall positive reception to the film.

In this chapter, I examined and discussed the success of Transformers films in China and how the collective memories of the fans for the original TV cartoons had influenced the reception of the more recent films. By watching the cartoons and playing with the toys, Transformers were "burned into the memories" of a generation, not only because the audience were lack of options but also because the roles these robot characters had played in their life – the companions of their personal life and the glue of their social life. As they grew, these memories were pushed back from the front of their consciousness. Two decades later, the arrival of the Transformers film revived these memories. As the owners of the nation's mainstream culture nowadays and with the help of the internet, the group strengthened their collective memories and social existence. In return, the strengthened social existence and identity of the individuals of the group influenced the reception of the Transformer

films. What was received by the fans from the films was not simply a luxuriance of visual effect made possible by the modern filming technologies but symbolic resonance to their personal and social (collective) memories around which their identities had been shaped and were being re-shaped.

Conclusions

The main work of this research was finished in 2011 before the release of *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, the third instalment of the Transformers film series. To emphasise the continued strong performance of the series in the Chinese film market, Chapter 6 *Transformers: the Power of Memories* was slightly updated with some industrial statistics of the film. The success of the film was not a surprise to the author nor, it seemed, to those Chinese companies who marketed solely in mainland China and were willing to pay millions of dollars *per second* for their product placement in the film. As the research was being concluded, new development of events continued to support one of the author's fundamental claims, that is, the OCG audience group, as a significant force of media consumption in China, maintains strong audience-media relationships with Hollywood family films – excellent examples of American family entertainment.

The only child generation, the American family entertainment and the relationship between the two had been the three basic objects of the research. In terms of objective, the study of the audience group and the media had been to support that of the relationship. The relationship between the OCG and the American family entertainment did not exist from the dawn of time. As a matter of fact, the two objects emerged within their own social and cultural boundaries between which ideologies and perceptions, on both individual and social levels, were very different and, in certain aspects, contradictory. Naturally, one would wonder how the relationship came into being.

Since its establishment in 1949, the People's Republic of China had been operating a closed economy until dramatic economic reform took place in late 1970s. Collectively known as the Open Door Policy, the series of policies was put forward by the Chinese government to attract Western technology and investment. The Policy was always linked to its economic significance – it was a series of economic policy after all. However, if we shift our eyes away from the skyscrapers and the ever growing modern cities, and focus our thoughts on the people, on how they had changed in the past three decades, the Policy's influence on the cultural aspect of the society would become apparent. From television programmes to films, more and more Western multi-media products made their way to the Chinese audience. On the outside, the Western trademark promised advanced production and novel entertainment experience. Almost intuitively, imported products were linked to better quality. For example, the Chinese audience would refer to their own films as “film” but the imported films as “big film”. The imported blockbusters revived the nation's dying film market by inviting the audience back to the cinemas. More importantly, they revived the audience's interest in films. On the inside, the imported media, such as the Hollywood blockbusters, were produced under the influence of a different culture and were inherently infused with it. The audience, when in contact with the media, might not be actively looking for these cultural elements. Nonetheless, the cultural messages were still broadcast to them through the media. Trading barrier and censorship were employed by the Chinese government to protect the local production and to counter the Western cultural influence. On the economic side, even with the Open Door Policy in place, China was still not a free market. Hollywood and their products had to cross thick barriers or to stay completely outside. On the cultural side, although the censorship was effective in preventing contradictory cultural and

political messages from being publicly on display, it did not eliminate the fact that different voices existed. The censorship, to certain extent, only reinforced people's awareness of that.

The only child generation emerged in a society that was undergoing dramatic changes in both economic and cultural aspects. Comparing to their progenitors, they were faced with new challenges within their families, in their education and even regarding gender. Encounters with these issues became part of their childhood memories. To many of them, instead of being a place to dissolve the pressure, family was where the pressure came from. As the only children of their families, meticulous care and pressure came in one package. These "little emperors", to their parents, were their families' "only hope". Born in the baby boom that the society failed to prepare for, the competition they had to face for their share of resource had been fierce. The OCG were dissatisfied by the nation's mass education in which everyone was taught the same thing and evaluated the same way. The only thing mattered was the marks of the final exams for college and university admission. The negative feeling about education only deepened in realisation of their powerlessness to break away from the system. Special attention needed to be paid to the female members of the generation. Although the government was in constant campaign to publicise gender equality, discrimination towards females (although in subtle) still existed. Usually, a family responded to this social situation by hoping for a baby boy over a baby girl. If they had a girl, they would try to raise her to be a tough and competitive "tomboy". The society forced an unnatural way for the OCG females to construct their gender cognition. Their struggles were made observable in popular culture where female figures with male characteristics became popular among the female audience. The most important rationale behind separating the only children born in

the 1980s in urban China to the rest of the population was the unique social experiences that they share from their youth to today. The shared experiences formed the collective memories of the group. In recent years, a series of nostalgic activities took place within the group as the social means to preserve the collective memories. The shared experiences, of negative and positive, were glorified. On the one hand, the negative aspects of their childhood were seen as the marker of a heroic age; on the other hand, the positive aspects of the past became something for them to long for in the present. As a tribute to their childhood, the nostalgic activities fostered a strong sense of belonging within the group and also strengthened the social identities of both the individuals and the group. As media consumers, the OCG should not be seen as “empty vessels” into which meanings simply flow and fill (education model), nor should they be considered powerless in their encounter with the media (power model). In this research, the OCG individuals were conceptualised as having developed attributes of some sophistication from the social context. They would respond to media through their decoding of the media text by reading the meanings that fit into their own socially generated schemata – family, education, gender and memories. In this thesis, this claimed is supported by four case studies.

The first case study on Disney and their family film *The Lion King* (1994) exemplified how a group of OCG audience responded to media text through the “family” schema. *The Lion King* was the first film whose media texts were used by an OCG audience group to address their real life issues. Not only did they find the adventure and growth of the young King easy to relate, the father-son relationship displayed in the film also provided them with solutions or at least consolations to problems in their own lives. On this level, the communicational exchange between the film and this group of OCG audience was dominated by the maker of the media

text. However, this did not imply a power or education model in the audience-media relationship. The fact that the OCG audience relied on their own social experiences to interpret the meaning of the media text suggested a mediation model in which the OCG audience used the media as a mediated access to the world.

Mulan (1998) was another Disney animated feature selected as a case through which cultural enrichment and its implication in reception was studied. The “gender” schema for OCG female audience group was also covered by this case. The film was an excellent example of how a story originated from one culture was reconstructed and encoded by media makers from a different culture. The study revealed that, cultural displacement to a story originated from the audience own cultural background did not necessarily induce negative reception or an oppositional way of decoding from the audience. However, since the audience were “subject matter experts” themselves, they negotiated with the media text and found their own meanings and pleasures within the text. The female OCG audience were found to relate *Mulan* with themselves. “Who is that girl I see, staring back right at me?” Through the decoding of the media text, self-reflection among the female OCG were introduced. They found the Disney interpretation of heroine a much more intimate figure than the original, not only because they found it easy to relate the experiences of the heroine to their own but also because the heroine represented their ideal self, the self that many of them were unable to achieve. Again, the received media texts were put into the audience’s own socially generated framework for reference but not in an oppositional way. The female OCG audience received the media texts based on their own social context and reflect the decoded meanings back to the gender issues they experienced in their world.

The third case study, featuring the Harry Potter franchise, investigated how a group of OCG audience responded to media text using their “education” schema. Not to be confused with the education model of audience-media relationship, this “education” schema was formed through the audience’s own experience in education and was in place to influence their reception of media texts. Because of the schema, the audience were able to abstract meanings from media text of a fantasy film and relate them to their own lives. It was interesting to observe that, from such a vast Harry Potter world of magic, from the main conflictions and storylines, the OCG audience chose to focus on the education system in the story, a tributary of the entire story construct. The case study of Harry Potter suggested that, although the audience did not oppose the principles in the meanings proposed by the makers of the media texts, they were still able to neglect the intention of the makers by displacing the focus of the texts. The negotiation between the audience and the media text was again exemplified.

As one of the inspirations of the research, the Transformers multi-media franchise case was to study the influence of memories on the reception of media texts. Unlike the other media selected by the earlier case studies presented in this thesis, the Transformers were in contact with a group of OCG audience for a period of time in their childhood and made a come-back recently. As a matter of fact, it was the film *Transformers (2007)* that ignited the group’s nostalgic activities. Being part of their collective childhood memories, the original Transformers television series and the toys had become an anchor to which the Transformers fans clung to maintain their connection to the past. Unlike individuals, a group needed to reply on social strategies to preserve their collective memories. For the OCG Transformers fans, it was done through the glorification of the past. The old days were seen as the simpler

and better days; the old products were considered the classics. They cherished the memories and made them an integral part of their identities. Driven by the nostalgia of their glorified past, they refused the influence of the makers of the media. The meanings of the media texts intended by the makers hardly mattered. Instead, they took the initiative to decode the media into symbolic resonance to their memories and social identities.

The only child generation was a social creation. In a society where both the domestic and external forces were in play, neither had achieved the dominant position in the process of this creation. Born and grown up in the everlasting economic and cultural tension between the Eastern and the Western world, they acquired their own sophistication in their social characteristics. Such sophistication was reflected in their relationship with the Western media. They reached out to the media as their mediated access to the world where confusions were balanced. The way they interacted with the media required them to not be passive recipients of any meanings imposed to them; instead, they needed to become meaning acquirers who had to decide if they should accept, decline or negotiate with the meanings that the senders of the media texts had intended.

As a member of the only child generation herself, the author took it as a great privilege to have been able to study this special and interesting group of people and their relationship with Western media. The author hoped the findings presented in this thesis could bring China's only child generation to the attention of more thinkers and practitioners of the media world and the knowledge and understanding for this special audience group could keep growing for years to come.

Appendix A. Imported American Films (Revenue-Sharing Basis) and Top 10 Chinese Domestic Films (1994-2001)

Year	Imported American Films				Top 10 Chinese Domestic Films			
	Film Title	Genre	Production Company	Box Office (million yuan RMB)	Film Title	Genre	Production Company	Box Office (million yuan RMB)
1994 (1)	The Fugitive 亡命天涯	Action Crime Thriller Drama	Warner Bros. Pictures	25.8	Chongqing Negotiation 重庆谈判	History War	Changchun Film Studio	7.57
					La Peinter 画魂	Biography Drama	Shanghai Film Studio	4.82
					The Long March 金沙水拍	History War	Yunnan Minority Film Studio	4.2
					Green Snake 青蛇	Romance Based On Tale	Shanghai Film Studio	3.89
					The New Legend of Shaolin 新少林五祖	Martial Arts Costume	Beijing Film Studio	3.81
					Deadful Melody 六指琴魔	Martial Arts Costume	Shanghai Film Studio	3.41

					The Dragon Chronicles - The Maidens 天龙八部	Martial Arts Costume Drama	Shanghai Film Studio	3.35
					The Lovers 梁祝	Romance Based On Tale	Nanhai Motion Pictures	3.18
					It's a Wonderful Life 大富之家	Comedy Romance	Shenzhen Film Studio	3.1
					Burning Honglian Temple 火烧红莲寺	Action Drama	Shanghai Film Studio	3.06
1995 (6)	True Lies 真实的谎言	Action Comedy	Twentieth Century-Fox	102.0	In the Heat of the Sun 阳光灿烂的日子	Drama Teen	China Film Co- Production Corporation	50.0
	Die Hard 3: With a Vengeance 虎胆龙威 3 – 纽约大劫案	Action Crime Thriller Violence	Twentieth Century-Fox	47.0	Red Cherry 红樱桃	Drama War Teenage	Youth Film Studio	40.0

	The Lion King 狮子王(G)	Family Animation Musical	Walt Disney Pictures	41.3	Qi Qi Shi Bian (July 7 Incident) 七七事变	History Drama	Changchun Film Studio	33.0
	Speed 生死时速	Action Drama	Twentieth Century-Fox	37.8	Shanghai Triad 摇啊摇，摇到外婆桥	Drama Crime	Shanghai Film Studio	9.07
	Bad Boys 绝地战警	Action Comedy Crime Thriller	Don Simpson/Jerry Bruckheimer Films	32.8	Blush 红粉	Drama Based On Novel	Beijing Film Studio	7.2
	Forrest Gump 阿甘正传	Comedy Drama	Paramount Pictures	19.6	Hong Chen (Human Society) 红尘	Romance Drama	Nanhai Motion Pictures Company	5.5
					Warrior Lanling 兰陵王	Fantasy Drama	Shanghai Film Studio	4.0
					Peng De Huai Zai San Xian (Peng De Huai Went down to grass-roots) 彭德怀在三线	History Drama	Beijing Film Studio	3.8

					Bei Gao Shangang Ye (The Accused Uncle Shangang) 被告山杠爷	Drama Peasant	Emei Film Studio	3.24
					Jing Hun (The Spirit of a Policeman) 警魂	Drama Hero	Zhujiang River Film Studio	2.51
1996 (10)	Twister 龙卷风	Action Thriller	Universal Pictures	54.5	Kong Fan Sen 孔繁森	Biography Hero	Shandong Film Studio	>30.0
	Broken Arrow 断箭	Action Thriller	Twentieth Century-Fox	50.5	The Emperor's Shadow 秦颂	Costume Drama	Pacific Motion Pictures Company	
	Jumanji 勇敢者的游 戏 (PG)	Family Adventure	Interscope Communications	47.7	Jiao Liang(Stack up against)较量	Military Documentary	August First Film Studio	>10.0
	The Rock 勇闯夺命岛 (R)	Action Adventure	Hollywood Pictures	47.7	Her Majesty Is Fine 太后吉祥	Costume Drama	Fujian Film Studio	

Mission Impossible 谍中谍	Action AdventureThriller	Paramount Pictures	45.1	The Bewitching Braid 大辫子的诱惑	Romance Drama	Zhujiang River Film Studio	
The Bridges of Madison County 廊桥遗梦	Drama Romance	Warner Bros. Pictures	39.5	Meeting in the Dark 人约黄昏	Romance Arty	Shanghai Film Studio	
Waterworld 未来水世界	Action Sci-Fi Thriller	Universal Pictures	34.0	Meng Duan Nan Yang (Waterloo Nan Yang) 梦断南洋	Drama Crime Tragedy	Zhujiang River Film Studio	
Outbreak 恐怖地带	Drama Sci-Fi Thriller	Warner Bros. Pictures	32.6	Jian fei lüxing tuan (Weight Reducing Trip) 减肥旅行团	Comedy	Shenzhen Vanke Film and TV Co.	
Toy Story 玩具总动员 (G)	Family Animation	Walt Disney Pictures	31.8	Liu Hu Lan 刘胡兰	Biography Heroine	Shanxi Film Studio	
A Walk in the Clouds 云中漫步	Drama Romance	Twentieth Century-Fox	20.5	Flying Tigers 飞虎队	Action Crime	Emei Film Studio	

1997 (7)	Jurassic Park: The Lost World 侏罗纪公园 2: 失落的世界 (PG-13)	Family Adventure Sci-Fi Thriller	Universal Pictures	72.1	Opium War 鸦片战争	War History	Emei Film Studio	80.0
	Dante's Peak 天崩地裂	Action Drama	Universal Pictures	47.6	Red River Valley 红河谷	Romance Tibet	Shanghai Film Studio	50.0
	Eraser 蒸发密令	Action Drama	Warner Bros. Pictures	45.8	Keep Cool 有话好好说	Comedy Based On Novel	Guangxi Film Studio	46.0
	Speed 2 生死时速 2	Action Romance Thriller	Twentieth Century-Fox	30.4	Da Zhuan Zhe (A Turn of China's War of Liberation) 大转折	War History	August First Film Studio	40.0
	Courage Under Fire 生死豪情	Action Mystery War	Fox 2000 Pictures	25.0	The Days Without Lei Feng 离开雷锋的日子	Drama Biography Hero	Youth Film Studio	30.0
	Space Jam 空中大灌篮 (PG)	Family Animation Sport	Warner Bros. Pictures	24.1	After Divorce 离婚了，就别再来 找我	Drama Comedy	Youth Film Studio	25.0

	Sabrina 龙凤配 (情归巴黎)	Comedy Romance Drama	Paramount Pictures	20.0	Dragon Town Story 龙城正月	Action Swordsmen	Tianjing Film Studio	
					Jin Ji Jiu Zhu (Succor of Emergency) 紧急救助	Drama / Based on Reportage	Shanghai Film Studio	
					Zui E(Sin) 罪恶	Drama Crime	Shanghai Film Studio	
					Great Marching 大进军	History War	August First Film Studio	6.0
1998 (7)	Titanic 泰坦尼克号	Drama Romance	Twentieth Century-Fox	359.5	Zhou En Lai Wai Jiao Feng Yun (The Success of Premier Zhou En Lai in Diplomacy)周恩来 外交风云	Biography History Politics	The Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio	31.2
	Saving Private Ryan 拯救大兵瑞 恩	Action Drama War	Paramount Pictures	82.3	The Dream Factory 甲方乙方	Comedy Romance New Year's Hit	Beijing Forbidden City Film Company	33.0

	Deep Impact 天地大冲撞	Disaster Sci-Fi	Paramount Pictures	51.3	Spicy Love Soup 爱情麻辣烫	Comedy Romance	Xi an Film Studio	30.0
	Home Alone 3 小鬼当家 3 (PG)	Family Comedy	Twentieth Century-Fox	40.2	Great Friend : Zhou En Lai 周恩来——伟大的 朋友	Biography History Politics	Zhejiang Film Studio	25.0
	Batman and Robin 蝙蝠侠 和罗宾 (PG-13)	Family Action Adventure	Warner Bros. Pictures	20.0	A Time to Remember 红色恋人	Romance Revolution Drama	Beijing Forbidden City Film Company	22.0
	Volcano 活火熔城 (火山爆 发)	Action Thriller Drama	Twentieth Century-Fox	17.8	Hai Zhi Hun (Spirit of The Sea) 海之魂	Army Hero Drama	Shanghai Paradise Film and Television Group	
	Daylight 十万火急 (龙出生 天)	Action Adventure Thriller	Universal Pictures	15.9	Going To School with Dad on My Back 背起爸爸上学	Children Family Drama	Beijing Forbidden City Film Company	

					Working for My Wife 给太太打工	Comedy	Xiaoxiang Film Studio	
					Liu Shao Qi : The Chairman of People's Republic of China 共和国主席刘少奇	Biography History Politics	The Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio	
					Great Marching : Sweeping the Southwest 大进军：席卷大西 南	History War	August First Film Studio	15.0
1999 (6)	Star Wars, Episode I : The Phantom Menace 星球大战前 传 1 (PG)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy Sci-Fi	Lucasfilm	33.0	Be There Or Be Square 不见不散	Comedy Romance New Year's Hit	Beijing Forbidden City Film Company	41.0
	Entrapment 偷天陷阱	Crime Romance Thriller	Twentieth Century-Fox	29.0	Not One Less 一个都不能少	Drama School	Beijing New Picture Film Co.	30.0

Rush Hour 尖峰时刻	Action Comedy Crime	New Line Cinema	25.0	Lotus Lantern 宝莲灯	Family Children Animation	Shanghai Animation Film Studio	29.0
Enemy of the State 国家公敌 (R)	Action Drama Thriller	Touchstone Pictures	22.0	National Anthem 国歌	Drama Arty	Xiaoxiang Film Studio	>10.0
Mulan 花木兰 (G)	Family Animation Musical	Walt Disney Pictures	11.0	Lovers' Grief Over the Yellow River 黄河绝恋	Drama War Romance	Shanghai Paradise Film and Television Group	>10.0
Tarzan 泰山 (G)	Family Animation	Walt Disney Pictures	11.0	Hao Han San Tiao Ban (Three and a Half Men) 好汉三条半	Comedy Drama	China Film Group Corporation	>10.0
				Liang Xin (Conscience) 良心	Drama Based on Reportage	Tianshan Film Studio	>10.0
				A Tree in the House 没事偷着乐	Comedy Drama	Xi an Film studio	>10.0

					The Road Home 我的父亲母亲	Drama Romance	Beijing New Picture Film Co.	>5.0
					Nan Fu Nü Zhu Ren (A man takes charge of the women issues) 男妇女主任	Comedy Drama	Changchun Film studio	>5.0
2000 (12)	U-571	Action Drama War	Universal Pictures	29.0	Fatal Decision 生死抉择	Crime Politics	Shanghai Film studio	130.0
	Dinosaur 恐龙 (PG)	Family Animation Adventure	Walt Disney Pictures	27.0	Sorry Baby 没完没了	Comedy Drama New Year's Hit	Beijing Forbidden City Film Company	35.0
	Gladiator 角斗士	Action Adventure	Universal Pictures	25.0	A Sigh 一声叹息	Drama Romance	Beijing Film Studio	>30.0
	Mission Impossible II 碟中谍 2	Action Adventure Thriller	Paramount Pictures	23.0	Shower 洗澡	Comedy Drama	Xi an Film Studio	30.0
	The General's Daughter 西点揭秘	Crime Drama Thriller	Paramount Pictures	21.0	Never Say Divorce 说好不分手	Drama Romance	Shanghai Paradise Film and Television Group	>10.0

Stuart Little 精灵鼠小弟 (PG)	Family Adventure Comedy	Columbia Pictures	20.8	Crash Landing 紧急迫降	Adventure Drama	Shanghai Film Studio	>7.0
The Matrix 黑客帝国	Action Sci-Fi	Warner Bros. Pictures	17.0	Breaking the Silence 漂亮妈妈	Drama Mother son	Zhujiang River Film Studio	>7.0
Double Jeopardy 双重阴谋	Thriller Crime	Paramount Pictures	15.0	Are You Lonesome Tonight 相约 2000	Comedy New Year's Hit	Shanghai Paradise Film and Television Group	>5.0
Knock Off 迎头痛击	Action Thriller	MDP Worldwide		Get out Your Secret 说出你的秘密	Romance Drama	Zhejiang Film Studio	>5.0
Perfect Storm 完美风暴	Drama Action	Warner Bros. Pictures		Shadow Magic 西洋镜	Drama Romance	Beijing Film Studio	>3.0
Big Momma's House 超级奶妈	Action Comedy Crime	Twentieth Century-Fox					
The Bone Collector 神秘拼图	Crime Mystery Thriller	Columbia Pictures					

2001 (14)	Pearl Harbor 珍珠港 (PG-13)	Action Drama Romance War	Touchstone Pictures	105.0	Big Shot's Funeral 大腕	Comedy Drama New Year's Hit	Huayi Brothers and Taihe Film Investment Co.,Ltd. & Columbia Pictures (Asia)	110.0
	Vertical Limit 垂直极限	Action Adventure	Columbia Pictures	29.6	The Marriage Certificate 谁说我不在乎	Comedy Drama	Beijing Forbidden City Film Co.	33.0
	The Mummy Returns 木乃伊归来	Action Adventure Fantasy	Universal Pictures	29.0	Gua Sha Treatment 刮痧	Drama Chinese Medicine	Beijing Forbidden City Film Co.	27.0
	Rush Hour 2 尖峰时刻	Action Comedy	New Line Cinema	15.0	Yuzhou yu Ren (Universe and Human) 宇宙与人	Science Education Documentary	Beijing Science & Education Film Studio	21.0
	Proof of Life 生命的证据	Action Thriller	Castle Rock Entertainment	4.8	Roots and Branches 我的兄弟姐妹	Drama Family	Tianshan Film Studio	20.0
	Chicken Run 小鸡快跑 (G)	Family Animation Comedy	DreamWorks SKG		Purple Sunset 紫日	War Humanity	Beijing Forbidden City Film Co.	8.0

	Charlie's Angels 霹雳天使	Action Adventure Comedy	Columbia Pictures		Red Turn 走出西柏坡	History Politics	Shanghai Film Studio	8.0
	The 6th Day 第六日	Action Sci-Fi	Phoenix Pictures		Shan Ling Xiong Meng 闪灵凶猛	Horror	Guangzhou City Film Studio	6.0
	Meet the Parents 拜见岳父大人	Comedy Romance	Universal Pictures		Happy Day 幸福时光	Drama New Year's Hit	Guangxi Film Studio	5.5
	Enemy at the Gates 兵临城下	Action Drama War	Paramount Pictures		Zhen Xin (Wholehearted) 真心	Drama Based on Reportage	Shanghai Paradise Film and Television Group	>2.0
	Swordfish 剑鱼行动	Action Thriller Crime	Warner Bros. Pictures					
	The Mask of Zorro 佐罗的面具	Action Adventure Western	TriStar Pictures					
	Lara Croft: Tomb Raider 古墓丽影	Action Adventure Fantasy	Paramount Pictures					

	Antitrust 反托拉斯行 动	Thriller Crime	Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer	
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Appendix B. Imported American Films and Top 10 Chinese Domestic Films (2002-2010)

Year	Imported American Films				Top 10 Chinese Domestic Films			
	Film Title	Genre	Production Company	Box Office (million yuan RMB)	Film Title	Genre	Production Company	Box Office (million yuan RMB)
2002 (16)	Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone 哈利波特与魔法石(PG)	Family Adventure Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	59.0	Hero 英雄	Action Adventure Drama	Beijing New Picture Film Co. & Elite Group Enterprises	250.0
	The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring 指环王(PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy	New Line Cinema	56.0	Together 和你在一起	Drama Father-son Violin	21 Century Shengkai Film	13.0
	Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones 星球大战 2 (PG)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy Sci-Fi	Lucasfilm	45.0	The Missing Gun 寻枪	Crime Drama Mystery	Huayi Brothers and Taihe Film Investment Co.,Ltd.	12.0

	Spider-Man 蜘蛛侠 (PG-13)	Family Action Sci-Fi	Columbia Pictures	43.0	Fall in Love at First Sight 一见钟情	Romance Drama	Beijing Forbidden City Film Co.	
	The Bourne Identity 谍影重重	Action Mystery Thriller	Universal Pictures	15.2	Charging out Amazon 冲出亚马逊	Drama Adventure	August First Film Studio	
	Stuart Little 2 精灵鼠小弟 2 (PG)	Family Comedy Fantasy	Columbia Pictures	12.0	I Love You 我爱你	Romance Drama	Xi an Film Studio	
	E.T. the Extra- Terrestrial: 20th Anniversary Celebration 外星人(PG)	Family Adventure Sci-Fi	Universal Studios Home Video	11.0	Ghosts 凶宅幽灵	Horror	Yunnan Minority Film Studio	
	Shrek 怪物史瑞克(PG)	Family Animation	DreamWorks SKG	6.5	Chief Executive Officer 首席执行官	Drama	Beijing Film Studio	
	Planet of the Apes 决战猩球	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Twentieth Century- Fox		25 Kids and a Dad 二十五个孩子一 个爹	Family Comedy	Beijing Oriental Sunny Culture Exchange Co.,Ltd.	

	The One 宇宙追缉令	Action Sci-Fi	Revolution Studios		Gada Meilin 嘎达梅林	Drama Adventure	Beijing Forbidden City Film Co.	
	Jurassic Park III 侏罗纪公园 3 (PG-13)	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Universal Pictures					
	The Princess Diaries 公主日记 (G)	Family Comedy Romance	Walt Disney Pictures					
	Ice Age 冰川世纪 (PG)	Family Animation Comedy	Twentieth Century- Fox					
	Windtalkers 风语者	Drama War	Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer					
	The Tuxedo 神奇燕尾服	Action Comedy	DreamWorks SKG					
	Bad Company 临时特工(PG-13)	Action Comedy	Touchstone Pictures					

2003 (17)	Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets 哈利波特与密室 (PG)	Family Adventure Fantasy Mystery	Warner Bros. Pictures	52.0	Cell Phone 手机	Black Comedy New Year's Hit Drama	Huayi Brothers and Taihe Film Investment Co.,Ltd. & Columbia Pictures (Asia)	53.0
	The Matrix Reloaded 黑客帝国：重装上阵	Action Adventure Sci-Fi Thriller	Warner Bros. Pictures	43.0	Warriors of Heaven and Earth 天地英雄	Action Adventure Drama Swordsmen	Huayi Brothers and Taihe Film Investment Co.,Ltd. & Columbia Pictures (Asia)	41.0
	The Matrix Revolutions 黑客帝国：矩阵革命	Action Adventure Sci-Fi Thriller	Warner Bros. Pictures	41.66	Infernal Affairs III 无间道 III 终极无间	Action Crime Drama Thriller	Media Asia Films Ltd.& Tianjin Film Studio	32.0
	Finding Nemo 海底总动员 (G)	Family Animation Adventure Comedy	Walt Disney Pictures	33.8	Cat and Mouse 老鼠爱上猫	New Year's Hit Drama Comedy Swordsmen	Media Asia Films Ltd. & Changchun Film Studio	23.0

	Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines 终结者 3	Action Sci-Fi Thriller	C-2 Pictures	28.2	Zhou Yu's Train 周渔的火车	Drama Romance Arty	China Film Co- Production Corporation & Hong Kong Glory Top Properties	20.0
	Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl 加勒比海盗 (PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy	Walt Disney Pictures	27.0	Heroic Duo 双雄	Drama Action	Sil-Metropole Organization Ltd.	14.0
	The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers 指环王: 双塔奇兵(PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy	New Line Cinema	24.0	Warm Spring 暖春	Drama Village	Shanxi Film Studio	12.0
	The Italian Job 偷天换日	Action Crime Thriller	Paramount Pictures	17.0	Deng Xiao Ping 邓小平	Biography	Pearl River Film Co.	11.0
	Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle 霹雳天使 2	Action Adventure Comedy	Columbia Pictures	15.0	Love for All Seasons 百年好合	Romance Comedy	One Hundred Years of Film Company & Tianjin Film Studio	10.0

	Catch Me If You Can 我知道你是谁	Biography Crime Drama	DreamWorks SKG	10.0	Sound of Colors 地下铁	Romance Drama Comic Adapt.	Jet Tone Film & Shanghai Film Group	7.0
	Daredevil 超胆侠 (PG-13)	Family Action Fantasy	Twentieth Century-Fox	9.0				
	The Core 地心抢险记	Action Adventure Thriller	David Foster Productions	8.9				
	Hulk 绿巨人浩克 (PG-13)	Family Action Sci-Fi	Universal Pictures	8.2				
	X-Men 2: X-Men United X战警 2	Family Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Twentieth Century-Fox	3.0				
	Sweet Home Alabama 情归阿拉巴马 (PG-13)	Comedy Romance	Touchstone Pictures					

	The Recruit 谍海计中计 (PG-13)	Action Thriller	Touchstone Pictures					
	Maid in Manhattan 曼哈顿灰姑娘	Comedy Romance	Revolution Studios					
2004 (16)	The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King 指环王: 王者归来(PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy	New Line Cinema	87.0	Kung Fu Hustle 功夫	Action Comedy Fantasy New Year's Hit	Huayi Brothers & Columbia Pictures (Asia)	170.0
	The Day After Tomorrow 后天	Action Adventure Sci-Fi Thriller	Twentieth Century- Fox	82.4	House of Flying Daggers 十面埋伏	Action Romance Drama Ancient Costume	Beijing New Picture Film Co. & Elite Group Enterprises	250.0
	Troy 特洛伊	Drama History Romance War	Warner Bros. Pictures	70.0	A World Without Thieves 天下无贼	Action Romance Drama New Year's Hit	Huayi Brothers and Taihe Film Investment Co.,Ltd.	120.0

	Spider-Man 2 蜘蛛侠 2 (PG-13)	Family Action Sci-Fi	Columbia Pictures	52.0	New Police Story 新警察故事	Action Drama	China Film Group Corporation	43.0
	Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban 哈利波特与 阿兹卡班的 囚徒 (PG)	Family Adventure Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	36.6	Zhang Si De 张思德	Biography	Beijing Forbidden City Film Co.	38.0
	King Arthur 亚瑟王	Adventure History War	Touchstone Pictures	26.0	2046	Romance Fantasy Sci-Fi	Jet Tone Film & Shanghai Film Studio	30.0
	Cold Mountain 冷山	Drama Romance War	Miramax Films	26.5	Magic Kitchen 魔幻厨房	Romance Comedy	Media Asia Films Ltd.	25.0
	Master and Commander 怒海争锋	Action Drama War	Twentieth Century- Fox	20.4	The Twins Effect II 千机变 II 花都大 战	Drama Fantasy	Shenzhen Film Studio & JCE Movies Ltd.	23.0

	Garfield 加菲猫 (PG)	Family Comedy Based On Comic	New Line Cinema	20.96	Baober in Love 恋爱中的宝贝	Drama Mystery Romance	Beijing Rosat Film & TV Production Co. Ltd.	15.0
	The Rundown 丛林奇兵	Action Adventure Comedy	Columbia Pictures	15.79	Deng Xiao Ping :1928 邓小平 :1928	Biography	Shanghai Film Group	14.0
	I, Robot 机械公敌	Action Sci-Fi	Twentieth Century- Fox	14.5				
	Paycheck 致命报酬	Sci-Fi Thriller	Paramount Pictures	13.65				
	Shrek 2 怪物史瑞克 2 (PG)	Family Animation Comedy	DreamWorks SKG					
	S.W.A.T. 反恐特警组	Action Crime	Columbia Pictures					
	The Bourne Supremacy 谍影重重 2	Action Mystery Thriller	Universal Pictures					

	Ladder 49 烈火雄心 (PG-13)	Action Drama Thriller	Touchstone Pictures					
2005 (17)	Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire 哈利波特 与火焰杯 (PG-13)	Family Adventure Fantasy Mystery	Warner Bros. Pictures	94.9	The Promise 无极	Action Drama Fantasy Ancient Costume New Year's Hit	21 Century Shengkai Film	179.5
	Star Wars: Episode III : Revenge of the Sith 星球大战前传：西 斯的反击(PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy Sci-Fi	Lucas film	75.54	The Myth 神话	Action Adventure Ancient Costume Fantasy	China Film Group & JCE Entertainment Ltd.	95.50
	Mr. & Mrs. Smith 史密斯行动	Action Comedy Romance	New Regency Pictures	61.98	Seven Swords 七剑	Action Drama	Beijing Ciwen Digital Oriental Film & TV Production Co.	83.45
	War of the Worlds 世界之战	Adventure Sci-Fi Thriller	Paramount Pictures	52.99	Initial D 头文字 D	Action Drama Comic Adapt	Media Asia Films Ltd.	63.0

National Treasure 国家宝藏 (PG)	Family Action Adventure	Walt Disney Pictures	35.92	A Chinese Tale Story 情颠大圣	Comedy Fantasy Romance	Huayi Brothers & Xi an Film Studio	50.0
The Legend of Zorro 佐罗传奇	Action Adventure	Columbia Pictures	30.76	Seoul Raiders 韩城攻略	Comedy Action	Media Asia Films Ltd.	41.0
Madagascar 马达加斯加 (PG)	Family Animation Comedy	DreamWorks SKG	28.19	Riding Aolne for Thousands of Miles 千里走单骑	Drama Father Son	Beijing New Picture Film Co.	30.0
The Interpreter 翻译风波	Crime Drama Thriller	Working Title Films	27.24	Perhaps Love 如果·爱	Musical Romance New Year's Hit	Astro-Shaw Television Broadcasts Ltd.	29.0
Stealth 绝密飞行	Action Sci-Fi	Columbia Pictures	26.40	Ren Chang Xia 任常霞	Biography	Shanghai Huayu Film Company Ltd.	27.0
Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid 狂蟒之灾 2: 搜寻血兰	Horror Thriller Adventure	Screen Gems	25.33	Sheng Si Niu Yu Ru (The Life of Niu Yu Ru) 生死牛玉儒	Biography	Beijing Forbidden City Film Co.	20.0

The Incredibles 超人总动员 (PG)	Family Animation Sci-Fi	Walt Disney Pictures	21.0	
Batman Begins 蝙蝠侠： 侠影之谜(PG-13)	Action Adventure Crime	Warner Bros. Pictures	20.7	
Fantastic Four 神奇四侠 (PG-13)	Family Fantasy Sci-Fi	Twentieth Century- Fox	20.0	
Shark Tale 鲨鱼故事 (PG)	Family Animation Comedy	DreamWorks SKG	15.20	
Flight of the Phoenix 凤凰劫	Action Adventure Drama	Twentieth Century- Fox	14.62	
xXx: State of the Union 极限战士	Action Crime Adventure	Columbia Pictures	14.0	
The Polar Express (G) 极地特快	Family Animation Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	9.0	

2006 (17)	The Da Vinci Code 达芬奇密码	Drama Mystery Thriller	Columbia Pictures	105.83	Curse of the Golden Flower 满城尽带黄金甲	Drama Adventure Ancient Costume New Year's Hit	Beijing New Picture Film Co.	240.0
	King Kong 金刚 (PG-13)	Family Adventure Drama Romance	Universal Pictures	102.31	The Banquet 夜宴	Action Drama Ancient Costume	Huayi Brothers & Media Asia Films Ltd.	130.0
	Mission: Impossible 3 谍中谍 3	Action Adventure Thriller	Paramount Pictures	81.2	Fearless (Huo Yuan Jia) 霍元甲	Action Drama History	China Film Group & Hero China International	102.0
	Poseidon 海神号	Disaster Thriller	Warner Bros. Pictures	68.93	Rob-B-Hood 宝贝计划	Action Comedy	Huayi Brothers & JCE Entertainment Ltd.	94.0
	Superman Returns 超人归来 (PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Warner Bros. Pictures	62.56	Battle of Wits 墨攻	Action War	Huayi Brothers & Sundream Motion Pictures	62.0

	The Chronicles of Narnia : The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe 纳尼亚传奇 (PG)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy	Walt Disney Pictures	61.0	Dragon Tiger Gate 龙虎门	Action Drama Comicbook Adapt	Mandarin Films Distribution Co. & Beijing Poly-bona Film Publishing Co. Ltd.	51.3
	Garfield: A Tail of Two Kitties 加菲猫 2 (PG)	Family Comedy	Twentieth Century- Fox	57.65	Confession of Pain 伤城	Crime Drama Thriller	Media Asia Films Ltd. & Beijing Poly-bona Film Publishing Co. Ltd.	43.0
	Eight Below 南极大冒险 (PG)	Family Adventure Drama	Walt Disney Pictures	55.70	The Knot 云水谣	Drama Romance War	China Film Group & Emperor Motion Pictures	36.0
	Ice Age II : The Meltdown 冰川世纪 2 (PG)	Family Animation Adventure Comedy	Twentieth Century- Fox	36.53	The Tokyo Trial 东京审判	Drama History War	Shanghai Film Studio	24.0
	Miami Vice 迈阿密风云	Action Crime Drama	Universal Pictures	32.0	Crazy Stone 疯狂的石头	Comedy Crime Gangster	Focus Films & Warner China Film HG Corporation	23.5

	When a Stranger Calls 来电惊魂	Horror Thriller	Screen Gems	24.0	
	World Trade Center 世贸中心	Drama History	Paramount Pictures	24.0	
	Firewall 防火墙	Crime Thriller	Warner Bros. Pictures	22.15	
	X-Men: The Last Stand X 战警 3: 背水一战 (PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Twentieth Century- Fox	22.0	
	Cars 赛车总动员 (G)	Family Animation Comedy Sport	Walt Disney Pictures	21.45	
	The Sentinel 一级戒备	Action Crime	Twentieth Century- Fox	21.0	

	Open Season 丛林大反攻 (PG)	Family Animation Adventure Comedy	Sony Pictures Animation	16.0				
2007 (17)	Transformers 变形金刚 (PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Sci-Fi	DreamWorks SKG	282.32	Assembly 集结号	Drama War Novel Adapt New Year's Hit	Huayi Brothers & Media Asia Films Ltd.	248.0
	Spider-Man 3 蜘蛛侠 3 (PG-13)	Family Action Sci-Fi	Columbia Pictures	149.71	The Warlords 投名状	Action Drama / War New Year's Hit	China Film Group	201.1
	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix 哈利波特和 凤凰社(PG-13)	Family Adventure Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	145.15	Lust, Caution 色戒	Drama Sex Novel Adapt	Shanghai Film Group	138.0

Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End 加勒比海盗 3: 世界的尽头(PG-13)	Family Action Adventure Fantasy	Walt Disney Pictures	126.0	Protégé 门徒	Drama Thriller Drug	China Film Group	65.0
Casino Royale 007 大战 皇家赌场	Action Adventure Thriller	Columbia Pictures	92.70	Invisible Target 男儿本色	Action Crime	Guangzhou Ying Ming Media Co.	34.0
Night at the Museum 博物馆奇妙夜(PG)	Family Adventure Comedy	Twentieth Century- Fox	64.84	Secret 不能说的秘密	Drama Romance	EDKO Film	37.0
TMNT (Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles) 忍者神龟(PG)	Family Animation Adventure Comedy	Imagi Animation Studios	36.80	Crossed Lines 命运呼叫转移	Comedy New Year's Hit	China Film Group	33.0
Eragon 龙骑士 (PG)	Family Adventure Fantasy	Twentieth Century- Fox	35.0	Flash Point 导火线	Action Drama	Beijing Poly-bona Film Publishing Company	31.0
Ghost Rider 灵魂战车	Action Fantasy Thriller	Columbia Pictures	29.3	Blood Brothers 天堂口	Action Drama Romance	China Film Co- Production Corporation	29.68

	Live Free or Die Hard 虎胆龙威 4	Action Crime Thriller	Twentieth Century-Fox	29.0	Brothers 兄弟之生死同盟	Action Drama Crime	Beijing Poly-bona Film Publishing Company	28.7
	Déjà vu 时空线索 (PG-13)	Action Drama Sci-Fi	Touchstone Pictures	28.0				
	Shooter 生死狙击	Action Crime	Paramount Pictures	28.0				
	The Guardian 惊涛大冒险 (PG-13)	Action Adventure Drama	Touchstone Pictures	25.0				
	The Bourne Ultimatum 谍影重重 3	Action Adventure Thriller	Universal Pictures	23.0				
	Ratatouille 美食总动员 (G)	Family Animation Comedy	Walt Disney Pictures	21.2				
	The Devil Wears Prada 穿普拉达的女王	Comedy Drama	Twentieth Century-Fox	18.0				

	No Reservation 美味情缘	Comedy Drama Romance	Warner Bros. Pictures	13.5				
	Babel 通天塔	Drama	Paramount Pictures	13.0				
	Click 人生遥控器	Comedy Drama Fantasy	Columbia Pictures	12.0				
	Shrek the Third 怪物史瑞克 3 (PG)	Family Animation Comedy	DreamWorks SKG	11.0				
2008 (20)	Kung Fu Panda 功夫熊猫 (PG)	Family Animation Action	DreamWorks Animation	186.0	If You Are The One 非诚勿扰	Romance Comedy New Year's Hit	Huayi Brothers & Media Asia Films Ltd.	325.00
	Quantum of Solace 007: 大战 量子危机	Action Adventure Thriller	Columbia Pictures	142.0	Red Cliff: Part I 赤壁 (上)	History Drama War	China Film Group & Beijing Film Studio	321.00

Hancock 全民超人 汉考克	Action Fantasy Sci-Fi	Columbia Pictures	108.04	Painted Skin 画皮	Horror Action Drama	Shanghai Film Group	230.00
Iron Man 钢铁侠	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Paramount Pictures	92.0	CJ7 长江七号	Sci-Fi Fantasy Family	China Film Group & Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia	203.00
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian 纳尼亚传奇 2	Action Adventure Fantasy Family	Walt Disney Pictures	82.93	The Forbidden Kingdom 功夫之王	Fantasy Adventure Comedy Action	Huayi Brothers & Casey Silver Productions	188.00
10,000 B.C. 史前一万年	Adventure Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	81.0	Forever Enthralled 梅兰芳	Drama Biography	China Film Group & Emperor Motion Pictures	113.70
Wanted 通缉令	Action Crime Thriller	Universal Pictures	73.1	Kung Fu Dunk 大灌篮	Comedy Sport Romance	Shanghai Film Group & Emperor Motion Pictures	112.78
National Treasure: The Book of Secrets 国家宝藏 2 : 夺宝秘笈	Action Adventure Comedy Mystery Thriller	Walt Disney Pictures	67.36	The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon 木乃伊 3	Fantasy Action Adventure Thriller	China Film Co- Production Corporation, Shanghai Film Group & Universal Pictures	109.00

	The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep 尼斯湖水怪 : 深水传说	Family Adventure Fantasy	Revolution Studios	62.48	Ip Man 叶问	Action Biography History Drama	Shanghai Film Group & Mandarin Films Co. Ltd.	96.30
	The Incredible Hulk 无敌浩克	Action Sci-Fi Thriller	Universal Pictures	59.91	Three Kingdoms: Resurrection of the Dragon 三国之见龙卸甲	Action History War	China Film Group & Bona Film Group	69.90
	Journey to the Center of the Earth (3D) 地心历险记 3D	Action Adventure Comedy Sci-Fi Thriller	New Line Cinema	59.49				
	Bolt (3D) 闪电狗 3D	Animation Adventure Comedy	Walt Disney Pictures	44.0				
	The Golden Compass 黑暗物质 : 黄金罗盘	Family Adventure Fantasy	New Line Cinema	35.67				
	Speed Racer 极速赛车手	Action Sport	Warner Bros. Pictures	24.14				

	Hellboy II: The Golden Army 烈焰奇侠： 黄金军团	Action Adventure Fantasy	Universal Pictures	16.40				
	Next 预见未来	Action Sci-Fi	Paramount Pictures	15.26				
	Atonement 赎罪	Drama Romance	Universal Pictures	14.91				
	Fool's Gold 淘金俏冤家	Comedy Romance	Warner Bros. Pictures	13.66				
	Babylon A.D. 生死新纪元	Action Sci-Fi	Twentieth Century- Fox	10.0				
	27 Dresses 27 套礼服	Comedy Romance	Twentieth Century- Fox	0.1				
2009 (19)	2012	Action Adventure Drama	Columbia Pictures	466.00	The Founding of A Republic 建国大业	History Drama	China Film Group & China Movie Channel	420.00

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen 变形金刚 2	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Paramount Pictures	455.00	Bodyguards and Assassins 十月围城	Action History Drama	China Film Group & Shanghai Media and Entertainment Group	293.00
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs 冰川世纪 3	Animation Action Adventure	Twentieth Century- Fox	156.90	A Simple Noodle Story 三枪拍案惊奇	Comedy Costume	Beijing New Picture Film Co.	261.00
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince 哈 利波特 6	Adventure Family Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	156.35	Red Cliff: Part II 赤壁 (下)	History Drama War	China Film Group & Beijing Film Studio	260.00
G.I. Joe: Rise of Cobra 特种部队	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Paramount Pictures	130.50	The Message 风声	Thriller Drama Mystery	Huayi Brothers & Taihe Film Investment	216.00
Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian 博物馆 奇妙夜 2	Action Adventure Comedy	Twentieth Century- Fox	121.32	City of Life and Death 南京, 南 京	History Drama War	China Film Group & Media Asia Films Ltd.	172.00
Terminator Salvation 终结者 2018	Action Drama Sci-Fi	The Halcyon Company	112.32	Silver Medalist 疯狂的赛车	Comedy Adventure	China Film Group	108.5

	Up 飞屋环球记	Animation Adventure	Walt Disney Pictures	90.76	On His Majesty's Secret Service 大内密探零零狗	Comedy Costume	China Film Group & Mega-Vision Pictures	103.00
	X-Men Origins: Wolverine X战警前传：金刚 狼	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Twentieth Century- Fox	80.47	Look For A Star 游龙戏凤	Romance	Huayi Brothers & Media Asia Films Ltd.	102.30
	Dragonball Evolution 七龙珠	Action Adventure Fantasy	Twentieth Century- Fox	65.00	Sophie's Revenge 非常完美	Romance Comedy	China Film Group & CJ Entertainment	94.00
	Star Trek 星际迷航	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Paramount Pictures	58.85	Overheard 窃听风云	Thriller Action Drama	Bona Entertainment & Sil-Metropole Organisation	90.00
	Valkyrie 刺杀希特勒	Drama History	Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer Pictures	57.30	Niu Qi Chong Tian 喜羊羊与灰太狼 之牛气冲天	Animation Family	Shanghai Media Group	85.50
	This Is It 迈克尔.杰克逊 就是这样	Document ary Music	Columbia Pictures	48.26				

	Madagascar 2 马达加斯加 2	Animation Adventure	DreamWorks Animation	34.00				
	Monsters vs. Aliens 大战外星人	Animation Action Adventure	DreamWorks Animation	32.20				
	Knowing 神秘代码	Mystery Sci-Fi	Summit Entertainment	31.83				
	Fast & Furious 赛车风云	Action Crime	Universal Pictures	31.00				
	The Taking of Pelham 1 2 3 骑劫地 下铁	Action Crime Thriller	Columbia Pictures	30.15				
	G-Force 豚鼠特工队	Action Adventure Comedy	Walt Disney Pictures	26.55				
2010 (22)	Avatar 阿凡达	Action Adventure Fantasy	Twentieth Century- Fox	1378.70	Let The Bullets Fly 让子弹飞	Comedy Action	Emei Film Studio & Emperor Motion Pictures	664.70

Inception 盗梦空间	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Warner Bros. Pictures	457.14	Aftershock 唐山大地震	Drama	Huayi Brothers & China Film Group	647.75
Alice in Wonderland 爱丽丝 梦游仙境	Adventure Family Fantasy	Walt Disney Pictures	226.40	If You Are The One 2 非诚勿扰 2	Romance Comedy New Year's Hit	Huayi Brothers & Media Asia Films Ltd.	473.50
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1 哈利波特与死圣 (上)	Adventure Drama Fantasy Mystery	Warner Bros. Pictures	221.10	Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame 狄仁杰之通天帝 国	Action History Mystery Costume	Huayi Brothers	295.50
The Expendables 敢死队	Action Adventure Thriller	Millennium Films	213.06	Ip Man 2 叶问 2	Action Biography History	Mandarin Films Distribution Co. & Beijing ShengShi HuaRei Film Investment & Management Co.	232.34
Iron Man 2 钢铁侠 2	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	Paramount Pictures	176.37	Sacrifice 赵氏孤儿	Drama History Costume	Stellar Megamedia & Shanghai Film Group	196.30

	Clash of the Titans 诸神之战	Action Adventure Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	175.18	Little Big Soldier 大兵小将	Action Adventure Comedy	Bona Entertainment & JCE Movies	160.77
	Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time 波斯王子：时之刃	Action Adventure Fantasy	Walt Disney Pictures	158.22	Just Call Me Nobody 大笑江湖	Costume Action Comedy	Bona Film Group	158.95
	Resident Evil: Afterlife 生化危机 4	Action Adventure Horror	Impact Pictures	143.20	Under the Hawthorn Tree 山楂树之恋	Romance Drama	Beijing New Picture Film Co.	144.13
	Toy Story 3 玩具总动员 3	Animation Family	Walt Disney Pictures	110.90	14 Blades 锦衣卫	Action Costume	Shanghai Film Group & Mediacorp Raintree Pictures	143.64
	How to Train Your Dragon 驯龙记	Animation Adventure Comedy	DreamWorks Animation	91.24				
	Knight and Day 危情谍战	Action Adventure Comedy	Twentieth Century-Fox	90.90				

	Shrek Forever After 怪物史瑞克 4	Animation Adventure Comedy	DreamWorks Animation	88.08	
	Sherlock Holmes 大侦探 福尔摩斯	Action Adventure Crime	Warner Bros. Pictures	81.74	
	The Spy Next Door 邻家特工	Action Comedy Family	Relativity Media	69.74	
	Unstoppable 危情时速	Action Thriller	Twentieth Century- Fox	67.52	
	The Sorcerer's Apprentice 魔法师的学徒	Action Adventure Comedy	Walt Disney Pictures	61.22	
	Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps 华尔街 2	Drama	Edward R. Pressman Film	49.83	
	Robin Hood 罗宾汉	Action Adventure Drama	Universal Pictures	45.00	

	Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole 守卫者传奇	Animation Adventure Fantasy	Warner Bros. Pictures	30.80	
	The Last Airbender 最后的风之子	Action Adventure Fantasy	Paramount Pictures	29.91	
	Percy Jackson & the Lightning Thief 神火之盗	Action Adventure Fantasy	Fox 2000 Pictures	29.10	

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Appendix C. Disney Focus Group

Date: 16th May 2009

Duration: 3pm – 5pm

Venue: Group meeting room at a popular coffee shop (Sculpting in Time) in Beijing.

Participants: With the help of disneybox.com, an unofficial internet forum for Chinese Disney fans, five post-80s were invited to the focus group. They were either working or studying in Beijing at the time. Unfortunately, all participants were male.

Questions	Duration	Remark
1. When you see “Disney” what comes into your mind first? How would you introduce Disney to the others (friends, families)?	Introduction 10 min	
2. What Disney films/televisions have you seen? Can you name your favourite ones? Why do you like them? 3. Have you used materials from Disney films/televisions in your English study? If yes, what were they? Were they provided by your teachers or did you find them yourself? Do you think they are helpful?	General discussion 20 min	
4. Have you seen the film Mulan? Which episode? Have you seen it multiple times? How many times? How do you like it? How would you rate it (0-10)? What do you like the most about this film? 5. Is Mulan in the film different from what you originally know about this character? If yes, what’s the difference? What do you think about Disney’s modification? Which one do you prefer, the Disney one or the original one? 6. Have you seen any Chinese film that you find is similar to Mulan? If yes, in what way? Do you remember any female protagonist in Chinese children’s films/televisions? 7. Do you like the princesses in Disney films? Do you think Mulan falls into this category?	Mulan session: 40 min was allocated to Mulan discussion. However, due to lack of interest, discussion was cut short and finished within 20 min.	Not as expected due to lack of female participants.
8. Have you seen The Lion King? Which episode? Have you seen it multiple times? How many times? How do you like it? How would you rate it (0-10)? What do you like the most about this	The Lion King session: Planned duration for	

<p>film?</p> <p>9. Have you seen any Chinese film that you find is similar to The Lion King? If yes, in what way?</p> <p>10. Apart from entertainment, what else have you got from The Lion King? Have you learnt anything? What have you learnt?</p> <p>11. Do you admire Simba and his experience? Do you ever picture yourself as him? Do you see yourself from him? In what way?</p>	<p>this session was 40 min. Extended to 50 min to accommodate heated discussion.</p>	
<p>12. Besides Mulan and The Lion King, is there anything else about Disney animation films you would like to share? (e.g. 3D vs. 2D)</p> <p>13. Any question to ask me?</p>	<p>20 min</p>	

Appendix D. Transformers Focus Group

Date: 8th June 2012

Duration: 8pm – 9.30pm

Venue: Qingqing Cafe, Tsinghua University, Beijing

Participants: Four participants were invited to the focus group. All of them were active members of the Transformers board of SMTH (one of the most influential university BBS (Bulletin Board System, a popular form of internet forum among college students)). They were all Tsinghua University graduates, now working and living in Beijing.

Questings	Duration	Remark
1. Why do you go to the SMTH Transformers Board and what do you normally do there? 2. Do you consider yourself a Transformers fan? If yes, how long has it been? 3. Imagine you are one of the Transformers, who will you be?	Introduction session: 15 min	
4. Have you seen the original Transformers series? If yes, what do you think of the series? 5. When was the last time you watch the series? 6. Can you describe a scene that gives you the deepest impression?	TV session: 25 min	
7. Have you ever owned a Transformers toy? Do you still have them? Do you remember how much they cost? 8. How did you play with them when you were little? By yourself or with the others? 9. Have you bought any new ones recently?	Toy session: 25 min	Extremely engaged discussion.
10. Which of the Transformers films have you seen? How do you like it? 11. Where did you see the film? When and with whom? 12. Describe your favourite scene of the film. 13. What's your opinion on the Chinese product placement in the film?	Film session: 25 min	

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