**How Chinese Audiences Engage with Hollywood Films with Chinese Elements**

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**Abstract**

Since the 1990s, and especially since China’s entry into the World Trade Organization in 2003, a wave of Hollywood films incorporating Chinese elements has been released in China. Media scholars have interpreted such films in terms of US cultural hegemony, and the changing relationship between China and the USA in an era of globalization. However, no previous empirical research has been done to explore how audiences actually understand these films. This thesis fills this gap by presenting a detailed study of the ways in which Chinese audiences actually make sense of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. It draws on Stuart Hall’s theory of cultural identity, John Corner’s approach to audience interpretations of television programmes and my own quantitative and qualitative audience research. Using a grounded theory approach, it explains how the cultural identity of Chinese audiences influences their interpretation of such films, taking account of their personal and socio-cultural circumstances.

My fieldwork data shows that Chinese audiences engage with such films in more complex ways than a literal interpretation of the films might suggest. For a start, the interpretation of Chinese elements takes diverse forms, given the personal and socio-cultural differences among Chinese audiences. Those audiences do share a general sense of Chinese cultural identity, which helps them make sense of the superficial tangible Chinese elements in Hollywood films, but it is much more difficult to incorporate more intangible Chinese values into such films in a way that Chinese audiences appreciate. These films thus tend to present a Chinese skin but a Hollywood core, which expresses the sense of individualism central to Western identity. This can be compared to the reception of collectivist values in recent popular Chinese films. What this reveal is a relative unacceptance of Chinese elements in Hollywood films by some Chinese audiences.

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**Author’s declaration**

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author of this thesis conducted in accordance with the regulations of the University of York. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this or any other University and no part of this thesis has been published in other places. All sources are acknowledged as References.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Mulan: a Hollywood version of Chinese culture

My wife is Asian. She's a bit irate over this new one [Mulan] and is deeply disappointed there's none of the original songs and that they changed most of the story... (IMDb film review from ianlmeyer, Sep 6th, 2020).

As a 71-year-old Caucasian male, I really enjoyed Mulan 2020. Of course, as a Disney film you would expect flaws, but this time the writers and the director used considerable restraint so as not to make it too "Disneyfied", as they tend to do all too often. An inspirational storyline for younger girls, was enhanced by fantastic visuals and an interesting and at times informative historical backdrop, that helped those ignorant of ancient China, to visualize an imagined time and place different from their own (IMDb film review from garrya-91199, Sep 11th, 2020).

The film [Mulan] is limited to using oriental faces and Chinese architecture. Chinese elements are indeed used in terms of make-up and dress, but they are completely wrong. It is what Westerners imagine, or what they think these items are like. It has nothing to do with China. This is only the film named Mulan. However, everything including the plot just presented it in the style of a Western hero movie (Douban[[1]](#footnote-1) film review from不会破, Sep 6th, 2020).

Mulan 2020 is actually worth watching, but its target is not Chinese audiences, but those who do not understand Chinese culture (Douban film review from 迷天大圣, Sep 9th, 2020).

Mulan, the Chinese female icon from the traditional Chinese Mulan lyrics, has once again been adapted by Hollywood and remade into a live-action version, following the animated version of 1998. The recent high-profile world-wide release of *Mulan*, produced and distributed by Disney in 2020, has aroused controversy and debate in both Western countries and China, as demonstrated by the above quotations, extracted from IMDb (an online film database developed initially in the UK but now owned by Amazon) and Douban (an online Chinese film forum). It is interesting to look at the entirely distinct online reviews of *Mulan* 2020[[2]](#footnote-2) from Western and Chinese viewers. The second Western viewer likes this film due to his consideration of a less “Disneyfied” version and a sufficient depiction of Chinese culture. The other three viewers are suspicious or critical of its use of Chinese culture with regard to the superficial Chinese elements included in the film but the absence of a deep-seated version of Chinese culture. As with the box-office performance of *Mulan* 1998[[3]](#footnote-3), the new *Mulan* succeeded in the US but failed to gain popularity in the Chinese market. *Mulan*’s release in 2020 may have triggered audience nostalgia for *Mulan* 1998, but it again drew academic attention to debates about Hollywood’s inclusion of Chinese cultural elements and its remake of Chinese culture.

*Mulan* 1998 is not the first Hollywood film featuring Chinese culture, and *Mulan* 2020 will not be the last. The inclusion of Chinese cultural elements has been a general rather than a new trend in Hollywood film production, especially in the context of globalization. This study will not undertake a deeper investigation of *Mulan* 2020, since it was released too late to includeas a case study in the empirical audience research at the heart of this thesis. However, it highlights the purpose of this study, which is to move beyond textual analysis to look at the Hollywood films with Chinese elements in the context of globalization. Specifically, it will explore the issue of how Chinese viewers today engage with and interpret recent Hollywood films featuring Chinese cultural elements.

Hollywood’s penchant for Chinese motifs and themes began in the 1920s ­(Wang and Yeh, 2005). For various historical reasons, although the appearance of Chinese elements in Hollywood films is not a new phenomenon, the representation of those Chinese elements has gone through a long process of transition from representations full of malice to representations that fully embrace China. In the 1920s and 1930s, the most typical Chinese elements in Hollywood movies were two screen images: the gentle Chinese detective with decadent ideas, Charlie Chan, and the wicked boss dressed in Qing style, Fu Manzhou. Much later, from the 1980s onwards, with China's economic, political and cultural reforms, and its opening up to the rest of the world, especially the opening of its film market, Hollywood films with positive Chinese elements were more vigorously launched into China. This was further enhanced by a desire for Chinese economic cooperation with other nations, and Hollywood films returned to the Chinese market, but with a different appearance.

Hollywood films in this study refer to all of those which are produced, distributed by or co-produced with Hollywood studios. Chinese elements are defined according to how they are recognised by Chinese viewers, as revealed through my audience research. Such elements include images, icons and customs embodying both the traditional and modern spirit of the nation, Chinese cultural characteristics associated with its national identity and interests. Chinese cultural elements thus include both tangible objects and more intangible values and questions of philosophy. An increasing number of seemingly more positive and appealing Chinese cultural elements, ranging from Chinese actors and directors, to buildings, clothes, food and scenes full of Chinese flavour, have embedded themselves into Hollywood films. Whether these films are permeated with a sense of Chinese values or philosophy is another matter.

## 1.2 Globalization, Hollywood and China

The popularity of these Hollywood films featuring Chinese culture has attracted the attention of both critics and viewers in China. Various pieces of relevant research have been conducted on this topic in China, particularly in the last 20 years (for example, Li, 1997; Li, 2002; Zhang, 2012; Zhang and Cao, 2017; Sun, 2010; Jiang, 2007; Xie, 2018; Zhang, 2018, etc.). According to Zhang (2018), there have been 1088 articles related to Hollywood-China relations published in core journals from 1994 to 2016, according to CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure, the biggest academic database in China) and 215 books relevant to the discussion of Hollywood in the National Library of China.

The investigation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements involves a range of disciplines including globalization studies, sociology, cultural studies and media studies. The popularity of the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films can be ascribed to two reasons. Firstly, the process of globalization in the twentieth century, especially since China’s entry to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), has increasingly fostered global communication and enhanced the transnational relationship between China and the rest of the world.

Due to the soaring development of science and technology and the proliferation of media communication, the world is shrinking as never before (Dissanayake, 2006). The interconnectedness of and the communication between nations are intensified by global circumstance and transnational communication across national boundaries compresses the world and promotes relations between nations. The sweeping process of globalization has triggered the transformation of politics, the economy and culture in different countries in the global era and has enriched relationships across national boundaries in terms of culture and communication. Anthony Giddens calls the emergence of global culture and economy, and the arrival of science, information and technological society as a “world system” (Giddens, 1986: 36; Yin and Xiao, 2011: 33). Culture, in this sense as an important aspect of globalization, is no longer limited to what is communicated within a country or society. Rather, Eastern and Western culture have converged and fused in various ways. Cultural globalization is seen as a continuously hot topic in the field of international communication (Su, 2011).

The discussion of cultural globalization, Diana Crane (2002) suggests, can be categorized into four models. The first model is what some media and cultural scholars consider as cultural or media imperialism (Tomlinson, 1991; Salwen, 1991), which refers to the imposition of a more powerful nation’s culture, belief and ideology on other countries. As some scholars argue, it refers to unbalanced development in terms of economy, politics and culture in the globalizing world and particularly emphasizes the dissemination of American culture to the rest of the world. Alternatively, Straubhaar (1991, 2007: 25-26) proposes the argument of “cultural identification with various cultures, nations and regions and cultural proximity” which competes with the idea of cultural imperialism. Rather than considering “linear imposition of the cultures of the strong on the weak, or of industrial centres on less developed peripheries” (Straubhaar, 2007: 37), the second model concerning about the argument of cultural hybridization considers that there is no clear boundaries between core and periphery nations. (for example, see Pieterse, 1995; Appadurai, 1990; Bhabha, 1994). The concept of hybridization has become a new facet of the debate on global culture in modernity. Pieterse considers the process of globalization as a process of hybridization, resulting in “a global melange” (1995: 45). The flow of media images and narratives across geographically national boundaries and communities is proposed by Appadurai (1990) as one of the “scapes” of globalization. This creates what Pieterse calls “a third space” where different cultural elements encounter and transform each other (Papastergiadis, 2000: 170) and “a site of struggle and resistance” against imperialist powers (Kraidy, 2002: 316). With the purpose of suppressing the line between core and periphery, the argument about hybridization in the communication of global culture is a critical “departure from the linear diffusion model of ‘the West to the rest’” as suggested by cultural imperialism (Wang and Yeh, 2005: 176). The third model is what Crane sees as “reception theory” (2002: 4), which provides a perspective from audiences, insisting that audiences actively rather than passively and vulnerably respond to global media products, and that audiences from different nations, regions or racial communities understand the same media content differently. This model effectively challenges the argument of the vulnerable nation facing the dissemination of global culture. Lastly, the fourth aspect is the assertion of a nation’s cultural policy strategy to resist, counter and negotiate with global cultural communication and to preserve national culture in the context of globalization.

In this thesis, the investigation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements will more or less draw on all of these models, but it will especially focus on the third model, concerning the issue of audience reception. Like other forms of visual communication, modern films regarded as a part of popular culture are subsumed into the topic of cultural globalization. Within the increasing process of globalization, films have appeared to be different compared with the past. A more varied range of films are available to international audiences. At the same time, Hollywood films, the symbol of American popular culture, have become increasingly international and transnational (Crane, 2014: 377), attracting both American and non-American audiences. It should be addressed here that, in this thesis, what I mean by American films refers to Hollywood even though many Hollywood films are clearly global or transnational productions. As Dissanayake (2006) holds, Hollywood stemming from America is constantly transforming and reinventing itself to reach beyond itself and engage cross-culturally.

In film studies, transnational cinema is not a new phenomenon. Some scholars have argued for some time for the necessity of a shift from national perspectives to both national and transnational consideration in terms of film and cultural research in the global context, particularly since 2005 (Shaw, 2017). There is a wide debate about the idea of transnational cinema (e.g Tim Bergfelder, Andrew Higson, Lucy Mazdon etc. as referred to by Austin Fisher and Iain Robert Smith in a critical roundtable (Fisher and Robert, 2016). Higson noted the limitation of national cinema in an article first published in 2000, and attempted to explain the meaning of a transnational perspective in the field of film studies (Higson, 2000). He considers transnational cinema as a useful way to describe six features of contemporary cinema, including international production, distribution and exhibition arrangements across national boundaries; the involvement of producers from more than one country; the use of content or narration from different nations to enable audiences to encounter different cultural background; “the ways in which such films will occasionally draw attention to the social and political implications of such journeys and encounters”; “the ways in which films draw on cultural traditions, genres and formal conventions associated with different countries”; and the ways that international audiences interpret such films (Higson, 2016). Bergfelder also emphasizes the connections and interactions between national cinemas and nations. In addition, as Steve Rawle indicates, there is a consensus in terms of what transnational scholars contend lies in “the pluralism and polycentrism”of much of contemporary cinema (Rawle, 2018). Based on the roundtable discussion, Rawle, in his *Transnational Cinema,* explained the difference between “world cinema” and transnational cinema and used Hollywood as one example to discuss the way in which “transnational cinemas engage with the national” (2018: xiv).

Going back to the Hollywood films with Chinese elements that I will discuss in this study, they can be considered as transnational constructs in the context of contemporary globalization. Not only has globalization offered an international economic environment within which Hollywood produces and distributes its film products on a global scale (Song, 2018), it also creates the opportunity for Hollywood studios to seek cross-cultural resources and materials from across the world. The Chinese market, with the world’s largest audiences, has increasingly attracted Hollywood’s attention and interests. On the one hand, US media executives foresee the “prospect of a global Chinese audience that includes more moviegoers and more television households than the United States and Europe combined”, as Michael Curtin (2007) writes in his *Playing to the World’s Biggest Audience*. Many scholars believe that “this vast and increasingly wealthy global China market will serve as a foundation for emerging media conglomerates that could shake the very foundations of Hollywood’s century-long hegemony” (2007: 3-4).

This relationship between Hollywood and China can be understood in two ways. First, one significant goal of the US is to enhance its hegemonic power over cultural resources around the world and to promote its position of cultural imperialism by way of transnationally disseminating its cultural/media products or content. Yin and Xiao (2011) believe the export of cultural products not only helps to create new markets and promote profits, but also and more importantly to permeate cultural values and ideology carried by the medium commodity. The exportation of ’Hollywood-style’ culture is the strategy of cultural imperialism and cultural colonialism and exporting the American way of life (Yin and Xiao, 2011; Miller et al., 2001). To achieve global audiences and maintain its dominance in the international film industry, Hollywood is devoted to continuously producing costly blockbusters and cinematic spectacles by fusing its products with other cultural exotics or specificity (Ezra and Rowden, 2006) to create a hybrid with culture faceless.

To enter the Chinese market, with its serious censorship regime and limitations on foreign films, Hollywood comes up with several ways of reaching Chinese audiences. One significant and relatively effective strategy is what I will examine in this study. That is, the employment of local cultural elements to cater to the tastes of the Chinese audiences. Hollywood’s attempts to embrace Chinese culture and to pick up Chinese stories and material for its films gives rise to Hollywood films featuring Chinese elements.

The second way in which we can consider the relationship between Hollywood and China is from the perspective of the Chinese position. To encourage films that include some elements of Chinese ideologies and cultural assumptions, China too adapts its cultural policy and asserts its soft power. Deng Xiaoping's thoughts about opening up to the outside world in 1978 have given birth to the Chinese strategy of "going global" (Zou Chu Qu). Since then, Chinese culture with a distinctive Eastern style has demonstrated its unique charm to the world. At the Symposium on Literary and Artistic Work held in October 2014, President Xi Jinping put forward his expectation:

Literary and artistic workers should tell Chinese stories, disseminate the Chinese voice, elucidate the Chinese spirit and show the Chinese style, so that foreigners can deepen their understanding of China and enhance their understanding of China by appreciating its cultural works. We should publicize and promote our excellent culture and art to the world, let both foreign people and Chinese feel the charm in the aesthetic process, and deepen their understanding of Chinese culture. (Xinhua News Agency, 2015).

The general process of global integration results in both Hollywood’s promotional incentive for more extended transnational markets and the interaction and hybridization of American and Chinese culture. What is more, the Chinese cultural strategy of “welcoming in” (Yin Jin Lai) opens China up to foreign culture and contributes to the introduction of American cultural products to the Chinese market.

## 1.3 The importance of audience research

Most media scholars in China have interpreted the issue of Hollywood films with Chinese elements by using textual analysis or by looking at it from the angle of considering the relationship between US and China. But little academic evidence has been provided to explore the meaning of these hybrid films from a sociological perspective, by focusing on Chinese audiences. Actually, there is a lack of empirical audience research in the field of media and cultural studies in Chinese academia. According to a report written by Hu, Cencen (2017), Chinese audience research is mainly focused on new media and social media audiences, using a more superficially quantitative approach such as surveys, but there is a need for a deeper qualitative understanding of Chinese audiences. In particular, there is a lack of sociological or critical consideration of the audiences of Hollywood films with Chinese elements in China. *The Chinese Cinema Book*, edited by Lim and Ward (2020) and published by a top UK publisher, in conjunction with the BFI - the British Film Institute, presents itself as a fundamental book for understanding China cinema. But it demonstrates the lack of material about Chinese film audiences or audience research in academic scholarship about Chinese cinema.

In my opinion, the lack of qualitative audience research and of critical and sociological consideration of Chinese audiences is because most of the media scholars in China come from a literature background. This may result in an obsession with the film content or texts themselves but a neglect of the social and cultural contexts in which audiences watch and understand such films. However, there are huge differences in cultural traditions between China and the Western world, which means it is difficult for researchers themselves to identify what different performance or responses cultural difference may cause among the audiences in the process of transnational communication. The reception of Hollywood films with Chinese elements, to a large extent, is revealed by examining how real Chinese audiences make sense of and respond to them. In this sense, it is essential and critical to perceive the Chinese audiences’ attitudes towards and engagement with Hollywood films with Chinese cultural elements. That is the purpose of this thesis.

## 1.4 The core research questions: towards a contribution to knowledge

As previously mentioned, the popularity of Chinese local or indigenous cultural elements appearing in transnational Hollywood films has triggered both a public debate among general Chinese audiences, evident in comments on the Internet and on social media, but also an extensive scholarly debate about this issue within academia. As also noted, research on Hollywood films with Chinese elements has mainly focused on the film texts themselves, and there is nearly no empirical data about the reception of these hybrid films by Chinese viewers and how this relates to their sense of cultural and national identity.

In this thesis, I will fill this gap by presenting both qualitative and quantitative audience studies of how such films are socially and culturally valued by Chinese adult audiences in contemporary China. I will consider the reception process in relation to both Chinese culture as a shared body of knowledge and understanding and specific demographic factors such as personal and socio-cultural issues that may impact how Chinese viewers engage with these films. This thesis addresses four crucial questions concerning the reception of Hollywood films with Chinese elements in China. The four questions are:

1. What sorts of cultural elements are presented as Chinese in Hollywood films?
2. How do Chinese viewers understand and respond to Hollywood films with Chinese elements?
3. How do different demographic and socio-cultural factors shape the responses of such viewers?
4. To what extent do Chinese viewers, through recognizing and interpreting Chinese elements in Hollywood films, relate the representation of such elements to their own cultural and national identity?

In a general sense, this thesis will present empirical research that can contribute to a broader understanding of contemporary Chinese audiences. Specifically speaking, the original contribution to knowledge by this thesis involves three aspects. By looking at the issue of Hollywood films with Chinese local cultural elements and how they are understood by Chinese local viewers, this study firstly provides a case study in the field of the transnational communication and reception of hybrid films. it generates many ideas about how Chinese viewers deal with transnational films in relation to indigenous culture in a global era. The second contribution to knowledge lies in the adoption of Western audience theory and methodology in the field of media/cultural studies to understand Chinese audiences. This involves a local adaptation of some key Western concepts in the context of the specifics of contemporary Chinese society and China as a nation. Thirdly, this study tests and develops one particular approach to reception studies, namely John Corner’s three-step approach to audience interpretation of television programmes (1995). The key new development of Corner’s approach undertaken in this thesis is to add a fourth step, analysing how Chinese audiences physically respond to watching Hollywood films with Chinese elements; I call this derivative behaviour (see Chapter 6).

## 1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of eight chapters. The next chapter, Chapter 2, conducts a literature review on the key themes and theories in relation to this project. The literature review is focused on three strands of scholarship. The first is about theoretical and empirical approaches in the existing research about Hollywood films featuring Chinese elements. The second considers issues concerning Hollywood strategy in relation to the Chinese film market, in which the factors and motivations that drive Hollywood producers to integrate Chinese cultural elements will be summarised. The third strand of the literature review looks at some of the most significant paradigms in screen audience reception studies, within which field this study is based. Each strand will attempt to critically examine relevant research, theories, themes and approaches drawn from both Western and Chinese academia, in order to theoretically and methodologically frame my research. An integrated review of both Western and Chinese literature on film communication and audience interpretation serves two purposes. On the one hand, as my research takes place within the context of globalization, specifically pointing to the articulation and hybridization of American and Chinese culture, the integrated literature review is able to offer a panorama of the knowledge in this field on a global scale. On the other hand, an integrated review of both Western and Chinese scholarship will establish a dialogue between Western-originated media and communication theories and social and cultural issues concerning the contemporary Chinese film market and Chinese audiences. In terms of Western theories, I identify the work of Stuart Hall (1990, 1992) on cultural identity and John Corner (1995) on audience interpretation as particularly useful.

Chapter 3 introduces issues concerning the methodology I adopted for my research. It consists of four parts. The first part will introduce the mixed methods used in this study and explain the reasons why I adopted a particular mixed methods approach, including both quantitative and qualitative investigations, in order to deal with my specific research questions. In the second part, I will concern the ethical issues in the process of the empirical audience research. Section 3.4 and 3.5 will respectively provide a detailed discussion of the use and process of the chosen research methods, including film textual analysis, questionnaire surveys, in-depth interviews and case studies. Guided by grounded theory, I will concentrate on the process of research data analysis as it moves towards writing up the findings in section 3.5. The final section will summarise the gains and limitations of my mixed method research practice.

Drawing on Hall’s concept of cultural identity (1990, 1992) and Corner’s three-step approach (1995) to television programme interpretation, Chapters 4-7 will provide data analysis based on the empirical research I undertook from May 2018 to November 2018. The data collected from questionnaire surveys and in-depth interviews provided a deep investigation of Chinese viewers’ engagement with Hollywood films with Chinese elements. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 explore general issues by analysing any films referred to by my respondents rather than limiting the analysis to specific cases. From these I have found that the ways in which Chinese audiences interpret Hollywood films with Chinese elements are complex, both textually and physically.

Chapter 4 is the first analytical chapter and discusses the findings in terms of Chinese audiences’ engagement with the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films including both textual interpretation and reception. The chapter includes a perspective on the different modes of response Chinese audiences adopt as they engage with such elements in Hollywood films; the definition of Chinese elements as indicated by the cultural features mentioned by respondents as particularly impressive; the different ways in which they respond to what I define as tangible and intangible Chinese elements; and a discussion about how audiences respond differently to Hollywood films with Chinese elements, on the one hand, and recent popular Chinese films, on the other hand. Here, I employ audience response analysis but supplement this with substantial textual analysis; in particular, I explore the ways my respondents engage with ideas of individualism and collectivism in such films.

Chapter 4 thus adopts a macro-level of analysis and draws on Hall’s first level of cultural identity as a shared identity. Chapter 5 draws on Hall’s second level of cultural identity as differentiated rather than shared, and adopts a micro-level of analysis, focusing on a range of demographic, socio-cultural and personal features of my respondents to look at how these features shape their different responses to the Chinese elements in Hollywood films. The first part of the chapter will briefly introduce information about the different demographic categories into which my respondents can be divided. The second part, based on my questionnaire survey data, will explain which differences or similarities in their interpretations of Chinese elements can be attributed to different demographic categories. In the final section, I will draw on the in-depth interview responses and mainly concentrate on the different interpretations of Chinese cultural elements according to my respondents’ personal and socio-cultural situation.

In the Chapter 6, I will go beyond the analysis of viewers’ textual interpretation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements to look at their physical, behavioural activity post-consumption, which I name derivative behaviour. I will look at three aspects of derivative behaviour, including tourism induced by Hollywood films with Chinese elements, the purchasing of tie-in consumer goods, and other special behaviours after watching such films, such as the imitation of film characters. The main part of the discussion will draw on the concept of film-induced tourism, by introducing the issue of Chinese film-related tourism and identifying different types of Chinese film-related tourists and the reasons that give rise to this type of tourism.

Chapter 7 will move on from the general analysis of the previous chapters to adopt a case study approach. Here, I concentrate on one film series, the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy, which is considered as the most successful Hollywood animation with Chinese elements in the last 15 years. I will look at the three single films, released respectively in 2008, 2011 and 2016, to exemplify how the general arguments discussed in Chapter 4, 5 and 6 fit with this specific case study. The chapter consists of three sections. The first section will give a brief introduction to the production and marketing ofthe *Kung Fu Panda*[[4]](#footnote-4)seriesin China and the style of each film. The second part will look at the film text to demonstrate the use and representation of Chinese elements, including story, setting and character development. The third section will draw on an investigation of the interview data offered by my respondents, and additional online comments about the series that I have gathered. I will focus on the representation of specific Chinese elements in each film and how audiences respond to and make sense of these elements. In doing so, I attempt to demonstrate the specificity of the *Kung Fu Panda* series. In Chapter 8, I shall provide a summary of the key findings of this study and draw some conclusions. Through the detailed discussion and analysis of how Chinese audiences respond to Hollywood films with Chinese elements, this study hopes to use Western media/cultural studies theory in the Chinese context to demonstrate the way in which Hollywood films represent Chinese culture and indicate the convergence and conflict of American and Chinese culture in Hollywood films, thereby fill the gap that there is lack of empirical audience research in Chinese film studies, especially concerning the issue of transnational audiences of hybrid films. To illustrate these themes, here are two interesting examples extracted from my respondents:

Chinese culture is represented on the surface rather than at a deep level (Qi-51-Male).

The movie has substantially expressed the “American dream” with the assistance of Chinese elements (Liu-29-Male).

# Chapter 2 Literature review - theoretical framework and the rationale of the research

## 2.1 Introduction

Having introduced the research background, this chapter will move on to review academic materials concerning this project and to provide an overview of the theoretical framework adopted to answer my research questions. It positions this study in the context of scholarly debates about contemporary film culture in a global context, as well as about audience reception and interpretation. In terms of research on Hollywood films with Chinese elements, there emerges a diversity of conceptual frameworks and research subjects in both Western and Chinese academia. By reviewing the existing research in this field, it becomes clear that the systematic investigation of transnational audiences is underdeveloped in the discussion of transnational hybrid films.

As the study of the transnational audience of the hybrid films is a relatively nascent discipline and has yet to offer firm conceptualizations of such transnational audiences, this chapter is not restricted to material on film culture and audiences within film studies. Rather, I will broadly engage with debates from various disciplines, including the fields of sociology, television and media studies, attempting to transfer insights from these fields into my inquiry about transnational audiences for hybrid films. By surveying a wide range of scholarship, I will set out to shape the conceptual and theoretical foundation of this study.

This chapter will concentrate on three strands of academic scholarship. The first section is about theoretical and empirical approaches to the existing research about Hollywood films featuring Chinese elements. The second section considers issues concerning the strategy of Hollywood films for the Chinese film market, in which the factors and motivations that drive Hollywood films to integrate Chinese cultural elements will be summarised. The final section will provide a review of some of the most significant paradigms in screen audience reception studies, within which field this study is based. Within each section, an attempt will be made to critically examine relevant themes and approaches drawn from both Western and Chinese academia, in order to theoretically and methodologically frame my research. An integrated review of both Western and Chinese literature on film communication and audience interpretation serves two purposes. On the one hand, as my research takes place within the context of globalization, particularly pointing to the articulation and hybridization of Chinese and American culture, the integrated literature review is able to offer a panorama of the knowledge in this field on a global scale. On the other hand, an integrated review of both Western and Chinese scholarship will establish a dialogue between Western-originated media and communication theories and social and cultural issues concerning the contemporary Chinese film market and Chinese audiences.

## 2.2 Theoretical and empirical approaches to the analysis of Hollywood films with Chinese elements

Research on the relationship between Hollywood and Chinese films in Western and Chinese academia shows obvious differences. The Chinese research focuses on the influence of the Hollywood film culture industry and its system of cultural production on the Chinese film industry, and the production, distribution, projection and marketing of Chinese national films. There is also the analysis of the ideology of Hollywood film texts from the perspective of political economy. On the other hand, much Western research employs a cross-cultural perspective in the investigation of the political, economic, and cultural contexts of Chinese films, drawing on Western film theories, including the theory of film criticism. At the same time, they discuss the spread and acceptance of Chinese films in the West.

Research on Hollywood films with Chinese elements has generated much attention in both Chinese and Western academia. The aspects of Hollywood films associated with China as discussed by Chinese and Western scholars can be summarised into three approaches. The first aspect is to analyse the overall changes in the history of Hollywood’s images of Chinese people and culture, pointing out that a demonizing imagination is the essence of Hollywood’s images of China (e.g. Wu, 1996; Zhang, 2018; Han, 2018; Wu, 2014; Wu, 2017; Homewood, 2018; Zhang and Cao, 2017).

In an early and profound project regarding Hollywood film with Chinese elements, *Screen Lies: Demonized Chinese Images in Hollywood Movies,* Li, Yiming (Li, 1997) gives a brief review of the typical Chinese images created by Hollywood, and concludes that these images are inevitably embedded within a specific American ideology and value system by which Chinese in Hollywood films are deemed as ‘the other’. Building on Li’s argument, Zhang and Cao (2017) continue to use image and textual analysis to focus on how the Chinese images in Hollywood films have changed since China's reform and opening up. By comparing the historical and recent Chinese elements in Hollywood films, they believe that due to the increasing Chinese soft power and China’s more significant position in the world, especially since Chinese Economic Reform and the opening up of the Chinese market, images of China and Chinese people have gradually transformed from being weak to much stronger in an effort to befriend China.

As a Chinese scholar who receives an American education and works in an American academic context, Wu, Jianping (1996) in his work *Hollywood and China,* uses the critical approach to look into the Chinese images under the American cultural hegemony and its discourse of racial discrimination. Wu (1996) starts from a description of images of China and Chinese people to tease out how Hollywood films smear China and Chinese culture. In doing so, hepoints out that Hollywood films, as an important part of American culture, not only provide entertainment, but are also inseparable from the operation of American politics, demonstrating the characteristics of cultural hegemony.

Zhang, Yingjin (2012), also as a Western-based Chinese media scholar, combines theoretical analysis with case studies from a cross-cultural perspective to demonstrate how Hollywood presents an American ideology and how its narratives and discourse operate. He draws on Gina Marchetti’s narrative theory to argue that Hollywood films with Chinese elements employ various story modes to confuse and influence the audience by taking six film cases from different historical periods as examples *(Broken Blossoms; The Bitter Tea of General Yen; The Good Earth; The World of Suzie Wong; Flower Drum Song; M. Butterfly*[[5]](#footnote-5)*)* (2012: 1).

Coming from a film aesthetics approach, Wu, Hongchang (2014), in his paper *Discussion on the Chinese Elements in Hollywood Movies Today,* summarizes the development of the trend for applying Chinese elements in Hollywood films respectively at the visual, story, and ideological levels. Through reviewing the evolution of this trend, it is found that, compared with Chinese elements used in Hollywood before the 21st century, the more recent Chinese elements have undergone great changes. The inclusion of Chinese elements has been deepened and expanded, and the methods of inclusion have become more sophisticated, with Hollywood’s attitude changing from fragmentation to diversification in terms of film content, with a transfer from Western curiosity to an attempt to cater to Chinese audiences.

Influenced by theories of ideological criticism, post-colonialism and mass communication originating in Western media research, Wu, Weihua (2017) integrates macro investigation with case studies to describe and tease out the panorama of Chinese elements included in Hollywood films. On one hand, Wu is critical of Hollywood film texts with Chinese elements. On the other hand, he situates those film texts in a broader historical, social and cultural context, in order to look at the issues of racism, class, and Western and Eastern civilization and criticize the ideology presented in Hollywood films from the perspective of social and cultural criticism. By using some film cases associated with Chinese culture, Wu exemplifies his argument that Hollywood represents the themes of a “love story between East and West”, “the western world rescuing the Chinese” and “Chinese social reality” (2017: 19) in order to demonstrate Western superiority and cultural hegemony. He also argues that, in the twenty-first century, although it seems popular and common for Hollywood to seek positive Chinese material and stories, it continues to adopt the pattern of “Chinese story plus American spirit” (ibid: p68), referring to Hollywood’s purpose of conveying American values and ideology through its films to China and Chinese audiences by the way of ostensibly decorating the film with a Chinese face, put simply, resorting to ways which the Chinese can more readily accept in order to permeate American values. This would become an important argument in later discussion.

In his book *The Cross-cultural Communication of Hollywood Films in China,* Zhang, Jiangcai (2018) employs observation, documentary, and content analysis to examine the cross-cultural communication of Hollywood films at a macro-level, studying which historical and social contexts enable this process to take place, what the nature and characteristics of this process are, and the powers and forces which play the most significant and decisive role in its transnational communication. He particularly puts emphasis on the cultural context of the transnational communication of Hollywood films, pointing out that “the spread of Hollywood films in China is situated in at least two contexts or the integration of both, including the Chinese social context, which is going through a period of cultural and economic transformation on the one hand, and the global context in which the cooperation and merging of transnational conglomerates is intensifying” (2018: 13).

Zhang (2018) reviews the different course of Hollywood films’ communication in the Chinese market over history, comparing the period 1896-1949, focusing on regional communication centred on Shanghai; the elimination of the Hollywood effect between 1949 and 1978; the recovery and development of Hollywood films in China between 1978 and 1994; the gradual prospering of Hollywood in China after 1994 and the emergence of Huallywood (Hua Lai Wu) in the new century. Similar to what Wu (2017) argues as previously mentioned, Zhang (2018) observes that the transnational dissemination of Hollywood films and film images to China is one of the ways in which the US diffuses American values and ideology to China and to Chinese audiences and achieves its cultural hegemony. Similar to Zhang (2018), Gao, Xingmei (2015) examines changes of Chinese images in Hollywood films within five historical periods, as well as the interaction and relationship between the changes and the sophisticated effects of politics, economy and culture in each period. An obvious trend of cultural imperialism with the high intensity of global communication, as Zhang (2018: 56) argues, “is the diversity of communication subjects and the concealment of its means”. In terms of China, the permeation of cultural imperialism in China takes place with the increasing economic and cultural globalization, especially after China’s entrance to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2001, after which the US aimed to appeal to Chinese audiences by way of Sino-US co-produced films (issues about the policy of co-produced films will be discussed in section 2.3).

In this respect, Zhang (2018) focuses on these co-produced films and especially the “Chinese images” created by Hollywood films, trying to explore the reasons why some Sino-US co-produced films are popular in the US but are not welcomed by Chinese audiences. With the changing of the political relationship between China and US since 1894, when the first American film related to China was shot, Hollywood has created diverse and various Chinese images. Zhang applies the method of observation and content analysis to classify Chinese images in Hollywood films into four broad themes, which are “yellow peril and the savage eastern”, “domesticated people”, “evil and the hypothetical conquered”, and “demonizing and diverse” (2018: p131-137). Based on his classification, he draws on Edward W. Said‘s concept of orientalism to explain that the stereotype of Chinese images created in Hollywood films is actually a product of the imagination of American society. The Chinese image is considered as the "other" embedded in the construction of the collective imagination of the American. By textual analysis, Han (2018) employs a similar theory of orientalism and argues that what Hollywood spreads is a reconstructed Chinese culture, which strongly influences the recognition of China by the world. He treats the Chinese elements in Hollywood films as rewritten codes, which are imagined by “others” and cannot accurately express the connotations of Chinese culture (Han, 2018: 29). As Zhou, Ning (2003) writes in *Chinese Images: the "Other" of Western Modernity,* in the Western narrative context, the most important feature of Chinese images is orientalism.

Taking *The Painted Veil*[[6]](#footnote-6), considered to be the first Sino-US co-produced film, as an example, Zhang (2018) analyses online film comments by critics and others and concludes that the failure of *The Painted Veil*’s box office in China lies in the distinction between Chinese audiences’ psychology of cultural expectation or anticipation toward *The Painted Veil* and the cultural identity actually expressed in the film. Inspired by the notion of “imagined community” proposed by Anderson (1992), Zhang discusses the contradiction and disjunction in terms of cultural identity in *The Painted Veil*. He argues that the “identity” and “community” constructed by Hollywood is an imagined vision, which stands on the point of “western cultural superiority” (2018: 211). It cannot be recognized by Chinese audiences, although Hollywood’s initiative is to try to establish a cultural identity for the Chinese audience by the way of a “localized strategy” (2018: 210). What he calls about Hollywood’s localized strategy, in this sense, is understood to fuse Chinese characteristics through which attempts to narrow the gap and establish the bridge between Hollywood films and Chinese audiences. There will be more about strategy in section 2.3.

Similarly, Homewood (2018) as a Western media scholar, also adopts a post-colonialist approach to examine Chinese cultural elements featured in Hollywood films. In his work *Directed by Hollywood, edited by China?*, Homewood takes *Looper*[[7]](#footnote-7) and *Transformer: Age of Extinction*[[8]](#footnote-8) as examples to claim that recent Hollywood’s new and positive images are actually “a ‘new’ form of China-specific Orientalism” (2018: p177), which circumvents the negative stereotype of Chinese images related to “orientalist distortion” (ibid: p179). He argues that the recent Hollywood strategic narratives especially in a variety of Sino-US co-produced films featuring Chinese story elements “are structured around the imaginative concepts” of an updated orientalism (ibid: p178).

If the first aspect historically concerns the panorama of the changes of Chinese elements taking place in Hollywood films, the second aspect of research on Hollywood films with Chinese elements particularly gives attention to the evolution of images of Chinese people and characters in Hollywood films, pointing out the binary contradiction and conflict of racialism, gender and ideology behind the Chinese people images presented in Hollywood films. In this respect, both Chinese and Western scholars have further developed the concept of orientalism used by Han (2018), Zhang (2018) and Homewood (2018) to analyse the orientalist representation of Chinese people in Hollywood films (e.g. Li, 1997; Li, 2002; Zhang, 2012; Zhang and Cao, 2017; Sun, 2010, Jiang, 2007).

In her PhD project *The Others Looks, Interrogating Chineseness in Hollywood Cinema*, Li, Yufeng (2002) reviews the images of Chinese people in Hollywood films from 1980 to 1990 to analyse the cultural representation of the Chinese and the film discourse mechanism, again by engaging with the theory of post-colonialism. She argues that the portrayal of Chinese people in Hollywood films is relevant to the China’s relationship with the US in terms of political conflict, contradiction and convergence.

Different from the perspective of the scholars who look at the panorama of the images of Chinese people in the way that Li (2002) describes, Sun Meng (2010) concentrates instead on Chinese female images in Hollywood films. In her book *the Image of the Other: Chinese Women in Hollywood Films*, she starts by probing the Chinese female images portrayed in Hollywood films and explores how these images have evolved. From the perspective of feminist criticism, Sun examines how the representation of female images is related to time, culture, environment and history and how the creation of Chinese female images again indicates orientalism. She identifies fifteen types of images of Chinese women, which although they seem diverse, actually have internal similarities in Hollywood films. They are constructed and imagined by Hollywood, converting “demon” to "angel" or “angel” to “demon”. Sun argues that these Chinese female images are “dual others” created according to Western standards, reflecting both Western patriarchy and negative orientalism.

Jiang, Zhiqin (2007) also emphasizes on the representation of Chinese gender issues in Hollywood films. Whereas Sun is concerned with the representation of Chinese female images, while Jiang gives attention to the Chinese male characteristics. In her *Fu Manchu and Charlie Chen: Images of China in American Popular Culture*,standing on the point of popular cultural criticism, she adopts the critical discourse of racism to investigate the way how Chinese male images are displayed in Hollywood films from the cross-cultural perspective. She observes that although the images of Fu Manchu and Charlie Chen are portrayed in different ways with one being positive and the other being negative, in essence, both present Chinese males who are marginalized by mainstream American society. In analysing the Chinese male images, Jiang (2007) discerns the racial and sexist discrimination connotated in such Hollywood films.

The third aspect is about the examination of the ideology of Chinese elements implied in Hollywood films by focusing on specific film texts or particular film cases. On the one hand, a few researchers, especially Chinese-origin scholars, show interest in how Hollywood animation represents Chinese elements by investigating animation cases such as *Kung Fu Panda* or *Mulan* (e.g.(Cheng, 2016b; Li and Zhou, 2016; Li, 2002; Hao and Lai, 2019; Bi, 2014; Xie, 2018))*.*

They intend to explore how Chinese elements are created and developed by using *Mulan* or *Kung Fu Panda* as examples and find the distortion, misunderstanding and convergence of Chinese culture in Hollywood animations. Based on Hall’s encoding/decoding model (which I will discuss later in this chapter), Li (2019), for example, employs textual and symbolic analysis to argue that the successful cross-cultural communication of *Kung Fu Panda 2* in China lies in its symmetry between the meaning of the Chinese visual and aural symbols encoded by Hollywood producers and the understanding of these symbols by Chinese audience decoders. By comparing the film text and previous *Mulan* and *Kung Fu Panda* films, Xie (2018) argues that, as American animation films, both choose Chinese stories to spread American values. However, they engage with conflicting communication strategies. *Mulan* deliberately distorts Chinese culture, whereas *Kung Fu Panda* endeavours to demonstrate Chinese culture objectively. Both enlighten and make a lot of sense for Chinese domestic films’ cross-cultural communication in terms of “the purpose of communication, the choice of communicating strategies and the identification of transnational audiences” (Xie, 2018: 39).

Wang and Yeh (2005) look at *Mulan* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*[[9]](#footnote-9) to explore globalization and the complexity of hybridization embodied in transnational cultural products. They see “deculturalization”, “acculturation” and “reculturation” as the critical characteristics in hybrid cultural products (Wang and Yeh, 2005: 175). They go further to explore how the producer’s personal circumstances, including background, inspiration and working style, have an effect on how these characteristics are constructed. In analysing *Mulan*, they argue that Disney’s version circumvents filial piety, which is a representative Chinese trait, to present woman’s pursuit of freedom and self-actualization, which is regarded as a core of Western trait (Wang and Yeh, 2005). I will discuss these three characteristics in detail in the next section since it can be considered as cultural strategy for transnational film communication on a global scale.

In addition, it is interesting to find some research, including works by Western-based scholars, about specific film content or elements considered to be ironic in how they portray Chinese culture, particularly the obsession with Chinese Kung Fu or martial arts. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon,* for instance,is seen by many as the most exemplary and successful example of transnational cinema, but various disputes have revolved around it.

Kenneth Chan (2004), a US-based media and film scholar, has generated a series of works on transnational Chinese cinema and Chinese people working in Hollywood. For example, one of his projects, *The Global Return of the Wu Xia Pian (Chinese Sword-Fighting Movie)*, examines how Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (which I refer to as *Crouching Tiger* in the following discussion) connects with questions of cultural identity and Chineseness. Chan draws attention to what he sees as “Lee’s conflicted critique of traditional Chinese cultural centrism and patriarchal hegemony” (Chan, 2004: 3).

On the one hand, by quoting director Ang Lee’s claims in various interviews, and drawing on his own textual analysis, he finds that *Crouching Tiger* not only aims to appeal to Chinese or Asian audiences but also targets Euro-American audiences who are nor familiar with traditional Chinese Kung Fu conventions (Chan, 2004). To achieve the maximum box office performance in the global market, not only does Ang Lee collaborate with a global crew from several countries in terms of *Crouching Tiger*’s creation, production and distribution, but he also reconfigures and restructures the traditional Chinese Wu Xia genre to tell a Chinese story with a global face (Chan, 2004), in order to balance the particularization of Chinese exoticism and universalization of its appreciation by global audiences (Wu and Chan, 2007a).

Chan also employs an informal survey of audience responses to *Crouching Tiger* and analyses how critics or scholars assess this film. He ascribes the unprecedented success of *Crouching Tiger* in Western countries but its mild success in China to its “cultural syncretism and hybridization” (Chan, 2004: 6). According to Chan, *Crouching Tiger* is accused of diluting the traditional Wu Xia genre, resulting in the dissemination of inaccurate and inauthentic representations of traditional Chinese culture. At the same time, it meets with Western audiences’ thirst for “Oriental exotica and kung fu stereotypes of Asian culture”(Chan, 2004: 5; Elley, 2001). Chan’s discussion resonates with Wang and Yeh’s (2005) arguments about the popularity of *Crouching Tiger*. They too note its repackaging of an “ethnic story” for global audiences, the process of cultural confluence and hybridization, and the international mechanism for production and distribution of the film (p179).

Chan pays particularly attention to the female issue in *Crouching Tiger*, arguing that the dilemma facing Chinese women depicted in the film emphasizes and challenges “Chinese patriarchy as a sign of the oppressive nature of Chinese cultural centrism and traditionalism” (Chan, 2004: 14; Wu and Chan, 2007). Both the reconfiguration of the traditional Wu Xia genre and the depiction of Chinese females in *Crouching Tiger* contribute to the appeal to both Chinese people and liberal Westerners.

Chan (2004), and Wang and Yeh (2005), thus analyse the film in terms of its cultural fusion and hybridization. In a different way, Christina Klein (2004) discusses *Crouching Tiger* from a diasporic perspective to suggest a tool for understanding film from the transnational angle. In doing so, Klein sees *Crouching Tiger* as a diasporic film, displaying both localizing and globalizing features, which results from director Ang Lee’s triangulated identity. She explains this in terms of his connection with the “Chinese homeland”, with “other members of the Chinese diaspora” and with the “American hostland” (Klein, 2004: 21). It is Lee’s complex diasporic identity that “complicates both his own sense of Chineseness and any simple cultural-national identification of *Crouching Tiger*” (Klein, 2004: 23; Wu and Chan, 2007; Lee, 2010). These scholars use an auteurism approach to investigate how Lee’s style ties to *Crouching Tiger*’s complicated cultural representation. This approach, as Barker and Austin propose, “puts centre-stage the issue of film-makers’ style and associates this with meaning and quality” (Barker and Austin, 2000: 3). As an American- and Chinese-based film director, Lee acknowledges both Western and Eastern audiences’ film cultural preferences and tastes. Klein and Lee claim that, despite the lack of cultural authenticity, the Wu Xia genre triggers diasporic members’ collective memory of homeland and meets their demand for nostalgia (Klein, 2004; Lee, 2010).

By reviewing a range of works related to Hollywood films with Chinese characteristics, we can see Chinese scholars, by and large, prefer to employ textual analysis to discuss the distortion or stereotyping of Chinese culture in Hollywood films from a post-colonialist and orientalist perspective. Western or Western-based scholars, on the other hand, tend to look at the fusion of Chinese culture into Hollywood films from a transnational angle. Both perspectives provide reference points for this study. The next section will focus on some of the political issues involved in the transnational communication of Hollywood films.

## 2.3 Hollywood strategy, soft power, the Chinese market and the implied audience

The previous section demonstrates the existing research regarding distinct theoretical and methodological approaches to the analysis of Hollywood films with Chinese elements, in both Western and Chinese academia. As discussed, much of the research has focused on the film text of Hollywood films that feature Chinese characters. This section will turn to another critical issue, the external economic and political context that influences the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. One may ask why those Chinese elements are featured in Hollywood films and what role the inclusion of Chinese elements plays in Hollywood films, and the business of exporting such films to China. Again, both Chinese and Western media and film scholars (for example, Su, 2014; Vlassis, 2016; Kokas, 2017; Homewood, 2018) are interested in the reasons why Hollywood studios are passionate about including Chinese elements; why they seek access to the Chinese film market; and how Chinese policies influence the production, import and distribution of Hollywood films in the Chinese film market.

In part, as Chinese media scholar Wendy Su (2011) points out, it is “China’s huge market potential with its underlying economic profit that draws Hollywood studios to this untapped ‘gold mine’” (Su, 2011: 194). In other words, Hollywood wants to make films that will be successful in the largest film market in the world, namely China. So, the studios are keen to include some Chinese elements in their films, while primarily pushing the politics and cultural identities of America and the West more generally. In other words, they are promoting the power of America and the West through what the political scientist Joseph S. Nye (2004, 2005), calls soft means (rather than the hard power of military aggression). But another reason for including Chinese elements in Hollywood films is that China is very rigorous about which films it will distribute in its own market. By encouraging films that include some elements of Chinese ideology and cultural assumptions, China too is asserting its soft power.

Soft power, first defined by Nye, rests upon the ability of a country to affect others to do what it wants by the way of “drawing attention” to positive or negative national images, “creating, alluring or positive magnetic effects” (Nye, 2004, 2011: p91-92) or having the power to “shape others’ preference” (Nye, 1990: 166), through means other than threats or force. Nye identifies “culture, values and policies” as well as “economic resources” as the sources of soft power, with culture being considered the most important (Nye, 2004: 85). In the case of China, as Nye observes, it endeavours to launch into the realm of global culture by promoting its attractive and profound traditional history and culture. In October 2011, the 17th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party underlined the demand for a strengthening of Chinese soft power “with a view to [enhancing] the overall prosperity of cultural undertakings and sound development of cultural industries” and for holding “fast to the approach of multi-level, extensive international cultural exchanges and continuously improve[ing] the international influence of Chinese culture” (Vlassis, 2016: 481 quoted from Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China 2013: 3). The growth and assertion of Chinese soft power thus contributes to Hollywood’s favouring of Chinese cultural components.

The following sections will therefore discuss this issue from two perspectives. The first one is to review the research on the relationship between Hollywood strategy and Chinese soft power and Hollywood strategy for the Chinese market under the rigorous Chinese policy and restriction. Section 2.3.2 will focus specifically on Hollywood’ s strategy for Chinese general audience and its construction implied audience, or those considered by Hollywood as the main target audience. This is the premise of the analysis of the actual Chinese audience and helps to understand whether Hollywood’s strategy for implied audience is achieved by actual audience.

### 2.3.1 The debate about Chinese policy, Chinese soft power and Hollywood strategy

The global presence of Hollywood and the relationship or interaction between Hollywood and the Chinese film industry, as Su (2014) notes, has attracted serious attention and been extensively studied in academia. In her work *Cultural Policy and Film Industry as Negotiation of Power,* Su seeks to extend the understanding of these issues beyond the “political economy approach and the perspective of media globalization” (p93-94). Such approaches emphasize American media imperialism, Hollywood expansion and its dominance in the global order when examining Sino-Hollywood relationships. Su instead explores the “global-local interplay” by examining how the continuously changing Chinese state and ongoing Chinese cultural policy have shaped its interaction with and embracing of Hollywood since 1994 (2014: 94). As a multi-cultural media scholar with a Western cultural background but Chinese origin, she also seeks to address these issues from the Chinese cinematic angle, going further to focus on how the global-local interplay influences the Chinese domestic film industry.

Building on the central position of the nation-state in globalization theory, in her discussion, Su notes what Waisbord and Morris (2001) summarize as two positions regarding the relationship between the nation-state and media globalization, but argues for a third significant position of the nation-state in contemporary globalization by taking the case of China. She argues that “the state and media globalization are not two opposite ends of the spectrum, but rather two forces that are both mutually beneficial and competing” (Su, 2014: 96). On the one hand, she is critical of the popular ideas asserted from the “western liberal perspective” (ibid: p97). The example she provides is of Rupert Murdoch, the News Corporation chief, who said that the expansion of satellite television would undermine the authoritarian control of media communication in China by Chinese government. The assumption is that, as China enters the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and foreign media corporations continuously expand in China, the authority of the Communist Party’s control over the media industry will be subverted and press and media freedom will thus be facilitated. Instead, Su builds on Zhao Yuezhi, Anthony Fung and Eric Ma’s arguments about the maintenance of Chinese government power, and argues for the Chinese government’s continuing capability of negotiating with transnational capital while maintaining its state power in the process of media communication (see Zhao, 2008; Fung, 2008; Ma, 2000).

Anthony Fung (2008), in his *Global Capital, Local Culture: Transnational Media Corporations in China*, explicitly analyses the Chinese government’s alliance with global capital and market forces. As Su concludes, the two alliances are “state-capital and state-market” (Su, 2014: 98). To answer the question about whether the relationship between the nation-state and globalization is one of “enemies or partners”, Fung argues that the purpose of Chinese government strategy is to ensure a dominant and hegemonic position by the way of submitting the market to the control of the Chinese state (Fung, 2008: 29; Su, 2014). Regarding the state’s alliance with capital, he asserts that the mainstream tone of PRC strategy towards global capital has shifted from resistance and confrontation before 2001 to collaboration and “dancing with wolves” (Fung, 2008; Su, 2011: 197). What Fung and Su suggest is reflected in the argument that a multi-perspective approach to the global process has replaced “the master narrative of globalization that Hollywood usually portrays” (Manning, C., Shackford-Bradley, 2010; Song, 2018: 179). Fung identifies the mutual benefit and interconversion of “the state and the market”, which aims to “push China to a higher geopolitical stage" and to "become one of the globalizing powers” (ibid: 79). In this sense, it can be understood that Hollywood is no longer considered as the only dominant power in the global order. Thus, Eric Ma uses the case of China to demonstrate that the relationship between state and market forces is “transforming each other to become new sociopolitical powers” (Ma, 2000: 21-34; Su, 2014).

Su (2014) thus draws on arguments about the mutual benefit of each entity in the interaction between state and global capital and between state and market forces; she also draws on the notion of “authoritarian liberalism”(Donald, Keane and Hong, 2002). In doing so, she is able to further illuminate the intensity of the relationship between the Chinese state and the Chinese market, as well as the conflicting and competing relationship between the Chinese state and global Hollywood. That is to say, she investigates the ways in and conditions under which the two alliances take place. Gao argues that that the Chinese government is well aware of the essential need to accommodate cultural policies with increasing globalization and Hollywood influence and to support Chinese film industries and protect domestic film culture (Gao, 2009b). Similarly, Su insists on the ability of the Chinese government to ensure its dominant position when facing the challenge of global capital and asserts the initiative of the Chinese state in determining how to import and distribute Hollywood capital and when to release Hollywood films.

As Su points out (2011, 2014), since the 1990s, and especially after 1994, mainland China started implementing a policy to adopt 10 foreign films to release in China by way of revenue-sharing arrangements each year, and this number increased to 20 per year after China’s entrance to the WTO. After 2012, the Chinese government’s quota for foreign films grew to 34, with 14 so-called special blockbusters, which refers to the importation of 3D and IMAX films. With the Chinese film market opening up to foreign films in this way, Hollywood capital flowed into the Chinese market at an unprecedented speed. Regulation of and restrictions on the importing of foreign films was the initial and most effective cultural policy that China adopted to protect its local film market and domestic film industry (Crane, 2014a), while benefiting from a limited number of American imports. To deal with Hollywood capital inflow, the challenges of American ideology being promoted through Hollywood films, and the threat of erosion of Chinese culture, the Chinese state developed a further two-fold strategy towards Hollywood, as discussed by Su (2014). First, the Chinese government has attempted to cope with the importing of Hollywood films at the level of film content by developing the policy of “Yi wo wei zhu, wei wo suo yong” (“self-centred and for our own sake”) (Su, 2014: 101). This asserts that, with a tough policy of restricting foreign film imports and under strict regulation and censorship by the bureaucratic-authoritarian Chinese state, all of the imported Hollywood films must “serve China’s needs and national interests and should be made use of for China’s gains and goals” (ibid: 101).

Su observes a second aspect of Chinese strategy for resisting Hollywood ideology following the unprecedented level of Hollywood capital inflow, in the form of what is called the “Main Melody” (Zhu xuan lv) policy. “Main Melody” is defined as a film that “combines elements of the action film, war film and crime film to evoke strong Chinese nationalistic and patriotic sentiments” (Li, 2019). Through this policy, the Chinese state supports the development of Chinese domestic “Main Melody” films, such as *Operation Red Sea*[[10]](#footnote-10) and *Wolf Warriors II*[[11]](#footnote-11)(2014: 101). These are designed to contend with Hollywood films and to diminish their possibly threatening influence by promoting a collectivist and patriotic Chinese ideology different from the individualist ideology of Hollywood films (Su, 2014, 2010).

While Su describes the purpose of the “Main Melody” policy, it is not her intention to explore whether Chinese audiences accept the individualist or collectivist ideology or whether those audiences have a collectivist vision of Chinese national identity. This is however my focus in the following chapters. Challenging the argument about a susceptible state, Su concludes that Hollywood is only allowed to “operate within the parameters set by the Party-state” in the Chinese market (2014: 113), and that the Chinese state has been fully aware that the key issue in the process of engaging with Hollywood films is to consolidate Chinese national identity and have the ability to maintain its “cultural security” and promote its “cultural soft power” (2014: 113).

Kokas in her recent work *Hollywood Made in China,* interrogates the ongoing changing relationship between China and Hollywood during the period from 2001, as China was entering the WTO, to 2016, when the Shanghai Disney resort opened. Her discussion covers both “macro-level” and “micro-level” examinations of how the “Sino-US media system” operates, both from the perspective of state policy and brand capital and from the perspective of individual cooperation (Kokas, 2017: 15).

With regard to “macro-level” interrogation, Kokas argues for a distinction between the Chinese and US governments in terms of the government’s relationship with the media industry. That is, “Chinese government intervention drives the media industries”, while in the US the media industry sets its own agenda (2017: 27). By employing “China- and US-based industry ethnography” (2017: 13) and textual analysis, she traces in detail how the approach of Sino-US film collaboration influences both China and the US in terms of global communication. She notes that Chinese and Hollywood filmmakers have embraced collaborative ways of operating, thirsting for mutually beneficial and feasible collaborations in terms of their respective markets. In terms of Sino-US collaboration, Hollywood seeks to expand its market and amplify its dominant position in the global order; at the same time, China seeks to actively promote and extend its cultural soft power.

On the one hand, according to Kokas (2017), the policy of Sino-US film cooperation gives Hollywood more opportunity to access the Chinese market without being obstructed by the foreign film import quota imposed by the Chinese government. Under the conditions of the Chinese government’s strict control and censorship, adopting collaborative measures makes it easier for Hollywood films to get official import approval. Firstly, she notes that Hollywood has also invested in “branded real estate” (Kokas, 2017: 41) in China, such as the Shanghai Disney resort. This has enabled Hollywood to enlarge its presence in the Chinese market by amplifying its brand effect and increasing the media infrastructure. Secondly, Kokas focuses on “Sino-US film co-production”, the most significant form of China-US collaboration. She notes that such co-productions enable the film narratives to access both Western and Chinese audiences. She also identifies five modes of co-production in terms of how the Chinese film industry and Hollywood collaborate, respectively “Faux-Productions”, “Assisted Productions”, “Talent Exchanges”, “Commissioned Productions” and “Buyout Films” (2017: 71-81).

On the other hand, Kokas notes the ways in which China benefits from Sino-US film collaboration, in accordance with Chinese government policy, which requires the inclusion of “sufficient Chinese talent” and “financing” (Kokas, 2017: 23) or at least part of the production process. One of the visible ways for Hollywood to expand its Chinese market and access to Chinese audiences is by responding to their thirst for Chinese landscapes. Kokas suggests that the bilateral measures from China and US contribute to this sort of promotion of Chinese cultural influence. However, she uses the example of *Iron Man 3*[[12]](#footnote-12) to criticize the Chinese-specific version and argues that China’s “influence over the production process does not immediately translate to gains in cultural soft power” (2017: 33). By discussing China’s finance, talent and genre investment in the film collaboration, Kokas also uses *The Great Wall* as the case to argue that China’s increasing investment in Sino-US film production is beneficial for “certain types of commercial Chinese films”, however, at the same time exerts negative effect on the development of local diverse film production in China by the reason of distracting from local to global vision(Kokas, 2019: 224).

In terms of “micro-level” exploration, Kokas (2017) looks at how the “compradors” such as directors, producers and actors function as cultural translators in the process of Sino-US collaboration. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural intermediary theory (Bourdieu, 1984), she suggests that the purpose of the work of compradors is to pertain to their negotiations of different “cultural taste”. Compradors, in this case, serve to bridge the cultural gap between a foreign and home country, and in this case, the cultural differences between America and China.

Differentiating his own work from that of Kokas, Song, Xu (2018) notes Hollywood’s awareness of the obstacles and impediments to engaging with the coproduction process as a way of accessing the complexities of the Chinese market. Thus, they are fully aware of the challenges of government intervention and the strict cultural policies on whether a film is allowed to be imported and get approval from Chinese regulators to be screened. Rather than analysing the interplay between Hollywood and China by looking at Sino-US film coproduction, Song probes Sino-Hollywood film interaction by establishing an external but meaningful framework for understanding Hollywood’s strategy of “China-focused endeavours” and its “coping mechanism” for ensuring profitable activity in the complex Chinese market (Song, 2018: 183). In this sense, he identifies five relationships which Hollywood has to manage to cope with the Chinese market, including “government relations, general audience relations, fan-based community relations, investment and distribution partner relations and media relations” (Song, 2018: 183-188). The aim of Hollywood’s relationship management is to extend the Hollywood network in China and achieve higher profit margins (Song, 2018).

My research explores the general audience relationship with Hollywood films, focusing on the response of Chinese audiences to such films. To some extent, I also look at certain fan communities that have grown up around Hollywood films, but this is not central to my work. There are however several points where I refer to fans in a loose sense. Fan culture in itself is a research field which attracts many scholars, such as Matt Hills (Hills, 2002). In his *Fan Cultures*, he conceptualised media fans from the perspective of sociology and cultural studies. By reviewing previous academic writing on fans, he goes on to suggest a new approach to fan culture. As it is not the aim of this study to discuss the idea of fandom in detail, I will provide a basic definition of what I mean by fans, but not provide a detailed analysis of Chinese fandom. Fans, according to Hills (2002), refer to those active and dedicated audience members or consumers who are, at the same time, producers. That is the sense in which I use the term here, though I do not explore the idea of fans as producers.

The other relations identified by Song are beyond the scope of my audience response analysis. Thus, I do not look at Hollywood’s political relations with the Chinese government or its economic and financial relations with Chinese media institutions. Song argues that the most prevalent and effective strategy Hollywood has developed to attract Chinese audiences is to include Chinese elements (Song, 2018; Kwak & Zhang, 2011), and it is precisely how Chinese audiences respond to this aspect of Hollywood films that is the subject of my research. In the next section, I will thus review some of the existing literature about Hollywood’s Chinese audience-oriented strategy.

### 2.3.2 General audience strategy and implied audience

Song (2018) takes *Transformers: Age of Extinction* as an example to demonstrate that the purpose of Hollywood’s inclusion of Chinese elements in some films is to attract Chinese audiences. In an empirical study of what factors dominate the box-office performance of foreign films in China conducted by Kwak and Zhang (Kwak and Zhang, 2011), the strategy of including localized content in Hollywood films is verified as one of the most positive determinants in box-office success. This operation can be understood as equal to Zhang’s (2018) proposition of localized strategy. According to Kwak and Zhang (2011), Chinese-specific content in Hollywood films serves to meet the need for and to accommodate to a Chinese audience. From what they discuss, it is clear that the general Chinese audience, rather than specific fan communities, is the most significant factor which Hollywood takes into consideration when determining which films to import, and how to import them and expand their share of the Chinese film market.

Wang, Ting (2009), in her project *Understanding local reception of globalized cultural products in the context of the international cultural economy,* looks at the local reception of two domestic films – *Hero*[[13]](#footnote-13) and *House of Flying Daggers*[[14]](#footnote-14) – in the context of cultural globalization. Instead of engaging with Hollywood films packaged with local culture, she investigates the reverse cultural flow from China to the global, referring to the transnational reception of these domestic films which are influenced by Hollywood film style and marketing practice. It is worth noting her arguments about the distinction in the reception of these two films between Western countries and China. It is interesting to find what she suggests resonates with other arguments about the role local content plays in explaining box-office performance. “Local content”, as one factor that determines film performance, argued by Wang (2009) here indicates what Straubhaar (1991, 2007) proposes as the concept of cultural proximity which is an important theory for this study.

In his academic paper *Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetric Interdependence and Cultural Proximity*, Straubhaar (1991) points out the effect of cultural distance on the success of films and TV programmes. Cultural proximity, as stated by Straubhaar, is one way to “capture the essence of cross-cultural interaction via media” (Straubhaar, 2007: 17). His survey shows that local audiences, based on their familiarity with their local culture, language and environment, always intrinsically tend to accept and prefer films and television programmes produced from or within similar and familiar national cultures or transnational cultures. Where there is cultural proximity, they are easier to absorb and understand (Straubhaar, 2007; Fu and Govindaraju, 2010). Su (2010, 2011) establishes the same argument that foreign cultural products are well received by audiences from other countries if they contain factors that are reminiscent of the cultural consciousness of the receiving audience’s home nation, or in this case, a particular region, thereby reducing the sense of cultural distance. Iwabuchi (2002), a Japanese scholar emphasizes in his *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* the significant position of Japanese culture in Asia and on a global scale. He attributes the successful dissemination of Japanese culture in Taiwan to what Straubhaar conceptualizes as cultural proximity and more importantly proposes the concept of cultural odour. He argues that erasing the specificity and cultural odour of Japanese culture is an efficient way giving rise to successful transnational communication in other national contexts.

Similar to what Straubhaar (2007), Su (2010, 2011) and Iwabuchi (2002) argue, Rohn (2011) argues that it is always more possible for foreign media content to be received and recognized when it can satisfy the demands and psychology of the foreign audiences rather than merely domestic viewers. Again, Levy and Windahl (1985) argue that the degree to which viewers recognize texts as relevant largely lies in the extent to which they can make a connection between themselves and the text, which significantly influences how attractive they perceive the text to be. Regarding Hollywood films and China, Kwak and Zhang (2011) do an empirical study on the predominant factors which determine the performance of Hollywood films in China. By undertaking a statistical analysis of Hollywood films’ box office, they conclude that Chinese elements, as one of the selling points in the Chinese film market, help to narrow down the cultural distance between Chinese audiences and the film’s origin and promote their box office in the Chinese market.

Going back to Wang’s discussion, to explain why *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* gained popularity and success in Western countries but caused dissatisfaction and controversy in China, Wang (2009) emphasises the factor that the film producers keep Western audiences in mind, as the director Zhang, Yimou told the *New York Times*. Regarded as “Hollywood-ized Wuxia films” (Wang, 2009: 308), the two Chinese films imitate the “Hollywood model of high-concept style and narrative transparency” (Wang, 2009: 299; Olson, 1999; Song, 2018), and culturally dilute the Chinese Wuxia tradition to appeal to Western audiences who cannot understand traditional Chinese culture. However, Chinese audiences who are exposed to and affected by Chinese culture may not interpret the film content in the way that the producer intended (Wang, 2009). This can also be found in the distinct reception of *Crouching Tiger* in the West and China (see the discussion in section 2.2). In this respect, the success of *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers*, or even *Crouching Tiger* as mentioned above rides on their pandering to transnational, especially Western audiences, by including debilitating Chinese exotica and entailing a Hollywood formula.

It is worth noting how Song understands what he calls the Chinese general audience and what Wang says about the importance of keeping target Western audiences in mind. Both discussions indicate the concept of an “implied audience” (Iser, 1980, 1974; Livingstone, 1998, 2005, 2003) in the field of reception studies, which is partly parallel to Stuart Hall’s (1973, 2005) discussion of the preferred reader or what David Bordwell names the ideal reader in his *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Bordwell, 1988). The implied audience approach as applied in cultural studies, as Livingstone (Livingstone, 2003) explains, is initially informed by literary and semiotic theory to conceptualize “how texts anticipated, invited, and so were fitted for, readers with a specific interpretive repertoire of codes, presuppositions, and interpretive frames” (Livingstone, 2003: 7). Drawing on Iser’s theory of the implied reader (Iser, 1980) and Umberto Eco’s arguments about the relationship between texts and readers, Robert C. Allen stresses how the soap opera serial presumes what its viewers want to see and how the texts guide viewers to the preferred reading (Allen, 1995; Livingstone, 2005). Building on Iser’s concept of the real or empirical audience, he goes further to argue for the active attribute of the real viewers who assert their own preference and interpret the content with reference to their knowledge and experience (Allen, 1995). What Allen implies is that the anticipation and attraction of the media text may not fit with the viewers or audiences’ expectation, which results in an asymmetry between audiences’ interpretation and the “interpretative contract” established by media texts (Livingstone, 2005; Allen, 1995). I discuss the cultural studies approach to audience research in more detail in the next section.

This approach can be related to what has been noted about Hollywood’s strategy of involving Chinese cultural specificity to attract a potential Chinese general audience and thereby achieve success in the Chinese market. It is important to continue investigating whether this strategy achieves its goals, since it anticipates that the inclusion of Chinese elements will attract and appeal to Chinese audiences. It is this that I investigate in my own research about actual audiences, rather than making assumptions about how implied audiences will respond.

What Su, Kokas and others write establishes the political and industrial context for understanding the response of transnational audiences and demonstrates the importance of understanding these issues as part of the background context in the later chapters. By introducing China’s cultural policy and strategy for promoting Chinese soft power and the domestic film industry in terms of dealing with the challenge of the invasion of American culture, we can see both the contradictions and the convergences between film culture in China and the US in the global context. From the above discussion, we can see the significant factor that Hollywood is passionate about breaking into the Chinese market and seeks to engage a general Chinese audience by including Chinese cultural material. The next section will move on to a review of various approaches to audience research, which aims to provide the framework for my own audience analysis.

2.4 Changing paradigms of screen audience reception studies

I will now move on to look at the range of research about screen audiences and reception within the fields of both television and film studies. Reception studies is a significant field within media communication research, which is a shift from an emphasis on textual interpretation to a focus on audiences and the ways in which they make sense of and respond to films. This is in part because, as Stafford (2007) puts it, a film, albeit as a kind of popular culture product, has no real meaning unless someone watches it. Studying audiences can tell us something about the films as texts, and about how audiences relate to the world. But crucially, it can tell us about “the way we read the mediated texts that constitute an ever larger part of our horizon of experience” (Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington, 2007). As stressed by Meers (2001), some film scholars (e.g. Austin, 2002; Barker and Brooks, 1998; Barker et al., 2008; Stacey, 1994) have noted the lack of the research on film audiences in the field of film studies.

Baran , Davis and Striby (2014) note in *Theory of Mass Communication: Foundation, Ferment, and Future* that media audience research emerged in the West in the early twentieth century when most of the early researchers focused on descriptions of the audience and judged whether the media played a direct influence on people. The audience in such source-dominated theory was considered passive, simply receiving information from the communicator, so research focused on the communicator and the process of communication rather than the audience itself. Researchers have since turned their attention to new problems and developed new media theories to explain why people use specific media. As a result, the perspective of cultural studies has taken centre stage.

It was not until the 1980s and 1990s, with the boom of cultural studies and the ensuing television audience research rooted in the Birmingham School, that researchers began to emphasise the film audience, which informed the re-surfacing of film audience research, which had been largely ignored in film studies (Meers, 2001; Strafford, 2007). Since then, influenced by cultural studies, the discussion in film studies has departed from the film itself to a focus on both the film and the film audience (Stafford, 2007). In this case, the following discussion will review various paradigms that have been employed in film audience analysis, especially engaging with cultural studies in television audience research, which situates audiences in the broader social context and its influence on film audience analysis.

In post-structuralist film theory, audience members are regarded as spectators within the film text (Allor, 1995). Heath (1981) proposes that it is the spectator immobile in front of the screen that moves in a film finally. Owing to cultural studies, film research has shifted from the primacy of this implicit spectator to the actual audience and its relationship with media texts. Audience research has combined the study of audience behaviour with and awareness of how opinions and feelings are determined by interaction with the media products in broader cultural, social and individual contexts (Brooker and Jermyn, 2002).

Cognitive theory is another challenge for film audience studies. Drawing on cognitive psychology, this theory is about the ways that audiences make sense of experiences and learn from film contents (Stafford, 2007). The complex types of cognitive structures and processes consist of developing cognitive schemas, which can represent generic experiences and cultural knowledge (Höijer, 1998). Schemas are constructed by the individuals related to the social environment and the stock of social experiences (Shore, 1998; Höijer, 1998). They also have an effect on our interpretation and reactions as well as our identities and sense of self.

Cognitive theory focuses on the audience and the emotional connection with the screen images while watching films. The cognitive paradigm in film audience research thus more provides some evidence of considerations from an emotional perspective. From the perspective of cognitive psychology, as Deschamps and Devos (1998) present, some personal features or specific character attributes of individuals are assumed to indicate personal identity and the idea that each individual is a unique combination of features which distinguish them from others. Personal identity is thus considered unique and particular (Doise, 1998). Barker and Austin continues Bordwell’s work of criticising the “psychoanalytic film theory” employed in audience research for its high dependence on the concept of “identification”, which is a key term in the media effects tradition, considering audiences’ passivity and vulnerability to media products (2000: 13).

The cultural studies perspective interrogates the immobile and passive audience argued in post-structuralist theory and insists that meaning stems from the interaction between film text and audience. The cultural studies paradigm is sceptical of post-structuralist theory employed in film audience research, but it is also critical of the cognitivist approach, because of their lack of consideration of the broader context in which audiences are situated. Cultural experiences have proved to be linked with the specific society or culture within a society. In this sense, audiences are socialized into habits, knowledge typical for the society where we live, the gender and social classes to which they belong as well as their occupation and so on (Höijer, 1998). According to Hurn and Tomalin (2013), audiences are inclined to select what to accept and reject, on the basis of their views of their demands in relation to the culture and society which they live in. The next section will focus on the paradigm of cultural studies in television studies and review the influential projects that eventually enlightened film audience analysis.

### 2.4.1 A milestone in audience research – the paradigm of cultural studies

The “uses and gratifications” research model represents a shift from regarding audiences as passive and innocent and the relationship between audience and media as optimistic towards the more active characterization of the media audience and consideration of media as tools used to satisfy users’ needs and accomplish their goals (Muller (Ed), 2002; Seiter, 2004). The model is a straightforward attempt to understand the audience and account for the significance of individual differences in the audience experience (McQuail, 1997). As a widely accepted theoretical framework for media research, the uses and gratifications model, according to Merton (1971), highlights how different audiences use the same media to meet different needs according to their own demands. As for films, for instance, different audiences watch the same film to obviously distinct ends. In other words, each distinct audience member perceives the same film in a different manner consonant with their own tendency system (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003). However, the focus of this theory is on the idea of “use” which is considered from a “behavioural” perspective, according to Hall (1973: 4), thereby failing to take into account “structures of understanding as well as social and economic structures”.

Hall criticizes the “uses and gratifications” tradition and welcomes a cultural study of media audiences. In order to do this, he develops an analytical framework that combines cultural form analysis from the perspective of semiotics with cultural policy criticism from the perspective of social economic structure. In his profoundly influential article on encoding and decoding (Hall, 2005), he focuses on the use of semiotics to analyse and discuss the "encoding" and "decoding" in television communication, revealing in detail the process of meaning circulation in ideological television discourse. Inspired by Gramsci’s cultural hegemony theory, Hall (2005) proposes that the media is a place where ideological struggles between different classes take place. In the interpretation process, the audience and the dominant meaning structure compete for hegemony.

The progression from the “uses and gratifications” model is also evident in Stuart Hall’s theory of the text as possessing “encoded” meanings, which are “decoded” by different audiences (Brooker and Jermyn, 2003). On account of the different class, ethnic and gender characteristics of audiences, the decoding of texts is shaped differently. According to Hall, audience decoding can be divided into three types, which he names dominant, negotiated and oppositional. The meanings of these terms are, respectively, accepting the ideology; accepting or rejecting some features of the prevailing ideology to shape the text to satisfy the audiences’ own demands; and absolutely opposing the prevailing ideology (Cruz and Lewis, 1994). Ideology, as Liebes and Katz (1993) argue, is produced through the process of negotiation between various kinds of senders and receivers. Proponents of cultural studies intend to investigate the ways by which audiences actively create meanings from the interaction in specific contexts between media products and their social or cultural identities (Stokes and Maltby, 2001).

Based on Hall’s encoding and decoding model, quite a few Western scholars rooted in Birmingham cultural studies began to use ethnography in audience research to explore media consumption. In his *Nationwide Audience,* Morley (1980), on the one hand, uses textual analysis to identify the ideological themes of the programme and the particular ways in which it addresses the viewers. On the other hand, he moves beyond the textual analysis to carry out a qualitative investigation of viewers’ interpretations of the programme, which is considered the first British audience research project in the field of cultural studies using qualitative methods. By engaging with viewing groups from different educational and social backgrounds, he examines how different social class impacts on the interpretation of viewers. What Morley conducts in such ethnography embodies Hall’s idea of decoding.

Hall explains the polysemy of the television text from the perspective of linguistics (Hall, 2005), while Morley takes the social position of receivers into consideration when analysing audiences’ responses to television text (Morley, 1992). According to his argument, the main reason for the diverse understanding of the text is the different social and cultural context of the audiences. Morley, in his *Television, Audiences & Cultural Studies*, argues that

the individual viewer does not come to the moment of viewing “culturally naked”- he comes to the text carrying already, and thinking within, his own set of cultural codes and frameworks derived from his social and cultural situation and background (Morley, 1992: 92).

Nevertheless, it is essential to point out that Morley’s *Nationwide* research merely assumes the factors of social background that may have significance on audience interpretation rather than drawing attention to other aspects (e.g. gender, age, geographical location etc.). In his postscript, he transfers from “the theory of decoding which had emerged out of Parkin’s notes on ‘meaning system’ towards a genre-based, contextual model of media consumption in everyday life” (Moores, 1993: p47).

Charlotte Brunsdon also suggests in her article *Crossroads: Notes on a soap opera* that “The relation of the audience to the text will not be determined solely by that text, but also by positionalities in relation to a whole range of other discourses - discourses of motherhood, romance and sexuality for example” (1981: 32). Gray agrees with her argument and proposes the need to prioritise “understanding the subject-text-context relationship”(Gray, 1987: 45). What Brunsdon suggests allows her to

“think of the subject in the social context occupying different positions in relation to different discourses which change across time. As particular discourses become central issues, they will affect the ways in which the social subject occupies, or resists, the subject position constructed by a text” (Gray, 1987: 45).

Morley's research prompted a large number of ethnographic audience research projects in cultural studies (Ang, 1989; Katz and Liebes, 1984, 1990; Radway, 1987). One in particular was the ethnographic research on the consumption of romantic fiction by female audiences conducted by Janice Radway (1987). In her *Reading the Romance*, she focuses on the community of women readers to see how they engage with the narrative of romantic fiction and how gender plays a role in understanding the genre of romance. She is thus aware of the essential need to consider “the meaning of romance reading as a social event in a familial context” (Radway, 1987: 7).

In their influential transnational project, *the Export of Meaning: Cross-cultural Readings of Dallas*, Liebes and Katz (1990) conducted research about cross-cultural audiences of the American TV series *Dallas*. They discuss the reasons why a series originally produced by American media can get great popularity and be universally understandable but unsuccessful in Japan, taking into account the ways of understanding in different places and the different kinds of involvement and response on the part of audiences. By investigating viewers from different countries or communities, they found that audience decoding varies in the process of interpretation of the text. The understanding of and attitude towards *Dallas* changes with the cultural background of the viewers. According to Liebes and Katz (1993), the different ways of negotiating the programme are proved to result from the different cultural and social values of the audiences. Besides, within a group, the richer mosaic of differences results in variations in decoding, uses and enjoyments (Liebes and Katz, 1993). The different types of interaction and involvement generated by *Dallas* indicate that the viewers’ reality may lead to a perceived distance between audience and text (Liebes and Katz, 1993).

The Japanese scholar Takahashi, Toshie (2002), building on previous audience research using an ethnographic approach and establishing the theoretical frame of audience research in Western countries, conducts his PhD study on *Media, Audience Activity and Everyday Life*. He uses a qualitative method to examine the case of Japanese engagement with media and information communication technology (ICT) to “investigate the effect of media and ICT on Japanese society, and how, in their various ways of engaging with the media in everyday life, Japanese audiences reflexively 'create' and 'recreate' their sense of self and the social groups to which they belong” (Takahashi, 2002: 2).

From the above discussion, what the cultural studies paradigm makes explicit is the need to take both the media text and social and cultural context into consideration when undertaking audience analysis. The purpose of their work lies in two aspects. On the one hand, while Katz and Liebes (1993) are concerned with the audience of TV series and Takahashi (2002) brings empirical research into the study of the engagement of Japanese audiences with media and ICT in everyday life, the purpose of this study is to focus on how Chinese audiences make sense of and respond to Hollywood films with Chinese elements in the context of globalization, taking into consideration personal, socio-cultural issues that may relate to Chinese viewers’ engagement to such films. In this respect, these are significant and influential projects within audience research, outlining an approach for understanding audiences in their social and cultural context, which tie in with my own research. On the other hand, the film audience projects that will be discussed in the next section are inspired by Morley’s work on *Nationwide* audience, and Liebes and Katz’s work on the cross-cultural reading of *Dallas*. What the latter helps us to understand is how cultural distance rather than proximity results in different interpretations in the transnational communication of media texts. The next section will move on to the discussion of film audiences.

### 2.4.2 Reinvigorating film audience research

As argued at the beginning of this section, informed by audience research rooted in cultural studies and the empirical investigations developed within television studies (Brunsdon and Morley, 1978; Ang, 1991), some film scholars set out to engage with the field of film spectatorship, positioning actual film viewers as the new and significant focus of their inquiry by employing different cross-disciplinary approaches.

Jackie Stacey’s work in 1994 is considered one of the earliest and most influential pieces of film audience research, in which she constructs a theoretical framework for a study of 1940s-1950s female spectatorship of Hollywood films, by combining “theories of spectatorship” in film studies, particularly feminist film theory, with “work on gender and audiences” in cultural studies (Stacey, 1994: 19). In her writing, Stacey is critical of the dismissal of “real” cinema spectators by film scholars, and their obsession with the “psychoanalytic model” of the imagined and passive spectator conceptualized by the film text (Stacey, 1994) (see also Barker and Austin’s work as mentioned above). Since film scholars seemed to be in “fear of dirtying one’s hands with empirical material’, as Stacey argued, they are reluctant or refuse to move beyond the film text and engage with the “actual spectator” within film studies (ibid: 29).

Two exceptions which empirically look at real film audiences are offered by Jacqueline Bobo and Helen Taylor (Stacey, 1994). Bobo (1988) accepts a cultural studies approach to explore how black female spectators respond to *The Colour Purple* by interviewing actual black female viewers. In Taylor’s work (1989) on *Gone with the Wind*, she explores:

how GWTW lives in the imaginations, memories and experiences of individuals and groups – that is, through the eyes of its fans, who, to judge by the statistics of book sales, film and television viewing figures and a wealth of memorabilia and popular references, come from many nations, classes, races, generations and life experiences (1989: 18).

By analysing the film’s production, the text itself, the changing historical context and how the film acts in spectators’ imaginations, memories and experiences, Taylor identifies the cultural significance of the meaning of *Gone with the Wind* as opposed to its more limited textual significance.

Going back to Stacey’s work, rather than merely focusing on the “textual spectator”, she brings the “empirical spectator” into the foreground (1994: 23). By undertaking an investigation of actual viewers through empirical studies, including letters and questionnaires, and drawing on the notion of what dominates the audiences’ understanding and interpretation of media products in cultural studies, she takes the film viewing context and social practice into consideration when analysing the film spectators. Further, she positions the social and material conditions of film consumption as more dominant in many cases than the specific film text. The following table illustrates how Stacey makes a comparison of paradigms of audience research in film studies and cultural studies.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Film studies* | *Cultural studies* |
| Spectator positioning | Audience readings |
| Textual analysis | Ethnographic methods |
| Meaning as production-led | Meaning as consumption-led |
| Passive viewer | Active viewer |
| Unconscious | Conscious |
| Pessimistic | Optimistic |

Figure 2.1 Contrasting paradigms: film studies and cultural studies (Stacey, 1994: 24).

This table can be related to the previous discussion of Stacey’s theoretical approach which combines audience analysis in film studies with that in cultural studies and is inspired by the context-oriented approach in television and cultural studies. It is found that what is significant for film audience studies is that it is essential to shed light on the actual film viewers rather than solely assuming the ideal spectators and the matter of the dominant position of social context and the practice of film viewing in understanding actual film viewers. Stacey considers the priority of context rather than text in many cases and its role in determining the relationship of and interaction between viewer and film text.

As the boom in empirical audience research in cultural studies permeated into film audience studies, it is interesting to note some film audience work that attempts to engage with specific film texts. For example, Valerie Walkerdine (1985) only concentrates on one male viewer and analyses how he make sense of the violence presented in *Rocky III* released in 1982 in America.

Martin Barker and Kate Brooks (1998) do systematic studies on the impact of popular action films on boys who view it and the ways in which different groups make sense of and engage with the film text by concentrating on one film case – *Judge Dredd*, adapted from the popular comic *2000AD*. Their work began with Barker’s earlier research on the influence of violent comics on viewers. In his *Comics: Ideology, Power and the Critics*, Barker (1989) asserted the “contract” (chapter 11) relationship between media and audiences, particularly “committed” ones. In so doing, he resists the traditional communication theory explanation, which assumes the effect of violent comics on passive and vulnerable viewers who are closely involved in the viewing experience. He argues that the more critical “contract” relationship between viewers and comics that more likely happens is premised on viewers’ knowledge of the genre and based on the historical experience of involvement (1998: 15).

Drawing on such conclusions, Barker and Brooks (1998), carried out a thoughtful and well-structured research project about *Judge Dredd* in an attempt to rescue understanding away from the assumed passive effect of violent and action films on viewers. In other words, their work on *Judge Dredd* was the antithesis of the existing traditional researches on "media violence" and also a criticism of the ‘media effects’ approach. They firstly point out the problems existing in contemporary audience researches, which is driven by the pursuit of “policies” and “political position” (1998: 83). What they mean by this is that the, at the time, current effects research about films pointed to policy and political issues rather than neutrally investigating how audiences really reacted to violent films.

The researchers investigated the audience of this film and explored the various responses, as well as the social aspects of film-viewing and the language that the audience use to discuss the pleasures of watching films. By talking with the audiences (in focus groups), observing how they behaved and analysing how they expressed their pleasure for *Judge Dredd* (“procedures derived from discourse analysis” (1998: 109)), Barker and Brooks summarized the different responses of different audience groups, and, according to the different types of expression for the pleasure of the film, divided the responses into six orientations (p155-175). They term these orientations “The Action-Adventure”, “The Future-Fantastic”, “The 2000AD-Follower”, “The Film-Follower”, “The Stallone-Follower” and “The Culture-Belonging SPACEs”. It can be identified from these six orientations just how much existing social experience matters to audiences’ understanding of *Judge Dredd.* The discussion of *Judge Dredd* in terms of the analysis of the engagement and responses of audiences in part verifies what Barker considers to be a contract relationship between critical audiences and media. By the same token, Barker argues that the “high investor” (audience members “with a high level of investment” in a film) offered a more explicit and detailed response to the film. The degree of investment – that is, “all those aspects of audiences’ relations to film that relate to how and why a film matters to them” (Barker, 1998: 236) – determines the process of every aspect in film watching, which includes “choosing, preparing for, experiencing, recalling and incorporating a film” (ibid: p239).

While this project seems not to be directly relevant to my research in terms of its attempt to consider the relationship between transnational audiences and hybrid film texts, the work is instructive for this study in two respects. On the one hand, Barker and Brooks provide a model of how to systematically take up a film case study and structure a frame for thinking about how different audiences may respond to the film in relation to the pleasure of watching films. By employing the different language of expression and discourse about film-watching pleasure, their research exemplified that audiences reacted to the action film by actively negotiating with the text rather than being vulnerable to and innocently affected by the violent content. On the other hand, Barker was inspired by Baxandall’s (1988) research on how viewers understand paintings to focus on the media use in the frame of society. Barker thus agreed with Baxandall’s argument about the significant role of “particular social history” in understanding a cultural product (1998: 133). That is, the media is not able to determine the pattern of audience responses, rather, the position in which media and audience is placed within the social and cultural context is crucial to how audiences understand it. Their discussion is useful in terms of the ways in which audiences are influenced by their awareness of the cultural associations of particular texts and for its analysis of the ways in which pleasure is articulated by participants in audience research.

In her *Interpreting Film*s, Staiger (1992: 20) argues that “inferences established prior to any specific act of reading are determinants to the perception, comprehension, and interpretation that occurs during reading”. In other words, resonating with what Barker notes in his work on *Comics* and *Judge Dredd*, what Staiger means is that audiences’ existing and historical experiences prior to viewing a film play a role in shaping how they respond to it.

Identifying Barker and Brooks’ *Judge Dredd* project as an attempt to challenge the traditional effect theory of mass communication paradigm, I now turn to discuss another profoundly ambitious project developed by Barker. From 2003 to 2004, Barker and his colleagues undertook an international study of *The Lord of the Rings*, which “represented the largest and most complex attempt to date to study audience responses to a film” (Barker et al., 2008). The project involved researchers in twenty countries taking part, gathering approaching 25,000 multi-language questionnaire responses, constituting both qualitative and quantitative questions and followed by group interviews (Barker, 2009). By working on such a quantity of cross-national data, the project looks at how different national viewing contexts in which *The Lord of the Rings* is situated actually affect audience reception of the film. This then is a study of cross-cultural communication, examining how the fantasy genre functions in audiences’ engagement with the film and the effect of different publicity and marketing strategies in different national contexts, which all give rise to the actual film reception process.

By contrast to the other film projects discussed above, the project on *The Lord of the Rings* is carried out in a cross-cultural context and looks at the transnational audiences’ reception. This study, like that of Liebes and Katz on the transnational reception of *Dallas*,is thus closely related to my study of the transnational reception of hybrid films. The next section will particularly concentrate on Corner’s approach for analysing how audiences respond to film and television texts.

### 2.4.3 Corner’s three-step approach

Having reviewed various projects on television and film audience investigation, in this section, I will focus on the argument developed by one particular British media scholar, John Corner (1995). Even though he writes about audience interpretation of television programmes, rather than film, I have adopted his approach for my analysis of Chinese audiences in this study. Corner’s work on audience interpretation of television programmes is built on and developed from the cultural studies approach as discussed in previous sections. For instance, he draws on Hall’s concept of encoding and decoding and borrows Bourdieu’s argument of cultural competence to develop a new approach to the process of interpreting television programmes. As such, Corner’s approach provides a very useful framework for understanding the process of how Chinese audiences interpret Hollywood films with Chinese elements.

Corner’s book *Television Form and Public Address* (1995) explores “the relationship between the communicative forms of television and their social agency” (p1). He develops the analysis of this relationship by defining “television as a kind of public address” (p1) and positioning it in a wider social and public environment. One of the significant aspects on which Corner focuses on in his book is the broad and various factors that exert an effect on “media ‘influence’” and how they matter to “viewer interpretation” (1995: 135). He points out the core linkage between the two, as they intertwine with each other, is “the production of meaning” (p135).

Two points addressed in Corner’s work are worth recognizing here. The first is Corner’s assertion that the production of meaning around the televised text is not fixed but rather contingent. He gives an explanation about the contingency of meaning production, arguing that “meanings are not inherent properties of televised texts, they are instead the product of viewer interpretation working upon significations” (Corner, 1995: 136). This is suggested as a development from what Hall believes, in that the media text is originally meaningless and thus has no effect. Only if it is considered as “a meaningful discourse and meaningfully decoded” (Corner, 1995: p3) can it be endowed with meaning. It can be argued that the production of meaning is enacted from the interpretation and reading of viewers or their interaction with the media text, rather than existing in the text in itself. Corner goes further by giving examples to verify that the production of meaning is with reference to the viewer’s competence. The meaning of televisual texts depends on what meanings viewers endow them with and how they interpret them. In this sense, the meaning of the media text is not fixed and stable. What causes the variation of meaning production in media texts is the interpretation of viewers which is in relation to their competence affected by reference to wider social and cultural factors.

From this, it can be seen that Corner attributes the production of various meanings to the dominance and significance of the viewers in the interpreting process. He gives special attention to differentiating the multiple layers in the process of meaning production. As clarified by Corner, the “primary meaning accorded to signifiers” is, sometimes, different from the “broader significance” generated by the special user context.

From the perspective of media studies, Corner’s work is, as indicated above, influenced by Hall’s encoding/decoding model (Hall, 1973), in which he defines the television programme is defined as the “televised sign” (1973: 11). Drawing on the iconic sign defined by Peirce, Hall considers the televised sign as a kind of iconic sign, which is made up of both “denotative visual sign” (ibid: p11) and “connotative visual sign” (ibid: p12). The former one, put crudely, is reproducing the objects in the real world into the visual and virtual media image, while the generation of connotative meanings is inferred from the denotative visual meaning with reference to the broader contexts of cultural ideology, history and daily cultural practice. Hall explains the relationship between the denotative and connotative aspects of the sign by explaining that the latter “is precisely the point where the denoted sign intersects with the deep semantic structures of a culture and takes on an ideological dimension” (ibid: p12). Revisiting Corner’s different layers of meaning production, the “primary meaning” given by Corner is what Hall identifies as the meaning generated by the denotative visual sign, while the layer of “broader significance” reflects the prevailing cultural and social life and context. Combining Hall’s work with the propositions of Corner, it can be surmised that denotative meaning is relatively certain, which is by virtue of viewers’ competence, whilst the production of connotative meanings accrues more to the social and cultural process of contextualization.

The first key point I want to focus on in Corner’s work is on the side of media text and is about where and how text meaning is produced and what factors result in the variables of meaning production. The second significant contribution I want to pull out of Corner’s work is the way he turns to the perspective of the viewer’s interpretation of meaning. He is concerned with the way in which viewer interpretation comprises television meaning, which Livingstone (2008: 4) suggests he defines in terms of a “three-step approach”, embracing “comprehension”, “implication and association” and “response” (p152-154).

According to Corner, comprehension as well as implication or association are revealed through textual analysis, with the first step being basic denotative content analysis, and the second step drawing in broader questions of form, content and genre analysis. In the process of making sense of a text, comprehension is the basic and initial engagement with and understanding of what is visually portrayed on the screen, which refers to the literal or denotative meanings. Implication or association can be regarded as a deeper and broader understanding of the denotative sign, by reference to the inferential, connotative meanings implied by what is depicted on the screen or associated with what is on the screen. The third step – response – as Corner explains, is about how audiences actually make sense of the first two steps of denotative and connotative meaning in the context of their own circumstances, established knowledge and dispositions. On this level, by shifting the focus from textual analysis to the viewer side, Corner brings in the propositions of British cultural studies about media audiences and suggests that viewer interpretation is in the frame of social practice. He thus puts the understanding of viewers’ responses into the broader context of social and cultural construction and the viewers’ personal lives. This implies that the different meanings that particular audiences ascribe or attribute to what is on the screen come down to the social factors in play.

A similar approach to the process of audience interpretation can be found in Justin Lewis’s work, *The Ideological Octopus: An Exploration of Television and Its Audience* (Lewis, 1991). Lewis attempts to reduce the process of interpretation to two components, which are comprehension and interpretation. He discusses the case of *Cagney and Lacey* exemplified by Condit to suggest that viewers in most cases comprehend what has happened in television programmes in a similar way, but they variously interpret and assess the issues involved in the programme. Lewis conceptualizes the process of interpretation as a type of evaluative judgement.

Sonia Livingstone (2008) is critical of both Lewis’s two-component process and Corner’s three-step approach. On the one hand, she suggests that the way in which Lewis attempts to boil down the interpretation to the evaluative process is ambiguous and simplified. The assertion that Lewis reduces the process of the interpretation of the television text to assessable judgement is a dilution of cultural and social complexity in the interpreting practice. On the other hand, she is sceptical of Corner’s general and confusing definition of “response” and his three-step approach to interpretation, arguing that “the analytic gain exceeds the confusion which each scheme seems to generate” (Livingstone, 2008: 9). In this regard, based on what Lewis and Corner propose, Livingstone argues for her own two-step process of interpretation which includes comprehension and interpretation. She moves away from the idea of there being three steps, since both textual and extra-textual knowledge are in demand for every step in the process but nevertheless differentiates her model from Lewis’s two-component process of comprehension and evaluative judgement. Rather than identifying textual interpretation as “a separate process”, Livingstone suggests shifting the focus on the “distinctive interpretative process” (ibid: p7) towards regarding it as a way of helping to ascertain the “extra-textual resources” (ibid: p9) on which viewers depend when they engage with media content.

To conclude this discussion about the process of interpretation, I argue that it is a considerable move to try to integrate the three-step interpretation into a more simplified two-step model of comprehension and interpretation. I also understand the danger of over-analysing the textual meaning that exists within each step. Admittedly, Corner has developed only a hypothetical way to understand the interpretative process, and it is hard to make clear the boundaries between steps and the extent to which the meanings stretch across each single step. However, Corner’s approach to understanding audience interpretation, grounded in Hall’s encoding and decoding model, is still inspiring for this study in analysing how Chinese audiences make sense of the cultural representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

Having reviewed and evaluated his approach, I will employ his three-step approach in my film audience study as it provides a very useful framework for understanding how audiences make sense of and interpret film texts. His approach helps to make a distinction between the way Chinese audiences interpret different Chinese elements (see the argument in Chapter 4, below, where I make a distinction between tangible and intangible elements). I will draw on Hall’s concept of cultural identity to look at how one’s cultural identity impacts on Corner’s three steps of interpretation. However, drawing on the data collected through my audience research, I move further to develop a fourth step to the audience reception of films, which I call it “derivative behaviour”. This focuses on the physical aspect of the process of audience interpretation, pointing out the subsequent actual behaviour by audiences after they have watched and made sense of a film. In particular, I engage with the issue of film-related tourism, defined as “visitation to sites where movies and TV programmes have been filmed as well as tours to production studios, including film-related theme parks” (Beeton, 2005: 11). This is a relatively new perspective in analysing the interaction between Chinese audience and Chinese elements in Hollywood films (see the details in Chapter 6).

## 2.5 Conclusion: understanding the reception of hybrid films by transnational audiences in the context of globalization

To conclude what has been discussed in this chapter, it has two purposes. The first one is to review the most important existing scholarly literature relating to this study. The second purpose is to identify the approach that I will adopt for my thesis, which is applying cultural studies into the analysis of the Chinese audience.

By reviewing various material, this chapter has surveyed three different bodies of literature. The first is the approaches to researching on Hollywood films with Chinese elements. By going through some of the most influential works in the fields of both television and film studies regarding Hollywood films with Chinese elements, it can be seen that the approaches of textual or discourse analysis are widely employed but there is a lack of research on audience perspectives, in terms of the reception of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. The second one is approaches to the study of Hollywood’s global industrial strategy and China’s soft power strategy. Previous studies have made it clear that the US intends to expand its place in the Chinese film market, with an aggressive ambition to invade and dominate the Chinese cultural industry. This strategy, along with the growth of Chinese soft power ambitions, has resulted in the increasing inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, producing what can be considered a hybrid film culture. As previously noted, the representation of Chinese images included in Hollywood films has changed along with the political relationship between China and the US. In this context, Athique suggests that “the prevailing geopolitical relationships” developed on a global scale should be taken into consideration as these, to a great extent, determines “both the form and the reception of transnational media flows” (2016: 55).

The final one is the approaches to audience research and reception studies, built on which I establish my audience research. In terms of the discussion about television and film audience research, it is clear that audience research has transferred its focus from national audiences to transnational audiences, as evidenced by Martin Barker’s transnational project on the audience reception of *The Lord of the Rings* and Liebes and Katz’s study of *Dallas* as transnational communication, noting its success in America and other Western countries, but its failure to satisfy audiences in Japan*.* With the increasing of globalization and the global dissemination of the film, the receiving audiences are no longer restricted to a national space. Indeed, as Athique suggests, there is a growing intent for media products to reach “multinational audiences” (2016: p5). “Media studies has increasingly embraced a new ‘transnational’ paradigm conceived in opposition to the long-running national canons of media content and academic expertise” (Athique, 2016: 1; Ezra *et al.* (Eds), 2006; Durovicova and Newman, 2009; Shohat and Stam, 2003).

Athique draws upon Fanon and Said’s (Fanon, 2001; Said, 1978) arguments about Western media imperialism to write that “the growth of transnational flows theoretically implies a greater volume of imperialist ‘effect’” (Athique: 2016: 49). In the transnational flow of media products, America’s cultural imperialism is actually rebalanced rather than withering away because of the enhanced “media power” (ibid: p49) of other countries.

In this context, the purpose of my research is to demonstrate how what can be seen as ‘transnational audiences’ in China respond to Hollywood films with Chinese elements by adopting a cultural studies approach. Such films are a type of hybrid cultural form, and my intention is to discuss whether local audiences resist or welcome transnational media products in the process of Hollywood’s cultural erosion of local cultures. The next chapter will move on to focus on the empirical approach employed in my audience research.

# Chapter 3 Towards empirical research - questions of methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

Having discussed the theoretical framework adopted for this study in the previous chapter, this chapter will concern the methodology underpinning my research. It is comprised of three sections. In the first section, I will introduce the general methodology and the individual methods used and how they allow me to engage with my research questions. I start with an analysis of the various methods employed by previous scholars to study Western media audiences. In accordance with the purposes and questions of my study, both quantitative and qualitative approaches will be applied for this research. The second section will concentrate on a detailed discussion of the implementation of the specific methods which I adopt. In this process, I take into consideration ethical issues and reflexivity concerning each method. The last section will demonstrate how I adopt both quantitative and qualitative approaches and identify and acknowledge the respective benefits and limitations of these approaches.

## 3.2 Research design and the methodology adopted for this study

As discussed in Chapter 2, the study of Hollywood films with Chinese elements in Chinese academia has been mainly conducted within the area of literary studies. Chinese scholars are obsessed with adopting textual or literary analysis for such films. Research on Hollywood films with Chinese elements in China has thus focused on analysing the cultural elements themselves using semiotic or image analysis, thus deviating from the angle of examining the perceptions and receptions of Chinese audiences. They did not undertake empirical audience research until after 2000, when audience and culture research began to be placed on the agenda.

Previous scholars with similar interests in Western countries have conducted their investigations using a variety of ethnographic research methods depending on their particular research concern. The cultural studies approach to audiences triggered a series of empirical studies on television programmes for different audiences in the late 1970s and 1980s, for example, *The Nationwide Audience* by David Morley (1980), the first British audience research project in the field of cultural studies using qualitative methods. He chose 29 groups with 5 to 10 people within each group from varying social and cultural backgrounds to watch the national public event TV programme, *Nationwide*. He conducted focus group interviews to analyse the interpretation of different people from different social backgrounds after viewing the programme. Morley's research prompted a large number of audience research projects with ethnographic approaches in cultural studies, in particular, the study of romantic series (Ang, 1989; Katz and Liebes, 1990, 1993; Hobson, 1982).

Inspired by the ethnographic approach conducted by previous media or culture scholars as discussed above, in order to address the question of how Hollywood films represent Chinese elements and the way that Chinese audience understand these elements, this research requires a methodology that can successfully approach these two research angles. There is no off-the shelf and single method to simultaneously fit these two questions. In this case, driven by the emphasis of this research and the need to best investigate and understand the research problems, I have designed a complex mixed methods approach. I use both quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as developing one case study. It is only through conducting quantitative research that I am able to identify the respondents’ demographic factors and whether they prefer Hollywood films with Chinese elements and how they understand Chinese elements in terms of a general trend. But it is only through a qualitative approach that I can analyse the ways that Chinese adult audiences discuss the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, and identify the ways in which they understand and respond to Hollywood films with Chinese elements in relation to their personal and socio-cultural circumstances in the context of globalisation.

Mixed methods research “involves the collection and integration of quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone” (Creswell, 2014: 4). It is a relatively new research method in the field of cultural and social research as well as human science, especially in Chinese audience research, which allows “the limitations of one method [to be] offset by the strength of another method” (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011: 8). Mixed methods research is then “about observing an object of study from different angles” (Grix, 2004: 136), and the object of the study in this case is the reception of Hollywood films by Chinese audiences. The different angles to consider here include the films being watched, the studio or company that produced and marketed them (although I do not consider this factor in any depth), and the audiences watching them. To do this will require more than one type of research method. According to Gunter (2000), the purpose of a quantitative method is to describe phenomena, while a qualitative method will emphasize interpretation. Neither quantitative nor qualitative methods individually can completely answer the specific questions addressed in this stage of my project. Despite the various developments in audiences research discussed in the previous chapter, the strategy of using mixed methods to approach film audiences has seldom been adopted.

More concretely, the quantitative analysis in this research observes the Chinese audience through a large-scale survey, drawing on a widely circulated questionnaire, which provided statistical data about Chinese audiences. Meanwhile, the qualitative research here concentrates on small-scale, one-to-one, in-depth interviews; I supplement this interview-based research with a small amount of netnography, and some textual analysis of films discussed in the interviews. I use questionnaire survey with the assistance of textual analysis to answer the first research question “What sort of cultural elements are presented in Hollywood films as Chinese?” and to respond to the question “How do Chinese viewers understand and respond to Hollywood films with Chinese elements?” in general rather than specifically. The purpose of in-depth interviews is to solve the third and fourth research questions about the effect of demographic and socio-cultural issues on Chinese audiences’ responses and how Chinese viewers relate the representation of Chinese elements to their cultural and national identity. Overall, the quantitative research enabled me to identify some basic information about my respondents’ demographic circumstances, including their gender, age, and occupation, and the countries and cities in which they live. It also enabled me to sketchily examine the general reception of Hollywood films with Chinese elements by Chinese audiences, and to understand whether Hollywood films with Chinese elements are more popular among Chinese audiences than other types of films. However, finding out the reasons for the varying reception of these films requires different sorts of analysis. The quantitative method was indeed useful here and was an essential step in enabling me to identify appropriate in-depth interview questions and general directions for my qualitative research. The qualitative research enabled me to explore how individual Chinese audience members make sense of Hollywood films with Chinese elements.

Thus, I collected substantial questionnaire survey data from a wide number of participants to get a general understanding of popular taste, general audience responses to films, film preferences and the popularity of particular types of films. But, building on the results of the data analysis from the responses to the questionnaires, I then purposefully set out the interview questions to further examine key issues that arose from the quantitative research. The qualitative research design was thus intended to explore the effects that such films have on Chinese audiences and the different interpretations of Chinese audiences from different social and cultural groups. The overall intent of collecting and analysing in-depth interview data was thus to explain the initial quantitative results in a more detailed, complex and diverse manner. This strategy, as Creswell describes it, involves “explanatory sequential mixed methods” (2014: 224), by “explaining quantitative results with qualitative data to get a more in-depth understanding of the quantitative results” (Creswell, 2014: 231).

I also combined my in-depth interview approach with textual analysis and netnography, which I did for two reasons. Firstly, because some of the responses my respondents offered to films were very simple and brief, I needed to analyse the film texts suggested by my respondents in more depth, to understand how Hollywood films actually present Chinese cultural elements. Secondly, although in-depth interviews are central to this study, I also adopted a netnographic approach, looking at online film comments or reviews, which in some cases offer interesting and relevant ideas which can supplement what the in-depth interviewees provide. As briefly noted at the beginning of the thesis, the online film reviews are mainly from Douban, an online Chinese film forum, and IMDb, an online film database developed initially in the UK but now owned by Amazon. What should be noted here is that I only use netnography in circumstances where I can proceed regardless of demographic factors. That is to say, I will not employ this method in analysing the question of how different demographic and socio-cultural factors shape the responses of such viewers.

Finally, I move beyond the general issues, where I don’t focus on any specific films, to focus on one particular case study, looking at the *Kung Fu Panda* series to see why this series gained popularity in the Chinese market and how Chinese audiences interpreted it. There were two reasons for choosing the *Kung Fu Panda* series as my case study. Firstly,the series has been a great success in China, both in terms of critical acclaim and at the box office. Drawing from the answers to my questionnaire, 91.28% of my respondents have seen or are aware of the films. This is the biggest percentage received by any of the potential case study films in terms of whether respondents have seen or know of the cases and is indicative of the popularity of this film among Chinese adult audiences and in the Chinese market. The three individual films are in many ways the most representative Hollywood films with a Chinese style in recent years, in embodying and reflecting the exertion of Chinese cultural elements everywhere in the film text.

Secondly, the *Kung Fu Panda* series chronologically covers a period of eight years (from 2008 to 2016), which experienced quite radical changes in the realm of economy, politics and culture in China that had been underway since the beginning the new century; as such, they witnessed a surge in and promotion of the form and recurrence of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. *Kung Fu Panda* 1 and 2 were produced when China held the Olympic Games. Since then, the image of China in the foreign movies has changed. In 2016, following “The Belt and Road Initiative” and “a Community of Shared Future for Mankind” policies, through which the Chinese government asserted comprehensive co-operation designed to create mutual political trust, economic integration and cultural inclusion, *Kung Fu Panda* 3 was produced and released in China. The three films thus, to some extent, reflect the changing nature of Hollywood films with Chinese elements imported into China, and the changing relationship between Hollywood and Chinese cultural policy. By investigating the features of these films within this special time node, it is possible to examine one aspect of the globalization of Hollywood and China.

## 3.3 Ethical issues

Before commencing a detailed discussion of individual methods, I want to take into account some of the ethical issues concerning the use of mixed methods. Ethical issues are taken into consideration throughout the entire process of empirical research. As Colin Robson has noted, it “should be self-evident that there are ethical considerations when carrying out real world research involving people”(2011: 194). To ensure the project was conducted in an ethical manner, and in as effective a way as possible, I completed the ethical application process and secured ethical approval from the University of York’s Department of Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media (TFTI) prior to undertaking my audience research. The ethical approval form can be found in the Appendix. All participants were provided with information about the study through an informed consent form and a project information sheet (see Appendix 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b) written in Chinese to confirm they understand the general purpose of my research. On the project information sheet, I informed participants of the ways in which I intended to use the data collected. They were asked to read the information sheet and sign a consent form, which advised them that their information and responses would be treated anonymously and protected securely; their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were entitled to withdraw their responses at any time during the research process. To protect and guarantee the privacy of participants as much as possible in the process of conducting the research, the questionnaire was administered by the participants themselves and the interviews took place face-to-face without anyone else present apart from the interviewee and the researcher. Also, I gave the option of individual privacy to participants and negotiated with them the extent to which they would allow me to access their private life, thoughts and feelings. If any personal issues arose that produced uncomfortable or distressed feelings, they were able to stop the interview at any time. In terms of maintaining anonymity while gathering demographic data, participants did not have to provide their real names either in the questionnaire survey or interview. I have labelled the survey respondents by number and refer to them in this way in my analysis below (for example, Questionnaire Survey [QS] participant 1), and use pseudonyms when analysing interview responses. As mentioned above, my research object is Chinese adults, so it does not involve children or young people under 18 years old. I designed my questionnaire to ensure that no-one declaring that they were under 18 years old was able to complete it.

Having considered methodological design issues above, in the next two sections, I will demonstrate how these methods were implemented from a practical perspective and discuss the process of my empirical audience research, focusing on my pilot study, and the subsequent data collection and data analysis of the full questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews. I start by looking at the quantitative aspects of my research, in section 3.4, then discuss the qualitative aspects, in section 3.5.

## 3.4 Quantitative audience research: using a questionnaire survey

Quantitative methods in this field focus on general information about who is consuming cultural and media products among a large amount of people (Vicente-Mariño, 2014), by asking questions of a sample group of the population. Thus, as Gunter puts it, “Behavioural phenomena are quantified and measured numerically” (2000: 23). The survey is the most frequently used quantitative method, mainly for getting a simple understanding of the audience including the aspects of attitudes, feelings or opinions, etc., via a representative sample.

As mentioned above, the first stage of my audience research was designed to get a general understanding of popular taste, general audience responses to films, film preferences and the popularity of particular types of films. “A descriptive survey”, as Hansen and Machin write, “aims to collect information and describe patterns and trends relevant to a particular population” (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 207). As one type of survey, it focuses on phenomenon description rather than on the analysis of details as in an analytic survey. Such a method can tell us a great deal about audiences – how many people go to watch a film, who these films appeal to and why, how this relates to their social context, what their feelings are about such films, and so on. Questionnaires are widely utilized as the central instrument of data collection in survey research (Hansen and Machin, 2013). In light of this, I initially did a descriptive survey by sharing an online questionnaire via social media. By asking participants questions, I wanted to find out what kind of films impressed Chinese audiences, partly in order to identify the case studies I might use in subsequent research and see how further in-depth interview study should be carried out.

### 3.4.1 Modes of data collection

According to the aim of the survey in this study, namely, to get a sense of the general viewing habits and tastes of participants to films, rather than investigating the trends in viewing habit as they change over time, a cross-sectional questionnaire survey was by far the best way to approach my research. This is a “one-off survey” (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 210), in which a sample of respondents is interviewed once, and the responses are collected at one point in time (Creswell, 2014). My questionnaire was posted online over 3 months from the beginning of February 2018 to the end of April 2018, to ensure as many participants as possible saw and filled in the questionnaire. At the end of April, I closed and completed the quantitative survey, finally getting 839 responses, including 25 invalid questionnaires (respondents under 18 years old). All Chinese adults (over 18 years old) living in mainland China, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as Chinese adults living in Britain and USA, were eligible for inclusion. Initially, I planned to recruit 700 survey respondents – 500 in China, 100 in the UK and 100 in the USA, but I comfortably exceeded this total, and in fact concentrated mainly on respondents living in China in the main questionnaire phase.

My research objective is to understand the Chinese adult audience living in the UK or US and throughout China. It would have been impractical and impossible for me to give out questionnaires and survey every Chinese adult face-to-face on my own, travelling through three countries within three years as a single PhD research student without enough budget or time. Thus, a self-administered questionnaire was designed for this study, and I adopted a sample approach. The questionnaire was distributed widely online and by Chinese social media (I posted the e-questionnaire on Wechat, QQ, micro-blog, Douban, etc., and these are Chinese social media platforms similar to Facebook in the West.) to minimize the bias of the researcher as much as possible in terms of selecting the participants, and to ensure as wide a sample as possible, a point I will discuss in more detail below. Participants were able to complete the questionnaire at any time during the three months when it was convenient for them to do so.

### 3.4.2 Pilot study: testing the feasibility of the survey

Before designing and launching the main survey, I undertook two pilot research studies. First, I researched Chinese audiences’ attitudes towards Hollywood films with Chinese elements for my master’s dissertation at the University of Leicester, using in-depth qualitative interviews and a case study of *Kung Fu Panda* (see Master’s Dissertation interview questions in Appendix 3). Twenty interviewees took part in my interview, according to which six factors were identified from the data analysis to motivate participants to select *Kung Fu Panda* and contribute to its successful box office: the brand effect of Hollywood; the creation of theme and motif; the comedy genre with its aim of entertainment; herd mentality; the attraction of Chinese elements; and personal preference. As indicated above, my master’s research focused on just one film case, and used only a qualitative research methodology, without conducting any quantitative research. With regard to the limitations of the method adopted for the master’s research, the sample size of the interview was very small due to the limitations of time, space and funding. Additionally, the adoption of just one case study and semi-structured interviews failed to generate an understanding of the general phenomenon of Chinese audience’s preference and the relationship between their preference and their particular demographic circumstances. It was however interesting to find that my interview respondents referred to other Hollywood films with Chinese elements to make analogies and comparisons, rather than only mentioning *Kung Fu Panda* when responding to my interview questions.

To develop and improve the research I undertook for my master’s dissertation, based on those initial findings, I decided to expand my master’s research onto a larger scale in my PhD study, and explore the general understanding of Chinese adult audiences towards Hollywood films with Chinese elements. In doing so, I planned to take into consideration any Hollywood films with Chinese elements, rather than just one case study.

Secondly, as a part of my PhD audience research, I developed a pilot questionnaire in English using Google Forms (see the Pilot Questionnaire in Appendix 4). I tried out the pilot study on around 40 respondents, mainly friends and colleagues living in UK, to test the feasibility of the questionnaire and enhance the validity and reliability of the research in four aspects. Were the questions understood as intended? Did both the respondents and I know how to work through the questionnaire? Were questions worded and organized in a useable and appropriate way so that they would contribute to the aim of the survey research? And were the respondents in any way misled by the questionnaire? I contacted potential participants living or studying in UK and who had access to Google and notified then about the general aim of piloting the questionnaire. The pilot survey questionnaire link was sent by email and provided access to an English-language version of my consent form and information sheet for those who agreed to participate. It took me two weeks in middle to late January 2018 to collect the pilot data. I then analysed and reflected upon the pilot questionnaire and its outcomes, made some small changes and revised it as outlined below.

In the “Personal information” section, participants would no longer have to provide their names or nicknames in the formal questionnaire. In some questions about the frequency of watching films or the degree of their preference, such as “How often do you watch films?”, the order of options was adjusted so that the answers worked in a more sensible and appropriate way. For the closed questions, pilot participants who felt they neither liked nor disliked something I had asked them about in the pilot questionnaire were not exactly sure which one to choose, so “no strong opinion” was added to the answer categories. That is, as Neuman (2006) writes, a “Neutral Position”, which offers a non-attitudinal choice to reduce the possibility of expressing opinions on fictitious issues and objects when participants indeed have no certain ideas. In section 6, I added representative posters of selected films to help respondents recall the particular films. In addition, the partially open questions, in which I left space for participants to write answers, were changed to the form of multiple-choice questions, such as when asking about their general feelings or opinions about Hollywood films with Chinese elements. This provided convenience both to respondents and to me to answer the question and work with the response data.

### 3.4.3 The process of creating the questionnaire

Once I had established that the questionnaire worked effectively, I conducted the full study. Firstly, I translated the revised version of the pilot questionnaire into Chinese. I created my formal questionnaire using Wenjuan Xing (WJX), a widely used Chinese software package for designing online questionnaires. The reason why I did not use Google forms to develop the formal questionnaire was the difficulty many Chinese internet users have in accessing Google. With access to the internet and modern communication tools like email becoming universal, the format of the questionnaire was not confined to giving out a conventional paper questionnaire, which is geographically restricted; instead, I was able to circulate the questionnaire widely by electronic means (Schmidt, 1997). Web-based questionnaire surveys conducted on the internet or by email are fast and inexpensive, compared with conventional survey methods (Neuman, 2006). This also allowed flexibility for me to check the process. The rationale of developing an online questionnaire was then that large numbers of Chinese people now have access to the Internet, and in particular, to the World Wide Web. The China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) issued authoritative reports that the size of China's Internet users had reached 731 million by early 2017, with mobile phone users reaching 695 million.

The final version of my questionnaire as circulated in Chinese (see Appendix 1c with both English and Chinese version) was divided into 8 sections. Section 1 was about personal information such as the age, occupation and place of residence of each participant. The next section was about the film preferences and habits of respondents, such as “what kind of films do you watch?”, “Why do you watch movies?” and “how often do you watch films?”. Sections 3, 4 and 5 were respectively about Chinese films, Foreign films, and Hollywood films. Through the first two sections, I planned to explore whether participants had particular feelings about either Chinese or foreign films and make comparisons between their preference for Chinese and/or foreign films within different groups. In section 5, where Hollywood films were the main research object, I aimed to gather information about the popularity of Hollywood films and the situation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements among Chinese adult audiences. Section 6 asked questions about a series of representative Hollywood films with Chinese elements, where I provided film posters and asked respondents whether they had seen certain films, to help identify case studies in further qualitative research.

What should be noticed here was that some of the selected cases in this section were the films which were frequently referred to by my master’s research respondents. However, I also included some other well-known titles, including both films that were successful in the Chinese market (e.g the *Kung Fu Panda* series) and those that were less successful (e.g *The Great Wall*[[15]](#footnote-15)). The purpose of this section was to identify one film case study (see discussion in Chapter 7) and to look at respondents’ general reaction to particular Hollywood films with Chinese elements, instead of discussing such films throughout the thesis. The films which are analysed in the following chapters were again generated from the comments of my respondents. In the end, some films selected for section 6 in the questionnaire survey were not developed in the data analysis because they did not get mentioned much in the respondents’ discussion. Although a great range of Hollywood films with Chinese elements had been released in China, only a few could leave an impression on the respondents. *The Great Wall* is one example which appeared in the questionnaire but about which there was a lack of discussion in the data analysis.

The final two sections of the questionnaire were about general feelings and attitudes towards Hollywood films with Chinese elements. In section 7, I wanted to get participants’ intuitive feelings about the phenomenon of Chinese elements appearing in Hollywood films and the changes of Chinese cultural appearance recognized in these films. I therefore asked questions such as, “When Chinese elements appear in a poster for a Hollywood film, would you pay more attention to that film?” and “Do you feel a stronger engagement with Hollywood films that include Chinese elements?”. Section 8 was about participants’ feelings towards and general understandings or perceptions of the phenomenon, such as “What is your feeling about the phenomenon of adding Chinese elements to Hollywood films?” or “What effects do you think Chinese elements have on Hollywood?”

As a critical part of data collection, I would like to provide some information about the tool I used. WJX is a professional platform offering online questionnaire surveys, evaluations and voting services. The official statistics showed that 24.5 million users had recovered 1.6 billion questionnaire replies in 12 years. This therefore seemed a suitably robust means of conducting my questionnaire. By sending invitation emails and posting a link, the designed questionnaire was further distributed by using Chinese social media such as Wechat, QQ, micro-blog, Douban, etc., as noted above.

### 3.4.4 Sample strategy

I now move on to the question of recruiting participants in carrying out the survey questionnaire. Bounded by time, money and workforce, I considered non-probability sampling as the ideal way to reach respondents and circulate the questionnaire. Due to these limitations, it is almost impossible to randomly sample the entire Chinese film audience and specifically divide the population into sub-groups throughout China. As distinct from probability sampling in which the [probability](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Probability) of getting any particular sample may be calculated, non-probability sampling refers to the method of sample selection by investigators fundamentally according to their subjective judgment rather than statistical principles (Hansen and Machin, 2013).

On the one hand, I posted the questionnaire online and circulated it via social media as widely as possible, aiming to ensure a wide demographic and geographical spread by using channels used by different sorts of people, in order to secure a reasonably representative sample, and people who saw the questionnaire could decide whether they would participate. In terms of the main users of the channels that I used to post the questionnaire, the WeChat official offered a data report on the user quantity for 2018 that the monthly active numbers of WeChat remains at 1.08 billion users. Among them, there are 63 million users over 55 years old who use Wechat (WeChat 2018 data report, 2018). The users of Sina micro-blog are relatively younger. Users under 25 years old account for 57.4% of all micro-blog users (SOHU, 2019). Although Douban is the film channel, it is not merely used by film fans and professionals. Rather, there are some generalists, especially some young people. It should be noted here that most users are younger with 18- to 35-year-old users accounting for 92.5% among which 25-year-old ones occupy 46%.

On the other hand, according to my research objectives, I also combined snowball sampling with quota sampling to ensure as wide a sample as possible. A group of respondents who have the characteristics relevant to the research objectives is initially selected. On the basis of their knowledge of other qualified potential respondents, they are asked to identify and provide the third batch of respondents willing to participate in my survey as well as in- depth interview (I also used the snowball sampling strategy to identify interviewees). Quota sampling is defined as follows by Bryman (drawing on Hansen and Machin):

The aim of quota sampling is to produce a sample that reflects a population in terms of the relative proportions of people in different categories, such as gender, ethnicity, age group, socio-economic groups, and region of residence, and in combinations of these categories (Bryman, 2016: 188; Hansen and Machin, 2013: 211).

In my case, I started the snowball process by sending the questionnaire to my friends, family and colleagues from different sub-groups, for example gender, age, city and cultural background, etc. Then, the initially selected respondents with such characteristics passed the questionnaire to other people who would be willing to participate. It should be noted here that I made a special effort with data collection for the 51-60 age group for the reason that respondents in this age group were less evident than other groups in the first round of questionnaire collection. Chinese people in this age group would not usually browse websites or check their email or messages. To enhance the number of participants from this age group, I posted an invitation on Wechat purposefully to recruit participants in 51-60 age. My friends and my parents were asked to circulate and spread the questionnaire link to their friends’ circle as widely as possible. In total, as noted previously, I collected 839 questionnaires from Chinese people living in China, UK and USA, with 25 invalid responses. In consideration of the obviously smaller number of Chinese respondents from UK and USA, all of this data will be analysed together without considering the difference of respondents’ interpretation between different countries. On the one hand, this is due to the low numbers (See Table 2 and 3) in these groups. On the other hand, as those interviewees did not provide the specific and personal experience of living in China and in UK or USA, there is lack of more detailed background information offered on national identity in relation to such respondents. It is not possible to relate their understanding and interpretation to their different Chinese national identities.

### 3.4.5 Data analysis

When I stopped the online questionnaire, I downloaded general and preliminary statistical results generated by the WJX software program to a Word file, downloaded the original data to Excel and imported SPSS to do further analysis.

The design of my questionnaire enabled me to identify some key demographic data about the ages of participants, where they live and what sorts of jobs they have. Respondents were first separated into a number of sub-groups according to whether they met the demographic criteria. The detailed age group features are stated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Breakdown of survey participants by age group**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | Young people | Middle-aged people | | Older people | | All 18+ participants |
| Age | Under 18 | 18 - 30 | 31 - 40 | 41 - 50 | 51 - 60 | Over 60 | 18+ |
| Total | 25 | 407 | 150 | 137 | 113 | 7 | 814 |
| Percentage of total participants | --- | 50.00% | 18.43% | 16.83% | 13.88% | 0.86% | 100% |

Of these respondents, 25 were adolescents under 18 years old. In line with my ethics protocol, once these adolescents had revealed their age on the questionnaire, they were unable to proceed further and their initial responses are therefore considered invalid.

The other 814 participants can be generally clarified into young respondents, middle-aged and older respondents. Young people in China, as in the West, are the main targeted cinema audience group. In this survey, the sample in the 18-30 age group is obviously bigger than other groups, which is in accordance with cinema viewing habits in China. The total number of eligible responses from participants with a Chinese ethnic background was 814. All respondents are Chinese, with 791 living or studying in mainland China, 10 in Hong Kong, Macao or Taiwan and 13 in the UK or US. Participants were thus recruited from different countries as in Table 2:

**Table 2: Breakdown of survey participants by living country group**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Country | China | | | | UK and US |
|  | Mainland China | Hong Kong | Macao | Taiwan | UK and US |
| Total (876) | 791 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 13 |

Three choices – China, UK and US – were given in the questionnaire, which I planned to use to investigate the different performances of films within different cultural contexts. Given that Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan implement capitalist systems similar to the UK and US and the obviously small sample of respondents from outside mainland China, I will discuss responses from these territories together with Chinese respondents from the UK and USA in analysing the questionnaire data. Cities in mainland China are classified into first tier, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, etc., second tier such as Zibo, Changchun, etc. and other cities, on the basis of their economic importance, in line with a report by the China Business Network (CBN). This also labelled cities as developed, undeveloped or developing. By using these categories, I am able to explore whether the economic development and power of a participant’s home city or country had an influence on their viewing habits and performances as members of the film audience. Of the 814 respondents living in or outside mainland China, the distribution of participants in China (including mainland China and Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan) is as demonstrated as Table 3.

**Table 3: Breakdown of survey participants by living city group**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Cities | First-tier cities | Second-tier cities | Third-tier cities | Fourth-tier cities | Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan |
| Total (814) | 226 | 219 | 316 | 30 | 10 |

Additionally, participants also hold different type of jobs. 6 types of jobs (see Table 4) were given to the respondents in the questionnaire, according to the widely accepted stratification of occupation (Occupational Classification, see reference), so that I could discuss the effect played by social status on film audiences.

**Table 4: Breakdown of survey participants by occupational group**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of job | Manual Labour | Professionals (eg: Police, Teacher, Doctor) | Retired | Students | Self-employed | Others |
| Total (814) | 29 | 312 | 37 | 104 | 95 | 237 |
| Percentage (100%) | 3.56% | 38.33% | 4.55% | 12.78% | 11.67% | 29.12% |

It is noteworthy that 237 indicated “Other” occupations, since it was difficult or unclear for some respondents as to how to classify themselves according to the job categories I provided. The “other” allowed me to mitigate the bias or error brought by uncertainty in the process of data analysis. More detailed demographic factors and the illustration of the relationship between respondents’ social status and their viewing habits will be discussed in Chapter 5. The questions in the subsequent sections of the questionnaire were explored in relation to the key demographic data listed above.

## 3.5 Qualitative Audience Research: In-depth Interviews and grounded theory

Having introduced quantitative research, I will move on to the second stage of my investigation – qualitative audience research. As noted previously, in this stage, I will explore in detail the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films with Chinese elements, their effects on general Chinese audiences and the way in which Chinese audiences from different social and cultural contexts understand and interpret any such films identified by my respondents. Jonathan Gray (2003), in his project on the viewers of *The Simpsons*, finds it useful and effective to interview and analyse in depth the anti-fans and non-fans of cartoon films. He therefore argues that “we must look to anti-fans and non-fans as well, and study how the text changes as it meets different audiences and viewing environments” (p79). He believes that the strategy of investigating non-fans is the way to go with future audience research. Based on Gray‘s concept of fans and anti-fans, after the large-scale questionnaire survey was conducted, I undertook 34 in-depth interviews, both face-to-face and by Skype or telephone, with individuals who expressed either a relative liking for or a dislike of Hollywood films with Chinese elements.

Compared with a quantitative method, which may be more superficial in its focus on numbers, magnitude and measurement, qualitative methods emphasize the evaluation and judgement of the explicit responses of respondents (Babbie, 2010). As previously mentioned, I focused on in-depth interviews, in combination with textual analysis and netnography. This combination helped me to do a deeper analysis of the responses to Chinese elements offered by my respondents, supplementing the limitations of my interview sample. In this section, I will firstly introduce the process of interview data collection. Secondly, I will set up the analytical strategy adopted for the interview data analysis and how I analyse the interview data.

### 3.5.1 Data collection

To explore the deep perception of Chinese audiences for Hollywood films with Chinese elements, I adopted the interview as my primary data collection method. The interview, as a purposive conversation, is one of the most widely used and most fundamental research tools of the qualitative approach. As such, it is also one of the most useful and fundamental media research approaches for exploring the relationships between audience and media, and especially as a way of understanding audiences’ feelings, emotions and personal opinions (Berger, 2014). As interviews enable researchers to get some hidden information that is impossible to obtain by observation or survey alone, this allows the researcher to find out what motivates respondents by getting them to talk about their thoughts (Berger, 2014). Moreover, verbal narrative answers are considered more complex, rich and interesting than statistics (Bertrand, 2005). In this process, I was the key research instrument by interviewing participants without questionnaires or other instruments.

In order to analyse audiences’ interpretations of films, I used semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allowed me to gather a potentially much richer and more sensitive type of data on the dynamics of audiences and their relations to the films they watched (Hansen and Machin, 2013: 227), and to research the themes I identified more closely. My qualitative audience research was conducted from early September 2018 till late October 2018, lasting two months.

The interview questions (See Appendix 2c) were mainly arisen from the initial analysis of questionnaire (See Appendix 1c) data. For example, the question “which Hollywood films with Chinese elements most deeply impressed you?” in questionnaire survey generated the deeper investigation on the reason why such films left impression on them in in-depth interview. According to the film examples which were recurrently referred to in the questionnaire survey, I listed several cases to specially ask how the interview respondents understood the Chinese elements in those films. Another important example is that the comparison between recent Chinese films and Hollywood films with Chinese elements was initially induced by the questionnaire respondents’ answers to “Chinese film” section, particularly question 14 which is about the Chinese film that deeply impressed them.

### 3.5.2 Sample Strategy

The selection of participants for semi-structured interviews was made from the respondents to my online questionnaire. As with the data-collecting method of my survey questionnaire, I partly used the strategy of snowball sampling, and the non-probability sampling method, in this case, was an ideal way to collect data. It was only by adopting this recruitment method that I was able to manage a project of some scale in spite of the limitations of time and capacity. On the one hand, I contacted respondents to the questionnaire by email, asking who would be willing to continue participating in the project through the interview phase. On the other hand, I asked some of my participants to identify potential new interviewees. As Hansen and Machin mentioned, “individuals invited to the interviews must be able and willing to provide the desired information and must be representative of the population of interest” (2013: 235). In consideration of the limitation of time and expense, I decided 34 interviewees would be neither too small a sample to be productive, nor too large a sample with only one person doing the research.

According to their convenience, my interviewees were free to choose the way of being interviewed, including by telephone, online or occasionally in a sit-down, face-to-face conversation. Although the lack of eye contact in phone or online interviews may result in some misunderstanding or missing some responses, this was outweighed by the ease of telephone or online interviewing in overcoming the limitations of distance. Each interview lasted for about 50 minutes to one hour and was recorded by digital voice recorder with the permission of the participants.

In terms of the limitations and problems of non-probability sampling method, it should be acknowledged here that although it does make this sort of research manageable, it also to some extent provides a sample that is not representative of the nation as a whole, or even of Chinese audiences as a whole. However, I argue that, by carefully considering the risks involved in the non-probability sampling method in the process of collecting data, this method allowed me to generate some very interesting and useful findings.

After gathering the data through the interviews, interview transcription was the next critical step. The process of transcribing could permit re-examination of the respondents’ answers, which also allowed secondary analysis to enhance the depth and validity of my research. At this stage, I translated the interview responses from Chinese into English, since I was writing my thesis in English. In order to ensure the accuracy of the translation, I used the method of back translation or member checking. Thus, my original translation would be double checked by using translation software and by sampling by experienced translators or researchers, with all the results compared with each other. The next step was to code each transcription and label each component part, which was crucial to identifying key themes. In dealing with the interview transcription and analysing my data, I chose to combine software such as Nvivo with manual qualitative data analysis.

### 3.5.3 Grounded theory and data analysis

I use grounded theory in the analysis of my qualitative audience research data. The grounded theory approach was first developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (2005) in 1965 in *Awareness of Dying*. They observed the hospital setting to explore how a hospital cared for and dealt with terminally ill patients. The formation of this approach is related to both Philosophy and Sociology. On the one hand, it draws on pragmatist philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of action, dealing with problematic situations, and seeking methods during the process of solving problems; on the other hand, it draws on the symbolic interactionist sociology of the Chicago School, which widely uses field observation and in-depth interview methods to collect information, emphasizing the understanding of social interaction, social processes and social changes from the perspective of the actors. According to Strauss, grounded theory’s approach to qualitative data can be understood as follows:

[It] is toward the development of theory, without any particular commitment to specific kinds of data, lines of research, or theoretical interests. So, it is not really a specific method or technique. Rather, it is a style of doing qualitative analysis that includes a number of distinct features, such as theoretical sampling, and certain methodological guidelines, such as the making of constant comparisons and the use of a coding paradigm, to ensure conceptual development and density (1987: 5).

Martin and Turner (2016) best described grounded theory as “an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data” (2016: 141). Thus, it is a systematic qualitative approach that looks at qualitative data to generate a theory to explain a phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory emphasizes the promotion of theory from data. It is accepted that only through in-depth analysis of data can we gradually shape a theoretical framework, which is seen as a generalization process, from which the data will be continuously condensed. Unlike narrative theory, the grounded theory approach does not logically deduce the hypothesis set up by researchers in advance but roots it in the data analysis.

The main purpose of the grounded theory approach is to construct the theory itself. In essence, grounded theory as used here is based on a “social constructivism” framework. Creswell gave the definition to it:

In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things (2013: 24).

At a practical level, Creswell (2013) assumes that in constructivist grounded theory, researchers focus on the interaction between individuals and the specific context in which they position themselves. This argument is similar to the cultural studies paradigm I discuss in Chapter 2, which put the receivers into a broader context and social structure rather than merely concentrating the media texts in themselves. In this sense, I will investigate how audiences’ interpretation and understanding of films flow from their different cultural and social settings and how their personal experience and cultural background constructs their interpretation. As Kathy Charmaz (2008) asserts, “a social constructionist approach to grounded theory allows us to address why questions while preserving the complexity of social life” (p397). It is an inductive rather than deductive process, in which researchers continuously make comparisons and contrasts between different data and different theory, and then, according to the correlation between the data and the theory, extract the core attributes of the object of investigation.

Bearing all these points in mind, I adopted grounded theory as the strategy for my interview data analysis. As a result, the final conclusions were only reached after a series of initial analyses, each one informing the next. I initially coded the interview data, using the NVivo software. From this first stage of analysis, I identified some key terms which indicated respondents’ general attitudes towards Chinese elements, their preference for Hollywood films or Chinese films and their brief explanations of why this might be the case. I then built further analyses on the basis of my initial findings. An example may help to explain. In the first round of coding, I found one possible reason why respondents prefer Chinese films lay in what they identified as their characteristics of being “down to earth” or providing a “sense of belonging”. To investigate such terms more profoundly and to understand why they offered these responses, I undertook a second round of NVivo interview coding and found that what the respondents said related closely to the concepts of cultural or national identity (there is a more detailed discussion of cultural identity in Chapters 4 and 5). The reasons why different cultural identities resulted in the distinctive attitudes of the respondents can be attributed to the difference between the individualism at the heart of American values and the collectivism in the Chinese values, as indicated by a third round of coding. Accordingly, chapter 4 discusses respondents’ preference for films and explains that their particular understanding of Chinese films essentially lies in the conflict between collectivism and individualism.

As indicated above, I combined manual data analysis with Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to analyse my interview data, using NVivo software in my research (Zamawe, 2015). The function of CAQDAS was not to replace my personal role in analysing the data. Rather, it aided the process of data analysis (Zamawe, 2015). I adopted it to do coding and to help identify the categories worthy of being analysed.

The accomplishment of the in-depth interviews was the end of my research data-gathering practice. In *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World*, Ien Ang reminds us that:

The collection of data, either quantitative or qualitative in form, can never be separated from its interpretation; it is only through practices of interpretive theorizing that unruly social experiences and events related to media consumption become established as meaningful “facts” about audiences. “Understanding audience activity” is thus caught up in the discursive representation, not the transparent reflection, of diverse realities pertaining to people’s engagements with media (1996: 45-46).

In order to enable the interpretation stage, the data collected from the questionnaire and in-depth interview methods were integrated, ready for further detailed data analysis. And textual analysis by myself was used in alignment with that from in-depth interviews.

Inspired by Strauss’s concept of grounded theory, I analysed the interview transcriptions without setting any agenda in advance. Initially, I briefly analysed the questionnaire data to identify the issues that need to be deeply investigated in in-depth interviews. In analysing the interview data, I firstly identified some general themes by doing coding through which I continued to fractionally adjust the interview questions. The typical example is the issue concerning the respondents’ special stories related to Hollywood films with Chinese elements. It was generated from the general question about how they understand such films (including both textual and physical interpretation). Through the first-round analysis of the interview data, I identified this question which was worth being explored further. In this case, I used grounded theory approach to analyse the data thematically. As Chapters 4-7 will be devoted to a detailed findings discussion and analysis, I will not go to any length to present any particular themes based on my findings in this chapter.

### 3.5.4 Reflexivity

I have tried to be as reflexive as possible as a researcher in this project. The process of reflexivity is a significant and essential step in conducting empirical audience research. That reflexivity involves two levels in the process of research (Finlay, 2003; Beinhocker, 2013). First, reflexivity in research design involves a constant reflection on the appropriateness of the methods that I use, whether they are appropriate for answering my research questions, whether I have adopted the right design, and the impact of my role as a researcher. Thus, I changed my method having reflected on how well it is working for the purpose of my projects. As I argued above, the methods adopted for this study are effective and appropriate, even though they involve some risks and problems due to the limitations of time, money and distance. The second type of reflexivity in my project involves reflecting on how I have behaved as a researcher, in other words, how I have positioned myself during the research. As I discuss Chinese culture with Chinese audience members, I have to ask myself to what extent I am inside or outside Chinese culture and to what extent I share my opinions or experiences with the participants. To balance the position that I situate, on the one hand, I positioned myself as an outsider, keeping from providing any deductive answer. That is to say, the findings from and discussion of the data resulted from what my respondents offered. I did not give any indicative responses which might mislead them. On the other hand, in general, most respondents took a very corporate attitude towards my audience research. That is to say, they were quite aware of the fact that what I was doing was a piece of academic research so that what they needed to do was just to answer my questions one by one. However, there were a few unexpected situations. For example, as mentioned above, in some cases, some respondents’ answers were extremely brief and sketchy, for example, “I like/dislike it”, “I do not understand the representation” or “I do not know how to express this, but I do not think what it presents is appropriate”. At times like this, I acted as an insider, using textual analysis to supplement their answers by myself, given my professional and academic experience compared with general audience.

## 3.6 Conclusion

My research project entails using the mixed-method, qualitative-quantitative approach in order to study the reception of Hollywood films with Chinese elements in the context of globalization. As a critical film reception study, it makes an original contribution to three main areas from a methodological point of view. Firstly, it is not yet that common to adopt a mixed methods approach in film audience research. Therefore, the combination of a widespread questionnaire survey and focused, individual, in-depth interviews, along with the recruitment criteria I adopted, fill a gap in film studies, especially in researching contemporary Chinese film audiences. Secondly, it is also unusual to utilize textual analysis alongside audience research, but that proved useful in terms of understanding the Chinese elements that my respondents described as appearing in the Hollywood films they discussed. The third contribution is that I adopt a grounded theory approach, which is again unusual in a film studies context to inductively analyse the interpretation of Chinese viewers.

Also, it should be acknowledged that this research project still involves a few methodological limitations. The biggest one is the size of the audience sample. On the one hand, it is a reasonably large sample of more than 800. On the other hand, due to the limitation of time, distance and expense, I am not able to recruit more respondents, which might be appropriate given the size of the Chinese population. The research outcomes will be more scientifically convincing if more data can be collected. Despite the relatively modest size of the sample, this research is still robust and rigorous in a scholarly, academic manner due to some interesting and sensible findings. Next chapter will begin to analyse the data and discuss the findings, based on the theoretical framework set up in Chapter 2 and methodology discussed in Chapter 3.

# Chapter 4 How Chinese audience interpret Hollywood films with Chinese elements

## 4.1 Introduction

In previous chapters, attention was given to the theoretical and empirical framework within which my audience research took place and how my research was practically carried out. Chapter 4 will begin to integrate and analyse the data collected through the questionnaire survey and the in-depth interviews. This chapter firstly focuses on the interpretive framework through which audiences make sense of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. Chapter 5 will explain how demographic factors shape the responses of the audiences. Chapter 6 will analyse Chinese audiences’ physical and emotional reactions and responses to Hollywood films with Chinese elements, a rather different aspect of reception activity, which I call derivative behaviour. And Chapter 7 will present a specific film case study – the *Kung Fu Panda* series*.*

In this chapter, the particular framework emerges from my respondents’ discussion of three aspects that I explored in the in-depth interviews and some of the questions in sections 3, 5, 7 and 8 of the questionnaire surveys. These sections of the survey deal with the preferences of the respondents for Chinese films, Hollywood films, and Hollywood films with Chinese elements, and their feelings about the phenomenon of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. With regard to the responses to interview questions, the first aspect concerns the factors that attract the respondents to watch such films, and the implications of these for how they define ‘Chinese elements. Relevant questions here include, ‘Can you remember what Chinese elements these films have?’, ‘Which aspects feel familiar and sincere to you?’, and ‘What most attracts you to these films?’ The second aspect concerns the feelings or opinions that interviewees hold about the expressions of Chinese culture appearing in Hollywood films. And the third aspect is what they think about recent popular Chinese action films, compared with Hollywood films with Chinese elements.

Based on the responses to these interview and survey questions, this chapter will pay attention to Chinese audiences’ engagement with the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. In particular, it will explore the textual interpretation and reception of Chinese elements by Chinese audiences. Section 4.2 will develop a perspective about how Chinese audiences engage with the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, and the different modes of response they adopt. Section 4.3 will look at how they define or understand Chinese elements, based on those expressions of Chinese elements in Hollywood films mentioned by respondents as particularly impressive. Section 4.4 will examine the different ways in which they respond to what I define as tangible and intangible Chinese elements. Finally, in section 4.5, following the use of analogy by several of the respondents, I will develop a discussion about how audiences respond differently to Hollywood films with Chinese elements and popular Chinese films in recent years by employing audience response analysis and the supplement of substantial textual analysis. In particular, I will explore the ways my respondents engage with ideas of individualism and collectivism in such films.

## 4.2 Engagement with the representation of Chinese elements

The way in which Chinese audiences understand and interpret the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films is pivotal to explaining their engagement with Chinese elements. This section will gather together information from both interviews and questionnaire responses to demonstrate my participants’ feeling about and understanding of Chinese elements. By synthesizing the data, it is possible to see how my respondents show their understanding and acceptance of some Chinese elements in Hollywood films, while in other respects they disagree with or cannot acknowledge the expression of Chinese elements. The responses are not confined to any specific Hollywood films with Chinese elements but include any which the respondents referred to.

Accordingly, there emerge four modes of responses that I need to address here. In spite of some brief and superficial responses, they provide me with significant clues to further explore the audiences’ engagement with Chinese elements in Hollywood films. The first mode of response is the use of analogy, including the analogy between Hollywood films featuring Chinese elements and those without Chinese elements, as well as a comparison between Chinese films and Hollywood films with Chinese elements. The second mode of response is a sense of acceptance and sureness. Respondents explicitly show their interest in and preference for Hollywood films with Chinese elements, and they clearly accept the way those elements are presented. They understand the inclusion of Chinese elements and express their preferences with a sense of sureness. The third mode of response is characterized by uncertainty and a non-committal attitude. What should be noticed in this category is that some respondents take a quite relaxed attitude towards the phenomenon of Chinese elements merging into Hollywood films. That is, some of my respondents have no strong opinions about this issue. Actually, no strong opinion is an attitude in itself. Respondents who have no strong opinions are not in the minority. It is not an unusual circumstance to confront such responses in audience research, particularly in questionnaire surveys. When asked whether they like Chinese films or Hollywood films, 33.66% and 45.45% respondents respectively show their non-committal or indecisive thoughts. On the one hand, as the general audience, they express uncertainty because they find it quite difficult to know how to express their feelings about these issues in a meaningful way. On the other hand, they have no strong preference in relation to these issues. In other words, this is not an issue that really bothers them. Here are two examples (QS participant as mentioned below refers to Questionnaire Survey participants, the same as in the following discussion):

I do not mind about which country a film is produced in (QS participant 173).

I have no strong preference as long as the film is attractive (QS participant 775).

This indecisive attitude cannot simply be disregarded by researchers. That is to say, when we discuss the issue of movie preferences, we cannot neglect this category of people with no strong opinion. Thus, while the two quotations above seem to express a non-committal attitude, in fact, they indicate an opinion on the part of the respondents that their only concern is whether the film plot is appealing, rather than any other factors which may affect the film quality.

Apart from the attitudes of acceptance and uncertainty in reference to the presentation of Chinese elements, some respondents clearly fail to understand or appreciate the expression of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, and as a result do not like such films. This fourth mode of response is categorized as what I call misapprehension. Interestingly, once again, it is found that, in both the survey and the interviews, respondents tend to use analogy to describe their understanding and interpretation of Chinese elements, as a way of more explicitly expressing their ideas. This can be seen in responses such as these: “Compared with Chinese elements in Hollywood films, I prefer our own story in Chinese films because it reflects our real life.” And “I think Hollywood films without Chinese elements are more attractive than those with Chinese elements.”

In this sense, the analogy given by respondents will run through the analysis of their engagement with the representation of Chinese elements. At the heart of the debate in this chapter are issues concerning the representation of Chinese elements. The following section will firstly give a definition of “Chinese elements” and then, according to what Chinese elements are classified, respectively elucidate my respondents’ different modes of response to such elements and the extent of their acceptance or misapprehension.

## 4.3 Defining “Chinese elements”

As we have seen in previous chapters, the globalization of the economy and culture motivates Hollywood to pick material that will have an impact on a global scale. The inclusion of what I am calling Chinese elements in some Hollywood films is a typical example of the development of a global Hollywood style. But what exactly is meant by the concept of Chinese elements? Following the insights of cultural studies, how can we define this concept in complex terms, without resorting to simple stereotypes?

A survey ofhow foreigners perceive Chinese culture conducted by Beijing Normal University demonstrates that foreign people have the highest awareness of the cultural icons of Chinese natural resources (such as pandas, the Yangtze River, etc.), followed by Chinese lifestyle (green tea, etc.) and Chinese traditional symbols (Confucius, etc.) (Jin, 2015). A 2017 Survey Report on Foreigners' Perception of Chinese Culture shows that foreign respondents are highly aware of Chinese medicine, the abacus, and the Silk Road. Additionally, according to *The Survey Report 2016-2017 of Global Tone of China's National Image*, released by the Institute of Contemporary China and the World, reveals how overseas respondents define Chinese elements and what they think about Chinese culture. They believe that Chinese food, traditional Chinese medicine and martial arts are the most representative of Chinese cultural elements and the “business cards” of the international communication of Chinese culture, which can best represent Chineseness to foreigners. However, they are symbols of Chinese culture in other’s eyes, and the product of an orientalist perception, as introduced in Chapter 2. From these reports, we can see that the overall recognition of Chinese philosophical concepts which Chinese are proud of are relatively low. I will shed more light on the issue of the low recognition and lack of acceptance of Chinese philosophical and traditional concepts in section 4.4.2.

What the reports show is what foreign people consider as Chinese elements and Chinese culture. Regarding this study, rather than me defining what I mean by Chinese elements, I will explain how my participants define it, in their responses to one of the multiple-choice questions: “What sort of Chinese elements do you recognize in Hollywood films?”. The definition of “Chinese elements” that emerges from the survey can be classified into the realm of culture. Chinese culture is a complex and diverse formation which includes both traditional and modern cultural elements. However, most Chinese people, when asked about what they see as typically Chinese and representative Chinese culture, refer primarily to traditional Chinese images and artefacts such as Qipao in terms of clothing, which is a style of dress dating back to the 17th century and the Qing dynasty, or the Imperial Palace or courtyard in terms of architecture, which can date back to the 15th century and is part of the Forbidden City in Beijing, but they rarely consider modern Chinese elements as representative of Chinese culture even though they are specifically and typically part of it. It is interesting to see that not only do Western people talk about Chinese elements and typical Chinese culture in terms of stereotypes, but also Chinese people generally resort to the same stereotypes in conceptualizing Chinese-ness, especially when defining the Chinese cultural elements appearing in international or global cultural products. Given that, it is difficult to identify modern Chinese elements because Chinese culture is now a hybrid and full of Western elements and influences, especially within the context of modernity and globalization. This is perhaps why some Hollywood filmmakers are passionate about the inclusion in their films of traditional Chinese cultural characteristics in a highly recognizable and iconic form.

Nevertheless, in spite of permeating Western cultural features, Chinese audiences are capable of recognizing modern Chinese elements that are not associated with traditional Chinese-ness or with Western exoticism. From the questionnaire survey, when asked what sort of Chinese elements they recognize in Hollywood films, the most frequently cited element was contemporary Chinese actors (64.99%), who are clearly examples of modern Chinese cultural icons. Over half my respondents also come up with Chinese traditional clothing (57.37%) and landscape and scenery (51.6%). Nearly half of them think of Chinese dialogue and language (45.09%), traditional crafts (44.72%) and traditional Chinese stories (44.35%). A further one in five persons also mention Chinese food (29.73%), Chinese products (29.85%) and Confucian culture (21.25%). Some of these elements are also clearly both traditional and modern, such as language, Chinese food and Confucianism. They are central and everyday aspects of modern Chinese culture, although they are also parts of long traditions. In this case, my respondents recognize both traditional and modern Chinese elements, but in trying to define Chinese-ness, they often resort to traditional stereotypes.

To sum up, the figures mentioned above in alignment with the analysis of film images indicate that the Chinese elements as understood by respondents are both concrete and abstract. On one side, when Xiang (48-M) answered the question about Chinese elements, he said “Panda, of course!” The panda is generally perceived as a national treasure and even as the symbol of China. Chinese elements in his eyes are therefore visual and concrete. On the other side, Zhuang (51-F) thought of “Mulan”, a character from traditional Chinese lyrics, in which a girl disguises herself as a male soldier to take her father’s place in the conscription army. Chinese elements, from Zhuang’s perspective, are traditional and based on a classic Chinese story. As a fictional character contained in a story, this example ought logically to be considered as more abstract.

In this vein, when I refer to Chinese elements in this thesis, I broadly refer to the images, symbols and customs that are recognized by my Chinese respondents as embodying both the traditional and modern cultural spirit of the national and Chinese cultural characteristics, national identity, and interests. Chinese cultural elements thus include both tangible material objects and intangible cultural content. In film, according to the questionnaire responses, tangible material objects can be considered in terms of Chinese and totemic buildings, Chinese food, clothes, architecture, actors and so on. The intangible elements in my research include invention and creation, folk customs folk-art forms and the use or adaptation of recognizably Chinese stories, Chinese values or beliefs and spiritual cultural elements. These Chinese icons or characteristics, either identifying as tangible or intangible, are constantly absorbed into Hollywood films.

What should be noticed here is the genesis of these concepts of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in the heritage sector and in heritage studies. In this respect, a key official document, the UNESCO Convention of 2003, explicitly gives the definition of intangible cultural heritage as

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO, 2018: 5)

It is important to acknowledge that the way I am using the concept of intangible cultural elements is not quite the same as how this definition is used in heritage studies and the heritage sector. In this study, I work with an adapted version of the well-established distinction between tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Going back to what I discuss about the tangible and intangible cultural elements, it can be seen that the concepts of tangible and intangible elements are actually similar to what I call concrete and abstract cultural elements. The tangible material objects are concrete, while intangible content can be considered as abstract. Hollywood films that involve such tangible/concrete or intangible/abstract elements are too numerous to enumerate, but examples of tangible elements include the holy land of Wudang Mountain in *The Karate Kid*[[16]](#footnote-16); the Bamboo Sea in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*; Dandan noodles, tofu and buns in the *Kung Fu Panda* series;and the spirit of peace and mutual assistance in *Farewell Atlantis*[[17]](#footnote-17),or the reincarnation of Buddhism and the soul in *The Painted Veil,* as intangible aspects.

However, it can be found from the responses to my questionnaire and interview questions that people also reduce Chinese-ness to specific elements, like the panda – which thus becomes a reductive stereotype of Chinese-ness. As members of the general audience, respondents seem to have the problem of trying to use one single image to sum up the whole of Chinese culture. When that happens, one is forced to rely on stereotypes. What needs explaining here is that they can partially represent Chinese culture, but it is difficult and irrational for single images to generalize the whole of Chinese culture in all its complexity and heterogeneity, as I emphasized above.

In the survey, over half of the respondents (60.93%) express cordial feelings when seeing Chinese elements in Hollywood films. 63.02% of respondents feel a stronger engagement with Hollywood films that include Chinese elements than their engagement with those without Chinese elements. These two percentages indicate the impact of Chinese elements exerted on audiences. We can also find more specific examples of such cordial feelings among the comments of the respondents:

**This kind of film gave me the feeling of cultural similarity, even though it is a foreign film (QS participant 267).**

**It helps to reduce cultural misunderstanding and promote the accessibility of different cultural backgrounds (QS participant 318).**

**It seems close to national culture (QS participant 406).**

**Chinese elements provide me with a sense of cultural belonging, I feel the intimacy of national culture (QS participant 57).**

These comments raise some interesting questions. What do the first two respondents mean by “cultural similarity” and “promote the accessibility of different cultural backgrounds”? How can we understand the meaning of “national culture” and “a sense of cultural belonging” mentioned in the other two quotations? Why do they refer to the films in these terms? And how do these comments relate to Chinese elements in the films? Firstly, the respondents seem to feel a sense of shared cultural and national identity. From their perspective, the native cultural elements which they are familiar with are part of Chinese culture, either tangible or intangible. The inclusion of Chinese elements, accordingly, helps to construct their cultural identity.

How then should we understand the concept of cultural identity? Cultural theorist Stuart Hall believes that

there are at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. The second position recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute ‘what we really are’ (Hall, 1990: 223)

Hall is using the second way of thinking about cultural identity to criticize the first, more familiar definition. The first definition emphasizes similarities at the level of cultural identity and overlooks or represses differences. The second definition confirms the similarity of cultural identity within the same national group in terms of historical experience and shared cultural background, but more significantly and critically, Hall notes the deep differences which constitute `what we really are'. As Hall explains regarding the second position, “cultural identity […] is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’[…] It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture” (Hall, 1990: 225). Chinese media scholar Zhang (2018) interprets this concept as a process of finding shared meaning through a common code. The code is a fluid, constantly changing, and reconstructed process. Cultural identity, restricted by history, culture, and power games, is constantly split and reconstructed. Hall uses the concept of cultural identity to understand the issue of “colonial experience” in the Caribbean and how its continuously changing historical and cultural circumstances define the colonials’ cultural identity. Here, I adopt both of the two positions to explain how these different senses of identity can influence Chinese audiences’ understanding of American and Chinese culture, using the evidence offered by my respondents regardless of the reasons for the ongoing historical issues in this case.

According to Hall (1992), one of the critical sources of cultural identity can refer to the national culture in which we are born and positioned. As he notes, those national cultures tend to gather the members of a nation together to form one cultural identity. What he points out is the linkage between national culture and cultural identity. Culture, cultural identity and national identity are fluid, contingent, unfixed and unstable (see also Higson (2001)). Especially in the context of modernity and globalization, national culture has gradually transcended national boundaries. Simultaneously, cultural identities are affected and displaced by the process of globalization. That is, the environment and cultural background under which we grow up and live contributes to constituting and consistently changing one’s cultural identity.

Chinese audiences are nurtured by shared aspects of their cultural background and enriched by a sense of sharing the same national culture. What they experience is sharing a similar historical culture and cultural experience, namely, the similar cultural codes that Hall discusses. Like Hall, Higson (2001: 406) concludes that “national identity is not biological but cultural”. National identity, according to him, “is about recognizing as familiar the established indigenous cultural traditions of homeland and community”. In this sense, national identity conceptualized by Higson from the cultural perspective, to some extent, can be considered as equal to the concept of cultural identity. Borrowing the definitions of national and cultural identity given by Hall and Higson, we can suggest that one’s cultural identity is affected by both their common experience and shared culture and other issues including personal circumstances, the specific socio-cultural context in which they situate themselves and so on.

Bearing these concepts in mind, I argue that we need to relate the “Chinese elements” which are the focal point of this study to what Hall and Higson write about national culture and cultural identity. Chinese elements, in this regard, act as a kind of cultural code in Hollywood films, evoking the same cultural memory in Chinese audiences, and furthering potentially the same cultural identity in terms of the shared context in which they live. Implicitly, defining “Chinese elements” in Hollywood films is synonymous with defining the concepts of national or cultural identity and national culture. What kind of Chinese elements can represent China and Chinese culture? As mentioned above, Chinese faces, Chinese kung fu, Chinese landscape, Chinese clothing and Chinese stories, etc. are all Chinese cultural elements that Hollywood can insert into films. However, we must always ask, are these images able to represent the whole of China? Are they equal to the whole of Chinese culture?

As summarized in Chapter 2, both Chinese and Western scholars have carried out studies of the history of and changes to the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. What they have found is that Hollywood tends to resort to Chinese stereotypes. Here, it is essential to briefly tease out the changes that have taken place in the characters of Chinese elements depicted by Hollywood films in order to further discuss the issue of Chinese stereotypes. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ethnic prejudice in American mainstream ideology in addition to the undeveloped openness of China resulted in distortions in the shaping of images of the East generally and China in particular. The Chinese images created in films were apt to be negative, drawing on the established Chinese picture imaged by Europeans and Americans. At the end of the 19th century, the image of China was of an ignorant, backward and decaying culture. And China became further associated with "uncultivated", “barbaric” and the "demonizing" images before and after the Cultural Revolution, struggling on the edge of poverty in the mid-20th century. At that time, elements such as a shady view of Chinatown, men with long twists of hair and women wearing a tight-fitting version of the traditional Chinese dress (Qi Pao) were typical features of the image of China and Chinese-ness. In the 1970s, the Western image of Chinese-ness began to change, as Bruce Lee used the unique Chinese martial art, kung fu, as a symbol to strike the American film and television industry with a sense of justice and clean fighting (Shu, 2003). Since then, Chinese kung fu has become increasingly representative of Chinese culture. From the 1990s and particularly since the new century after which the degree of globalization was more enhanced, an increasing number of Chinese elements in various forms have been merged into Hollywood films.

What should be noticed is that, as contemporary Chinese culture has become more complex, it cannot be defined by one word or one sentence. In other words, no single image can capture the diversity and panorama of contemporary China. Bearing in mind all concepts mentioned above, we can say that it is inexact to crudely stereotype Chinese cultural elements in terms of a single concrete symbol, such as kung fu. Hence, it is a problem to confine definitions of Chinese culture to specific Chinese elements. Even so, this is exactly what my research participants do in providing a variety of elements or images which they consider as representative of China. Here are some examples, in response to the question about what Chinese elements they remember seeing in Hollywood films and how they think of Chinese culture in those films:

The Great Wall as it appeared in Tomb Raider[[18]](#footnote-18) was impressive (Lu-20-F).

Obviously, Mission Impossible III[[19]](#footnote-19) was partly shot in Shanghai and Xitang ancient town. I saw the Oriental Pearl Tower, arcaded cornices and the small bridge over the flowing stream (Pan-30-F).

We often see Chinese kung fu in Hollywood films (Jian-29-F).

The first two quotations illustrate architecture in different ages, both of which are landmarks of China, respectively representing traditional China (the Great Wall and Xitang) and modern China (the Oriental Pearl Tower). The final quotation considers kung fu as representative of Chinese culture. Widely accepted both by ordinary Chinese people and on the internet, kung fu is considered an outcome of the wisdom of the Chinese nation, the crystallization or embodiment of traditional Chinese culture and a martial art unique in the world. Seen obviously from the perspective of my participants, when they try to explain Chinese culture in films, their responses reduce things to stereotypes. Certainly, all these examples or elements they refer to are indeed elements of Chinese culture that may induce the Chinese audience’s sense of cultural identity. However, they are not the full picture of Chinese culture. Once again, influenced by globalization and modernity, as Hall (1992) claims, “modern nations are all cultural hybrids”, which is similar to Higson’s argument that the nation is “multicultural, but in disarray” (2001: 404). In this case, national culture needs to be represented not simply as one or several elements, but as protean.

In light of this debate about the definition of Chinese elements, in the following sections, as I explore the four different modes of audience response to Chinese elements in Hollywood films, I will make use of the distinction between tangible and intangible elements. In particular, I will look at how audiences respond differently to tangible and intangible elements.

## 4.4 The use of tangible and intangible Chinese elements

What can be seen from my questionnaire and interview data is that most of the Chinese elements included in Hollywood films are tangible objects (food, buildings, landscapes), people (stars) or the external manifestations of Chinese culture, such as kung fu and martial arts. What is much more difficult to integrate into Hollywood films are intangible values, rather than tangible things, objects etc.

Interestingly, in the initial pilot study that I undertook when testing the interview process and the questionnaire feasibility, some participants offered me their understanding of Chinese culture in Chinese films and made an analogy with Hollywood films without Chinese elements. On the one hand, as the general audience, it is hard for them to just focus on Chinese elements and give their interpretation from a professional viewpoint. Their analogy, on the other hand, provides me with their understanding of Chinese culture and corroborative evidence which contributes to the insightfully in-depth analysis of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. Building on the experience of the pilot study, both the in-depth interview and questionnaire survey were designed to include a section about audiences’ feelings about Chinese films, through which participants readily express their ideas about what they mean by Chinese elements or Chinese culture and demonstrate their understanding of them in Hollywood films.

Among the 814 questionnaire participants, nearly half of them (46.07%) state that they like Chinese films very much, while 33.66% of them have no strong opinions or preferences. It is worth noting that, when talking about why participants like or do not like the Chinese films in the survey, their comments are mostly brief, concentrating upon the film story. Participants who prefer Chinese films recurrently mention that the story is much better, and the quality of Chinese films is much higher in recent years. These are the key factors that make Chinese films more attractive than those in the past. Typical responses are as follows:

Chinese films have in the past been criticized for their rough production level and boring plot. But now, with the improvement of production, they are quite good and worth viewing. Therefore, I am looking forward to watching more Chinese films in the future (QS participant 345).

The quality of Chinese films is much higher and more attractive than before (QS participant 458).

Chinese films are more like blockbusters, given their higher levels of production (QS participant 102).

These three answers are all from middle-aged (41-50 years old) participants. The recent four decades of economic reform and the opening up of China to the West has witnessed the improvement of Chinese films. Middle-aged people in particular have experienced rapid development either in film quality or story in the 20 years since China entered the World Trade Organization (WTO) against the background of globalization. With reference to film story, I see this as related to intangible elements. Other than the quality of technology and production, which is visually intuitive in the viewing process, stories have become increasingly culturally sophisticated in terms of how they need to be interpreted and understood, and this relates to viewers’ cultural and national background.

Films function as a key mode of entertainment in daily life. Moreover, film can be seen as a reflection of life, and most plots and scenes presented in films originate from life. The characteristics of characters in films can be seen as epitomes of people in real life. Meanwhile, films reflect people's yearning and desire for things which may be difficult to accomplish. In this respect, the stories in films can seem better than daily life. The stories that Chinese films usually tell are set in China and have what viewers see as Chinese cultural identities. As one middle-aged respondent offers,

We all have the same values, so the stories shown in the films cater to our taste and conform to our feelings and thoughts (QS participant 65).

What does he mean by the same values and taste? What understanding of Chinese cultural elements is implied by his response? Values and taste, from his perspective, refer to the common cultural memory shared by Chinese members, that is, Chinese culture. “We”, as inferred from what he says, refers to the whole body of Chinese. This understanding only works with Hall’s first definition of cultural identity. QS participant 65 assumes that all Chinese people think and feel the same, and share a similar cultural and national identity, regardless of all the many differences in terms of any demographic factors such as age, social status, wealth, gender, ethnicity and geographical location.

One of my interviewees, Zong, offers a Chinese soap opera released at the beginning of 1990s as another example of what he perceives as embodying Chinese values and taste. Although it is not a film, as a visual cultural product, it is to some extent similar to film. When *Yearn*[[20]](#footnote-20)showed in 1990, Zong recalls that the whole town turned out to watch. The soap opera creates a female character who is hard-working, kind, tolerant and firm. She seems to be the combination of all traditional Chinese females’ good nature and quality, which reflects the audiences’ desire for female characteristics at that time.

I can see the same quality in some women in our life. They are like her (Zong-48-M)

Zong’s statement indicates that the Chinese taste is with reference to real life and to stories adapted from real events taking place in everyday life, which resonate with Chinese audiences. In this case, Chinese elements can superficially be seen as conforming to Chinese audience tastes and arousing audience memories. More profoundly, this sense of a shared Chinese taste is indicative of audiences’ strong recognition of Chinese culture, and how they understand the construction of their cultural identity. Zong’s use of the term “our” is worth noting. This suggests that Zong believes that the same quality can be traced not only in his but in all Chinese people’s lives. What Zong and QS respondent 65 say can be understood in terms of Hall’s first proposition about cultural identity: that people living within a nation are nurtured by a shared national culture. This shared culture endows a nation’s members with a shared identity, which seems to be the opposite of what Hall emphasizes in proposing his second definition of cultural identity. However, evidence from my audience responses proves that to some extent Hall’s first proposition may be correct in terms of how the sense of sharing the whole national culture results in a similar cultural identity. Despite the differences between those with the same general cultural background, their “common historical experiences and shared cultural codes” (1990: 223) are clearly factors that do contribute towards their sense of national cultural identity. Chinese elements, in this sense, are the bridge between individual viewers and a shared Chinese culture that enables those viewers to make sense of the films, and in the process arouse their sense of a shared cultural identity.

Nevertheless, we should also bear in mind that building on the second definition of cultural identity given by Hall (1990), there are also many differences within that so-called national culture. These differences are related to differences in ethnicity, age, gender, social status, wealth, geographical location, etc. within China and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

What Zong says is similar to another respondent’s idea, commenting on the Chinese action war thriller, *Operation Red Sea*:

The story and actors are all Chinese. Their thinking is the same as our understanding of life (QS respondent 83).

However, it is worth noting that this survey respondent is different from the other participants, as he is a navy pilot (27-M) and is more impressed by and familiar with the plot of Operation Red Sea, a naval drama. In fact, he sees the film as realistic. From his response, it can be seen that he thinks the film reflects the real situation of the evacuation of overseas Chinese from war zones. He answers that,

although there are bloody and cruel scenes in it, the core is anti-war. As the popular saying goes ‘There is no time to be quiet, just someone to carry your weight forward’. In fact, in recent years, our navy soldiers have made a lot of silent contributions and sacrifices in various places. It seems to be my life!

If we understand what he says in terms of Hall’s first level of cultural identity, his suggestion that the characters in the film share “our understanding of life” implies that the film reflects and fits with what Zong means by Chinese taste and values. In terms of Hall’s second level of cultural identity, his special occupation connects him with the film plot. Revisiting Hall’s definition of cultural identity in terms of personal and social aspects, I would argue that his different social status and attributes make his cultural identity both similar to as well as different from the others. Furthermore, from what he says about “the real situation of the evacuation of overseas Chinese”, we can see that his special identity gives rise to a special and different interpretation of the film. This is an issue concerning Hall’s concept of cultural identity on the second critical level which is beyond the scope of this chapter. I will go back to analyse this point in detail in Chapter 5.

The questionnaire survey revealed that “culture” (Wen Hua) and “life” (Sheng Huo) are two recurring words mentioned in the answers given by respondents who like Chinese films. The short but similar responses to the questionnaire survey responses below indicate some of the feelings of the respondents about Chinese films:

It is related to our life, down to earth (Jie Diqi) and close to national culture and reflecting the times (QS participant 37; QS participants 68, 156, 275, 286 and others used very similar terms).

An interview excerpt verifies this answer in response to the question regarding feelings about Hollywood films with Chinese elements:

I remembered a film plot in a Hollywood film which I forgot the name of, where the actors are dining in a Chinese restaurant. Their dialogue in Chinese language was very lame. But the dialogue between the guests and the boss was very interesting. I think what foreigners think of China and what the film story illustrates is like this. Although it is sometimes distorted or lame, it is their real thinking about China. The films in which the images and characters are designed and created only for the purpose of catering to Chinese people are boring (Ding-28-F).

These are really interesting responses, especially in terms of how ordinary Chinese people think about themselves. The concept of being “down to earth” (Jie Diqi) is intriguing, and widely used, as is clear from its popular use in Chinese social media on the Internet. Here, it refers to a film story taking place in what feels like real life to Chinese audiences or at least something originating from the surroundings of those audiences. From the interview quotation, we can see that there are both tangible elements (such as the Chinese restaurant) and more intangible elements (such as the Chinese dialogue) in Hollywood films. The inclusion of such Chinese elements often feels “down to earth” to Chinese audiences and indeed expresses a “down to earth” Chinese-ness. Ding’s response implies that the Chinese elements in such films are like a mirror, in which she can find a reflection of herself and track her own life. It is interesting for ordinary Chinese audiences to see how their habits and lifestyles are expressed by foreigners from another national and cultural context; put simply, such audiences are curious to see how a Western life can be depicted as “down to Chinese earth” in films.

Another important issue worth sorting out is what Ding says regarding “their real thinking about China”. It seems that this involves the concept of what some scholars see as Western media products conceiving of Chinese culture in terms of the perspective of the orientalist stereotype. However, Ding’s idea actually indicates her acceptance of the “lame” characteristics and expression of Chinese culture in this Hollywood film produced from the viewpoint of the Westerner. She assumes that Chinese culture is difficult to comprehend for Western people, meaning that the “distorted and lame” understanding of Chinese elements in the Hollywood film that she refers to is not equivalent to orientalist stereotypes of China. Rather, this is how they actually see Chinese culture.

With reference to cultural products, what my respondents provide as above indicates that they like films that are broadly related to the ordinary lives of Chinese people., This suggests that they think it is better to watch films which seek to reflect the wishes, demands or interests of the general public by using the living habits of the masses, rather than breaking away from their actual needs and wishes, and simply floating on the surface. Mallinger and Rossy (2003: 610) regard film as an emotional exercise in terms of showing “hopes, dreams, challenges and fears”. This is one reason why it is very difficult for Hollywood films, even those that include Chinese elements, to provide down to earth representations of Chinese life that might align with the experiences of ordinary Chinese audiences. The types of Chinese elements included in Hollywood films rarely seem “down to earth”. Adding Chinese elements to a film, to a certain degree, does increase its appeal to Chinese people and help to close the gap between Chinese viewers and Hollywood film. However, these films are still far removed from the experiences of ordinary Chinese people and merely introduce superficial Chinese cultural elements instead of realizing the complexities of real Chinese life. The core themes in Hollywood films, even those with Chinese elements, seem much more American than Chinese, which is more possibly related to the more intangible and abstract aspects of films, while those elements that are primarily tangible and concrete are apt to be on the surface rather than under the skin. Thus, the inclusion of Chinese cultural aspects can give rise to a sense of cultural distance for some Chinese audiences. Here are some examples from my questionnaire participants:

I cannot understand foreign languages let alone foreign culture. The stories of Chinese films are closer to my life, I can easily understand them (QS participant 28).

Due to the cultural similarity [of Chinese films], I can understand the stories. For example, when watching a comedy, I can easily understand the dialogue and get the punchline (QS participant 69).

Sometimes, the stories expressed in Chinese films seem to indicate my story (QS participant 712).

I am familiar with the actors (QS participant 281).

The cultural background of Chinese films is more consistent. It is more understandable and closer to life. (QS participant 479).

These responses can be understood from two perspectives. On the one hand, what they say about films being “closer to my life”, expressing “cultural similarity” and indicating “my story” is opposite to the sense of cultural distance which might be brought about by watching Hollywood films. This reflects how the “down to earth” qualities of Chinese films and some Western films (such as those Ding mentioned above) have an influence on audiences’ understanding and interpretation of such films. The seamless connection with Chinese culture is one significant factor that determines these respondents’ preferences. On the other hand, they may seek to avoid Hollywood films due to a lack of English listening skills, which concurs with what Rohn writes about the effect of “content lacuna” and “language barriers” in the process of selecting and interpreting media products (2011: 633-634). Counter to the indicators of cultural proximity as proposed by Straubhaar (1991, 2007), Iwabuchi (2002), Rohn (2011), Fu and Govindaraju (2010) which have been discussed in Chapter 2 (I will go back to this concept in the following sections), Rohn suggests that lacuna “represent cultural barriers” in cross-cultural communication and the reception of media content (2011: 633), which is similar to Lee’s argument of “cultural discount” (Lee, 2008: 119; Crane, 2014). It suggests that a lack of language, knowledge and cultural capital reduces the appeal of foreign media to transnational audiences. Chinese scholars use the concept of cultural vacancy to indicate a strong cultural difference (Zhang and Chen, 2018). This concept suggests that the cultural specificities of one nation cannot be recognized by the inhabitants of another nation. In this sense, their failure to understand the English dialogue and their absence of foreign cultural grasp are important factors in how they experience American films.

This is in alignment with the responses that explain their preference for foreign films. The survey participants present their ideas as follows:

Foreign films do not resonate with me culturally (QS participant 530).

We have different cultural backgrounds. Sometimes, I can't really understand what is going on in foreign films (QS participant 17).

The stories of foreign films are far from our way of life (QS participant 443).

Combining these three answers with the above quotations, it again indicates the fact that due to the unfamiliarity of foreign culture and different cultural knowledge, the survey participants and interviewees have some difficulty in interpreting and understanding the stories and dialogue of foreign films, regardless of the language and translation issues in relation to both subtitling and dubbing. Meanwhile, Chinese films seem closer to real life, and easier to understand. We can relate this to Cameron’s argument:

What allows people to assert that something belongs uniquely to them and would be termed a national characteristic, may be merely based on familiarity and what they believe because of thought or cultural associations to be the product of their nation (1999: 4)

I would argue that, from the perspective of my respondents, their appreciation of the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films is less affected by either tangible or intangible elements than it is by concerns about whether it is close to their life, namely, “down to earth”. In the following part, I will go on to analyse how my respondents actually respond respectively to the inclusion of tangible and intangible Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

### 4.4.1 Responses to the use of tangible objects

Having discussed what kind of Chinese elements are integrated into Hollywood films, which has enabled me to define this concept of Chinese elements, here I particularly extract some of the more tangible elements recurrently used by Hollywood and mentioned by my respondents. The utilization of some Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films relates to the idea of national specificity, which is a critical and underlying factor in the construction of national or cultural identity. In other words, the national specificity of some elements means they can only be recognized in Chinese culture, such as Chinese kung fu, the panda, characteristic Chinese clothing and scenery or traditional lyrics or stories. These can all be categorized as tangible, concrete Chinese elements, except the last one which is either concrete or abstract.

Specifically speaking, Chinese kung fu is widely accepted as the symbol of indigenous virtue and strength in Chinese culture. Lu, Zhang and Hong (2014), in *Projecting the ‘Chinese-ness’: Nationalism, Identity and Chinese Martial Art Films*, discuss how kung fu is bound to national identity and nationalism through films. That demonstrates kung fu has been associated with the representation of Chinese culture in Hollywood films and is in tight relation with Chinese nationalism. The panda, another representative concrete Chinese element used by Hollywood, is regarded in China as a national treasure. A case study related to the panda in the *Kung Fu Panda* series will be analysed in Chapter 7. Additionally, some specific Chinese scenery like ancient water towns or the Great Wall, which will be discussed in the following section, are recognised around the world as unique and nationally specific scenery.

My questionnaire respondents provide a good deal of evidence that supports the concept of the recognizable and iconic concrete Chinese elements. Analysing the in-depth interviews enables us to see how Chinese audiences understand and interpret tangible Chinese elements in Hollywood films. For audiences who share a similar cultural background and a familiarity with particular aspects of Chinese culture, seeing certain tangible Chinese elements in Hollywood films can give rise to cordial and benign (Qin Qie in Chinese) feelings. Here I offer some examples:

The film White Snake: Origin[[21]](#footnote-21) co-produced by China and US recently is quite good. It is based on the Chinese folk love story "White Snake" as a prototype. It is a white snake prequel. Especially at the end of the film, the sound of "Past Life and Present Life", which is the episode of the Legend of the White Bride, brought me back to my memories. I think it should arouse many viewers’ feelings and resonate with them (Luo-27-Male).

Seeing Chinese people in foreign films has a little sense of identity. It is certainly easier to attract fans of specific Chinese actors (Li-31-Male).

Chinese elements such as some actors or scenery can make Chinese audiences feel a sense of belongings across different generations. We feel proud of Chinese cultural elements around us that have entered the Hollywood platform to show the characteristics of China (Shen-30-Male).

It is found from the first answer that Luo is familiar with the Chinese tangible elements, referring to the film music, which originally emerged from the episode of Chinese television drama and the Sino-US co-produced character – white snake, which is originally adapted from classic Chinese television drama - *Legend of the White Bride*. The second response points out the importance of Chinese actors, a kind of obviously familiar concrete element for Chinese audiences, which seems easy to recognize. Although the third quotation does not refer to any specific Chinese element, Shen frankly expresses his feelings about the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. If we bring in Corner’s first step in interpreting television programs, it seems that Chinese viewers readily comprehend the literal and denotative meaning of these concrete tangible Chinese icons or stories.

Going further to explain the above quotations, they indicate the reasons for the preference for Chinese films lie in the audiences’ familiarity and association with Chinese stories or actors, their existing knowledge and the similar understanding of Chinese life on account of sharing the same cultural background and same national culture as the filmmakers. Integrating Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films, in this sense, helps to cut down the distance between Chinese audiences and another cultural context. If engaging with the issue of Hollywood films featuring Chinese elements in terms of how these references work, the concept of cultural proximity proposed by Straubhaar and discussed by Iwabuchi, Fu and Govindaraju can considerably explain the appeal of such films. In accordance with and based on this concept, the desire for cultural proximity probably draws audiences to the cultural products outside their culture which have some familiar elements (Rohn, 2011).

From the above discussion of both audience responses and the scholarly debate, it can be seen that the inclusion of elements that seem nationally specific (in this case, Chinese elements) in an otherwise foreign cultural product can create a sense of cultural proximity for audiences. For example, the key terms in the first response above, from Luo – “brought me back to my memories”, and “resonate” – indicate how a sense of cultural proximity is constructed and how it works for the audiences. By adapting Chinese folk stories, the Sino-US co-produced film version preserves the original character and preserves the episode as the final song of the film. In so doing, it arouses Luo’s nostalgia for the original Chinese televised version and, as indicated by his use of the term “resonate”, creates a consensual experience for audiences watching *White Snake: Origin*. This can also be seen in what Li says in the second quotation. The obviously tangible elements – Chinese actors – are the determining factor in creating cultural proximity for audiences, especially for fans of such actors. Going further, those elements with the characteristics of cultural proximity may relate to or feel part of the national cultural identity experienced by those audiences. By reviewing what Cameron (1999) asserts, we can argue that familiarity and the association of particular cultural elements with an audience’s national culture, especially those that seem nationally specific, are fundamental for audiences to identify their national identity.

Emerging from my analysis of interview responses, I would like to add the idea of how cultural proximity works on the Chinese audiences and Hollywood films developed by Kwak and Zhang (2011), as addressed in Chapter 2, that the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films for the Chinese film market, narrows down the cultural distance between Chinese audiences and the film’s origin. Reducing cultural distance, in this respect, is another way of increasing cultural proximity. To supplement Kwak and Zhang’s argument, what my above discussion suggests is that cultural products can stretch across geographical distances but cannot absolutely fill up the sense of cultural distance or cultural difference. In terms of films, obviously, against the backdrop of globalization, they spread on a global scale, transcending geographical and national boundaries. While the inclusion of indigenous cultural elements can shorten the cultural distance between films and target audiences with a different cultural background, it is still difficult to narrow the gap of deep-seated cultural differences. The reasons are twofold. On the one hand, it is by reason of the cultural specificity in terms of the meaning of some cultural elements, especially those with complicated and particular significance or attributes. On the other hand, the formation of the national culture is a long historical process influenced by other factors including politics, economics and so on. Sophisticated or deep-seated “national character” would not be easy to change, imitate and comprehend by the outside nations(De La Garza, 2007: 28).

### 4.4.2 Responses to the use of intangible values

In section 4.2, I discussed the mode of misapprehension in terms of respondents’ engagement with Chinese elements, suggesting they clearly fail to understand or appreciate the expression of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. From the evidence of the audience responses I have collected, the intangible aspects, especially those related to Chinese values or ideology, are misapprehended or distorted by my respondents. On the one hand, this is because of what I discussed above about cultural difference or cultural vacancy. This sense of cultural collision is unavoidable in the context of globalization. This section will turn to examine how cultural difference has an influence on audiences’ understanding of Chinese culture, particularly those intangible values and how one’s cultural identity discerns the cultural difference between American and Chinese films.

What I mean by misapprehension and distortion in this study is both from the perspective of Western filmmakers who misunderstand Chinese culture and of Chinese audiences that cannot accept or comprehend the Chinese elements in Hollywood films. Even though Hollywood filmmakers make an effort to include what they perceive as authentic Chinese elements, the limitation of their understanding of Chinese cultural elements and the facts of cultural difference inevitably cause their use of stereotypes and inaccuracy in their use of Chinese elements. The inauthentic use of Chinese elements by Hollywood filmmakers leads to misunderstanding on the part of audiences; that is to say, the Chinese elements expressed in films conflict with or do not make sense to them.

Yang posted an article to the *People’s Daily* online, in which it criticizes what they see as unreasonable and unacceptable representations of Chinese characteristics. They express the following opinion:

We are no longer the group of people depicted in Red Sorghum[[22]](#footnote-22), nor are we those Crazy Rich Asians[[23]](#footnote-23); we are just ordinary people who are eager to know the world and want to be treated in the right way (Yang, 2019).

Yang suggests that the world has shown a strong desire to get to know more about Chinese culture and to look at how to present China. This quotation clearly demonstrates Yang’s concern about the authenticity and fidelity of Chinese features in foreign media products. Although contemporary China is illustrated by some foreign media in a more comprehensive fashion, they still adhere to some stereotypical impressions in their expression of Chinese cultural elements.

As the core form of cultural and creative products, the first thing that can attract hundreds of millions of audiences around the world is familiar cultural symbols. Revisiting the survey reports on how foreigners perceive Chinese culture, it is clear that both traditional and modern Chinese icons are well recognized, including the panda, traditional Chinese calligraphy, Peking Opera, tea, Taiji and so on. These are, however, only the superficial tangible aspects of Chinese culture. As discussed above, the cross-cultural recognition of more tangible Chinese cultural symbols is generally high, but the difference in philosophical thinking between the East and the West results in much lower recognition of the more intangible and abstract elements of Chinese philosophy, Confucianism and values.

As noted in Chapter 2, Zhang (2018) develops a similar argument in her *The Cross-cultural Communication of Hollywood Films in China*. Here she gives some examples of Chinese cultural symbols that appear in Hollywood films, such as oil paper umbrellas, bamboo rafts in Lijiang, Chinese drama on the stage, rickshaw pullers on the street, traditional Chinese carriages, and other specific and unique modes of transportation like slippery and sedan chairs (Zhang, 2018). Obviously, the examples Zhang mentions are perceived as tangible symbols or icons of Chinese culture. However, as argued previously, the complexity of China and Chinese culture cannot be adequately manifested by these ostensible icons, which effectively reduce a complex culture to a series of simplistic and superficial stereotypes. Zhang suggests they are just the outward symbols of Chinese culture, but do not represent the whole China. What is missing is those deep-seated intangible aspects of Chinese culture that make sense of the superficial manifestations of those tangible and intangible icons.

One may also ask whether Chinese viewers’ interpretations are symmetrical with what foreign people perceive as Chinese culture. In other words, how does the perception of Chinese culture by Westerners in Hollywood influence the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood products, and how does it relate to Chinese viewers’ understanding. Drawing on my empirical data, these kinds of social and cultural symbols, including both tangible and intangible aspects, on the one hand, contribute to enhancing Chinese audiences’ cultural identity, but on the other hand, my respondents suggest, they deepen the biased understanding of Chinese culture. As one of my interviewees explained:

In fact, I don't like Chinese elements in Hollywood films, because most of the films with Chinese elements are satirical about China. They don't really understand China. They unilaterally present China as they thought of it, so that foreigners have a lot of biased understanding for our country. This is not true because they do not really understand China. If they really come to China, they will have a different understanding (Ding-28-Female).

For Ding and others, the Chinese cultural elements shaped in Hollywood films more or less convey what Hollywood filmmakers think about China and Chinese culture, rather than the real China. Put simply, they depict a reconstructed Chinese culture. The Chinese elements expressed in films can be considered as kind of rewritten symbols that are imagined by others, but which cannot accurately represent Chinese culture at the level of connotation.

It is worth noting Ding’s awareness of the inauthenticity of the expression of Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films. Superficially, Ding points out the significant reason that causes the inauthenticity of Chinese culture and the distortion and unacceptability of Chinese audiences is the lack of knowledge of China on the part of Hollywood filmmakers. Looking more deeply, this cultural inauthenticity can be also explained in terms of the concept of cultural distance. I argue that cultural distance and the absence of symmetrical cultural identities are factors that feature heavily in the survey outcomes, and result in what Said discusses as orientalism. Orientalism, in this case, is about reducing Chinese culture to stereotypes that are the result of Western perspectives.

Taking the animation *Mulan* as another example to illustrate the above ideas, it is based on traditional Chinese stories and lyrics, which shows the girl named Mulan acting as a man, substituting for her father in joining the army. When watching this film, whether looking at the typical Eastern environment or the exhibition of the garden with Chinese cultural characteristics, Chinese audiences seem to be brought into a real China. In the film, Mulan's brown skin, thick lips and apricot eyes are in line with the western image of the Eastern aesthetic. The ink landscape, with its depiction of the ancient Great Wall, a sacrificial temple, a courtyard in the Chinese style and other scenes, also attracts audiences’ attention. What is more, the presentation of Chinese food and the plot that Mulan and her family eat noodles and dumplings, the Chinese kung fu which is used by the enemy in the battlefield, the dragon and lion dance to welcome them when they succeed in winning, and the traditional clothes with yellow mirror stickers, are all displayed in a specific way to draw Chinese viewers’ attention. All these superficial images clearly belong to what I conceptualize as tangible elements. The inclusion of such images in Hollywood’s animated version of *Mulan* demonstrates how Hollywood endeavours to understand Chinese culture.

However, what we know about this ancient Chinese story is that Mulan joined the army for the benefit of her whole family, given the circumstances of her old father and younger brother, and that the family stands in for the nation. In the story adapted by Hollywood, however, the unique ethical feelings of the nation and the spirit of family dedication are weakened. Instead, it emphasizes the realization and success of self-worth and self-discovery. In Chinese traditional culture, Mulan is virtuous and filial. The ancient Chinese lyrics of *Mulan* is “Father has no grown son, Nor Mulan an elder brother; I want to buy a saddle and a horse, and from now on fight in place of my father”. While this film highlights Mulan's confused thinking and emphasizes her personal value and her desire to realize personal values. The active Chinese audience would assess the film according to their existing knowledge and cultural experience. For example, an interview respondent offers:

When I was young, I watched Mulan because of the traditional Chinese story as every Chinese knows when we are small. Honestly, some elements attracted me, such as the grasp of the plot and rhythm and the colourful picture, but it was a bit awkward including the action language. The girl is a little different from what I heard when I was a child (Ding-28-F).

What she says is an example of a Chinese respondent talking about *Mulan*. She gives the information that it is the beautiful backdrop with its Chinese style and her familiarity with the story that appeals to her about the film. However, Mulan seems to be an American female soldier in this film, not the expected Chinese heroic character. It should be noted here that the attractive factors for her lie in the tangible elements - the colourful images of the scenery with Chinese characteristics and in the Chinese story with both tangible and intangible attributes. As another respondent says, “she is just a woman named Mulan, which is the same as a traditional Chinese female”. What stands out in the Chinese lyrics for the Mulan story is the trait of filial piety that Chinese culture has always admired. The concept that "Filial piety is the foundation of all virtues" drives the girl to give up her female identity and play a brutal man who protects the country. In Hollywood’s *Mulan*, in addition to rescuing her father from a dilemma, what the story emphasizes is self-awareness. In Chinese culture, what is valued is doing something for others, while in Western culture, the emphasis is on doing something for oneself. These responses towards the Hollywood *Mulan* reflect the collision of Chinese and American culture, especially in terms of the difference between collectivism and individualism. *Mulan* is representative of traditional Chinese culture, which helps to construct a cultural identity for Chinese audiences. But the film story in Western style shows another identity, which may result in the inapprehension of Chinese audiences.

From the conflict between an ancient Chinese story and what Hollywood portrayed in the *Mulan* film, we can see that the story is interpreted from different perspectives, which is actually the collision of two cultures. Actually, Although Mulan is given a Chinese skin, but she is a Chinese female with a Western core. Tang Jun, in *A Cross-cultural Perspective on Production and Reception of Disney's Mulan through its Chinese Subtitles,* also indicates Chinese viewers’ inapprehension and misunderstanding of “Disney’s hoyden with upward-slanting eyes and the cultural deviations from the original narrative” (Tang, 2008: 153).

Regarding the collision of cultures, Zhang (2018) provides another example in *The Painted Veil*. She picks some online critics of this film to explain that the beauty of the Chinese countryside and the scenery of the Lijiang River appeal to Chinese audiences, but the reason for the unsatisfactory box office can be attributed to the Chinese viewers’ lack of acceptance of the story. Cultural identity exerts an impact on audiences’ film selection and reception. From these two examples, we can see that both *The Painted Veil* and *Mulan* try to establish a cultural identity for Chinese audiences, but the films show the gap and conflict between Western and Chinese expressions of culture. The expression of Chinese elements in terms of deep-seated values and ideology cannot be accepted by several respondents. Here are just two examples:

It would be better and purer not to have Chinese elements in some Hollywood films. American film can have its own thinking. For example, we can actually understand what Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri[[24]](#footnote-24) tells. I can also see what American people think and their real life in the United States. So, I think if the film is really involved with China and they really want to experience and know our life, it would be great and interesting to add such content, but if it is just their imagination, it would be very awkward and boring. I think it is also not respecting us. I do not like and sometimes misunderstand some plots as they are disconnected from contemporary mainland China, which makes me feel really strange (Yang-23-Female).

Jet Li and Jackie [Chan] worked with Hollywood films for many times. They focused on martial arts and acted as the characters whose families were kidnapped and they rushed to the rescue, which represent justice. In Hollywood films, they believed that kung fu and martial arts can represent China. Honestly, I do not like Hollywood action movies. In traditional China, Chinese kung fu itself originally means building up and strengthening a healthy body but in some American films, it becomes just about fight and competition (Fu-31-Female).

Both of the two female respondents perceive a distortion of Chinese culture in Hollywood films. Yang considers that Chinese elements merely serve to decorate Hollywood films rather than affect its narrative and philosophical connotation, while Fu is critical of Hollywood’s inauthenticity in expressing Chinese cultural elements in terms of their implication and association. Hollywood films may display the action and images of Chinese kung fu, but they fail to grasp the connotative meaning of it. As discussed above, kung fu is an obvious example of a Chinese element that is welcomed but distorted by Hollywood films. The *Kung Fu Panda* series almost becomes Hollywood's Chinese model and aggregator of Chinese stories, mixing a variety of Chinese elements. *The Last Airbender*[[25]](#footnote-25), *The Matrix*[[26]](#footnote-26), *Kill Bill*[[27]](#footnote-27), *Kiss of the Dragon*[[28]](#footnote-28) and so on, all rely on the excavation of Chinese kung fu. However, they are newly interpreted and recreated from the Western perspective rather than in terms of Chinese connotative values. In the case of kung fu used in Hollywood films, it can be seen that the symbolic level of broader inferential meanings implied by what is depicted on the screen is different between Hollywood depiction and the connotations drawn by Chinese audiences.

I argue that cultural difference and distance results in distortion and inauthenticity in terms of the expressions developed by producers and disappointment or misinterpretation on the part of Chinese audiences. That is, Hollywood has difficulty understanding the meaning of the more complex, intangible and culturally specific Chinese elements, particularly at the level of connotative and implicated meanings. The distorted understanding by Hollywood gives rise to the invalid communications in the context of intercultural communication, which makes it difficult for Chinese receivers to understand and accept Hollywood representations of Chinese-ness, and to achieve reasonable and completely effective communication. Thus, the information communicating process from the source culture to the transnational receivers is unequal and creates an information asymmetry, as Hall’s three-type communicating process implies (See Chapter 2).

What is becoming clear is that the tangible elements included in Hollywood films can often be quite superficial and relatively easily appreciated, whereas the intangible aspect of deep-seated values is more complex. It thus results in a cultural conflict between a superficial Chinese ‘skin’ and an American ‘core’. In this context, I will now explore the difference between Chinese and American values, and in particular the sense of individualism in American films and the collectivist values of Chinese culture.

## 4.5 The relationship between American individualism and Chinese collectivism

As I stated in the analysis of *Mulan*, one of the most representative and core conflicts between Chinese and American culture in Hollywood films with Chinese elements is the conflict between Chinese collectivism and the individualism of the typical Western narrative structure and organisation. In this section, I will develop a discussion of the relationship between Chinese collectivism and Hollywood individualism. As Wang and Su (2006) explain, the priority of the individualist orientation lies in personal goals rather than that the goals of the groups in which the person is situated, while the collectivist orientation emphasizes group goals instead of personal aims. Developing this analysis will provide a more particular knowledge of the influence of cultural identity on how Chinese audiences make sense of films with a ‘Hollywood core’ but a ‘Chinese skin’. I will combine the interview responses with my own textual analysis to explain the issue of individualist and collectivist values in the following sections by the reason that my respondents, as general viewers are not able to work on and give deep explanations of this issue, but rather superficially talk about or mention it. It, thus, needs textual analysis to the specific films mentioned by them to supplement and deeply analyse what they offer.

In view of discussions about the concept of national identity, we can say that tangible Chinese elements decorate Hollywood films with a Chinese skin, whereas the deep-seated intangible elements of Chinese culture rarely fill those films with a Chinese core. According to my respondents, the interpretation of intangible elements especially hinges on one’s national identity. National identity is a collective, shared identity, but individualism could be at the heart of that identity. Indeed, according to the textual analysis of some Hollywood films, even though some of those films include tangible Chinese elements, the intangible values of individualism that are at the heart of American national identity will also fill the narrative heart of those films.

Revisiting my investigation of Chinese films, the Chinese film titles referred to most frequently by my survey participants are *Operation Red Sea*, *Wolf Warriors II* and *The Wandering Earth*[[29]](#footnote-29). These films made a clear and deep impression on my respondents and were all shown in the last three years and achieved great box-office success in mainland China. *The Wandering Earth* with 49.18 hundred million yuan at the box-office ranked second in the Chinese film market in 2019 (Box Office A). *Wolf Warriors II* (56.39 hundred million yuan) (Box Office B) and *Operation Red Sea* (36.22 hundred million yuan) (Box Office C) respectively topped the Chinese box-office lists in 2017 and 2018. It is also worth noting that, according to Box-Office Mojo, *Wolf Warriors II* is the 72nd most successful film of all time, from any country, which is an extraordinary statistic for a Chinese film (IMDbPro). From the angle of film narrative, these films, as my respondents say, are similar to the style of Hollywood action and science fiction films:

There are similarities with Hollywood films in terms of audio and visual effects. According to feedback from my friends, Wolf Warriors II and Operation Red Sea are more sophisticated in creating visual effects, and even more sophisticated than some Hollywood movies (Bin-30-Male).

It can be said that the fighting and action scenes in Operation Red Sea look like those in Hollywood movies. The imagination of The Wandering Earth is similar to or even better than the creation of Hollywood fiction films (Fu-31-Female).

It seems to be Wu Jing's personal show in Wolf Warriors II, which is too individualistic. I can trace the traits of Hollywood films with regard to the production and portrayal of film characters. For production, the narrative of Wolf Warriors II and Operation Red Sea is like a Hollywood action film. For character portrayal, the trait of individual heroism seems to be Hollywood style, but the individualist value in Operation Red Sea is not present, as it is more about collective heroism. However, although Wolf Warriors II superficially seems not to be consistent with the concept that people's security relies on the strength of the country, actually from the film story, we can see it is our country who rescues people in danger (Yang-23-Female).

At a superficial level, their answers may look like the issues about the comparison between Chinese films and Hollywood films in regard to the film production. The three films mentioned by these respondents, formally seem to be Hollywood action or science fiction movies, particularly in terms of the production. But if one critically examines the statements, there are three points worth special attention.

First, the third respondent, Yang, puts emphasis on character portrayal and the themes conveyed by the films. The trait of individualism applies to Hollywood narratives, which are generally organized around an individual, goal-directed hero, who drives the narrative forward by trying to achieve his or her goals, as defined at the start of the narrative (Carmago, 2002; Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, 1985; Bordwell, 2006, 1997, 1988). This is different to the collective hero of some Chinese films, where the power of individuals is weakened.

Secondly, Yang indicates, in her last sentence, that *Wolf Warriors II* seems to have an individual, goal-directed hero similar to the Hollywood hero image, but she goes on to suggest that contrary to Hollywood’s individualist values, the power of the individual protagonist in *Wolf Warriors II* is weakened, while the strength of the country as a collective whole tends to be emphasized. Leng Feng, the protagonist of *Wolf Warriors II*, is clearly the central character of the film, which in this case seems to be in a similar style to one of the hero-protagonists created in Hollywood films. However, by analysing the film text, we can say that Leng Feng is actually what I will call a “decentralized” protagonist, because of three film plot aspects.

The first one is that Leng Feng is being shot by machine gun and almost killed by rebel forces in the battle. Why he is able finally to survive is not because of himself but the external factors which cause the rebel forces to let him off. The rebel forces who would like to overthrow the regime and establish their new nation must get China’s allowance, as China is one of the five permanent members of the United Nations. We can understand this as the deterrent power of the country internationally. The second indication is that Leng Feng is infected with Lamanla virus and survived by the injection of the serum for the virus by Rachel. However, although the hero-protagonist in Hollywood narrative structures would encounter obstacles and tests, which are always put in the way of them and make it difficult for them to achieve the goal, they are generally set to overcome these obstacles on their own power rather than with the help of others. What can be seen from the above two plots is that, rather than being the omnipotent Hollywood hero, Leng Feng is also vulnerable and needs others to rescue him. Especially in the first plot, he seems to survive by himself, but actually, the nation behind him plays a critical role in his survival.

The third point can be recognized at the end of the film, when the Chinese navy is instructed to bombard the rebel forces and finally save the Africans and Leng Feng. Different from the American hero in Hollywood films, the national power behind the Chinese hero, Leng Feng, is actually the main theme that the film is trying to shape and convey. The central character in this film thus seems similar to the image of the Hollywood hero represented in Hollywood films. But the goal as defined at the start of the film is not achieved by the central character but de-centred. In fact, the national power behind the hero is the main theme that this Chinese film is seeking. I would argue that national power can be viewed in terms of collectivism, as implied by the story. Compared with the American hero who dominates the typical Hollywood narrative, although *Wolf Warriors II* contains one central protagonist, he is only able to play a powerful role with the assistance of Chinese collectivism.

How exactly is this “national power” conveyed in *Wolf Warriors II* and *Operation Red Sea*? As the most popular and successful Chinese action films in recent years, both of them, according to my interview respondents, give the impression of imitating Hollywood action films. But they also resonate with Chinese patriotism compared with Hollywood films. At the end of *Wolf Warriors II*, when they see a car driving slowly, on which Leng Feng stands, with the Chinese national flag twining round his arm, the African forces lay down their arms. 29 of 34 interviewees who like the film mention “patriotism”. These respondents express their view that patriotism triggers their support for this movie and makes them feel happy and proud to be Chinese. As my respondents said, the film arouses Chinese audiences’ patriotism. Here are some examples from my respondents:

Wolf Warrior II is more like a patriotic educational film (Zheng-43-Male).

The film is matching with the national and international conditions at that time, arousing the patriotic feelings of the audience (Qing-34-Female).

I hope to see more patriotic movies. In particular, Operation Red Sea can reflect that our motherland is getting much stronger. Our happy life is hard-won. It is because the people acted by the film actors block the darkness for us that we bathe in the sunshine (Luo-27-Male).

I like Wolf Warriors II and Operation Red Sea very much because they emphasize that only the strong country is really strong. Especially when I see the words on the Chinese passport at the end of Wolf Warriors II, “When you are in danger overseas, don't give up. Please remember, there is a strong motherland behind you.”, I feel so proud of our country (Xiu-37-Female).

From these examples, we can argue that the expression of “national power” arouses audiences’ patriotism. Going back to what I discussed about the relationship between collectivism and national identity, and national identity and individualism, Chinese audiences’ collective national identity is triggered by highlighting the power of the nation in the film.

Similar to how the Hollywood hero is conveyed, the Chinese heroes are also authentic and masculine, with great willpower, the ability to face embarrassment, the responsibility of fairness and justice and a commitment to rescuing the weak from danger. Nevertheless, what is more revealing is their high degree of humanitarianism and the loyalty to the nation.

Bearing these arguments in mind, although in some specific Chinese films like *Wolf Warriors II*, one individual seems to dominate the storyline or forward the narrative, the final achievement of the goal as defined at the beginning does not depend solely on the protagonist. Individuals are not singled out in the same way as individuals in Hollywood films. Rather, goals might be defined in terms of the group or collective, which might be the nation or even the world. Group traits tend to be more significant than individual traits.

Another example of the use of a decentralized protagonist is *The Wandering Earth*. The story is set in 2075. It tells that the sun is about to be destroyed and Earth is no longer suitable for human survival. When facing despair, humans start the "wandering earth" project, trying to enable the whole planet Earth to escape the solar system and find a new home for humans. All people rather than just one single protagonist from the world is trying to achieve the same goal. It is interesting to find that the protagonist acts to forward the process but cannot dominate the storyline. What differentiates this story from Hollywood fiction films are the themes and the values they express, namely, the intangible aspects, which in this case might be considered representative of “an Eastern core with a Western skin”. This contrasts with Hollywood films featuring Chinese elements, which many of my respondents see as having a Chinese skin, but a Western, Hollywood core.

The form of film expression adopted in this Chinese film, visual presentation, is similar to Hollywood fiction films. It seems that the theme of “people save the whole world” is taken for granted and labelled as Hollywood science-fiction style due to the macro effects, spectacular scenery and stirring audio-visual effects. However, the theme of nostalgia for the homeland in *The Wandering Earth* marks it out as a Chinese fiction film, which is different from Western science fiction films. Audiences may be curious about why humans escape with the Earth when there is a crisis on Earth. This is because of the special Eastern idea of nostalgia for "homeland", which is different from Western tradition. When it comes to family and home, many Chinese and foreign films have this theme, but the concept of the family in the East and the West is to some extent different. For example, the situation of grandfather and grandchildren trying together to wander the earth in *The Wandering Earth* is difficult to see in Hollywood films. Some family elements in Hollywood movies are basically a core family sociologically consisting of parents and children, but rarely three generations. In Chinese cultural identity, people emphasize not only the core family but also the extended family, which consists of three or four generations. In this film, this extended family style is magnified to the whole earth and humanity. The differences in family concepts between the East and the West are vividly portrayed in Ang Lee’s *Pushing Hands*[[30]](#footnote-30) and *The Wedding Banquet*[[31]](#footnote-31).

It is interesting to find some online critics of *The Wandering Earth* indicating how Chinese national identity can affect audiences’ interpretations of this film. Here is an example.

In fact, any culture has a sense of dependence on its hometown, but it is even more profound in the East. The Chinese phrases like "Fallen leaves return to the roots" and "Take off one’s armour and go home" are our Chinese identity, but it is opposite with "Indulge in pleasure and forget home and duty" which more conforms to Western identity. Therefore, on the global topic of "home", Westerners are more flexible, and we are relatively "conservative". Just like in the second half of The Wandering Earth, the end of the earth is approaching, and the radio says that everyone must return to their home and embrace their family. If the same situation happens in Hollywood movies, it may become to cherish the moment, or to play in time (Online comment from乌鸦火堂).

This statement implies a difference between Eastern and Western cultures. Chinese traditional views of the universe or attitudes to nature relate to the theory that man is an integral part of nature, while in the West, there is a separation of Heaven and Earth, and man can belong to both; in that sense, man in Western thinking, is not identified solely with nature. It is obvious to find that these different cultural identities and values result in different film productions for directors and different interpretations for audiences.

Returning to Hollywood films, as I mentioned in the previous paragraph, central to the idea of the typical Hollywood narrative structure is the individual protagonist, or goal-directed hero. The task of those protagonists is, however, to reach their goal. The values of Western individualism determine that protagonists do not depend on their families or other people but prefer self-reliance. It seems to be the model that a lonely hero in Hollywood blockbusters can save the world, such as in the *Mission: Impossible* series or *Transformers*. Collective heroes are often associated with films that deliberately challenge the politics of the Hollywood film. Taking the line in *Fast & Furious 7*[[32]](#footnote-32)as an example: "The most important people in life are always those around you at this moment. This is the most real." The themes of *The Wandering Earth*, including nostalgia for homeland, three generations in the same family and dependence on families are typical Eastern family relationships, in which Chinese collectivist identity is extended to and connected with humans in the world, namely, the single family is closely connected with the world of humanity.

Regarding the most popular Chinese film in 2018, *Operation Red Sea*, this film continued to deepen and innovate the means of expressing an idea of a "Chinese superhero". As such, it meets the needs of the construction of the mainstream Chinese value system in the current political and social context (Li, 2018). The narrative of *Operation Red Sea* is laid on the emphasis and return of national tradition - collectivist values relying on the group and nation. It is adapted from a real event involving the evacuation of Chinese people from the Republic of Yemen and tells the story of how a Chinese navy group, the Jiaolong Commandos, executes the evacuation missions and rescues Chinese citizens from an extremely dangerous situation in Arabian Peninsula. What the whole film presents and elaborates are collectivist values - the mutual achievement of individuals working together and the heroic feeling of a sense of the supremacy of family and country (Qi, 2018). If we say *Wolf Warriors II* superficially displays one protagonist, Leng Feng, the Jiaolong Commandos in *Operation Red Sea* occupy the same important position, trying their best to exert their power in the war and synthesizing the power of the group. One female respondent offers her ideas about this:

When I heard them [the Chinese navy] shout “We are the Chinese navy, we will bring you home!”, I was in tears. I admire Chinese soldiers. They make me believe wherever I am, I will be safe (Zeng-25-Female).

Zeng does not refer to any particular character in her statement but emphasizes the whole Chinese navy. This is what the film aims to present, which is collectivist and national power. It promotes a sense of national honour and collective responsibility, which thus conforms to the educational background of the modern Chinese audience, and the sense of a Chinese collectivist identity, which is one reason why such Chinese films resonate with my respondents.

From the discussion, it can be seen that the power of the individual in such films is weakened to highlight the importance of the group and nation. By contrast, Hollywood films emphasize the importance of individual heroism and put those heroes and the world on opposite sides. In these films, Hollywood heroes are often portrayed as rescuing all living beings with their own strength, accompanied by a strong image, by contrast with traditional Chinese films. Although fighting action pictures, sound and stimulating audio-visual effects in Hollywood films provide audiences with an exciting viewing experience, the values propagated contradict with Chinese collectivist identity. In spite of the similarity with Hollywood action or fiction films in terms of the audio-visual effect or style, these Chinese films as discussed above are resonating with Chinese audiences’ patriotism and constructing their national identity, as some of my respondents offer:

Wolf Warriors II and Operation Red Sea gave me a sense of patriotic feelings. Particularly Operation Red Sea fits with Chinese people’ collectivist values (Ding-28-Female).

Wolf Warriors II and Operation Red Sea gave me a strong sense of national pride. [They are] close to Chinese reality (Liu-31-Female).

Patriotic feelings hit my heart when seeing Operation Red Sea (Dai-30-Male, Lin-42-Female).

To summarise what have been discussed, I depend on both empirical audience research and textual analysis to explain how the national identity impacts on audiences’ engagement with collectivism in terms of Chinese ideology and individualism in terms of American value.

## 4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed how Chinese viewers, who all share some aspects of China’s historical and cultural background, make sense of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. This process revolves around four dimensions of audience engagement with Hollywood films, as identified in section 4.2. These are the use of analogy, a sense of understanding and sureness about the Chinese elements in Hollywood films, a sense of uncertainty and non-committal attitudes, and a sense of failing to understand the expression of Chinese elements. Specifically speaking, except the non-committal attitude, Chinese viewers certainly recognize the superficial Chinese elements whereas some of them suspect or criticize the deeper meaning of the representation of Chinese elements. They tend to use analogy between Chinese and Hollywood films to explain how they think of the Chinese representation in Hollywood films. The data analysis demonstrates that the ways in which the Chinese audiences engage with such Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films are far more complex than generally thought.

I introduce how foreigners stereotypically perceive Chinese culture and deal with the issue of how Chinese audiences define Chinese elements by also resorting to stereotypes and how they connect Chinese elements in Hollywood films with Chinese culture. Building on Hall’s first definition of the concept of cultural identity, I find that many of my respondents define and make sense of the Chinese elements in Hollywood films in a similar way due to the shared aspects of their national cultural identity, and regardless of the personal and/or demographic differences in their cultural backgrounds (which I will address in the next chapter). Although the respondents define Chinese-ness by resorting to stereotypes, they are still able to recognize both traditional and modern Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films. They also distinguish between what I call tangible elements, which are concrete and superficial, and intangible elements, which are more abstract, such as values.

By employing the first and second level of Corner’s three-step approach of interpretation, in general, my respondents are confident in and sure about making sense of the denotative and literal meaning of superficial tangible Chinese elements in Hollywood films, since they often seem to be plain symbols of part of Chinese culture. To some degree, this inclusion of Chinese local elements can narrow the distance between transnational Hollywood films and Chinese local audiences, since they arouse audiences’ shared sense of national cultural identity. However, compared with these relatively superficial tangible elements, there is a distinct lack of more deep-seated, complex and intangible Chinese values, which puts some Chinese audiences off such films. In spite of partly representing Chinese culture, but only at a superficial level, my respondents tend to fail to understand and appreciate the attempted expression of intangible elements in terms of their inferential and connotative meaning, which seems to be distorted by Hollywood films. This is in part because it is difficult for Western producers to understand and integrate the deep-seated meaning of more intangible Chinese values due to cultural distance. This may give rise to a bias towards or distortion of such films for Chinese viewers.

The most significant reason for the failure of Chinese audiences to understand and make sense of intangible Chinese values is the conflict between the sense of individualism in western identity and the collectivist values of Chinese identity. I move beyond focusing on Hollywood films with Chinese elements to develop an analogy with recent popular Chinese films mentioned by my respondents, and which demonstrate a stronger sense of collectivism. Whereas Hollywood films with Chinese elements may have a Chinese skin, there is still a Western, individualist core. The inclusion of tangible but superficial Chinese elements helps to decorate Hollywood films with a Chinese skin and cut down the geographic distance between Hollywood and Chinese audiences. But the lack of more profound and often intangible Chinese values means the films fail to get under the Chinese skin of these films, change the Hollywood core and shorten the cultural distance due to the different cultural and national identity.

Bearing in mind the second level of Hall’s theory of cultural identity, it can be seen that Chinese audiences engage with Hollywood films with Chinese elements in quite divergent ways due to their personal cultural and social differences. Based on my data, I shall move on in the next chapter to analyse how questions of age, gender, occupation and socio-cultural status influence the interpretation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements by specific Chinese audiences.

# Chapter 5 How demographic factors shape the responses of Chinese audiences

## 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, drawing upon the first level of Stuart Hall’s discussion of the concept of cultural identity, with a focus on shared values, I looked at how Chinese audiences sharing the same national historical and cultural context, with more or less the same cultural background, understand and interpret Hollywood films with Chinese elements regardless of any different demographic factors. I therefore investigate audience responses from a perspective that considers Chinese culture as a body of shared knowledge and understanding. I call this the “macro-level” of analysis. It was found in my investigation that respondents who encounter a shared national culture do express similar views, to some extent, because they share some of the same extra-textual codes, knowledge and experience.

As previously mentioned, however, the ways that my respondents engage with the representation of Chinese elements are more culturally complex than generally thought. This brings in Hall’s second level of cultural identity, with the focus on difference rather than similarity. This implies that respondents engage with such films in divergent ways, depending on their age, gender and socio-cultural status, as well as the extent of their connection with a specific text. Taking this concept into account, I develop a hypothesis that the interpretation of my respondents may vary within different social categories although within the same national culture. I call this the “micro-level” of analysis, and this is what I develop in this chapter.

Different types of analysis were developed in the previous chapter and this one also builds on Corner’s three-step approach to how audiences interpret television programmes. As explained in Chapter 2, the first step is comprehension, understanding things at the level of denotative meaning. The second step refers to inference, implication and association, understanding things at the level of connotative meaning. The third step is what Corner calls response, where audiences actually make sense of or the first two levels of denotative and connotative meaning in the context of their own circumstances.

In Chapter 4, I showed that the way that my respondents make sense of the tangible Chinese cultura­­­­l symbols and icons in Hollywood films involves them using the first step of interpretation, at the level of denotative meaning. Using Corner’s second level of interpretation, my respondents deal with deeper, more intangible meanings such as Confucian values and collectivism. On the one hand, Chinese audiences sharing a similar cultural identity are able to recognize the Chinese intangible elements. On the other hand, they are also able to assess the implicated and associated meanings of such intangible aspects as they are distorted by Hollywood films. In Chapter 4, I also discussed how Chinese viewers endowed with similar identities recognize the distortion of connotative meanings of intangible aspects. I argue that Hall’s first definition of cultural identity implies a literal (denotative) and inferential (connotative) interpretation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

In Chapter 5, I will adopt the micro-level of analysis and focus on a range of demographic, socio-cultural and personal features of my respondents to explore how these features may differentiate aspects of their national and cultural identities from others. Inspired by the work of Liebes and Katz (1993), rather than regard Chinese elements in Hollywood films as a body of mutual cultural knowledge, I examine how my respondents engage and negotiate with the Chinese cultural elements reflected in Hollywood films in different ways on account of their different cultural and social values, put simply, how such values and features shape their responses to the Chinese elements in Hollywood films. This then reveals how audiences also fit in to Hall’s second definition of cultural identity. I also indicate how their interpretation of intangible aspects of Chinese culture is different in part due to the different demographic factors. Corner’s third level of responsive interpretation is fundamentally dependent on the socio-cultural context of the respondents and cannot be explained by the textual nature of the film itself.

Theoretically, I obviously draw on Corner’s three level approach to audience interpretation, as discussed above, but I also draw on Bourdieu’s critical sociological approach and the concept of cultural competence (Bourdieu, 1984). Methodologically, the chapter is guided by the grounded theory (see Chapter 3) that I developed during the second stage of my analysis of the audience research data. This allows me to demonstrate how my respondents in various demographic groups differently interpret the Chinese elements, and to understand what influence their different personal and socio-cultural circumstances exert on their interpretation.

It should be pointed out that, in this chapter, I do not draw on any online or secondary sources; instead, all of the responses examined are derived from the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews that I carried out, and the ways in which my respondents presented their mental processing and interpretation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. The questionnaire survey I undertook collected demographic information, as well as data on the viewing habits of Chinese audiences and their brief ideas and attitudes towards Hollywood films with Chinese elements that are specifically designed to appeal to those audiences. Here I will explore a panorama of my respondents’ replies classified in reference to different demographics. In my pilot study, I tested questioning techniques, then refined the questions I needed to ask. I also used the questionnaire to gather data on films which I planned to discuss further in my qualitative interview-based research, which aimed to elicit deeper and more specific interpretations.

I shall present my findings in three sections. Firstly, I will briefly introduce information about the different demographic categories into which my respondents can be divided. Secondly, I will move on to explain, with the assistance of some charts, what differences or similarities in their interpretations of Chinese elements can be attributed to different demographic categories. This analysis broadly emerges from my questionnaire answers. The final section will be based on the in-depth interview responses and mainly concentrate on the different interpretations of Chinese cultural elements according to my respondents’ personal, social circumstances and existing cultural knowledge – what Livingstone calls their “extra-textual resources” (2008: 7).

## 5.2 Introduction of demographic groups

In this section, I will provide more information about my respondents and the different demographic categories into which they can be divided. As discussed in Chapter 3, my respondents can be classified according to age, gender, occupation, and the countries and cities in which they live. This section provides more detailed information about each category. The total number of responses I received from participants with a Chinese ethnic background is 814, with 801 living or studying in mainland China and Hong Kong, Macaw and Taiwan, as well as 13 living or studying in the UK or US. All these respondents are over 18 years old, with various occupations. Those living in mainland China can be further subdivided in terms of the economic development of the cities in which they live, which are officially grouped into four tiers. The pie charts below respectively show the circumstance of each demographic group.

Figure 1. The age group of questionnaire survey participants

Figure 1 depicts the constitution of the age groups, which can be generally classified into younger respondents (from 18 to 40), middle-aged (from 41 to 60) and older respondents (over 60 years old). Younger people in China are the main targeted cinema audience group. As is shown in the chart, the sample size in the 18-30 age group is obviously bigger than the other groups, accounting for almost half of the respondents. This is in line with cinema viewing statistics in China. According to a report on *Analysis of film consumer groups* in 2017 (Chinabgao, 2017), the Chinese audiences can be divided into 6 groups, which are under 19 years old, 20-29 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old, 50-59 years old, and 60 years old and older. The results show that audiences aged 19 and under account for 28.3% of the cinema-going public, 20-29 years old account for 37.3%, 30-39 years old account for 19.9%, and the proportion of people aged 40 and above is relatively small, accounting for just 14.4%.

Figure 2. Data from questionnaire survey about the relationship between age and frequency of watching films

Figure 3. Data from questionnaire survey about the relationship between age and knowledge of watching films

These two bar charts demonstrate how age relates to the frequency of film watching (Figure 2) and knowledge about films (Figure 3). It is obvious that the frequency of watching films and the extent to which my respondents know about films gets lower with the older generations. This is especially the case for people over 60 years old, who hardly watch any films, with none of the respondents in this group watching film once or more than once a week. The extremely small numbers of this age group in my sample and their lack of film knowledge means that it is not tenable to do further exploration on how this age group actually interpret Chinese elements in Hollywood films compared with the large body of respondents in other sample groups. Meanwhile, going back to the age distribution of my participants, in relation to the two charts in Figure 2 and 3, the younger respondents are far more likely than other age groups to be regular moviegoers’ percentage. Thus, it is not surprising that half of my respondents are from the younger generation. Young audiences prove to be the largest proportion of Chinese audiences.

Figure 4. The occupation group of questionnaire survey participants

Figure 4 breaks down my respondents by occupation. It is indicated that private and self-employed owners, business administrators, students and professionals spend more money on film consumption, while retired people and manual labourers are careful about spending money on this given their income and economic level (chinabgao A, 2017). Personal consumption expenditure is positively related to one’s income, and that income level, to a certain extent, reflects and determines one’s consumption level. I find that the main occupation groups in my sample are professionals, self-employed and students, for the reason that they have more access to film activities, partly because of their economic level, but they also have a greater willingness to engage with my research, because they have more abundant knowledge about films compared with other groups. It is important to note here that the “other” occupation group comprises those who have difficulty or uncertainty classifying themselves according to the categories I used. This category is thus not as useful as one would hope.

Figure 5. The gender group of questionnaire survey participants

Figure 6. The different city group of questionnaire survey participants

As demonstrated in Figure 5, the gender of the respondents who participated in my survey is interestingly balanced between male and female. In addition, Figure 6 shows that the respondents from the more economically developed first, second and third-tier cities account for the majority of participants. It also shows as below that a much higher percentage of the respondents living in fourth-tier cities than in the other tiers watches films more than once a week (See Figure 7).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| City lived in/The frequency of watching films | | | | | | |
|  | More than once a week | Once a week | Once a month | Once a year | Hardly at all | Total |
| First-tier | 11.50% | 18.58% | 55.75% | 4.42% | 9.75% | 226 |
| Second-tier | 12.79% | 23.29% | 38.81% | 7.76% | 17.35% | 219 |
| Third-tier | 10.76% | 13.61% | 42.09% | 10.76% | 22.78% | 316 |
| Fourth-tier | 23.33% | 13.33% | 46.67% | 0% | 16.67% | 30 |
| HK, Macaw or Taiwan | 10% | 40% | 50% | 0% | 0% | 10 |
| UK or US | 0% | 46.15% | 23.77% | 0% | 30.08% | 13 |

Figure 7. Data from questionnaire survey about the relationship between cities in which my respondents live in and frequency of watching films

The *2008-2009 Chinese Film Audience Survey Report* indicates that the income composition of film audiences is similar to the income composition of the national urban population. Film consumption is thus related to the level of urban economic prosperity. Changes in the box office of a film reflect the prosperity and wealth of a city. But box-office is not entirely proportional to the affluence of the city. In other words, economic level to some extent determines what members spend on films. However, slightly different from what is implied in this table, the relative economic development of the mainland and other Chinese cities my respondents live in does not seem to impact too much on film watching activities, apart from the point noted above about the percentage of respondents from tier 4 cities who watch films more than once a week. This aspect of my analysis also demonstrates that most of my respondents are from developed or comparatively developed cities of mainland China tiers 1 to 3.

## 5.3 Relationship between demographic groups and their film interpretations

Having introduced some basic information about and criteria for each demographic category and the constitution of each group in my survey, this section will move on to analyse the relationship between the selected demographic groups and their interpretation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements, and to explain the reasons that may result in such relationships as a general trend.

There are some interesting differences in the interpretation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films between different demographic groups. The process of film dissemination is a process of transmitting and receiving information or, as Hall (2005) puts it, an encoding and decoding process. Going back to Chapter 2, the standard assumption about the process of audiences decoding the information at the receiving end is actually that it involves restoring as much as possible of the information transmitted by the disseminator. In film communication, this involves the communicator expressing unique meanings through pictures and sound symbols, but the meaning of the communicator may not be effectively and correctly conveyed due to the polysemy of the symbols or the extent to which the audiences can understand those symbols. Audience reception is not however a simple process and as will become clear there are differences in the interpretation of cultural elements by audiences with different cultural backgrounds, even if each audience receives the same content through the same film.

As noted above, extra-textual resources and contextual significance play a role in shaping audience reception and their understanding of film transmission. These terms refer to the external environment rather than the film text in itself that may have an impact on the interpretation of film content. An audience’s interpretation of cultural elements in films is inseparable from the impact of the social and cultural environment in which they operate. Thus, although viewing the same films, audiences from different ages, cultural backgrounds or regions will interpret films according to their own knowledge and ability to understand, which indicates that the meaning of the symbol itself is not the same as the meaning as interpreted by the audience as Hall proposes. For example, when films with anti-Japanese themes and patriotic emotions are released in China on the anniversary of the anti-French war, it is easier for Chinese audiences to resonate with the communicator, in the process of which they integrate with their social environment, more accurately and completely accepting the content of the communicator. It suggests that the context of the anniversary of the anti-French war shapes how Chinese audiences respond to the film and that if the same films were released at other times or released in other countries, the audiences might respond differently.

Surprisingly, there is not a great deal of evidence of different demographic factors having an impact on the general interpretation of my respondents of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. Thus gender and the city in which my respondents live do not seem to have much influence on their preference for Chinese or Hollywood films, their attention to Chinese elements or their engagement with Hollywood films with Chinese elements. In terms of gender, there was in the past a strong social division of labour in China, especially before the reforms of the 1970s when the “outside and inside are clearly divided”, so that the men worked outside home, while the women lived inside (Goodman and Larson, 2005: 2). But the subsequent and continuous opening up and development of society, the economy and culture have resulted in changing work patterns, with fewer women restricted to staying at home, and instead entering into society to work, including in occupations traditionally considered to be male. The days in which men’s and women’s work fell into clearly delineated categories have gone. The changing social participation and work pattern in modern China put women in the same social position as men. The boundaries of social and cultural contexts attributed to male and female experience have broken down, which has generally given rise to a similar social and cultural status for both males and females in terms of general circumstances (Goodman and Larson, 2005). Given the lack of evidence, I do not look in more detail here at the impact of gender of film interpretation. I will return to this issue in Chapter 7.

In terms of the evidence about the different cities in which the survey respondents live, in spite of living in cities with different economic levels and different cultural customs in China, the development of modern communication technology and the rapid exchange of information in modern China in the context of globalization has gradually blurred the cultural boundaries between different cities and promoted cultural homogenization. In terms of general trends, this offers my respondents from different cities at different economic levels the opportunity to embrace diverse aspects of Chinese culture and to view film products regardless of individual nuances between the inhabitants of different cities. Even so, there are some specific interpretations of Hollywood films that differ between the inhabitants of different cities, which I will discuss in section 5.4.

According to the audience research I have undertaken, the most significant issues concerning demographic factors relate to age and occupation, and it is worth elucidating these issues in terms of how these factors interact with particular interpretations of Hollywood films with Chinese elements.

### 5.3.1 Age

As explained in Chapter 4, I coped with the issue about how my respondents interpret Chinese cultural elements from the perspective of a shared national culture by collecting information through my questionnaire survey about respondents’ attitudes towards Chinese films, rather than merely concentrating on the text of Hollywood films featured with Chinese elements. The aim here is to further explore respondents’ preference for and interpretation of Chinese culture. The following charts give the respective proportions of preference for Chinese or Hollywood films within different age groups.

Figure 8. Relationship between age and Chinese films

Figure 9. Relationship between age and Hollywood films

As Figure 8 illustrates, the percentage of the preference for Chinese films grows with each age group. Within the younger generation (from 18 to 40 years old), no more than half the respondents really like Chinese films, across both age groups (18-30 and 31-40). By contrast, more than half of the respondents in the middle-aged group (from 41 to 60 years old) show a preference for Chinese films. The second chart indicates that the 18 to 40-year-old group also have a greater preference for Hollywood films than the middle-aged group in terms of percentages. The proportion of the preference for Chinese cultural elements increases even further with the older age group, which seems to indicate that older respondents are more interested in Chinese culture. This is an intriguing contrast which is worth exploring in more detail.

Figure 10, 11 and 12 offer information about the relative preference for Hollywood films, and especially attention to Chinese elements, in terms of whether the inclusion of Chinese elements is a reason or motivation for viewing a Hollywood film. The charts therefore indicate the respondents’ “macro-level” engagement with Chinese elements. Interestingly, the information from the charts below seem to indicate something contrary to the previous charts (Figure 8 and 9), since there seems no big difference between each age group when it comes to whether my respondents prefer Hollywood films with Chinese elements. On the other hand, more than 70% of respondents from the 18-30 age group and 64% of respondents from the 31-40 age group say they would pay more attention to a Hollywood film when Chinese elements appear in posters for that film. The proportion of respondents in the middle-aged group who say they would give attention to Chinese elements in a Hollywood film poster is smaller than that of the younger group. More than 60% within all age groups express their strong engagement with Chinese elements when they do appear in Hollywood films, which suggests that respondents are more deeply impressed by Hollywood films that do include Chinese elements. There is only a slight fluctuation between different age groups in this case. Why is that so? And why does this result seem to be contrary to what was indicated in Figure 8 and 9?

Figure 10. How age relates to preference for Hollywood films with Chinese elements

Figure 11. How age relates to attention to Chinese elements

Figure 12. How age relates to engagement with Chinese elements

In terms of age, members in the 18-40 years groups were born after the 1980s, and therefore after China’s economic reform and opening up. Before the 1980s, visual cultural products were relatively scarce and limited, but the 1980s witnessed radical historical changes in many aspects of Chinese life, including economics, politics, culture and so on. Since the 1980s, China has generally walked into the wider world, with the policy of reform and opening up in China accelerating communication and exchange with the rest of the world in terms of economic, political and cultural matters (Xuemei, 2018; Zhang and Cao, 2017). People who were born after the 1980s have only ever experienced a more open, diverse and global China. What younger generations can access is more divergent and multiple, with a number of Hollywood films gradually being introduced into mainland China. *True Lies*[[33]](#footnote-33) showed in 1995 in mainland China and was the beginning of the process of importing Hollywood blockbusters to China. When people aged 18-40 years old were in their teens, especially 18-20 year-old respondents born after 2000, this was the period that Hollywood blockbusters became popular and boomed in mainland China. As one of my interviewees said:

I have always had Hollywood sentiments since I was small. Hollywood's industrial standards, themes and creation, and language are great enough to appeal to me (Zhong-21-Male).

It can be seen that the majority of people born in the 1980s, 1990s and especially 2000s have watched Hollywood blockbusters since their childhood and have therefore had more chances to access Hollywood films and cultivate the habit of watching Hollywood blockbusters. By comparison, middle-aged respondents, particularly those aged 51 to 59 years old, may have experienced the rapid development of both economy and culture but had far fewer opportunities when they were young to access a diverse global culture.

It is also the case that, from the perspective of the genre and narrative style of Hollywood films, the typical features of hazardous fighting and action design, spectacular technology and special effects, and one-goal oriented narratives in which the hero overcomes difficulties and finally achieves their goal, tend to be preferred and pursued by younger respondents who are more active than older respondents. Here are two examples of middle-aged respondents expressing their dissatisfaction with Hollywood narrative style:

When I was younger, I liked Hollywood films because of their special effects and grand spectacle. But now, I prefer literary art films (Zong-48-Male).

Hollywood movies focus on spectacular scenes but lack deep connotations (Xu-48-Male).

The above two comments are representative of my middle-aged respondents: with the growth of age, the mindset and mentality of middle-aged people are relatively mature and stable and less attuned to aggressive action or thrill-seeking. They prefer to watch affective stories, which are more moving, with a strong emotional appeal.

Even so, as I discussed in Chapter 4, the inclusion of Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films contributes to a narrowing of the distance between American-led transnational films and Chinese audiences, regardless of different demographic factors. Regarded as the way to connect emotional relevance with transnational audiences, Chinese elements, in this case, help to establish an “affective affinity” (Ju, 2020: 69), which plays a role in drawing audiences’ attention to those transnational film content, despite the existing cultural distance. Affective affinity, as proposed by Ju, “enables transnational audiences to keep seeking out the preferred transnational content in order to voluntarily refine the unique cultural sensibility conveyed by the consumed content” (ibid: 69). Similar to Ju’s argument, American media scholar Handel in his work *Hollywood Looks at the Audiences,* proposes “emotional affinity” to explain that audiences tend to emotionally resonate with and construct their cultural identity through film images which are similar to their own culture (Handel, 2014: 125). In this sense, it can be argued that although some younger respondents express less interest in Chinese films than Hollywood films, they would unconsciously seek the local cultural symbols which they are familiar with to establish emotional affinity with transnational Hollywood films.

It is also indicated in Figure 9 that a minority of middle-aged respondents really like Hollywood films (38.69% for the 41-50 group and 43.36% for the 51-60 group). We can see that in comparison with younger groups, the proportion of middle-aged respondents who like Hollywood films is smaller regardless of genre and content. Thus, the overall ratio of middle-aged respondents that pay attention to Chinese elements in Hollywood films is a little smaller than that of younger groups. Nevertheless, despite this, more than half of the middle-aged respondents would give attention to and strongly engage with Chinese elements in Hollywood films. This implies that the fusion with Chinese elements in Hollywood film not only attracts younger respondents who like Hollywood films but also catches older audiences’ eyes. This is due to its function as a bridge of affective affinity for audiences and as a catalyst to establish their cultural identity.

In this sense, Hollywood films with Chinese elements draw the attention of and leave a deeper impression on my respondents, but as the bar charts demonstrate, there is not too much obvious difference between age groups in terms of the extent of their attention to Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

### 5.3.2 Occupation

Figure 13. Relationship between occupation and Chinese films

Figure 14. Relationship between occupation and Hollywood films

It is hard to distinguish any major differences between different occupation groups in terms of their preference for Chinese or Hollywood films as the atypical fluctuation of the percentage illustrates in Figure 13 and 14. In spite of this, what can be noted is that, from Figure 13, the proportion of retired respondents who really like Chinese films is approaching 60%, while student and manual labour groups who do not like Chinese films are respectively 8.65% and 13.79% of the total cohorts. As discussed in the last section, the proportions of respondents who like viewing Chinese films within the middle-aged and older groups are greater than those of younger groups. Combining age criteria with occupation criteria, many of my younger respondents, particularly those between 18 to 25 years old, also fall into the student group. Likewise, many of the over-55s respondents also belong to the retired group (the normal retirement age in China is 55 years old).

In Figure 14, comparing the student group with the retired group, the proportion of members who like Hollywood films in the former is obviously bigger than in the latter group. Thus, the reasons I discussed in the previous section on the age factor can also, to some extent, be employed to explain the difference between these two occupation groups.

Figure 15. How occupation relates to preference for Hollywood films with Chinese elements

Figure 16. How occupation relates to attention to Chinese elements

Figure 17. How occupation relates to engagement with Chinese elements

It is interesting to find from my audience study that occupation is another factor that plays only a small role in respondents’ interpretation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. Occupation is, to some extent, representative of one’s social and cultural status and position, reflecting respondents’ cultural identity and social resources. However, the general trend, similar to the age group trend, is that no significant differences between different occupation groups can be identified from the three charts, except for the manual labour group, when it comes to respondents’ preferences for and engagement with Hollywood films with Chinese elements demonstrated in Figure 15 and 17. The proportion of manual labour respondents who prefer such films is relatively smaller than for the other groups. Chinese elements in Hollywood films are therefore not a strong motivation for members of this group when they are choosing to view films.

The following tables indicate the feeling of my respondents within different age and occupation groups when seeing Chinese elements appearing in Hollywood films.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Feeling  Age | Feeling kind and happy with the way the Chinese elements are presented. (Qin qie) | Not a true representation of the original Chinese element | Absolutely beyond recognition, not familiar with it | Have no feelings | Other |
| 18-30 | 252(61.92%) | 87(21.38%) | 11(2.70%) | 38(9.34%) | 19(4.67%) |
| 31-40 | 95(63.33%) | 22(14.67%) | 3(2%) | 27(18%) | 3(2%) |
| 41-50 | 82(59.85%) | 21(15.33%) | 3(2.19%) | 19(13.87%) | 12(8.76%) |
| 51-60 | 62(54.87%) | 16(14.16%) | 3(2.65%) | 22(19.47%) | 10(8.85%) |
| Over 60 | 5(71.43%) | 1(14.29%) | 0(0.00%) | 1(14.29%) | 0(0.00%) |

**Figure 18. Relationship between age and the feeling of seeing Chinese elements**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Feeling  occupation | Feeling kind and happy with the way the Chinese elements are presented. (Qin qie) | Not a true representation of the original Chinese element | Absolutely beyond recognition, not familiar with it | Have no feelings | Other |
| Manual Labour | 14(48.28%) | 7(24.14%) | 1(3.45%) | 6(20.69%) | 1(3.45%) |
| Professional | 187(59.94%) | 62(19.87%) | 10(3.21%) | 36(11.54%) | 17(5.45%) |
| Retired | 25(67.57%) | 2(5.41%) | 1(2.70%) | 6(16.22%) | 3(8.11%) |
| Student | 69(66.35%) | 20(19.23%) | 3(2.88%) | 11(10.58%) | 1(0.96%) |
| Self-employed | 62(65.26%) | 11(11.58%) | 2(2.11%) | 16(16.84%) | 4(4.21%) |
| Other | 139(58.65%) | 45(18.99%) | 3(1.27%) | 32(13.50%) | 18(7.59%) |

**Figure 19. Relationship between occupation and the feeling of seeing Chinese elements**

According to these tables, there are no obvious differences between different age and occupation groups in regard to how respondents feel about the appearance of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. The exception again is the manual labour group, with no more than 50% respondents who feel happy with the way Chinese elements are presented, which is subtly less than for other groups.

We can therefore infer from the above analysis, at a macro-level, no significant cases can be distinguished between different demographic groups in terms of general trend, although there are some subtle fluctuations in the percentages of each demographic group with reference to the preference for and engagement with the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. What conclusions can be drawn if we combine Corner’s (1995) three-step approach with my analysis of questionnaire survey data and what has been discussed in Chapter 4? I argue that Chinese viewers are able to recognize the literal and denotative meanings of Chinese elements and distinguish the distortion by Hollywood films of the associative and connotative meanings of Chinese culture. Based on this, I identify that, at the macro level, there are only subtle differences between Corner’s first and second steps in the process of comprehending Hollywood films with Chinese elements. In accordance with the in-depth interview responses, as discussed in Chapter 4, it can be inferred that the feeling of happiness with the way that Chinese elements are presented mainly concerns the superficial tangible cultural elements. More than half of the members in each age group express their identification in terms of “affective affinity” with the tangible representation of Chinese cultural elements; these elements thus act as a bridge to narrow the distance between Chinese audiences and Hollywood films, in other words, the distance between “others” and transnational films.

## 5.4 Three types of interpretation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements

As previously argued, the debate about the interpretation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements needs to be re-examined beyond the literal level. According to the above discussion, demographic factors do not have too much impact on the interpretation of Chinese elements in general. Thus, rather than dwell on Chinese cultural elements as part of the body of shared national culture, I shift my attention to analyse some specific individual responses among those groups, to study how my respondents’ different ways of perception and interpretation are constructed, and at the same time, how they matter in a wider socio-cultural context.

In the previous section I undertook a multidimensional analysis of information about how different demographic groups responded to my questionnaire. In this section, I move on to focus on in-depth interview answers which go beyond the questionnaire survey and drill down to how my respondents undertake individual interpretations of Hollywood films with Chinese cultural elements. According to Corner’s argument about the third level of interpretation, respondents’ different ability to understand cultural elements and their existing knowledge and resources determine their final responses to film texts, especially in relation to the understanding of deeper intangible cultural elements (1995). At the micro level, I find that how particular respondents actually make sense of or interpret the meanings of Chinese elements can be ascribed or attributed to the context of their own circumstances, established knowledge and dispositions. Interestingly, the differences that appear at this level mainly exist in relation to different occupational and age groups.

Informed by the specific responses given by my respondents, I identify three main types of interpretations among my respondents in terms of how they engage with the Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films. It should be pointed out that the three types of interpretations adopted by my respondents are essentially methodologically determined. They are distinctively constituted within the in-depth interviews as well as the initial questionnaire survey. In general terms, talk involves sense-making, comprehension and interpretation as well as critique (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994). The in-depth interviews I conducted therefore provide insights into how my respondents engage with the Chinese elements in Hollywood films as a form of complex cultural textuality, and how this engagement is operationalized under different social and cultural circumstances. My intention of dividing the specific and representative respondents into three types is to reveal the operationalization process of cultural difference. It is also during this process that, as I argue, the activity of interpreting Chinese cultural elements becomes socially relevant. Next, I shall elaborate on each of the types of interpretation, linking them to particular cultural identities that emerge from the research data. I identify these three types or identities respectively as cultural authorities, film professionals, and conservatives and traditionalists.

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### 5.4.1 Cultural authorities

The first type of respondent that I identify is what I will term cultural authorities. Out of my 34 in-depth interview participants, I would say that there are around five respondents who can be categorized into this type. These respondents make sense of and respond to Chinese cultural elements in some Hollywood film examples from a perspective that connects with literary issues, history and culture. The respondents in this category include a history teacher, writers or would-be and part-time writers, and students majoring in culture, history and art. As far as the representation of Chinese elements is concerned, in their interpretations of the films, ‘cultural authority’ respondents prioritize the claims of the films as artistic works, often related to literature. The following quotations are representative of this type of audience. When explaining how they feel about the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films and how they understand the representation of Chinese elements, they give the following examples:

No one can surpass Ang Lee in terms of the westernized interpretation of Chinese culture. It seems that Chinese classical literature always confesses the ending of the story at first, and what really needs to be expressed in the process of story development is the sensory, emotional conflict and literary reference such as Feng Shen Bang or Dream of the Red Mansions[[34]](#footnote-34). The ending is explained at the beginning of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, that Li Mubai’s personal retreat was defeated, which results in his death. The film actually expressed that Taoist culture succumbs to Confucian culture, representing kindness as a key aspect of the classic Confucian theory (Sun-29-Female).

I heard a lecture given by Ye Shuxian, who is a litterateur and anthropologist. He took Avatar[[35]](#footnote-35) as an example to analyse it from the perspective of anthropology and connect the film with Chinese traditional folk songs. Since then, I began to pay attention to some movies and some folk songs from the angle of anthropology. I think a good film can not only provide entertainment but also leave some room for reflection. Indeed, Avatar does this! The Mission Impossible series is like literature, in which the plot is intensely conflicted, and suspense occurs repeatedly. Avatar is good because it highlights an anthropological theory that the so-called barbarians defeat civilized people. Needless to say, the story, director and actors of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon are all local Chinese. The backdrop of the film, like the bamboo forest or the permeation of Taoist theory, made an action feature film into an artistic and literary film (Zong-48-Male).

These long quotations offer some crucial perspectives about how ’cultural authorities’ interpret Chinese elements. What should be remembered here is that, as discussed in Chapter 4, unlike their significantly different interpretations of tangible Chinese elements, my respondents’ responses to deep-seated intangible issues vary only subtly between different occupational and age groups, and especially for some individuals depending on their specific socio-cultural status. It can be noted that these responses involving discussion of Chinese cultural elements do not focus on the concrete, tangible elements or what is directly depicted on the screen; instead, they focus on the abstract stories, and the deeper, less tangible meanings that they perceive behind the image portrayed in the film. They suggest the need for a multidimensional framework in thinking about the ways in which they debate issues related to the representation of Chinese elements.

First of all, by talking about the classic Chinese literary works *Feng Shen Bang* and *Dream of the Red Mansions*, whose style of plot design, story development and conflict resemble *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the female Chinese teacher makes an analogy between film and literature. Rather than directly interpreting Chinese culture depicted in this film, she links the way that the representation of Chinese elements is portrayed in the film with classical Chinese literature. Interestingly, instead of making any comments about the superficial representation of Chinese elements, what she is concerned with is “the sensory, emotional conflict and literary reference” which apply in the analysis of written literary works. She thus applies a method for analysing literature to her interpretation of the film and finally ascribes the theme of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* to the dispute between Confucian and Taoist theory.

The other example given above, which is both similar and interesting, is from Zong, a male, middle-aged, civil servant and would-be writer. What he says indicates at least three points. Firstly, similar to the first response offered by the teacher, Zong cites Ye Shuxian, a litterateur and anthropologist, to help understand *Avatar* as being full of Chinese scenery and tries to interpret this modern transnational film by relating it to traditional Chinese cultural style. Secondly, compared with general audiences, Zong’s experience of hearing the lecture about how to understand *Avatar* from an anthropological point of view gives rise to his interpretation of *Avatar* in regard to anthropological theory and arouses his interest in traditional Chinese culture. Also, his responses to the *Mission Impossible* series and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* draw attention to the comparison with literary conflict. As a writer, he shows a literary attitude towards the representation and interpretation of the Chinese themes of the film. Thirdly, Zong proposes a dichotomy between entertainment and reflection in films, which allows him to offer an informed critique of the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. This critical attitude reflects not only his purpose in watching such films, but also his ability to insightfully understand the features of the film, its themes and the representation of deep-seated intangible cultural elements from a specific perspective.

One may argue that the above discussion explains how “cultural authorities” make sense of their engagement with transnational films with Chinese elements. It therefore provides us with a point of departure to get involved with the debate about the representation of Chinese elements in a film’s text. However, I would like to push the discussion about the way that they interpret Chinese elements a bit further. The multidimensionality of how they understand the representation of Chinese culture offers me the possibility to reassess the relationship between generic knowledge and a specific interpretation within the reception process of Chinese elements when placed in the wider socio-cultural context. The response of a young student majoring in history and art provides an unexpected perspective:

Let me say something about Transformers: Age of Extinction, which contains many more Chinese elements than ever before and left a deep impression on me. It seems that in terms of the box office, it is not as popular as the previous three films of the Transformers series. But I feel really pleased and proud of our country when viewing it since I can recognize and understand the glorious Chinese history reflected in its story. For example, the Autobots who are led by Optimus Prime can be considered as the Red Army forces in modern history, while the Deception headed by the Galvatron and the human lackeys used by them can represent the Kuomintang (KMT) power. In Transformers, the alien creatures headed by "Confinement", are representative of American imperialism. Although the film story takes place in Texas in America in the 2X century, we who are familiar with Chinese history will be brought back to the familiar history of the Jinggangshan campaign against encirclement and suppression (Du-21-Male).

There are three important issues worth recognizing in Du’s discussion of *Transformers: Age of Extinction.* Firstly, although the film actuallyperformed very impressively at the Chinese box office, ranking top in the mainland Chinese film market, it had bad word of mouth among my respondents, particularly in terms of the inclusion of Chinese elements. Rather than blaming this on the placement of Chinese products and planted Chinese advertising, Du chooses to respond to the decoding of Chinese elements from an interesting and specific angle by making an analogy between film images and characters on screen and Chinese historical figures. Secondly, one may be surprised to hear a young Chinese viewer say “I feel really pleased and proud of our country” when discussing a transnational film. Thirdly, what we should give particular attention to is the word “we” (我们) that he uses in the final sentence to describe how he understands the Chinese elements and how he thinks the Chinese elements may affect audiences with the same cultural knowledge as him.

I will now look in more detail at the young student’s three progressive layers of interpretation. From the first point, what he is concerned with prompts the question of cultural competence in reception studies. Drawing on his own work in *The ‘Nationwide’ Audience* (Brunsdon and Morley, 1978)*,* and a comment in his critical postscript about “translating our concerns from the framework of the decoding model into that of genre theory” (Morley, 1981: 127), David Morley (1992) proposes a more flexible model for understanding the relationship between text and audience. In this model, the interaction between generic knowledge and cultural competencies is more thoroughly investigated. Here, Morley borrows the concept of cultural competence raised by Pierre Bourdieu. In Bourdieu’s *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (1984), he writes that “a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (p2).

Revisiting what Du, the Chinese student says, his educational capital in history surely plays a significant and direct role in his interpretation of Chinese elements in *Transformers: Age of Extinction.* The way Du makes sense of the film depends on his familiarity with the particular professional, historical and political knowledge that he has been exposed to as a student. In this regard, drawing on Morley’s and Bourdieu’s arguments, we can understand his response, compared with other audiences, depends on the fact that he is a student specializing in history, who possesses a professional historical capital, a cultural competence that he draws on in the process of interpreting Chinese cultural elements in the film. Borrowing Livingstone’s concept of “the active audience” and the processes of interpreting media texts (Livingstone, 2000: 175), we can argue that his “extra-textual resource” (Livingstone, 2008: 7) of historical knowledge determines his distinctive interpretation from others. Although what audiences see on screen is the same, how they actually interpret what they see, as Corner (1995) said, relies on their established knowledge and disposition.

The second layer of interpretation undertaken by Du reflects the issue of national identity. If we agree that his interpretation of Chinese elements is influenced by his particular pre-existing knowledge, we can also push our understanding further in relation to this issue of national identity. His pride in his country may raise the question of why he relates a transnational film that includes local cultural elements with his own country and how we understand the identity reflected by his pride. Going back to what we discussed in the first point, not only does he see the literal textual meaning of the film, considering what is directly depicted on the screen in visual terms, but he also brings in extra-textual issues that depend on his own knowledge. Rather than focusing on the denotative meaning of the Chinese products and Chinese advertising in *Transformers: Age of Extinction,* his particular decoding of the Chinese elements in their specific socio-cultural context endows the film with connotative representations and meanings. In the process of making sense of the film within a particular social and cultural context, what concerns him is how Chinese national history is presented, instead of criticizing a transnational film in which a national identity is constructed.

As discussed in Chapter 4, to some extent national identity can be regarded as equal to cultural identity when analysing how it impacts on the interpretation of Chinese cultural elements in this study. With Stuart Hall’s second level of cultural identity in mind, we can see that different social and cultural dispositions and backgrounds give rise to different constructions of cultural identity in spite of sharing the same national culture and history. We can therefore argue that this young student’s cultural background and educational capital contribute to the structuring of his cultural identity. More importantly, his cultural identity motivates the practice of reflecting on the representation of aspects of Chinese culture in a transnational film.

The third layer of his interpretation of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* concerns the question of what he means by “we” (我们). From his response, we can find that not only does he discuss how he responds to *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, but he also relates his interpretation to the demographic make-up of the Chinese audience, and what he assumes to be their shared cultural background and knowledge. On the one hand, “we”, as Turnbull points out, is a collective noun indicating that “this respondent imagines himself to be part of a very particular audience for the film” (Turnbull, 2008: 103). Here, Du considers himself as one member of a collective group who has knowledge of Chinese history. On the other hand, in this case of the Chinese cultural elements in *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, Hall’s argument about cultural identity and Corner’s third step of media interpretation have proved useful in making sense of the student’s response to the issue of the representation of Chinese elements in this Hollywood film. What he says about “we who are familiar with Chinese history” indicates that this deeper interpretation of Chinese elements in this film is available to those whose established knowledge is similar to his.

The above quotations reflect the notion of an ideological problematic in relation to audience research, raised by David Morley (1992) in his *Television, Audience and Cultural Studies*. According to Morley, an ideological problematic “must be understood not as a set of contents but rather as a defined set of operations: the way a problematic selects from, conceives and organizes its field of reference” (Morley, 1992: 66). Drawing on Hall (1997: 56), he continues to argue that it is through certain audience “subject positions” that certain ideological operations of the text become realized. Going back to the three responses from my interviewees quoted in this section, Morley’s explanation of the concept proves to be useful. These three respondents deal with various “fields of reference” depending on their own social and cultural knowledge to interpret the Chinese elements in Hollywood films. I will come back to access this notion of ideological problematic in the following sections.

### 5.4.2 Film professionals

My second type of interpretation is associated with what I call “film professionals”. Different from those answers given by my “cultural authority” respondents, with their focus on literary and historical context, this type of respondent tends to understand the representation of Chinese elements from the perspective of filmmaking, hence my choice of the term film professionals. On the one hand, they give their attention to how a Hollywood director integrates Chinese culture with Hollywood films. On the other hand, they put the presentation of Chinese cultural elements into the whole film story development by looking at how Chinese elements have an effect on the film plot and epistasis. Respondents who choose this perspective include online film critics, film editors, website editors and people in other occupations relevant to media, television or film. The following quotations are from two respondents that I identify as “film professionals”:

My favourite film is Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon directed by Li An. Personally, I feel that Ang Lee can best understand the meaning of traditional Chinese culture and apply Chinese aesthetics to Hollywood films. It is no exaggeration to say he can also figure out the relationship between film story and technology. When watching this film, you can see how he uses Chinese traditional culture to redefine martial arts and how much advanced technology can help the presentation of the story. On the other hand, The Great Wall is a relatively unsuccessful piece of Zhang Yimou's international process. It is reasonable in terms of technology and visual effect, but it really does not deal well with the relationship between story and technology (Bin-30-Male).

From the perspective of animation technology, Mulan uses a lot of monochrome abbreviated ink work (Xieyi painting) as the backdrop of the film such as landscape, flowers, gardens and fields. Disney imitates the peace and lightness of Chinese freehand brush work (Xieyi painting). However, rather than presenting a Chinese style of painting, the backdrop of the film incorporates a western sense of rich and gaudy style in terms of the image colour. This is the charm of the interplay between technology and freehand brush work. Disney makes an effort to dig out how to present this form of painting. But they are far from making sense of traditional Chinese painting. Only we are qualified and able to continue to do that (Fu-31-Female).

The use of the concepts “favourite” and “best” in the first quote suggests two possible kinds of Chinese elements that most appeal to this male respondent. One is the local story of China, and the other is the traditional Chinese aesthetics embodied in the film. However, the two elements are actually a bit difficult for Hollywood to achieve. What the respondents say suggests that the advanced technological means are not enough to promote a successful understanding of the representation of Chinese culture, let alone traditional Chinese aesthetics. Hollywood technology plays a positive role in visually presenting Chinese culture rather than understanding in depth the representation of Chinese culture.

Morley’s notion of an ideological problematic is again useful in analysing the two respondents’ interpretation of Chinese elements. Drawing on his concept, we find that these two respondents make sense of and respond to the Chinese elements through the field of technological reference, which is different from general audiences. As discussed above, the ideological problematic emerges from certain “subject positions” of the audience. In terms of their positions, the first male respondent is engaged in film editing. He takes two Hollywood film examples directed by Chinese directors attempting to estimate what factors determine the success of the film. Compared with a general audience, as a professional editor in the film field, he acknowledges the importance of technology. However, more significantly, he is able to see the story and the way of coping with the diverse cultural elements involved in a transnational film as actually determinant.

The second respondent’s occupation is also related to the media. As a website editor, she focuses on how the Chinese landscape is presented and whether the presentation of Chinese elements in *Mulan* is expressive enough to render the atmosphere and set off the film characters. In her opinion, the Chinese landscape imitated by Disney is full of American colour. In the process of presenting a Chinese landscape, film technology is applied to imitate and construct the backdrop of the story, but it fails to revive the background in terms of traditional Chinese brush and ink work. In this sense, technology in a transnational film helps to construct superficial local Chinese elements but is not used to present a deeper and connotative sense of the more intangible aspects of Chinese culture.

It is worth analysing the perspective from which the above two respondents engage with Chinese elements. If we understand their responses a bit further and investigate why they respond to Chinese elements in such ways, the angles of their interpretation continue to raise the issue of the relationship between generic and professional knowledge, or between generic knowledge and cultural competence, which I discussed previously in the section on “cultural authorities”. Nick Couldry (2006) argues for a particular understanding of knowledge in his article *Transvaluing media studies: or, beyond the myth of the mediated centre*, by moving beyond a media-centric perspective to the sociology of knowledge. He writes:

By knowledge, I mean, not our knowledge of media as researchers, but the relationship between media and the social distribution of knowledge about the world. The primary question, then, is not the analysis of this or that media form, but the role, if any (and there could be huge variation here), of different media in people‘s acquisition and use of knowledge, including knowledge of the social world (Couldry, 2006: 187).

If we accept Couldry’s suggestion about knowledge, we can shift attention from how these respondents respond to Chinese cultural elements, to explore how and why their understanding is constructed in a particular personal socio-cultural context. In this respect, their responses are not really focused on their textual engagement with the Chinese elements themselves. Rather it is necessary to explore extra-textual factors, as mentioned above. Couldry (2006) argues that “Accumulating evidence about how people read or engage with this or that text is not, by itself, enough unless it contributes to our understanding of how they act in the social and personal world with or without reference to media” (p187). Applying his argument to the analysis of the above quotations, we can thus connect the interpretations with the social position of the respondents. Their occupation endows them with professional knowledge about film technology. In comparison with a general audience, they possess a particular form of cultural competence in terms of professional film knowledge, while others interpret the Chinese elements from the perspective of generic knowledge. Here is another extract from the interview with Bin, the first respondent quoted above:

I watched the whole of the Mission Impossible and Transformers series. Before the films were released, I learned that Chinese elements would be merged into the films, and I was curious about how Chinese elements would combine with Hollywood action films and how the combination would be presented. The combination of a local Chinese story with Hollywood technology in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and The Great Wall made our own Chinese story better. Before watching Kung Fu Panda, I thought I would like to view how a Chinese animal is presented completely relying on Hollywood technology (Bin-30-Male).

It is implied by this response that not only does his professional knowledge exert an impact on the interpretation of Chinese elements, but it also influences his selection of films to watch.

By analysing these responses, occupation is certainly identified as a significant structural factor in terms of having an effect on the process of respondents’ interpretation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. In the next section, I will consider another type of interpreters in terms of respondents’ engagement with the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

### 5.4.3 Nationalists and traditionalists

The third type of interpreters are those that I call “nationalists and traditionalists”, according to the characteristics of my respondents. The term “nationalists” here refers to those who cannot accept or support the innovative phenomenon of including Chinese elements in Hollywood films. What this type of respondents say expresses their expectation of and preference for pure national films rather than hybrid transnational ones. The term “traditionalists” refers to those respondents who disagree with or cannot approve the representation and expression of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. Rather, they are keen on traditional Chinese cultural elements and look forward to viewing the new construction of traditional Chinese culture in Hollywood films. For example, some respondents in these types give opinions such as:

The most representative examples of Hollywood films with Chinese elements are Mission: Impossible III or the Transformers series etc., which left a deep and profound impression on me. A second type is where the content of the film involves China, such as the science fiction film The Martian[[36]](#footnote-36), Gravity[[37]](#footnote-37), Arrival[[38]](#footnote-38), etc. Also, there is another category of Chinese elements in Hollywood films which include Chinese stars or Chinese products due to investment by Chinese-owned enterprises or sponsorship by Chinese brands. The first two types of Chinese elements in Hollywood films are relatively easy to accept, while the last type is too fake and stiff. But what is more attractive is American local film (Fang-38-Female).

It is better and purer for Hollywood films not to include Chinese elements. If the film is made by Hollywood, it will always involve American thinking. For example, we can understand Three Billboards Outside Ebbing as completely produced by America and reflecting American thinking. I can also see the real American life and thought. If they really experience Chinese life and the Chinese elements included in Hollywood films can really understand and reflect our life, the elements would be funny and interesting. Otherwise, I do not think it is necessary to add Chinese elements into Hollywood films (Ding-28-Female).

Most Chinese elements in Hollywood films that I have watched are not essential. The inclusion of Chinese elements is mostly interest driven. The meaning of them is not significant, but Kung Fu Panda is exceptional. It is not necessary to express Chinese elements. There is no essential difference between Hollywood films with Chinese elements and without Chinese elements. The essence of a film is to tell a story. I think the differences between films and determinants on a successful film are actually the visual presentation and whether they satisfy audiences’ curiosity, but not any regional elements. (Zhong-21-Male).

From the three examples shown above, one can see that the ways the respondents perceive and evaluate the representation of Chinese elements significantly influences how they engage with Hollywood films with Chinese elements. The first female respondent gives her opinions on what kind of Chinese elements in Hollywood films might be easily accepted and reveals that she cannot approve the crude inclusion of superficial Chinese products or advertising. This is similar to the other two respondents in that they appreciate those Chinese elements which reflect real Chinese life and deep Chinese culture rather than superficial tangible aspects, as discussed in Chapter 4. They again implicitly prefer “down to Chinese earth” characteristics and deep-seated collectivist Chinese values. The second quotation is indicative of the respondent’s negative attitude towards hybrid transnational films. As I discussed in Chapter 4, the stereotyping or biased representation of Chinese culture may result in a misunderstanding of the meaning of Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films. Ding prefers to view pure Hollywood films that, in his view, reflect the real American culture. As this respondent says, the inclusion of superficial and peripheral Chinese elements does not contribute to the success of the film. There are some other examples of responses from my interviewees in this category. A 36-year-old male respondent explains that “The inappropriate inclusion of Chinese elements will make me uncomfortable” (Yi-36-Male). A young female respondent thinks that:

most Chinese elements appearing in Hollywood films are indispensable, and do not affect the film plot and story development. Such films aim to appeal to the Chinese audience. I do not think it is necessary to use Chinese elements because Hollywood films actually reflect Western culture (Yang-23-Female).

These respondents firstly review Hollywood films with Chinese elements that they have seen and then evaluate the appropriateness of the Chinese elements. Corner proposes the notion of “sensory engagement”, which is useful here. He defines this mode of engagement with films in terms of how audiences watch “the physicality of the past as places, people, objects and actions and then, on the basis of this, [develop] a more deeply cognitive and affective engagement with its meanings and implications” (Corner, 2007: 135). Although he does not go into great detail in discussing the issue of sensory engagement in this article, I still think it is useful. By applying his concept of sensory engagement, I have been able to propose three specific ways in which respondents process or make sense of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, reviewing and evaluating how those particular elements work in those films.

My respondents also demonstrate “a more deeply cognitive and affective engagement” with the “meanings and implications” of Chinese elements included in Hollywood films, which some of them subsequently reject. These attitudes can be seen in the responses of the three interviewees quoted above, which respectively involve Corner’s interpretive processes of classification, comparison and critical engagement. Furthermore, what the respondents say implies another significant theme - cultural identity, since their consciousness of Chinese culture drives them to question particular representations of Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

Rather than object to the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, traditionalists do not appreciate the ways in which Chinese elements are added into Hollywood films.

[In terms of] the Chinese elements, I like those aesthetic pictures which can deeply tie to the core of Chinese culture, rather simply a certain landmark, or scenery, such as Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. If Hollywood films want to add Chinese elements, they need an in-depth understanding of traditional Chinese culture instead of adding superficial elements (Lv-44-Male).

The elements that highlight Chinese culture mostly attract me, such as the restrained and moderate characteristics of traditional Chinese culture, the collision of traditional Chinese culture and foreign culture, or films adapted from traditional Chinese stories, such as Mulan. I do not like the Chinese elements that only cater to Chinese audiences but are not related to the theme of the films. However, I like the Chinese elements which really promote Chinese culture, such as Chinese martial arts, Chinese calligraphy, etc. The meaning of them cannot be far-fetched (Liang-41-Female).

By revisiting Corner’s concept of sensory engagement, we can argue that the way these two respondents negotiate the use of Chinese elements depends on the level of convergence of traditional Chinese culture. By assessing the Chinese elements that are more attractive and appealing to them, they concern themselves with what kind of Chinese elements should be included, and how they should be included, in Hollywood films. That is, rather than simply including superficial Chinese elements, they appreciate elements that relate more profoundly to traditional aspects of Chinese national culture.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Adopting a micro-level of analysis, this chapter has demonstrated how the demographic attributes of the respondents I worked with, including socio-cultural and personal features, influence their understanding and interpretation of and shape their responses to Hollywood films with Chinese elements. It is interesting to find that the aspects of gender and city location have not proved to significantly and obviously impact on my respondents’ interpretation of Chinese elements, with only inconspicuous fluctuations in terms of the percentages involved. This is partly accounted for by the global context in which films are watched today. But it is also a result of China’s opening up, especially since the 1980s, after which both males and females have gradually been provided with chances to enter society and take up occupational opportunities. In terms of the cities in which my respondents live, the blurred cultural boundaries between different cities, the promotion of cultural homogenization in the context of globalization, the opening up of China and its rapid development of media and technology have given rise to their relatively equal chances to access media products.

While there are then no significant differences in interpretation in terms of the issue of age and occupation, there are some subtle differences within these two demographic groups. Although the percentage of younger respondents who prefer Chinese films is lower than for middle-aged respondents, the majority of respondents in all age groups have a strong engagement with Chinese elements in Hollywood films. This suggests that respondents are more deeply impressed by Hollywood films that include Chinese elements. There are similar issues with the occupation factor, with the exception being the manual labour group whose percentage of engagement with Chinese elements is smaller than the others, suggesting their lower level of interest in the appearance of Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

The charts above help to understand the general trend of different demographic factors. To sum up, no obvious distinctions can be recognized in different demographic groups in terms of the general trend. However, when it comes to the micro-level, which is the focus of both Corner’s third-step interpretation and my emphasis in this chapter, I have demonstrated the existence of three types of interpretations associated with cultural authorities, film professionals and nationalists and traditionalists. This analysis thus demonstrates some nuances within different occupational groups in terms of Corner’s third-step interpretation. In the cases of the respondents discussed above, drawing on Bourdieu’s concept of cultural competence and Morley’s ideological problematic, I argue that respondents’ cultural or educational capital plays a significant and direct role in the interpretation of Chinese elements. Respondents draw on their own existing knowledge and extra-textual resources to understand and draw on their own field of reference to interpret Chinese elements. For example, the case of the student majoring in history demonstrated that he interpreted film content based on his educational capital and cultural competence in understanding the Chinese elements in the films he watched from the perspective of historical knowledge.

If Chapter 4 deals with how Chinese audiences interpret Chinese elements from the perspective of sharing the same national culture, this chapter emphasizes their specific interpretations in the context of their own socio-cultural circumstances. To summarize Chapter 4 and 5, drawing on Corner’s interpretation approach and Hall’s concept of cultural identity, I argue that there is no obvious difference when Chinese audiences share similar cultural backgrounds and identities and interpret films in terms of the literal or denotative meaning of superficial tangible elements. They are also able to recognize the deeper connotative or implicated meaning of intangible aspects, drawing on what Corner proposes as the first and second level of interpretation. However, in terms of Corner’s third level of interpretation, I use Hall’s second position of cultural identity to explain that Chinese audiences interpret the Chinese elements according to their different personal and extra-textual dispositions.

The next chapter will go beyond Corner’s three-step approach and discuss a fourth step I have developed, which I call “derivative behaviours”, referring to different kinds of physical reception activity.

# Chapter 6 The derivative behaviour of Chinese audiences

## 6.1 Introduction

Engaging with Corner’s three-step approach to analysing the process of audiences’ interpretation of and engagement with television programmes, I discussed the way that Chinese audiences interpret Hollywood films with Chinese elements in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5 explained how different demographic factors shape the different responses of those audiences. Chapter 6 will go further, moving beyond the former three levels to focus on a fourth level which I develop from Corner’s approach. This is what I call derivative behaviour, revealed through audience research. If the previous chapters are concerned with audiences’ engagement with a film’s textual meanings in terms of their interpretation of Chinese elements in their own social and cultural context, this chapter will be more about their physical, behavioural activity after watching those films. The investigation emerged from my respondents’ discussions in response to a question I asked them in the interviews about whether they have a special story to tell about their experience of viewing Hollywood films with Chinese elements.

Based on the responses to this interview question, this chapter will specifically explore the behavioural reception of particular Chinese elements by Chinese audiences. Moving beyond the textual interpretation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, I will emphasize the reception of Chinese elements by analysing Chinese audiences’ physical and emotional reactions and responses to Hollywood films with Chinese elements - a rather different aspect of reception activity. In what follows, I will look at three aspects of derivative behaviour, including tourism induced by Hollywood films with Chinese elements, the purchasing of tie-in consumer goods, and other special behaviours after watching such films.

As revealed by the empirical audience research, film-related tourism is the more common behaviour compared with the other two reception activities. In analysing the tourism related to a film, I will examine the way viewers encounter film(ed) places and the reasons why they have such connection with those film places.

## 6.2 Derivative behaviour

One way in which we can understand and assess Chinese audiences’ attitudes towards and reception of the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films is to consider what subsequent activities and behaviours audiences undertake after viewing such Hollywood films. To summarize the results of my survey and interviews and the comments of online film critics, they indicate that Chinese elements, such as film locations, scenery, actors and values appearing in Hollywood films evoke different audience reaction in terms of physical behaviour, psychology and emotion and result in what I name derivative behaviours.

Our life is full of substantial kinds of visual media products, from mobile phones through to computers, from TV programmes to films. Human behaviour is inevitably influenced as a result of exposure to such a visual environment. Taking a representative film as an example, the classic action in *Titanic* (1997) of Jack and Rose standing on the bow of the ship flying together has swept the world since the film showed globally (see the following picture). To date, lovers and couples still like imitating the action for its representation of intimacy, love and trust. The flow-on effect of films on viewers, thus, to some extent, is substantial or even permanent.

图片包含 人, 男人, 日落, 站

描述已自动生成图片包含 水, 户外, 人, 男人

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Website picture: the couple in the right picture imitates the classic action of *Titanic*

Wasko (2008) finds that the revenue of *The Lord of the Rings* is constituted of both the box office of the trilogy and other income from media outlets, tie-in products and merchandising. This indicates how the peripheral revenue (beyond the box office of the film in itself) contributes to the global market. In the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, not only can the merchandise “promote the film, but [it] also garnered additional revenues for the franchise” (Wasko, 2008: 33). Wasko argues that the film and merchandising mutually benefit from each other. That means on the one hand, the film tie-in products help to establish the purchasers’ tie to the film, and on the other hand the film increases the income for the products (Wasko, 2008).

Another similar example is that the shopkeeper of an animation shop in Changsha, China, who says that

“the sale of film tie-in products here is almost the same as that of the films. The characters of Star Wars, Captain America or Marvel movie series enjoy popular support from viewers, and there are constantly new stories and characters appearing. They are the best-selling film tie-in products not only for youngsters but also for middle-aged or older people born in the 1970s or 1980s who pay more attention to quality in purchasing and have a deep love for such film images with the purpose of collection and nostalgia. Some buyers collect all the Star Wars characters in every single film” (Changsha Evening website, 2016).

According to Barker, the revenue of *Star Wars* from continuing merchandising is extensively more than that from the box office (Barker and Brooks, 1998). From what the shopkeeper says, we can see it was the film that triggered the viewers’ transfer to become buyers of connected products. The tie-in products of the film, in this sense, cannot be solely regarded as commercial products but more importantly as a way of maintaining their ties with the film. What is worth noting here is what the shopkeeper says about collection and nostalgia. I will give a more detailed explanation later in this chapter about how the entanglement between viewers’ film watching and their physical behaviour reflects their sense of nostalgia.

However, the negative power of films on audience behaviour has also long been discussed, especially the public debate about the influence of visual media depictions of violence on the actions and behaviour of teenagers and children in real life. The negative influence of films is not however my focus in this study, and no such issues came up in my research.

In the following section, I will focus on three particular aspects of the behavioural influence of films, as one kind of visual medium, on Chinese viewers. In particular, I will firstly give attention to how Chinese viewers make sense of their own country by reason of engaging with Chinese landscapes and places in Hollywood films, and what impact this has on their behaviour, in terms of the role that such films play on film-related tourism. Secondly, I will investigate the issue about the effect of such films on consumer purchasing and other related derivative behaviours of viewers.

### 6.2.1 Film-related tourism

Film-related tourism or film-induced tourism are well-established terms in the field of social, cultural and tourism research. The terms are defined by Sue Beeton, a film-tourism research scholar, as describing “visitation to sites where movies and TV programmes have been filmed as well as tours to production studios, including film-related theme parks” (Beeton, 2005: 11; Busby and Klug, 2001; Macionis, 2004). Film, “as a motivational and image-making tool” (Beeton, 2005: 20), creates a linkage between film sights and viewers. Especially, films can promote places, regions or locations as potential tourist destinations through the images portrayed on screen.

A British report - “Thomas Cook Holidays” - points out that more than 80% of British viewers plan to visit places they have seen in films (Li and Liao, 2009). According to a British survey in 2010, one in ten foreign tourists to Britain were attracted to locations or scenery seen in movies. The survey indicated that among the 30 million foreign visitors, 3 million were drawn to British-style scenery or landscapes appearing in *Harry Potter*, *Sherlock Holmes* or *Pride and Prejudice*[[39]](#footnote-39), which contributes 19 hundred million pounds to the British tourist economy ([BBC, 2010](https://www.bbc.com/ukchina/simp/uk_life/2010/06/100611_life_tourism)). When analysing the factors that encourage tourists to see British landmarks such as Big Ben or Buckingham Palace, etc, Morris finds that one of the significant but less conscious reasons is screen tourism (Morris, 2019). These three reports or surveys reveal the role films play both in viewers’ determination to visit the film destination and on the tourist industry.

Similar to the British film and tourism industry, in China, personal interest-based tourism has become more popular, and tourism for the purpose of exploring arts and humanities dominates interest-based travel. A report on the *New Trend of National Tourism Consumption* in 2018 demonstrates that people have a significant preference for film and television entertainment and star-chasing travel (CBNData, 2018). In Chinese academia, the attention to Chinese film-induced tourism did not begin until 2004, when Liu, Binyi and Liu, Qin published *The Status Quo and Trends of China's Film and Television Tourism Development* in *Tourism Tribune*, which forms a prelude to the subsequent Chinese academic research on film and television tourism. This article has thus become the pioneering work of Chinese film and television tourism. My interview data also provided evidence that the same behaviours noted in Western tourists are true for Chinese viewers. More than half of the respondents to both my questionnaire survey and my interviews reflect that they are actual or potential tourists who intend to go to sites of Chinese scenery, induced by Hollywood films featuring such landscape or scenery.

The phenomenon of film viewers travelling to places appearing in television programmes or films has dramatically risen over the last decades (Kim and Reijnders, 2018). On investigating the reasons for this phenomenon of the increasing interplay between film and tourism, it can be found that the visible film images of a particular site are apt to shape virtual destination images in viewers’ minds, maybe positively or negatively. Destination images, as Croy (2010) asserts, are the fundamental and dominant factor for tourists during the process of making travel decisions. If relating what Croy proposes to a film in terms of its relation with destination images, we can consider that when the film images conform to viewers’ mood and mind, they may yearn for the destination, and film viewing can play a key role in enhancing their thirst for that destination. Classical imaging keeps motivating viewers to visit the real place, as in the example of the enduring imaging power of a classic film work of the 1950s, *Roman Holiday*[[40]](#footnote-40). The film has lured people to Rome for decades. The Spanish Steps where the heroine eats ice cream and the Bocca della verità where the hero pretends to have his hand cut off, has become some of the most popular attractions in the world. In a similar way, since *The Bridges of Madison County*[[41]](#footnote-41) was successfully released globally, Madison has drawn plenty of new couples to hold wedding ceremonies on the bridge where the hero and heroine fell in love with each other in the film.

图片包含 人, 户外, 照片, 建筑

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Website picture: the Spanish Steps in *Roman Holiday*

图片包含 人, 户外, 男人, 照片

描述已自动生成

Website picture: the bridge in the picture is the place where the hero

and heroine fell in love with each other in *The Bridges*

*of Madison County*

In terms of Hollywood films, as mentioned previously, globalization provides opportunities for Hollywood to seek and gather filming material worldwide. As discussed earlier in this study, Chinese cultural elements, especially those that are representative of traditional, ancient and typical Eastern culture, have dramatically attracted Hollywood’s interest, including Chinese actors, clothing, food, sites and language. In spite of some distortion, misunderstanding and misinterpretation in using such sounds and images, they have still, to some degree, aroused the attention of Chinese audiences. Among these elements, my research data suggests that the distinctive character of certain Chinese landscapes or scenery is one of the most frequent, popular and attractive Chinese elements in Hollywood films. By observing and analysing my 814 questionnaire responses and 34 interview responses, it becomes clear that Chinese scenery is one of the most recurrent elements of interest for my respondents, with the exception of Chinese clothing and stars. More than half of the questionnaire respondents (51.6%) express the ideas that they are more or less impressed by the Chinese landscape and scenery that is presented in Hollywood films.

Of the Chinese locations portrayed in Hollywood films over the last two decades, the images that Hollywood prefers are generally beautiful scenic areas with distinctively (stereotypically) Chinese characteristics or naturally unique scenery. Based on the responses of my interviewees and online film critics, I observe that the audiences who watch the Hollywood disaster film *Farewell Atlantis* first think of the Himalaya mountains of Tibet for the mysterious Noah‘s Ark being built. The snowcapped mountain and temple from beautiful and spectacular Tibet shown respectively at the beginning and the end of the film catch audiences’ eyes and their sense of reverie. One of the most spectacular scenes of *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*[[42]](#footnote-42) is the Tian Mo Desert in Hebei Province, with its unique and magnificent landscape, the boundless desert, the sunset and the broken walls and ruins. Not only is it an ideal and prevailing setting for other excellent domestic films such as *Longmen Feijia* and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, it also attracts many visitors and promotes local tourism by the virtue of its memorable scenery. What is more, emerging from informal discussion with some viewers (friends, family, or general audiences), when the graceful landscape of Guilin, which has long enjoyed a reputation in China for being most beautiful, appeared in the commercially-successful science fiction blockbuster, *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*[[43]](#footnote-43), Chinese audiences could once more marvel at their own beautiful natural scenery.

However, in spite of the extremely enchanting and attractive visual moving images, the actual process of viewers making decisions about whether to travel to places seen in films, how viewers act as tourists and what places are selected to be their destination is complex. Drawing on Dann’s conceptual approach of the “push and pull factor theory” and building on the existing literature about film-induced tourism, Macionis tries to understand film-related tourists and explain the complicated motivations and enabling factors that facilitate the phenomenon of film-induced tourism (Dann, 1977; Macionis, 2004: 86). It is argued that the physical images of places serve as one external factor that *pulls* viewers to select a destination on the one side, while the internal elements such as mental and emotional factors, psychological wants, personal experience or habits, play a role in *pushing* viewers to make decisions on the other (Macionis, 2004).

***Chinese film-induced tourists***

In this section, I will engage with what Dann, Macionis and other scholars such as Iso-Ahola (1987) and Witt and Wright (1992) say about the impetus of film-induced tourism to analyse how and why Chinese viewers respond to the Chinese scenery in Hollywood films, and explain how Chinese-specific scenery or landscape featured in Hollywood films acts as the driving force in determining a viewer’s film-tourist experience. By summarizing the responses from my interviewees in combination with online comments about or reviews of certain films, I will firstly demonstrate the actual relationship between Chinese viewers and Chinese places in Hollywood films, in other words, the viewers’ engagement with the film sites; and then explore the reasons and motivations that build such a relationship from the perspective of both the destinations and the viewers.

According to my interview data, 13 out of 34 respondents are actual or potential film-related tourists. 6 interviewees have actual film-related travel experience and another 7 have planned to travel to places related to film sites after viewing Hollywood films that include Chinese scenery. As one male interviewee comments:

Every time I see beautiful location images in films, I want to travel to see the actual place (Shen-30-M).

Shen does not demonstrate his specific experience of visiting certain film places. Instead, what he says indicates his thirst for the scenery portrayed in the film as long as it is appealing and attractive. This reflects, to some degree, the argument that films play an effective and motivating role in pulling viewers in and inducing film place specific visitation (Macionis, 2004; Couldry, 1998; Beeton, 2001; Kim and Richardson, 2003). A good number of other respondents also comment that they are interested in some of the beautiful places appearing in Hollywood blockbusters. They are induced to visit or consider visiting particular locations or sites by reason of the attractive and appealing images of such places on screen, which are in fact often the result of technologically advanced image processing.

***The relationship between viewers and film sites***

In his *Understanding the Film-induced Tourist*, Macionis classifies film-induced tourists into three types including “serendipitous film tourists”, “general film tourists” and “specific film tourists” (2004: 87). The first type, according to him, refers to those who travel to places appearing in films without any particular motivation or plan; general film tourists do film-related activities, but they are not specifically drawn to the place by the film; and specific film tourists seek out the particular places portrayed in a film. Beyond the three types, on the basis of my investigations, I argue that there is a fourth type, “potential film tourists”, who may not actually travel to a place featured in a film they have watched, but where the film has triggered their impulse to go sightseeing at some time. It is interesting to find one special response which I argue to be a bit like but not exactly the same as the “potential film tourists”. The male respondent says:

I like to watch images of beautiful places so that I don't have to physically go there! Consuming media images is much easier than physically travelling! (Bin-30-Male)

Film images, as he says, do stimulate his desire to see beautiful places but normally it is the other way around: he has a constant desire to see beauty and media images, from his view, are a convenient substitute for actually visiting. This is what I name as a “virtual film tourist”, the viewer who goes sightseeing virtually by way of viewing screen images. Due to its virtual and potential attributes, I consider it to belong to the category of “potential film tourism”.

In this respect, I will build on Macionis’s means of dividing film tourists and combine this with new findings resulting from my audience research to explicitly explain the formula of interaction between Chinese viewers and the Chinese sites appeared in Hollywood films. The purpose of this is to analyse how Chinese viewers emotionally and physically entangle with a film site; what factors drive this entanglement; and how this relates to cultural identity as discussed in the previous chapter.

As mentioned above, Hollywood has shown an interest in various Chinese landscapes. In *Avatar*, some of the Pandora planet is shot in Zhangjiajie, Hunan Province. The prototype of the Hallelujah Mountain, where the protagonist seeks to ride, is the famous Southern Pillar (Nan Tian Yi Zhu). This clearly has an impact on at least one of my respondents, who falls into the category of the specific film tourist:

I had heard of the natural beauty of the lakes and mountains of Zhangjiajie, but I have had no chance to see it. When the beautiful picture appeared on the big screen, I decided to really go for a sightseeing trip with my family. Actually, we marvelled at the uncanny workmanship of nature (Qi-48-Male).

In spite of several moving pictures of Zhangjiajie, it is the film *Avatar* that finally motivates him and his family to travel there. Anita Fernandez and Robert Young (2008) consider film sites as products from a marketing perspective. While the desire to travel to a particular location may have been made long before, repeated and intensive film images promote the possibility of traveling to the place and help the visit to become a reality. Given this, the impact of a film may be considered as advertising a location’s more persuasive and intuitive attributes than those shown by advertising based on word-of-mouth, and as such plays a significant role in visually introducing a place (Beeton, 2005).

Apart from spectacular deserts, graceful mountains and magnificent rivers, Hollywood is particularly passionate about the Canal Towns to the south of the Yangtze River (Jiangnan Shui Xiang/China’s water towns) in the south of China, referred to as the “Venice of the East”. This is an area which is famous for its ancient buildings that have not changed in centuries. With its classical and charming southern architecture and its white walls, grey tile roofs and small bridges over the flowing streams and rivers, the unique traditional folk cultures and elegant scenery are absolutely distinctive and different from any other countries. The uniqueness of China’s water towns provides a beautiful film location for Hollywood; in reverse, the moving images of these water towns in Hollywood films have inspired both Chinese and overseas tourists.

In 2005, after inspecting dozens of ancient water towns in Jiangsu and Zhejiang Province, the *Mission: Impossible III* crew finally chose Xitang as the best location for filming. Hollywood international superstar, Tom Cruise, leaps onto roofs and vaults over walls, demonstrating a first-class action show in one of the most beautiful water towns.

图片包含 户外, 男人, 建筑, 骑

描述已自动生成

图片包含 建筑, 户外, 男人, 前

描述已自动生成

Website picture: screenshots in Xitang from *Mission: Impossible III*

Director J.J. Abrams gives high praise: "We wanted to choose an ancient Chinese town as the scene of emotional drama. Xitang’s unique and beautiful scenery is very suitable for American movies." Tom Cruise praises Xitang as a "fairyland". The elegance and quietness of Xitang mutually complements the stirring and exciting action. Kuang Pingping, deputy director of marketing operation Department of Xitang Tourism Culture Development Co. Ltd., says: "After the global release of ‘*Mission: Impossible III’*, many travel agencies in the United States, Britain, France, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau of China have contacted us to visit, thus it can be seen that the impact is obvious." In addition to the increasing number of Chinese tourist groups, there are even more foreign faces coming in groups of two or three and walking in Xitang’s streets full of ancient Chinese characteristics (all quotations from SOHU, 2018).

Through an analysis of 163 long comments on *Mission: Impossible III* on the Chinese website, Douban (See reference), it can be found that lots of contributors refer to Xitang and express the deep impression that the images of Xitang have left on them. The following quotations are just some examples.

Not only is it an exciting spy film, but also a beautiful scenic film, from Rome to Shanghai and then to Xitang Ancient Town, I really want to visit the real Xitang (Online comment from爱吃馒头的宝宝).

The streets in the water towns that seem to appear in the Shanghai scene are actually shot in Xitang, Zhejiang. I went there for a trip in 2003 and found it really beautiful and charming, especially at night when the lanterns by the river were all lit up. It was very artistic looking all around (Online comment from尼玛).

The first quotation indicates the viewer’s intention to visit Xitang due to the experience of watching *Mission: Impossible III*, while the second one by contrast recalls Xitang scenery when watching a film which includes the site. It seems that they superficially cannot directly connect with Xitang, but their nuanced tie with the film site cannot be ignored. Relating what they say to Macionis’s classification, neither can be identified as falling easily into his three categories. The former possibly belongs to the ‘potential film-related tourist’, as I name this new category. Although the prime reason of the latter viewer for traveling to Xitang is not the film, what the viewer says establishes a linkage between the film site and their Xitang travelling experience. Going back to what is discussed about the sense of nostalgia, we can see in this case that film tie-in products (in this case, a tourist destination) construct the buyers’ (viewer’s) sense of nostalgia for being there. Here, I argue that the film is, in some cases, a trigger for nostalgia, which helps to recall one’s past experiences, when film images of a visited place re-emerge.

Similarly, another contributor depicts the impression of Xitang ancient town with poetic words:

We cannot find the same architecture as Xitang in other film spots with western style. It has narrow rivers, wooden eaves, small stone bridges, white walls, narrow alleys, all of which are beautiful and ancient, and can only be seen in China. At the end of the film, there is no fight, the elderly sitting alone in the sunshine, the quiet town moving back into peace and calm. When seeing this, I am extremely hopeful of living there, escaping the roar and crowd of the metropolis (Online comment from里托.贝森).

The above quotations demonstrate that although the initial purpose of most motion picture films is not to lure viewers to visit the film locations, “the medium can enhance the awareness, appeal and the power of imagery and the fantasy of the story” (Macionis, 2004: 86; Butler, 1990; Beeton, 2001; Couldry, 1998). In this respect, despite the fact that *Mission: Impossible III* is not a place-oriented movie, many Chinese viewers seem to go after the film shots, traveling to the virtual Xitang. For them, the beautiful Xitang images portrayed in *Mission: Impossible III* motivate them to be potential tourists. They could visually appreciate the beautiful scenery, and at the same time enjoy the fascinating action. Putting forward what Macionis, Butler, Beeton and others argue, more precisely this means that to elucidate natural and exotic scenery in film, as Beeton (2005) notes, is often to take on the work of a promotional agent that motivates viewers to actually visit a place.

Another recurrent example referred to by respondents is *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (referred to as *Crouching Tiger* in the following). In *Crouching Tiger*, the director Ang Lee abandons himself to the Chinese landscape, using a large number of icons of beautiful scenery in the film. The representative Chinese elements such as rivers, mountains and bamboo painting in the film occupy a considerable proportion of the visual elements as the backdrop to the action. In particular, the bamboo forest in Hongcun, Anhui province, another Chinese water town which was less well known before the film showing, was certified as a UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site in the year after the film was released and has drawn a mass of visitors every year since then (1905 Film, 2015). Three of my interview respondents also expressed their strong longing for visiting the bamboo forest and one person actually travelled there by virtue of *Crouching Tiger*. The following quotations are two examples:

I never imagined there were such beautiful lush groves of bamboo in China. I really like the feeling of pure Chinese charm. It looks like a “retreat away from the world” with a dense growth of evergreen trees (Liu-31-Female).

I especially like the bamboo sea in Crouching Tiger. If I have a chance, I would like to actually visit there. Inspirational animations like Kung Fu Panda are also very suitable for children to watch and stimulate their thinking (Liang-41-Female).

The panda in Kung Fu Panda [series] is so cute and lovely. After watching Kung Fu Panda [series], I really would like to travel to Chengdu, Sichuan province, the hometown of the panda in China, to see the national treasure (Sun-29-Female).

Bamboo has been depicted since ancient times by many Chinese writers and poets as implying firmness, elegance and vigour. In Chinese culture, a bamboo sea acts as a necessary foil that provides the setting for a decent fight. It is also occasionally selected as the backdrop for classic action in Hollywood action films. It seems that the scenery of bamboo groves in swordsman movies has never been surpassed. Thus, the Anji Bamboo Sea, Wuyi Mountain, in Fujian, as well as the tranquil and serene Zhejiang Xianju, are respectively shown as scenic spots in *The Forbidden Kingdom*[[44]](#footnote-44). Additionally, as Sun says in the third quotation above, the panda is widely accepted as a national treasure partly representative of and specific to Chinese culture and born and bred in Sichuan province. We can consider here that the cartoon panda, from Sun’s view, is the signifier that motivates her to visit the panda’s growing city. The above quotations indicate that audience desire to visit a film place is stimulated by the film images of a bamboo sea and an animated character, which are representative and typical of both Chinese plant life, animals and culture. Classic and characteristic Chinese scenery and animals, in this case, exert a promoting effect in determining film-related tourism.

My survey also demonstrates that some film viewers prove not to be specific or potential visitors. Even so, they are inextricably entangled with the film and undertake tourist activities at film sites. Macionis (2004) considers these as general film tourists. They actually come to a film location but are not specifically drawn by the film itself. But when they are in a place which once appeared in a film, they think of the film unconsciously. As two interview respondents commented:

When traveling to the ancient town of Xitang with my friends, I thought of Mission: Impossible III. Because of that, we took photos where the film was shot (Zhuang-51-Female).

When going to Zhangjiajie, the scenery of Avatar came into my mind (Zong-48-Male).

Different from those visitors yearning to visit certain places on account of their appearance in a film, they only recall the film once they are visiting the location. Interestingly, in contrast with the person who reviews their travel experience having viewed the film *Mission: Impossible III*, these two respondents go over the film site due having travelled to the scenery. Zhuang connects what she saw when visiting Xitang ancient town with the film scenery shot in Xitang in *Mission: Impossible III*, while the actual Zhangjiajie scenery ties the male respondent to the image of Zhangjiajie shot in *Avatar*. Chinese tourists (viewers), in this sense, connect Chinese sites with images they are familiar with from Hollywood films. By reviewing these two opposite types of interaction between viewers and film sites, I find that film, as a medium, thus creates a bridge between the location and film. As far as many viewers or tourists concerned, they are linked with and transfer to each other.

***Reasons for the relationship between film tourists and films***

Having identified the types of Chinese film-related tourists based on Macionis’s approach and my own audience research, I will then turn to discuss the motivations or driving forces that establish a linkage between Hollywood films with Chinese scenery and Chinese viewers. The factors that stimulate viewers to become visitors are complex. According to the data my research has generated, four factors covering both external and internal aspects promote the involvement of Chinese viewers with film locations: the impact of globalization, the attractive Chinese scenery in itself, the Hollywood brand effect or the power of celebrities and stars, and personal experience and emotion.

*Globalization and Chinese cultural policy*

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the sweeping process of globalization has triggered the transformation of politics, the economy and culture in different countries in the global era and has enriched relationships across national boundaries in terms of cultural and economic communication. In this context, the opportunities for film and tourism, as branches of popular culture and the economy, have been enhanced by global integration.

Revisiting Xi Jinping’s 2014 proposition and the debate on Chinese policy mentioned in Chapter 2, both the general process of global integration and specific Chinese policy initiatives provide a platform for Hollywood to embrace Chinese culture and to pick up Chinese stories and material for its films. In particular, the vast and diverse Chinese scenery proves fascinating to Hollywood. In order to seek interesting and appealing stories from around the world, Hollywood’s further choice is to select Chinese tourist attractions as the filming spots for some of their biggest films. As noted above, the use of Xitang as a location in *Mission: Impossible III* directly hastens the development of specialist tours to Xitang by various major travel agencies, and Xitang is now successfully regarded as a world-class tourist attraction. Globalization, in this sense, is effective as a motivational factor to integrate Hollywood films with Chinese filming sites. What is more, the Chinese cultural strategy of “welcoming in” (Yin Jin Lai), as introduced in Chapter 1 contributes to introducing American cultural products in the Chinese market. On account of these developments, it has become possible for Chinese viewers to view screen images of Chinese scenery in foreign films. The evidence of both the Chinese tourist report and my empirical audience research is that Chinese viewers are impressed by such images in Hollywood films.

*Unique Chinese scenery*

On the global platform, it can be argued that the unique Chinese filming location in itself is a critical factor that attracts viewers to actually visit that location. We can find the evidence to support this argument from the implication of one online comment about *Mission: Impossible III*,that the scenery “can only be seen in China”.This indicates, on the one hand, the uniqueness and specificity of Chinese scenery and on the other hand, the attractive and distinctive film sites which can only be found in China. Macionis (2004: 91) draws a similar conclusion about the effect of the film *The Piano* on the Karekare Beach site in New Zealand: as Croy and Walker (2004) noted, “it is this physical place of the moving image that has pulled the tourist to it”.

The same is now becoming true of various Chinese locations. Certain Chinese scenery, such as the natural landscapes or traditional water towns as discussed above, are easy to recognize with their typical and attractive attributes, in comparison with Western-style landscapes. As Beeton (2005) argues, the natural scenery and exotic locations depicted in films act as promotional factors that pull viewers to visit certain locations. Not only is the Chinese scenery used as the backdrop of the film story, but it is also central to the narrative action. The exciting story and the appropriate scenery set each other off, which makes the scenery more attractive, as in the use of Guilin in *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith*. Another example is the beauty of the Lijiang River in Guilin that features in *The Painted Veil*, although this film was not successful when it was released in 2006 in Chinese market. The hazy atmosphere of these beautifully pastoral areas in southern China is more than mere scenery and again plays a role in the storyline. Thus, the film setting of the British lovers sitting on a rowing boat on the river surrounded by rolling hills has enriched the mysterious verve of the Lijiang River. As a result, some Chinese viewers have been motivated to become local tourists to mentally experience the love of the actors in this special natural environment. The following are some evidence of this specifically in relation to *The Painted Veil* generated from online comments and pictures available online.

图片包含 户外, 人, 水, 女人

描述已自动生成

Website picture: the British lovers sitting on a rowing boat on the Lijing river in Guilin, China

一群人坐在船上

描述已自动生成

Website picture: the British lovers sitting on a rowing boat on the Lijing river in Guilin, China

A bamboo raft floated gently among the green mountains and beautiful waters like Chinese ink wash painting. The person who is sitting on the bamboo raft is a British gentleman, and the one behind him is his beautiful wife...When first glancing at the film The Painted Veil, the beautiful scenes and light colours [of the film images] seem to be different from the soul-stirring and spectacular setting in Titanic. Perhaps most people’s love is similar to that in The Painted Veil which is steady rather than Titanic. (Online comment from 凉风有心).

I have always considered travelling to a beautiful place like Fenghuang ancient town. After watching The Painted Veil the day before yesterday, I suddenly changed my mind and wanted to see the filming location [of The Painted Veil]. (Online comment from nata).

The first quotation is a good example which indicates the Chinese scenery in the film frames the British lovers’ love story. Lijing river in Guilin, China features as pretty and gentle rather than magnificent and spectacular. From the commenter’s view, the features of Lijing river resonates with the lovers’ steady love in *The Painted Veil*, compared to the vigorous situation in *Titanic*. What the quotation tells is how the Chinese scenery and the story of British lovers mutually set each other off. This is what has been discussed about the role of Chinese scenery plays both in the film story and the narrative action. The second comment demonstrates how the film scenery influences the commenter’s tourist determination. This indicates what Beeton argues, about how the natural scenery portrayed in films can turn viewers into tourists and visit certain locations.

In this vein, some examples from my interviewees reflects on the pivotal role that attractive Chinese scenery can play in the transformation of Chinese audiences from viewers to visitors.

I believe that the scenery, like Tiankeng in Wulong appearing in Transformer: Age of Extinction, or the bamboo forest in Crouching Tiger, cannot be found other than in China. The uniqueness of such scenery attracted Hollywood directors. It certainly appealed to us when the scenery showed us such beautiful images (Fang-38-Female).

I had never seen such dense bamboo forest before watching Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon. Honestly, maybe the feeling will be changed if it is filmed in another place rather than in the bamboo sea. It triggered my next travelling plan. (Qing-34-Female).

I think there must be particular reasons that Hollywood films select Chinese landscapes as filming sites. I am now more interested in seeing the special attractions of such sites (Wang-49-Male).

It is widely acknowledged by my research participants that Hollywood films increasingly favour special and distinctive Chinese scenery and landscape. Drawing on the analysis of the three responses above, it can be seen that, at a superficial level, the attractive and unique images of Chinese scenery as distinct from Western scenery generate viewers to appreciate the real place. Indeed, according to the third respondent, the intent of comprehending the meaning behind the screen images enhances the awareness of the location and motivates him to explore the scenery. Apart from the natural landscape itself, the cultural and historical contexts can therefore be considered as the core factors that attract both foreign and domestic viewers. The moving film images of Chinese scenery trigger viewers’ passion to get an insight into local customs and traditions.

*The Hollywood brand effect and the power of celebrities and stars*

There is an additional powerful motivation provided by the Hollywood brand effect and the involvement of film celebrities and stars which contributes to the determinants that enhance the relationship between Chinese audiences and Chinese locations. As discussed previously, the “halo” effect of the Hollywood brand plays a significant role in motivating Chinese people to select and watch films with Chinese elements. In this section, I will explore its influences on the interpretation and reception activity of Chinese audiences after viewing such films, in particular in relation to film-induced tourism.

The interview responses verify that Chinese audiences appreciate the most advanced shooting technologies and the high quality that Hollywood represents in filmmaking. There is therefore a brand attachment in terms of the effects of Hollywood films on how audiences respond to Chinese film locations. Here are two examples given by my interviewees when sharing their opinions of the Hollywood brand:

Hollywood possesses outstanding actors, a mature producing and distributing system, and eye-catching and appealing stories. Hollywood films represent high quality in the worldwide film industry. So, if a new Hollywood movie is released, I will watch it as soon as possible. Now that Hollywood films choose certain Chinese locations as their filming sites, I think it must be attractive and worth really going there. I believe it is impossible for them to select a location randomly (Qi-46-Male).

If I have the chance, I hope to visit every beautiful Chinese location appearing in Hollywood films. I would like to know why a famous foreign film studio should show off such beautiful Chinese landscapes as Zhang Jiajie and Xitang, and why it chose such places but not elsewhere, and see whether the Chinese scenery is as appealing to me as the picture depicted in Hollywood films (Wang-49-Male).

From these two statements, it is easy to identify the importance of the Hollywood brand in relation to the creation of destination images and in terms of establishing an intention to travel to locations used in Hollywood films. In the first example, the 46-year-old man expresses his confidence in every dimension of the renowned Hollywood film brand and the information it gives him about particular Chinese sites. He explains his film preferences and selections in terms of this brand effect. In other words, in Qi’s view, if these locations are good enough for Hollywood, they must be very good indeed. The producer and distributor of a film thus play an initial role in motivating him to watch the film. Furthermore, the high quality of the moving images of Chinese scenery and landscape in Hollywood films helps to build a bridge between Chinese locations and the interviewee by attracting him to the place.

In a similar vein, the second example shows the interviewee’s curiosity towards and favouring of Chinese locations in films produced by the famous brand, while, superficially, the brand is one motivational driver for him to go on a sightseeing tour. Beyond this, his focus is further sharpened by the fact that a renowned Hollywood film chooses such locations as its filming sites. Thus, he would like to see if it is as good as he has seen in the films. In these two cases, not only does the brand of Hollywood affect the selection of viewing, but it also shapes how the viewers respond to the films as it signifies the high quality, excellent technology and authenticity of the films. Authenticity, according to Peterson (Peterson, 1997), indicates something highly valued and requested by individuals or groups as part of the process of becoming. The brand signal theory referred by Veasna et al suggests that “when tourists trust a credible destination source, their impressions of the associated destination image may be considerably influenced” (Chen, 2018; Veasna, Wu and Huang, 2013: 513).

According to the evidence of my in-depth interview data and online comments, the “halo” effect spreads to the film celebrities and stars associated with Hollywood. What some audience members demonstrate in my investigation is that they pursue the celebrities or stars they admire and revere in films and follow those stars by traveling to the film sites which they have endorsed. As Beeton notes, this can be regarded as “the cult of celebrity” (2005: 32). The current tourist industry, affected by the development of mass media, has been propelled into the “era of celebrity”. Celebrity worship, as defined by Yen and Croy (2016), is about “individuals who display an unusually intense admiration and reverence of a celebrity”. Films play a mediating role between celebrity involvement and destination images (Yen and Croy, 2016). In other words, they indirectly contribute to the motivation of audiences transitioning from viewers to tourists. Celebrity involvement, as Lee, Scott and Kim (2008) argue, has a positive effect on visiting intentions. In this sense, tourist industry stakeholders and marketers post advertisements or attractive logos with film stars or celebrities in the tourist attractions to appeal to tourists. The following is a representative example:

This is where Tom Cruise shot Mission: Impossible III! Here is the misty rain corridor of soap opera Like fog, Like Rain and Like Wind[[45]](#footnote-45)! Turn a corner and see the alley of With You[[46]](#footnote-46)…… There are also many unknown film clips. The Xitang scenic area is very unique. As soon as you enter the narrow traditional alley, you will have the feeling of "time and space staggered". The ancient Chinese southern style with its “original juice with original taste” and traditional folk customs make Xitang ancient town become a "natural film studio” (SOHU, 2018).

It is clear that tourist industry stakeholders make use of audiences’ celebrity worship and desire for pilgrimages to establish a bond between viewers and Chinese film locations (although, as indicated, this is not simply about Hollywood stars). As reflected by the comments of audience members, celebrities or stars in Hollywood films to some extent evoke their intention to travel to the places endorsed by their idols. Two young interviewees, for example, say:

Wow, I have been a fan of Tom Cruise since he played in the Mission Impossible series! I unwittingly followed him to Xitang ancient town (Yang-23-Female).

I was attracted by Tom Cruise. He is so handsome, and his action is so exciting and amazing. I must travel there where he played! (Zhang-28-Male)

This is not just confined to seeing their favourite idol in the film, as they tend to communicate emotionally and behaviourally with film stars and want to experience the lives of their characters. In this respect, the star is regarded as a “cultural icon” that can act as a proxy for Chinese locations, “shaping the perceptions and needs of many audience members” (Yen and Croy, 2016: 1032). It is worth noting the reference to “fan” in the first quotation. Drawing on the definition of fandom I provided in Chapter 2, compared with other viewers, Yang is a more dedicated viewer in terms of her feelings towards and preference for the star or celebrity, here referring to Tom Cruise. This can be transferred to related products – in this case, destinations. As my research makes clear, for Hollywood films with Chinese elements like *Mission: Impossible III,* famous stars become the spokespeople that attract both Chinese and foreign viewers to Chinese locations.

Interestingly, both of the above respondents are under 30 years old, so belong to the young age group. To some degree, compared with middle-aged and older people, young audiences are more likely to bond themselves with film stars and celebrities and further go with them to the film locations they have endorsed. Horton and Wohl (Horton and Wohl, 1956) define the term “parasocial interaction” to describe the phenomenon whereby “individuals become deeply involved in media presentations and respond in some ways as if they were interacting with people known through media products” (Tian and Hoffner, 2010). Film celebrities and stars are powerful factors that draw viewers and result in para-social interaction with the place depicted in the film.

*Personal experience and emotion*

Relating the previous discussion to Dann’s conceptual approach, the three aspects discussed above, including globalization, the intrinsic attractiveness of Chinese scenery, and the Hollywood brand effect or celebrity worship, can be considered external *pull* factors in terms of the reasons why viewers visit the Chinese sites featured in Hollywood films. The fourth factor I want to discuss, personal experience and emotion, is an internal motivator that *pushes* viewers to the location. The pull factors are prone to enhancing the appeal of the scenery and other images and promoting viewers’ willingness to visit the real destination (Macionis, 2004). Yet, the effect of these external factors, according to Young and Young (2008), is fractional. The intention of traveling to a film site is largely the product of viewers’ personal experiences and emotions. Kim indicates that “audiences’ emotional and behavioural involvement was the main driver that positively affected their on-site film tourism experiences” (Kim, 2011: 387). Here is a quotation from my audience responses which speaks to this issue:

I have imagined the bamboo sea scenery depicted in the novel since reading Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon when I was small. When it showed the beautiful images [in the film version], I decided to actually go there (Xiu-37-Female).

Different from general viewers watching the film and seeing the scenery images directly, she acknowledges the backdrop of the film setting where the storyline has occurred. However, print media like literature is less intuitive in illustrating the scenery and shaping the images in audiences’ minds (Butler, 1990; Kim and Richardson, 2003). It is the visual language of the film that arouses her impression of the scenery and reconstructs her imagination of the site which she has conceived of through the literary experience. Rather than merely gazing at the sight, she actually visits the attraction, a visit which is triggered at least in part by the experience of reading the novel.

In a contrary example, some viewers visit particular places for the reason that the scenery portrayed through the screen images does not conform to their memory. An online comment about the experience of watching *Mission: Impossible III* describes the feelings the film generated in the viewer:

The scene of running out of a dilapidated corridor, which was actually Xitang, destroyed my good memories of looking out of a small window, and seeing the most beautiful scenery of the water town. So, I went to Xitang again to seek the beauty of Xitang in my memory (Online comment from Angel3765).

It is interesting to note that Xitang scenery is not unfamiliar to the commenter. The previous experience of travelling to Xitang has created a primary memory and cognition in the mind. Compared with the viewers with no first-hand experience, the cognition and evaluation of Xitang in the memory of this viewer conflicts with the screen images. Kim (2010) points out that film audiences appear to link themselves with film tourism locations emotionally. In this vein, the quotation implies that the commenter establishes the emotional and familiar linkage with Xitang which is regarded as a resort that she (or he) has visited, and with which they therefore have an existing connection, rather than merely a film site when seeing *Mission: Impossible III*. Yen and Croy also suggest that “destination familiarity can develop a recognizable construction of the destination” (2016: 1031). In this case, however, the film images recall the previous travelling experience and create an opposite and contrary picture. In a sort of reverse move, with personal experience and special emotions invested in Xitang as the motivator, the film creates a bond between the viewer and Xitang once again.

To summarize what has been analysed in this section, it is found that some of my respondents fall into the categories of general, specific and potential tourists. Based on Dann and Macionis’ pull and push theory, I have shown four particular ways in which viewers and tourists transfer with each other. The next section will focus briefly on some other kinds of derivative behaviour generated by and observed in interview responses and online comments.

### 6.2.2 Consumer purchases and other physical behaviour related to viewing of Hollywood films

When it comes to the derivative behaviours of audiences for Hollywood films with Chinese audiences, they are not restricted to traveling to the Chinese film location. Having discussed the dimension of tourism induced by such films, I will now briefly demonstrate the impact of such film experiences on consumer purchasing and other similar derivative audience behaviours related to viewing Hollywood films with Chinese elements.

When a Hollywood blockbuster is released in Chinese cinemas, it becomes a fashionable topic. Film fans buy the DVD or download the film to watch it again. Lots of viewers discuss the characters or plots with other viewers after watching it. Like the soap opera *Dallas*, the films have brought audiences indoors, seated them together, and provided them with the opportunities of a shared experience and a topic for ceremonial conversation (Liebes & Katz, 1993). As indicated in the interview response, some young viewers may also attempt to resemble the classic physical features of a film character or even relate the film story or character to their own life. Here are two examples from younger respondents.

My own nick-name is “Panpan” which is like “Panda”. It is so cute to have a similar name to a panda. After watching Kung Fu Panda [series], I changed my individual online name to “Panda Warrior” (Pan-30-Female).

After watching In Time[[47]](#footnote-47), I may cherish time even more. I used to stay at the dormitory all the time, but now I spend three hours more studying in the library every day (Du-21-Male).

The first female respondent interestingly connects herself with the film character, while the male respondent changes his daily time management by virtue of watching a film. More discussion of the Kung Fu Panda series and its impact on derivative behaviours will be taken up in Chapter 7. Here, Wang’s connection with the film and the changes of Du’s life (although *In Time* does not actually include Chinese cultural elements), reflect the significant influence of a film on viewers.

What is more, such films prompt the merchandising of peripheral products generated by films. A male respondent, for instance, talked about his experience of buying tie-in transformer products for his son after taking him to watch the *Transformer* series. As he puts it:

After taking my son to watch Transformers 4 [Age of Extinction], he was fascinated by the transformer model. I bought lots of tie-in models for him (Xi-35-Male).

Although this example does not directly demonstrate how his purchasing is associated with Chinese elements, it is worth discussing in a broader way how film is relevant to product merchandising. Horváth and Gyenge (2018), in their proceeding paper *Movie Merchandising and its Consumer Perception*, gives attention to the use of merchandising “as the mass marketing of intellectual products” (p638). The intellectual and cultural way in which merchandising is used, as they consider the situation, is associated with what they call “image transfer” (p638). Relating what they argue to the above response quotation, we can understand that the transformers that appeared in *Transformers: Age of Extinction* can be perceived as signs or personalities, which play a defining role in the shaping of his son’s images. It is such image transfer by the way of the appearance of the sign in the film that results in the purchasing of the model.

## 6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the cultural impact of Hollywood cinema with Chinese elements, including the effect of the film on intellectual aspect of product merchandising and other interesting derivative behaviours such as viewers’ imitations related to viewing Hollywood films with Chinese elements. In particular, it shows how these films have encouraged Chinese audiences to rediscover their own country. There has been a lot of past research on film-related tourism, which I build on and connect with my own empirical evidence, focusing on China and Chinese viewers. Based on analysis of my field work data, this chapter has attempted to address an important issue in terms of Chinese audiences’ engagement with Chinese cultural elements in Hollywood films, namely the physical and emotional reception activities of Chinese audiences, which I name derivative behaviour. Going back to the concept of fan culture briefly discussed in Chapter 2, these derivative behaviours, including film-related tourism and film merchandising, can be regarded as fan behaviour since those respondents are considered as more dedicated viewers of such films and in some cases as consumers of film peripheral products.

Working from the perspective of reception studies, I have found that the ways that audiences engage with representations of Chinese elements are far more complex than simply orally expressing how they feel about or how they make sense of Chinese elements. Within this chapter dealing with the issue of reception activities, I theoretically verify the important role of films in transferring viewers into tourists and test the pull and push factors that motivate viewers to visit film locations. Empirically, it is explicitly demonstrated that the phenomenon of changes in tourism patterns in certain Chinese locations are induced by Hollywood films with Chinese elements, and by the subtle relationship between Chinese viewers and Chinese film sites. I also provide evidence about the reasons that motivate such relationships.

To put it more specifically, on the basis of my audience study, I have developed a fourth category, the potential film tourist, to extend Macionis’s three-type classification of serendipitous film tourists, general film tourists and specific film tourists. By employing Dann’s pull and push theory in analysing the reasons why Chinese viewers transfer to become tourists, I have identified four factors that facilitate the actual relationship between Chinese viewers and film sites of Chinese scenery or landscape. These are the global context and Chinese cultural policy, the uniqueness of Chinese scenery, the Hollywood brand effect or celebrity worship and individual or personal experience and emotion.

Importantly, returning to the context in which this project is positioned and discussed, this chapter indicates the remarkable fact that Chinese audiences are being encouraged to visit Chinese sites by watching Hollywood – that is, American – films. This is a strange example of one of the ways in which globalization works. Considering what has been discussed in this chapter in a broader way, on the one hand, it seems that these derivative behaviours are a subset of other derivative activities identified in other film cases and in other national contexts. On the other hand, not only does it promote the Chinese economy but more importantly reinforces China’s cultural influence in the global context by achieving the Chinese government’s initial goal of cultural policy goals (See chapter 2). Film-induced tourism is in itself a broader field involving film and tourism studies, and this chapter is just one part of my whole study, so does not include more comprehensive investigation of the influence of film-induced tourism on the national economy or other factors. Rather, by putting what is discussed in the field of film and cultural studies, I concentrate on the cultural aspects and try to fill the gap in terms of the relationship between hybrid films with localized scenery and transnational viewers. The next chapter will move on to use one film series as a case study to further investigate and explain the general issues discussed in chapters 4,5 and 6 to dig out some specific issues relating to the *Kung Fu Panda* series that emerge from my audience research.

# Chapter 7 Case study – the *Kung Fu Panda* series

## 7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters I discussed a range of general issues concerning the interpretation and reception of Hollywood films with Chinese elements, both textually and physically, by my respondents or commentors. In this chapter, I look at responses to one specific film example. From what has been discussed so far, it can be seen that Chinese audiences can actively assess the issue of merging tangible or intangible Chinese elements into Hollywood films. It is argued that the tangible Chinese elements (such as images of food, buildings, clothes, stars, etc.) are quite superficial in terms of storytelling and cinematic presentation, while the more intangible elements – what I call deep-seated values – are much less commonly presented in terms of Chinese values. From the view of the general Chinese audiences, they might appreciate the superficial Chinese cultural elements being integrated into Hollywood films, whereas they find it much more difficult to view the deep-seated values in films in relation to how they construct their cultural and national identity.

In this chapter, rather than analysing general questions, I will develop a more specific discussion, concentrating on one film series. My case study is the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy, comprising three films, released in 2008, 2011 and 2016. The analysis will consist of three sections. The first section will give a brief introduction to the production and marketing ofthe *Kung Fu Panda* seriesin China and the style of each film. In the second section, I will look at the film text to demonstrate the use and representation of Chinese elements, including story, setting and character development, revisiting the relevant works on *Kung Fu Panda* undertaken by other scholars. The third section is based on an investigation of the interview data I collected, and online comments about the series. It will focus on the representation of specific Chinese elements in each film and how audiences respond to and make sense of such elements. Through a discussion of the arguments about the series within academia and the general public’s responses, I attempt to demonstrate the specificity of the *Kung Fu Panda* series, which is regarded as the most successful Hollywood animation with Chinese elements in the last 15 years. In so doing, I exemplify how the general arguments set out in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 fit with this specific case study.

As I noted in Chapter 2, previous academic work on the *Kung Fu Panda* series mainly gives attention to the analysis of film texts, or the factors that determine the success and popularity of the films in the Chinese market from the perspective of textual aspects (a more detailed discussion about such research on the *Kung Fu Panda* series will be developed in section 7.3). In this chapter, moving beyond these previous studies, I will look at both the film texts and audience responses to explore the way in which this animation trilogy works and influences Chinese audiences in its transnational communication and how Chinese audiences’ cultural identity is constructed by watching the *Kung Fu Panda* series.

## 7.2 The *Kung Fu Panda* series

The reasons I chose the *Kung Fu Panda* series as the case study are two-fold. As I described in Chapter 3, on the one hand, the *Kung Fu Panda* series has been a great success both in terms of critical acclaim and at the Chinese box office. The three films (*Kung Fu Panda 1, 2* and *3*) are in many ways the most representative Hollywood films with a Chinese style in recent years, in terms of embodying and reflecting the exertion of Chinese cultural elements everywhere in the film text. This can be seen quite obviously in the film title, and the way the story narrates two typical Chinese elements – Kung Fu and the Chinese national treasure, the panda. The *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy is thus a Hollywood animation series with a quintessential Chinese national theme. The trilogy revolves around the story of a gluttonous and lazy panda who finally becomes a martial arts master through his persistent efforts. The animal images, kung fu, the landscapes and living utensils with Chinese characteristics used in the film all manifest how Hollywood films employ Chinese cultural elements. As a result, some Chinese scholars (such as Hao and Lai, 2019; Li, 2019) consider it to be the most successful film using Chinese elements in Hollywood history.

In terms of film genre, the three films can be characterized as the hybridization of comedy and animation. Drawing from the answers to my questionnaire, the vast majority of my respondents (91.28%) have seen or are aware of the films, whereas only 8.72% respondents have never heard of them. The figure of 91.28%, the biggest percentage received by any of the potential case films in terms of whether respondents have seen or know of the cases, is indicative of the popularity of this film among Chinese adult audiences and in the Chinese market. It is also interesting to note that all of those who participated in the in-depth interviews referred to the *Kung Fu Panda* series when it comes to Hollywood films with Chinese elements that they are deeply impressed by.

On the other hand, it is also worth noting that, from the chronological point of view, the *Kung Fu Panda* series covers a period of eight years (from 2008 to 2016). This period has witnessed a surge in and promotion of the form and recurrence of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. I shall now briefly introduce each of the three films in order to provide some necessary background detail.

### 7.2.1 Production, distribution and story

*Kung Fu Panda*

Produced by DreamWorks Studios and Pacific Data Images (PDI) in USA and distributed by Paramount Pictures in America, *Kung Fu Panda*, as the first in the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy, was released in China in 2008 and took 182 million yuan at the box office (Film Box Office a). What should be noted is that it was scheduled to be screened worldwide in June 2008 to coincide with the 2008 Beijing Olympics, in which martial arts was initially listed as a special Olympic event. *Kung Fu Panda* is the first animation in mainland China with over 100 million tickets sold at the box office, at a time when the Chinese film market, especially for animations, was not as strong in cinemas as after 2010. Since its debut in China, *Kung Fu Panda* has obtained unprecedented popularity and triggered a lively debate about Chinese culture and Chinese 图片包含 室内, 桌子, 电脑, 蛋糕

描述已自动生成style, both in academia and amongst the general public. Po, the animated character created by DreamWorks Studios for this film, has become a well-known kung fu star and sparked wide attention in China. The film tells the story of how panda Po eats his head off and knows nothing about martial arts but has always been fascinated by Chinese kung fu and dreams of becoming a Dragon Warrior. Po is accidently recognized as the legendary martial arts master Dragon Warrior and finally defeats “Snow leopard Taro” (Tai Lang), carrying off the dragon scroll and becoming the kung fu hero thanks to the help of various opportunities and his own continuous efforts.

*Kung Fu Panda 2*

图片包含 文字, 书, 桌子, 照片

描述已自动生成Similar to *Kung Fu Panda*, this film was also produced by DreamWorks Studios and Paramount and distributed in China by the state-run China Film Group and its sister company Huaxia Film Distribution (Landreth, 2011). Released in China in 2011, *Kung Fu Panda* *2* took 6.17 billion yuan at the box office in China, which ranked the second highest box office in 2011 (Film Box Office b). It tells the story of panda Po and the “Furious Five”, who face a new and more fearful challenge from a big wicked peacock, "Lord Shen", who has a secret and powerful weapon. He is trying to destroy kung fu and conquer China. Only when Po looks back on his past and uncovers the secret of his own life, can he release deep breathing to run across China and fight against the powerful weapon that threatens to destroy kung fu, ultimately rescuing the whole village.

*Kung Fu Panda 3*

*图片包含 桌子, 照片, 蛋糕, 各种

描述已自动生成*Different from the previous two *Kung Fu Panda* films, the third one, releasing in China in 2016, was co-produced by the China Film Group Corporation and Shanghai Oriental DreamWorks Culture Communication Co. Ltd., in association with DreamWorks Studios (MTime). It is jointly distributed by Chinese film company and 20th Century Fox Film Corporation in US and France, etc. (MTime). Those Chinese film companies are the Beijing Film Distribution Branch of the China Film Group Corporation and Shanghai Zhongmingyouying Film and Television Culture Media Co., Ltd. This Sino-US co-production took 10 billion yuan in China at the box office in 2016 (Film Box Office c). In reference to the story of *Kung Fu Panda* *3*, Po’s natural father suddenly appears, and they visit an unknown land of pandas, where Po meets a lot of cute and funny pandas. But when the arch-villain “Tian Sha” with his mysterious power sweeps across the wonderful land of China and tries to kill all the kung fu masters, Po must face many difficulties. He becomes responsible for training the panda villagers, who are passionate but clumsy, to become a cluster of invincible kung fu pandas.

From the changes in the production and distribution of the *Kung Fu Panda* series that took place in the eight years from 2008 to 2016, we can see what Su (2014), Kung (2008), Song (2018) and some other scholars say about the relationship between the Chinese film industry and Hollywood, and the transformation to collaboration. As we can see from the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy, the situation moves beyond merely integrating Chinese cultural elements into Hollywood films, to seeking a deep Sino-US cooperation at multiple levels, from production to distribution, from appropriation to collaboration and co-production.

### 7.2.2 The genre of animation with comedy

As noted in the previous section, the *Kung Fu Panda* series is both comedy and animation. From the response of interview participants, it is obvious that almost every participant had been attracted to watch *Kung Fu Panda* because of its strong entertainment values. A young student offers an example:

Kung Fu Panda belongs to comedy and animation. Both of the two types are characterized as relaxing and entertaining, which catches Chinese audiences’ psychology that watching films is about releasing pressure and relaxing, particularly for the young generation who are so tired and busy on their working days. Kung Fu Panda [the series] is not as aggressive and violent as the action movies and is not as serious as the historical films. Besides, as a cartoon [movie], some young parents are willing to take their children to watch it, which I think invisibly boosts box office sales. (Ding-30-Male)

From his perspective, we can find that the *Kung Fu Panda* series, as a mix of comedy and animation film, functions to entertain and relax audiences who watch it. It is an easy way for young viewers to escape their lives. For audiences, they watch films to some extent for the pleasures that the movies can provide.

Another example that refers to the comedy and animation genre mix is provided by a 24-year-old movie fan:

I am a movie fan. Especially, I like animation in which the animals act as the major characters. Like Kung Fu Panda [the series] or Mulan, in its publicity and press coverage, I saw that the panda was designed to be a character, as well as some other animals such as the tiger, the monkey, the duck and the praying mantis. The personification of the animals is in keeping with my aspiration of watching movies. (Liu-29-Male)

These two illustrations from young respondents indicate the preference of the younger generation for the comedy and animation genre.

Having briefly introduced the production, distribution and storytelling of the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy, I shall move on to the second step: textual analysis of the series, looking at the film story, setting, dialogue, characters and values. The practice of sorting out and assessing particular film texts can provide an important starting point for the audience to make sense of the specificity of Chinese cultural elements in the *Kung Fu Panda* series.

## 7.3 The use of tangible and intangible Chinese elements

As I said above, not only did the great success of the *Kung Fu Panda* series trigger a general debate in public, but it also gave rise to a rich body of research within academia. Before putting forward my argument for the representation of Chinese elements in this film series, and how audiences respond to the Chinese elements, I will tease out some of the themes in previous studies related to the *Kung Fu Panda* series carried out by Chinese scholars.

The research can be divided into two main categories. The first is the analysis of how Chinese culture is portrayed by Hollywood films, and research about Hollywood’s strategy for addressing Chinese audiences, by using a single *Kung Fu Panda* film as a case study. Yi, Xing (2009), for example, thinks that, from the *Mulan* animation film to the *Kung Fu Panda* series, Hollywood’s integration of Chinese culture has become deeper and more incisive. Similar to Yi’s (2009) view, Wang, Wei (2008) analyses the collision and fusion of Chinese and Western cultures embodied in *Kung Fu Panda* and proposes that the expression of Chinese cultural elements and the external manifestation of Chinese culture in the *Kung Fu Panda* series go deep into the grasp of, and reflection on, some of the more intangible aspects of traditional Chinese culture, thought, spirit and artistic conception. This is different from previous Hollywood films which superficially integrate what I am calling tangible Chinese elements into its film text. Cheng (2016) proposes that the use of Chinese elements in *Mulan* touches only superficially on Chinese culture, without going into it deeply, while the *Kung Fu Panda* series is full of deep-seated Chinese elements and Chinese value. Miao (2010) engages with the series in another way, to analyse the way in which Western films use Chinese cultural elements in the context of the convergence of Chinese and Western culture and explains how Chinese films use other countries' cultural elements.

The second category of research about the *Kung Fu Panda* series concerns the values ​​conveyed by the films. In spite of the Chinese image, as Lin, Ting (2010) puts it, the series more or less shows an American style. Su, Xingsha (2016), in her PhD research *Image's Power*,believes that the series is embedded with American values, but with Chinese outerwear packaging. The confluence of this orientation and these values ​​forms a model of Hollywood "copying" China. Similar to Chen’s argument (2010) raised in her article, Su (2016) argues that the *Kung Fu Panda* series outwardly portrays Chinese cultural elements but actually reflects American values to some degree, by analysing the transcultural phenomena in terms of the film characters, plots and scenes.

In summary, it can be seen that the two categories of research interpret the series in different ways. The first category argues for the transition from solely superficial inclusion of tangible Chinese elements to the adoption by the *Kung Fu Panda* films of both these tangible elements and more intangible Chinese values. These researchers agree with the view that the fusion of Chinese elements, in terms of the representations in *Kung Fu Panda,* is deep rather than superficial, as do some of my respondents and interviewees, according to both interview data and online film comments. The second category of Chinese scholarship about *Kung Fu Panda* seems to argue the opposite, namely that the trilogy still expresses American values and fails to grasp traditional Chinese values. Again, some of my respondents and interviewees clearly feel the same.

As introduced in section 7.2, the *Kung Fu Panda* series adopts the theme of Chinese kung fu, setting the story in traditional Chinese scenery, telling how a clumsy panda breaks through from zero martial arts skills to finally becomes a kung fu master who can assist the next generation and bring comfort to the common people. Each film is full of Chinese elements from form to content, from the application of Chinese classical music to the presentation of Chinese landscapes, architecture, folk customs, food and accessories, from the five Chinese kung fu masters represented by the Furious Five to the Chinese tradition of preaching and teaching, from the classical dialogue between “Master” and “Student”, to Taoist and Confucian culture. A strong Chinese feeling can therefore be seen in the *Kung Fu Panda* series. By reviewing, in Chapter 4, how Chinese cultural elements are classified, Chinese features in this series can also be categorized into tangible/concrete and intangible/abstract cultural elements. In the following section, I will explain in detail the tension between the opposites given by the two categories by looking at the incorporation of both tangible and intangible elements in the film trilogy.

### 7.3.1 Tangible Chinese cultural elements

Similar to other Hollywood films blended with Chinese elements, the *Kung Fu Panda* series is rich in tangible objects, characters and the external manifestations of Chinese culture, such as the panda, kung fu and martial arts. The purpose of this section is to analyse the tangible cultural elements recognized in this series by combining textual analysis with audience responses from both my interview and online critics. I will develop this section by addressing two aspects. The first is to analyse the film title, which is frequently referred to by respondents. The second is to look at the setting of Chinese scenery and other Chinese representational aspects of the trilogy.

***The film/series title: ‘Kung Fu’ and ‘panda’***

As mentioned above, the movie title indicates the theme of the film, that is, the telling of a story about a panda and kung fu. Panda Po is the protagonist, characterised as the Chinese national treasure animal, a panda. Kung fu or martial arts play a significant role in the representation of Chinese culture. As Lee said, “it is part of a shared common history, or common cultural imagination” (Lee, 2003: 291). The application of this character and representative/stereotypical Chinese cultural elements deeply mark the film with a Chinese imprint. Drawing from the interview responses, kung fu and the panda are two of the main factors that attract my respondents to see the film. One respondent, who always watches Hollywood films and deeply feels the changes of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, puts it like this:

There are hardly any Hollywood animations like Kung Fu Panda [the series] that have combined the Chinese national treasure Panda with typical Chinese kung fu. Both of them are representative of Chinese culture. Kung fu is considered as the quintessence of Chinese culture and the panda is the symbolic animal of China. These two points give it a strong Chinese cultural flavour and is attractive for its familiarity to Chinese audiences. I think if the panda was replaced by any other animal, it would not attract such large Chinese audiences. The way in which Hollywood inducts the panda and kung fu to the theme of animation is ingenious and creative. It has significantly attracted my attention and driven me to seek novelty. (Qi-51-Male)

From his perspective, the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy combines two Chinese motifs, highlighting the two representative cultural themes in the title. This seems to have become the new trend, especially since 2008 when *Kung Fu Panda* was released in mainland China, since when a plethora of Chinese elements have been merged into Hollywood films. With regard to *Kung Fu Panda*, Chinese viewers look forward to seeing how representative Chinese cultural elements are integrated into a western film, to satisfy their curiosity. Wang, in her *Remaking Chinese Cinema*, proposes that, by “juxtaposing two quintessential icons of ‘Chineseness’ – Kung Fu and a panda”, the series has embodied “Hollywood’s new trend of chinoiserie characterized by self-conscious appropriation and expropriation of ‘Chinese elements’” (2012: 1). However, the way in which panda Po appears in this Hollywood animation is entirely different from previous representations and is unprecedented, which has been regarded as ‘thinking outside the box’. The panda is perceived by Chinese audiences as a charmingly naive, innocent and sweet animal. In this film, however, it is connected with kung fu, which symbolizes justice, action and aggression. It is important to recall what I argued in Chapter 4, about Chinese stereotypes and how Hollywood producers fall into using such stereotypes in terms of creating films featuring Chinese cultural elements, but also what I noted about how my respondents reduce to stereotypes when defining Chinese elements. The *Kung Fu Panda* series both works with stereotypes – the panda and kung fu – and subverts or breaks with stereotypical icons, by bringing these two apparently quite distinct Chinese icons or stereotypes together to create something new and different. The series, in this respect, seems to make effective use of Chinese stereotypes and cultural icons, through which it subtly arouses the imagination of Chinese audiences. Based on this, a young respondent offers the following opinion:

As a general Chinese viewer, I want to see how foreigners understand and show the panda, as an animal full of Chinese colour. The panda is no longer merely a kind of Chinese animal that needs to be protected and respected; it is associated with Chinese Kung Fu and acts as a guardian. Unlike other Hollywood cartoon movies such as Mulan, the plot of which is almost a remake of the traditional Chinese story - the daughter joins the army for her father, this breakthrough is the most attractive point to draw Chinese audiences. (Yu-34-Male)

These two quotations from Yu and Qi respectively represent young and middle-aged audience groups. What can be seen from the two responses is that there is no obvious difference between age groups in terms of their attitudes towards the integration of two representative Chinese elements in Hollywood animation. We can go further to analyse what the two respondents say about the panda and kung fu. On the one hand, we can see that the way in which ‘panda’ and ‘kung fu’ are shaped in *Kung Fu Panda* emotionally triggers the Chinese audience's cultural identity by using a Chinese specialty – the panda. It grasps the panda’s characteristics, which are already rooted in the audience’s imagination, by showing Po’s chubby body and naive form, through which the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy portrays a panda image which is hard to resist. On the other hand, the character Po, as developed in the film, is tied to kung fu. It dances to the tune of the audiences that the heroic image presented by the lazy and humorous panda ultimately rises to face difficulties or challenges and fight with vicious power through thick and thin to rescue the local panda land.

Connecting textual analysis of the film trilogy with what my respondents say above, it is interesting to note from the title and theme of the *Kung Fu Panda* series that the tangible element symbolized by the outward characteristics – the physical and visual features of the panda which provide the superficial aspect of the familiar image – is blended with the more intangible character of a kung fu warrior. However, one may ask whether a kung fu panda really expresses deep Chinese values, or if it does, how it represents deep-seated Chinese values. I will engage with these issues in section 7.3.2.

***The setting of Chinese scenery and special manifestation***

First, however, I want to look at questions of scenery and setting. Apart from the two crucial themes of the panda and kung fu, there are a lot of scenes with a strong taste of ancient China in the film, including the great wall, the palace, streetscapes, fireworks and landscapes drawn in an impressionistic style. There are also pavilions, terraces and towers with local characteristics of Chinese ethnic minorities, and streets decorated with lanterns and streamers. These are again what I call tangible Chinese elements – superficial images. In addition to the overall scene settings, lots of nuances demonstrate the incorporation with a number of Chinese cultural elements, such as Tai Chi, calligraphy, acupuncture, chopsticks, noodles, buns, etc., which reflect the unique lifestyle of the Chinese. Besides, red lanterns, papercuts, shadows, etc. indicate unique Chinese folk customs. There is also scroll calligraphy, Taiji, yin and yang, ink and wash printing, and bamboo hats, Tang suits, and bamboo sticks, which are the classic equipment of Po, who is dressed in the style of the ancient Chinese kung fu hero, the unique carrier of ancient Chinese culture. Similarly, these are all surface impressions, images, and therefore tangible Chinese cultural elements. Here I offer some quotations from online comments about *Kung Fu Panda.* Interestingly,instead of offering ideas about the story or film plot, the first comment absolutely illustrates the scenery and settings of the film*.*

In addition to the two Chinese elements - kung fu and pandas, Po and his father’s traditional trolleys and noodle restaurant, the four-person sedan chair, firecrackers, Chinese acupuncture and traditional temple fairs in Heping Valley as well as the costumes of various characters, the ubiquitous Chinese characters (Han Zi), and the living habits of the valley people are also in line with the features of ancient China. Besides, the scenes where the animals write calligraphy, eat buns and noodles with chopsticks, and even mantis like to drink noodle soup, etc., bring strong visual impact and fatal attraction to the audience. In terms of architectural style, I see Hollywood carefully portrays the cornice brackets, the red green tiles, the interior walls, pillars, tables and chairs and the temples decorated with many landscape paintings and porcelain. The natural beauty of Sichuan, China is also vividly displayed in the film. (Online comment from 混世魔王)

Another commentator, who looks at the Chinese setting and Chinese flavour in *Kung Fu Panda* says, “I really appreciate Hollywood’s attention to the details in this animation, so exciting!”, and provides examples as follows:

For example, from the layout to the display, the noodle shop where Po’s father makes noodles is a traditionally pure Chinese street shop. He can use the kitchen knife with both hands and chop green onion so prettily. The Super Soldier Contest is very ostentatious, which is exactly the same as the Chinese New Year. And buns... the buns which I think about day and night! There are many folds. So vivid! (Online comment from ++I始终亚克西)

Although what they depict is identified as being from *Kung Fu Panda*, their comments can also partly reflect *Kung Fu Panda 2* and *3.* From these two online quotations about the display of tangible Chinese elements, I argue that the details they deal with, elaborately and delicately in reference to either character or setting in the film, work to localize the *Kung Fu Panda* series to Chinese taste. To summarise what is discussed in this section, these are all surface impressions, images, and therefore fall into what I name tangible Chinese cultural elements. By employing Corner’s three-step approach here, both my textual analysis of the trilogy and what the respondents offer reveal the literal and denotative meaning of the tangible Chinese elements and then their basic engagement with, and understanding of, what is depicted in the *Kung Fu Panda* series on the screen. They readily identify the outward meaning of tangible Chinese elements in this series; put simply, what they understand is what they see. The next section will turn to intangible Chinese elements presented in, or absent from, the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy.

### 7.3.2 Intangible Chinese cultural elements

By analysing the *Kung Fu Panda* series in the context of classical Chinese literature, it can be found that much of the dialogue – or the actors’ lines in the film – are indicative of traditional Chinese culture and often derive from Confucian and Daoist traditions, such as the dialogue in *Kung Fu Panda* between “Master” and “Student”, i.e., Master Oogway and Po the panda. According to how I distinguish between tangible elements and intangible elements in Chapter 4, the dialogue or language can be identified as both tangible/concrete and intangible/abstract cultural elements. One may ask, to what extent could these elements be perceived as tangible or intangible? If we understand the dialogue on-screen in the trilogy in terms of its language (English or Chinese), I argue that it falls into the category of tangible attributes. However, in cases where we focus on what the dialogue expresses or what it represents or signifies, then it is more the category of intangible attributes. It should be noted here that the dialogue quoted in the following section is from the American (English language) version of the film, with both English and Chinese subtitles. A more comprehensive analysis of the language aspect is beyond the scope of this study, so I shall exclude this factor and focus on the cultural determinants, that is, what the intangible meaning of the dialogue represents and the way in which it relates to Chinese culture.

Based on this approach, for example, when Master Oogway and panda Po talk about trees and fruits, Po says "I can control when the fruit falls and can control where to plant it". What he says, with a typically Confucian positive attitude, extends and expands his master’s thought: "Looking at this tree, I can't let the tree blossom for me and can't let it fructify in advance”. This is the concept of conforming to nature from a Daoist perspective. Finally, "No matter what you do, the seed will still grow into a peach tree. You may want apples or oranges, but you can only get peaches, and the seeds will grow into peach trees." As expressed by the Master, this vividly interprets the Daoist philosophy of “the Dao way follows nature” and “adaption to the situation”. Master Oogway is a well-known person who knows the world. He is quiet and good at using a natural method to persuade panda Po.

The understanding of water in *Kung Fu Panda 1* is extremely classic:

Your mind is like this water, my friend, when it is agitated, it becomes difficult to see, but if you allow it to settle, the answer becomes clear.

The source of this line can be found in Zen Buddhism (Chan Zong Fo Jiao): “Find one’s true self to become a Buddha”. In addition, the romantic and beautiful plot setting of the master taking flight to the immortal conveys the Daoist concept of the eternal cycle of birth and death, revolving around and reflecting the theory that man is an integral part of nature. In the first film of the trilogy, there is another classic sentence: "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, only today is a gift from God." Here is another example singled out repeatedly from *Kung Fu Panda 3* by some of my respondents*.* The picture below illustrates the dialogue between Master Oogway and panda Po.

Master Oogway: If you only do what you can do, you will never be more than you are now.

Panda Po: I do not wanna be more. I like who I am.

Master Oogway: You do not even know who you are.

图形用户界面, 网站

描述已自动生成

Website picture: Dialogue between Master and Po

All of the quotations here subtly reflect the intangible spirit of traditional Confucianism's active accession to the world, and the Daoist’s advocation of nature and the pursuit of harmony. Additionally, many respondents identify lines of dialogue which they consider impressive and in line with traditional Chinese philosophical thought:

To make something special, you just have to believe it special.

Inner peace, harmony and focus.

One often meets his destiny on the road he takes to avoid it.

Moving beyond my own textual analysis, it is worth noting what my interview respondents say about how the films are “in line with traditional Chinese philosophical thought”. They tie the dialogue in the film to traditional and classical Chinese culture, although they fail to explain the complex philosophical ideology in terms of how it reflects traditional Chinese culture. Combining what they understand with textual analysis, I argue that these three sentences can be traced to Confucian and Daoist culture, that is, the “Middle way” of “Internal peace” and “the balance of mind and body”. As Corner’s second level of interpretation demonstrates, how the respondents interpret the dialogue, or actor’s lines, in the *Kung Fu Panda* series can be understood in terms of inference and connotative meaning rather than the intuitional understanding of superficial meaning. I further combine their understanding with film content to reveal a broader symbolic level of meaning, the broader meanings implied by, and associated with, what is depicted on the screen, and which resonate with traditional Chinese ideology.

Bearing in mind the textual analysis and how audiences respond to the Chinese cultural elements, both tangible and intangible, Chinese elements in the *Kung Fu Panda* films, from their titles to the content, from the character development to the film setting, and from outward behaviour to inner values, are factors that can stimulate the interest of Chinese audiences. In this regard, these cultural elements can evoke and play to the established psychological and cultural identity of Chinese viewers. This argument seems to challenge those scholars who consider that the *Kung Fu Panda* series fails to grasp traditional Chinese values. In this case, I argue that the film has adopted intangible Chinese values, as the scholars placed in my second category above to some extent suggest. Is the same issue present if we investigate audience interpretation and understanding of Chinese elements in the *Kung Fu Panda* series from their own cultural and social position? The next section will move on to discuss how audiences respond to the representation of exotic Chinese appearances in *Kung Fu Panda* from the consideration of their social and cultural context.

## 7.4 Interpretations of the representation of specific Chinese elements

Having conducted textual analysis with reference to the content of the *Kung Fu Panda* filmtrilogy, in this section I will go further, to engage with audience reception of the trilogy by investigating how Chinese viewers understand and make sense of the specific Chinese cultural elements. The analysis in the previous section was based on what Corner identifies as the first and second levels when interpreting media programmes – the comprehension and implication or association revealed through both the respondent’s views and my textual analysis. This section will be based on Corner’s third level – response – which can only be revealed through audience research. Revisiting the discussion of Chinese scholars’ research on *Kung Fu Panda,* I suggestthat they focus primarily on the film content by doing textual or symbolic analysis but fail to question how actual audiences respond to such cultural elements. Thus, building on the arguments established above, I will explain how Chinese viewers interpret and reflect on the *Kung Fu Panda* series.

### 7.4.1 The engagement with specificity

From the interviews I undertook, it can be found that respondents from different social-cultural groups perceive the *Kung Fu Panda* series according to their own tendency systems and understand this film from different perspectives in relation to their social-cultural context. The following discussion mainly compares four different socio-cultural groupings in terms of how they interpret different aspects of the film series. These aspects include story-retelling, theme, the focus or key point of the films, and the language in which they watched and listened to the films. The four social-cultural factors that have an impact on how audiences interpret these aspects of the films are gender, personal experience or preference, age and language skills.

Firstly, in respect of the title of this film, which contains two cultural icons – the panda and kung fu – respondents in different gender groups focused on different elements. Here are several respondents’ opinions, revealing what they emphasised in the film title and theme:

When I heard the name of the movie, I had a picture in my mind, in which there was an extremely cute and lovely panda. And when I first saw the promotional poster of the panda with its classic gesture, I was fascinated by it. I wanted to see how the clumsy panda was designed to be active and lively by foreigners. (Yang-30-Female)

When I saw the title of the film, I was extremely interested in how our national treasure is presented in the way of foreign animation. (Cheng-29-Female).

In contrast, the young male respondents focused on the element of kung fu.

I am looking forward to seeing how an animal, acting as the main character of the film, performs Chinese kung fu and how a foreign cartoon movie expresses kung fu. (Liu-24-Male)

The title of Kung Fu Panda [series] illustrates two obvious Chinese elements. I wanted to see how kung fu was represented by an animal. (Fu-25-Male)

Hollywood movies are generally disaster movies and action movies. There are few cartoons tied to kung fu icons. It would be really attractive to demonstrate kung fu which is typically related to China. (Zhang-35-Male)

Although *Kung Fu Panda* is a cartoon movie rather than a violent or action movie, its name contains one element, ‘kung fu’, which is usually considered relevant to action and aggression. Compared with another element, ‘panda’, the icon of kung fu is more active and aggressive. From the five quotations, with two responses from female respondents and three from male respondents, it is interesting that the females refer more to the panda, while the male respondents pay more attention to kung fu when reflecting on the film name. Due to different gender identities, the points that audiences pay attention to between male and female groups are distinct. The above quotations interestingly indicate that the females prefer more gentle and quiet things than the males in terms of their attention to the film. Previous media research related to violence and aggression in media communication and entertainment suggests that boys are more aggressive than girls (Feilitzen, 1998). As Birgitta Höijer explains, the differences in socialization and social roles between the sexes can explain the gender difference to some extent, which may also result in the differences of selection and perspective (Höijer, 1998).

The second social-cultural factor that I have identified as significant, in terms of how different Chinese audiences interpret aspects of the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy, is personal experience and preference. In a way that is similar to the transnational dissemination of the American television programme *Dallas*, which has been discussed by Liebes and Katz (1993), and the international reception of *The Lord of the Rings*, as analysed by Barker (2008), the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy as a transnational Hollywood cartoon film series has also stimulated various kinds of responses. When asked to tell me about the plot details that most impressed them, or to retell an episode in *Kung Fu Panda*, some respondents talked about the personalities of the characters whom they prefer. Others emphasized what they saw as the main idea, themes and leitmotifs of the movie or expressed their feelings after watching this movie. If gender is the factor that determines how my respondents focus on the film title, it is interesting here to find that the contents which the respondents can remember and retell are inclined to be connected with their personal experience and preference. What is more, the cultural background of the audience is also a determining factor that influences their interpretation of a film (Stafford, 2007). According to Brooker and Jermyn (2002), religious belief, national identity and cultural experience all play a role in an audience’s decoding and perception of a film.

As reflected by my interview responses, the majority of the respondents can remember certain characters, details or even classic words. In addition to the leading character, the panda, one particular phrase, “inner peace” (Xin Ru Zhi Shui), for example, has left a deep impression on the respondents. This phrase indicates that the heart ought to be especially peaceful in Chinese culture. In particular, most middle-aged viewers still remember this phrase. Here is an example offered by one middle-aged woman:

I think they [Hollywood] indeed have work on Chinese culture. Most aspects of the film plot can be tracked to a Chinese cultural origin. For example, some [dialogue] can be explained by Chinese Taoist theory: "Inner peace" and "Nothing is impossible". Master Oogway’s kung fu skill represents what Taoism says about the highest state of calmness, that is, calm down and the answer will be close at hand. (Yu-50-Female)

When Master Oogway passed away, he turned into a peach blossom. This combined properly with traditional Chinese culture, reflecting the traditional Chinese artistic conception, which illustrates how teachers protect and devote themselves to their students, that is “Though turned to mud, they would quicken flowers’ birth next spring”; and when Master Oogway taught Po, his teachings reflected many Chinese Taoist theories, indicating what Laozi proposes: “The Tao that can be described is not the universal and eternal Tao”, “Heaven follows Tao, Tao follows nature”. (Qi-51-Male)

At a superficial level, the two respondents simply talk about the aspects of the film plot and the classic lines which have impressed them. Going more deeply, it should be noted here that the female respondent talks about her interest in Zen Buddhism and Taoist thought as developed in China. If we connect what she says with her experience and existing extra-textual knowledge, we can further understand the reason why she remarks on Master Oogway’s teachings. She relates this to what she knows about Chinese Taoist theory, which resonates with how this animated film represents Taoist theory. The second (male) respondent works in a university. What he talks about is endowed with the characteristics of his occupation. Similar to Yu, he also gives attention to Taoist theory. However, what is different is that he understands this from the perspective of the relationship between teacher and student. Drawing from Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural competence and Livingstone’s (2008) notion of extra-textual knowledge, I argue that their social and cultural capital, or their knowledge beyond the film in itself, in spite of the differences, determines their special, but pertinent interpretation of *Kung Fu Panda.* In this case, the female’s cultural capital, in terms of her existing knowledge of Taoist theory, results in her attention to how kung fu in this animation represents Chinese Taoism, while the male’s social capital connected with his occupation allows him to maintain his understanding of the film in relation to his social position.

Both of these respondents are middle-aged. In comparison with the young, middle-aged people tend to be calmer and more rational whenever they meet with trouble because of their relatively greater life experience. In this case, the concept of “inner peace” as it appears in *Kung Fu Panda* can be more easily identified by middle-aged viewers.

On the other hand, all of the middle-aged and some of the young respondents were fascinated by the images of temples, palaces, traditional buildings and related scenes. For middle-aged viewers, they have profoundly experienced and felt the tremendous changes in China brought about by globalization. Some traditional and typical temples or palaces have been gradually replaced by modern buildings. Under such circumstances, the familiar scenes appearing in the film can cultivate audiences’ nostalgia and mentally fuel their tie with their hometown.

For example, a 35-year-old man whose hometown is in the Sichuan province says that he feels extremely comfortable and benign when identifying some scenes in the *Kung Fu Panda* trilogy, which are similar to some of the scenery and buildings of Sichuan. This is an example of how cultural proximity can impact on the reception and interpretation of transnational media products. As Straubhaar (2007) and Su (2010, 2011) have established, foreign cultural products are well received by audiences from other countries if they contain factors that are reminiscent of the cultural consciousness of the receiving audience’s home nation, or in this case, a particular region, thereby reducing the sense of cultural distance. As discussed in Chapter 2, Rohn (2011) develops a similar argument, but it seems to be a little bit new and different in the idea that foreign media content is more likely to be well received and recognized when it can satisfy the demands and psychology of the foreign audiences rather than merely domestic viewers.

One respondent, for example, who has a special experience compared with most respondents, almost narrated the whole of *Kung Fu Panda 1* and *2*, as if it is the story of a linear progression:

I like Kung Fu Panda. I especially like the panda. Its growth is similar to the young generation today. At the beginning, the panda was an optimist who absolutely lived in its own world. Po is innocent and puerile but really happy. So, when he met with challenges or difficulties, Po was full of fear and resisted them spontaneously, which might lead to the lack of confidence. But after experiencing a tough period during which he made arduous efforts, panda Po made progressive growth. The whole process is like my experience from my carefree childhood to my youth when I felt confused, and to adulthood where I gradually determined my goal. (Ding-30-Male)

According to his description, the content of the film, to a large degree, is evocative and reflects the life of the young man. For this male respondent, his experience is very similar to the growth of the panda, because of which he is able to remember and retell the main line of the story. As Höijer (1998) explains, experience is incorporated in people’s minds and transformed into their inner psychic reality.

From the above analysis of the interviews, where I discuss how middle-aged respondents make sense of the dialogue which they see as resonating with Chinese culture, age can be identified as a key criterion for classifying the ways in which different audiences understand and interpret the *Kung Fu Panda* series. I will now focus on age as a third key social-cultural factor affecting interpretation and consider how the age factor may affect the understanding of the theme of *Kung Fu Panda*. Half of the young respondents from 20 to 35 years old consider this animation series to be full of educational meanings and they identify with the spirit and values that *Kung Fu Panda* aims to express through the panda animal. By contrast, the middle-aged viewers are more concerned about the issues of traditional Chinese culture.

A 35-year-old teacher shares her feeling:

Although it [the Kung Fu Panda series] is a cartoon movie, it is educational. The panda tried its best to practice martial art, overcoming its own defects. It never gave up the dream whenever meeting with difficulties, which had evoked our introspection and conveyed the spirit to the impulsive young people including my students that as long as they make hard efforts, dreams can come true. (Zhang-35-Female)

She refers to her students in this quotation. As a young teacher, not only does she present her own feelings, but she also understands the theme of the film from the point of view of her students and expresses their thoughts and feelings, which is also in relation to her occupational identity and social capital. Here are some examples that demonstrate how middle-aged respondents focus on the expression of Chinese culture when it comes to the theme of this film:

The Chinese elements contained in Kung Fu Panda, ranging from the temples, noodles and Chinese boxing to Confucianism and Taoism, have fully expressed the essence of Chinese culture. If the viewers from other countries watch Kung Fu Panda, they must yearn for Chinese culture. As a Chinese person, I am so proud of it. But meanwhile, I am worried why a movie full of Chinese colour has been produced by a foreign movie studio rather than the indigenous filmmakers. (Yu-50-Female)

As far as the image is concerned, the panda should have been cute and humble. [In this film] It is expressed in an American way so that it is expansive, bumbling, sometimes full of mistakes and self-centred. This is not same as what we Chinese consider as [the characteristics of] pandas. To some extent, the Kung Fu Panda series expresses Chinese culture, but Chinese culture is represented on the surface rather than at a deep level. (Qi-51-Male)

Some Chinese elements such as the transferring of the leadership from fathers to sons fully expresses Chinese culture. [However]there are also Western self-elements, [such as] individualism, but China is the greater self. (Li-53-Female)

Superficially, it seems that the three responses above are contradictory, particularly comparing Yu’s ideas with the other two responses. Yu considers the animation full of Chinese flavour by offering both tangible and intangible elements as examples, while the other two appear to be on the other side. If we take into consideration what Yu and Qi talk about above, both of them agree that the Chinese icons, including both tangible and intangible aspects, are Chinese, exotic and localized. With increasing cultural globalization, the middle-aged viewers have witnessed the whole process of Chinese culture gradually spreading abroad, or even over the world, instead of only communicating to domestic audiences as in the past. From *Kung Fu Panda*, they are likely to trace the traditions of Chinese culture and inevitably open themselves up to the film scenes. This indicated what Straubhaar (2007), Su (2011), Rohn (2011) as well as Levy and Windahl (1985) argue about the effect of cultural proximity on viewers’ recognition and interpretation of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. In this respect, the denotative and implied or associated meaning of Chinese elements conveyed by the *Kung Fu Panda* series plays a role in narrowing the cultural distance between the primarily Hollywood-made films and Chinese viewers. However, Qi and Li go further to talk about the theme of the film, considering its lack of Chinese values in terms of the representation of Chinese collectivism and its tension with individualism. This is in line with the discussion in Chapter 4, about Eastern countries being more in favour of collective values while Western countries are more likely to favour the concept of individualism (Kerrigan and Aquilia, 2013).

Some young respondents have the experience of studying and living abroad for at least one year, while some middle-aged respondents have never gone abroad. Surprisingly, their understandings and interpretations of the themes and leitmotifs of the films are quite different. For example, one 29-year-old student studying in China does not accept the growth experience of the panda and some ideas designed in this film:

The experience of the panda was so unconventional and illogical. In my mind, it is impossible for a person to save the world on his own. I think if we want to complete a task or achieve a goal, we must largely depend on solidarity and cooperation with others rather than acting by ourselves. The movie has substantially expressed the “American dream” with the assistance of Chinese elements. (Liu-29-Male)

Liu’s narrative demonstrates that there is lacuna between himself and the film content. In contrast to what is discussed about cultural proximity, the concept of “lacuna”, proposed by Rohn (2011), refers to the gaps or mismatches between the cultural baggage of the media products and the cultural baggage of the viewers which influences the kind of media content they select. When the contents of the cultural products conflict with viewers’ pre-existing attitudes or values, they are likely to consider it inappropriate and not enjoy it. For those with a background of living abroad, they believe the film has shown the hopes, dreams, challenges and fears of ordinary people (Cardon, 2010), since they have gradually understood and accepted the social and cultural values of America and the West. Due to a lack of experience of living in and knowledge of a western country, Liu does not find it easy to accept such film content associated with American culture.

Similarly, a middle-aged teacher cannot agree the nature of the dialogue between the panda and Master Oogway.

Usually, the nature of Chinese is introverted. Particularly when students talk with teachers, they are so respectful and polite. But in Kung Fu Panda, some dialogue manners are more like western style. For example, the panda expressed its dissatisfaction directly and impatiently or talked with its Master Shifu freely and humorously, which was seldom seen between Chinese teachers and students. (Zhang-55-Male)

The dignity of the teaching profession is highly praised in Chinese culture. As a Chinese teacher, Zhang is accustomed to talking with students in the Chinese style, which may be the reason for his displeasure. Rohn describes the phenomenon as a “production lacuna”, which indicates that viewers do not enjoy foreign-produced film content because they cannot accept its style in the process of cross-cultural communication (2011: 633).

There seem to be conflicting views about *Kung Fu Panda*. One may ask whether the films really express some of the more profound and intangible aspects of Chinese culture, or whether, in the end, it is individualistic American/western values that prevail. Summarizing the discussion, I argue that the *Kung Fu Panda* series presents both denotative and connotative meanings of Chinese culture in terms of the representation of tangible and some of the relatively outwardly intangible cultural elements, while it continues to convey American values in terms of the film’s theme and motif, which I see as deep-seated intangible values.

The final social-cultural factor I will discuss is language, which plays a critical role in cultural diffusion, especially in cross-cultural communication (Aoki and Berger, 2002). As is evident from the interview data, half the respondents watched one or more of the *Kung Fu Panda* films with their original English-language dialogue. Among these viewers, some have not had the experience of living abroad, but they have learned English more or less, and two viewers studying abroad have watched both original and translated films. The following quotation is just an example of responses that addressed questions of language:

I prefer the original film in which the language is English. And I do not think the sentences or dialogues of translated film are as humorous and interesting as that of the original film, even though it is in Chinese, which I am more familiar with. (Chen-28-Female)

In terms of the responses of viewers who only watched *Kung Fu Panda* in Chinese, some were not satisfied with the translation, because some of the words and sentences used in the translated film are not in accordance with Chinese manners. However, it would be more difficult for them to watch the original film because their understanding of English is not good enough. Berger and Huntington (2002) argue that every kind of language carries a certain cultural freight of cognitive, normative and emotional connotations. In this sense, language barriers are likely to occur in translated content, since the translated version can never exactly convey the same information as the original one (Whorf, 1956). This is then yet another factor that can explain why different Chinese audiences might interpret or make sense of the films in different ways.

### 7.4.2 The reception activity of the audiences

Not only did the understandings, perceptions and interpretations of the films vary with different groups, but also the reception activities around *Kung Fu Panda* are distinct. When the first movie showed in the cinema, *Kung Fu Panda* quickly became a fashionable topic. Film fans bought DVDs of the film or downloaded it from a website to watch again. Some viewers talked about the characters or plots with other viewers after watching it. As Cheng (29-Female) offers, “Almost all my friends knew about and discussed *Kung Fu Panda* when it was released.” Young viewers also attempted to imitate the memorable physical features of the panda. A young female respondent recalls:

Haha. I remember some boys imitated how Po did his split kick. (Yang-30-Female)

Zhang, an English teacher, let her students watch *Kung Fu Panda 1 and 2*, through which they were able not only to feel Chinese culture through the animation but also to learn English. Furthermore, the movie stimulated the sale of tie-in products or what I discuss under the heading of film-related tourism, which brings commercial value. Here are some examples:

After watching Kung Fu Panda, I was fascinated by the lovely panda. When I saw any picture or sticker of the panda and even the panda doll, I would collect them. At that time, not only me, but also my friends possessed some phone pendants of pandas. (Qu-33-Female)

I visited Sichuan – the panda’s hometown – with my family after seeing Kung Fu Panda. (Sun-29-Female)

This brief discussion of how my respondents responded physically to the *Kung Fu Panda* series is in line with what I analysed in Chapter 6 as derivative audience behaviour, including film-induced tourism and the purchasing of tie-in merchandising.

## 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the Kung Fu Panda series as a way of looking further at how the general issues discussed in the previous chapters can be applied to a specific case study, in terms of how audiences responded to the specific Chinese cultural aspects expressed in this animation trilogy. There are conflicting views amongst both other Chinese scholars and my interviewees about the extent to which the *Kung Fu Panda* films have managed to grasp the more intangible elements of Chinese culture, and especially the values of Confucianism and Daoism. Some think this has been done successfully, especially in comparison with earlier Hollywood films. Others think that the film still expresses American values.

By employing textual analysis and conducting empirical audience research, I argue that one of the significant reasons for the unprecedented success of the Kung Fu Panda series in the Chinese market is the fact that the films are full of Chinese exotic elements and localized appearances. This Chinese appearance includes the representation of both tangible and intangible meanings, which narrows down the cultural distance between Chinese audiences and transnational Hollywood productions. Hollywood, in this case, is quite good at integrating tangible Chinese cultural elements into the *Kung Fu Panda* series: objects, things, people, etc. (e.g., food, architecture, clothes, stars) and the outward manifestations of Chinese culture. The series, in this sense, properly and successfully managed to resonate with some Chinese viewers by really expressing some of the relatively more profound and intangible aspects of Chinese culture. Audiences differently engage with the inferential and connotative meanings of some of the more intangible elements in the films. In Chapter 5, I identified occupation, age and socio-cultural context as the main factors that determine an audiences’ interpretation. Here, when concentrating on this particular case, I find that gender also plays a role in understanding the interpretation of specific elements.

However, as discussed in the previous section, for some audience members, the film still conveys individualistic American/western values rather than a Chinese collectivist core in terms of the theme of the film. As one respondent put it, “Chinese culture is represented on the surface rather than at a deep level” (Qi-51-Male); and as another respondent put it, “The movie has substantially expressed the “American dream” with the assistance of Chinese elements” (Liu-29-Male).

# Chapter 8 Conclusion

## 8.1 *Mulan* and beyond

I am not Chinese, so I will probably never be able to make a real ‘Chinese Story’. My creative understanding [of Mulan (1998)] comes from my Western cultural background. So, I added lots of personality and characteristics that I understood in the process of creating [the animated version of] Mulan, which also made this work and this Chinese girl unique to a certain extent. This is an animated movie, which can be very personal and specific.

If the film story is too localized and exotic, or the cultural specificity is too obvious and limited to a certain and specific cultural area, then it may be difficult to disseminate it to the global market and difficult for it to be accepted by global audiences.

Regardless of how many cultural elements a film contains, the key factor giving rise to the film success is that the emotional core must be understood and resonated by many people. Although Mulan is a Chinese girl, and indeed a Chinese girl from ancient China, these features are just adding brilliance to the present splendor, but they are not critical (Tony Bancroft[[48]](#footnote-48), 2018, translated from 1905 Film Website).

The director of the animated version of *Mulan*, Tony Bancroft, seems to address here the controversy about the animated and live-action versions of *Mulan* in terms of the distinct responses of Western and Chinese audiences raised at the beginning of this thesis. What Bancroft says, on the one hand, suggests the difficulty Western producers have understanding some of the more intangible aspects of indigenous Chinese culture. Implicitly, this may be one reason for the superficial embracing of Chinese culture in both versions of *Mulan*. On the other hand, although the film character appears to be a faithful representation of an ancient Chinese girl and the story is adapted from traditional Chinese lyrics, what the *Mulan* producers have actually created, in practice, is a product targeted at global rather than local viewers. What this demonstrates is that Hollywood’s global dissemination can be ascribed to its absorption and confluence of various cultural materials and resources into its creations (Yin and Xiao, 2011).

Bancroft’s statement also gestures towards what Wu and Chan argue for, in terms of keeping a global-local perspective in the process of film production (2007: 212). They suggest that film producers need to “balance the needs for particularization and universalization” in creating films intended to achieve global audiences (2007: 206). The former aspect refers to the exploitation of the popularity and specificity of local culture, while the latter one matters in terms of the global acceptance of such products in their cross-cultural dissemination. The case of *Mulan* (although there is as yet no detailed analysis of the 2020 live-action version) demonstrates that the inclusion of a Chinese girl and the adaption of Chinese lyrics, as indicated by Bancroft, but also by Wu and Chan, is for both Chinese and Western audiences. And as mentioned at the outset of this thesis, *Mulan* is not the first case including Chinese local elements which results in disputes at the level of reception between Western and Chinese audiences.

This study has explored how such Hollywood films with Chinese elements are understood and socially and culturally interpreted from the perspective of Chinese audiences, taking into account the personal, social and cultural issues that may relate to the viewers’ engagement with these kinds of films.

As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, there has been heated and controversial debate among both the general public and academics about Hollywood films featuring Chinese culture, especially since 2003 when China entered the WTO and opened up more to the rest of the world, Media scholars in China have long interpreted Hollywood films with Chinese elements mainly by using textual analysis, but little academic evidence has been provided to look at the meaning of these films from the sociological perspective of Chinese audiences. With the primary purpose of filling this knowledge gap, in this study, although I still draw on film textual analysis and use specific film case studies, I also move beyond the films texts themselves and focus on the audience position, by adopting both quantitative and qualitative audience research methods. There are three reasons for employing this mixed methods approach in my research. Firstly, the quantitative method helps to demonstrate the general circumstances of Chinese viewers’ preference for Hollywood films with Chinese elements and the universal understanding of Chinese culture in these films. Secondly, the use of in-depth interviews following the collection of questionnaire survey data contributes to revealing more personally specific audience responses and enables the exploration of how audiences’ personal and socio-cultural situation relate to their responses. Thirdly, due to some simple and superficial responses offered by my respondents, I also engage with film textual analysis to further supplement their opinions and undertake deeper analysis.

In my introduction, drawing on the work of Diana Crane, I identified four different approaches to discussing cultural globalization, and I suggested that the issue of Hollywood films with Chinese elements that I explore in this study manifests all four approaches. The first approach is what Crane defines as cultural imperialism. The export of Hollywood films to Chinese market is one of the strategies for America to disseminate its ideology and values and to further expand its power in the global market and maintain cultural hegemony. The second approach is cultural hybridization, which refers to the blurring of the boundaries between nations and national cultures in terms of transnational cultural exchange and communication. In this sense, to readily enter into the Chinese market and appeal to Chinese audiences, the inclusion and presentation of Chinese culture in Hollywood films constructs a hybrid film product that mixes both American and Chinese culture. Audiences are typically attracted by the cultural products that are “close in cultural content and style to the audience’s own culture(s)” (Straubhaar, 2007: 26), in this case, those with tangible Chinese materials or icons. The third approach suggested by Crane is reception studies, which is what I have focused on in this thesis. In doing so, this approach reveals how Chinese audiences understand such hybrid films in the context of globalization. The final approach is what Crane sees as resistance by and negotiation of the nation’s cultural policy in facing the challenge of transnational products. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the Chinese government has, on the one hand, posed extreme restrictions through quotas for the import of foreign films. On the other hand, its strategy is to promote its soft power and international influence in terms of both the economy and culture, by enhancing its ability to create films whose “main melody” is Chinese, and which combines elements that aims to trigger Chinese nationalism and patriotism.

In this sense, Hollywood films with Chinese elements serve as a perfect case study for examining cultural globalization from the perspective of film culture. At the same time, the production, communication and reception process of Hollywood films with Chinese elements involve a series of contradictions and negotiations between American and Chinese interventions and the conflict and convergence of American and Chinese culture. In this respect, the production of Hollywood films with Chinese elements is a useful device for examining the transnational dissemination of hybrid cultural products and for investigating and evaluating how transnational audiences understand such hybrid films. The audience in this study is partly transnational, as Athique would argue, in the sense that even audiences rooted in one nation (eg. China) can also be transnational, not least where they are engaging with cultural products developed in other (trans)national contexts (eg. Hollywood). It is these aspects of my thesis that make an original contribution to knowledge and the thesis engages with three important questions in response to these issues. The first concerns the sorts of Chinese cultural elements presented in Hollywood films; the second is about the influence of different demographic and socio-cultural factors shaping the reations of Chinese viewers; and the third explores how Chinese audiences’ experience of cultural and national identity relates to their interpretation of the Chinese elements in these films.

I shall now provide a summary of the key findings of this study, which ﻿I have divided into three themes. First, I draw some conclusions about the representation of Chinese elements in Hollywood films. In defining Chinese cultural elements in the terms offered by my respondents, in a way which has not been done in previous related research, I note that these elements can be classified into both more superficial, tangible or concrete materials and deeper, intangible or abstract values. Secondly, I focus on how my respondents understand and interpret the different Chinese elements in Hollywood films. In particular, I note the four different modes of response adopted by my respondents as discussed in Chapter 4 and conclude that the ways in which Chinese audiences understand Chinese elements are complex. Drawing on what Stuart Hall conceptualizes as cultural identity and the framework that John Corner develops for understanding audiences’ interpretation of television programmes, I note that the interaction between Chinese elements and audience agency involves both textual and physical aspects. The former refers to how audiences respond to the textual meaning of Chinese elements in Hollywood films, and the latter refers to how they physically respond to the Chinese elements, especially in terms of their reaction to Chinese scenery or characters. I argue that the denoted and, in some cases, the associated meanings of the superficial, tangible Chinese elements featured in Hollywood films help to construct Chinese audiences’ cultural identity. They can thus be appreciated by Chinese audiences from the perspective of seeing Chinese culture as a shared body of national culture. Conversely, Chinese audiences find it difficult to accept or identify with some of the more inferential meanings of tangible elements as conceived by Hollywood producers, and the more deep-seated intangible meanings.

The third theme that I develop below extends the study of Chinese audiences’ responses to Hollywood films with Chinese elements to a wider global cultural arena. The intention is to identify new tendencies of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. Taking this study as a starting point, I will also propose a number of further potential research directions.

## 8.2 Hollywood’s construction of an implied Chinese audience and its representation of Chinese elements

The potentially huge economic profits to be made in the Chinese film market, the promotion of Chinese soft power in the international sphere and the purpose of the USA’s global extension in terms of cultural influence have given rise to Hollywood’s interest in the Chinese market. Particularly since the opening up of China to the rest of the world since the 1980s, Chinese elements in Hollywood films have experienced an enormous transformation in both their content and their quantity. Content-wise, Chinese elements included in Hollywood films since the early 1990s have been diverse, transforming from conceiving Chinese characters in negative and often savage terms, towards attempting to use various indigenous Chinese icons for appealing to Chinese viewers.

The general Chinese audience is clearly seen by Hollywood as a potential target audience for its products. Given the serious quota restrictions on the importation of foreign films and the Chinese government’s censorship of such films, the Chinese audience is the most important factor that influences Hollywood’s consideration in determining which films to import into China and how to present those films in order to expand their share of the Chinese film market. Drawing on Iser (1974, 1980) and Livingstone’s (1998, 2003, 2005) concept of the implied audience as well as Hall (1973, 2005) and Bordwell’s (1988) proposition of the preferred or ideal reader, I argue that Hollywood regards Chinese audiences as one of the implied audiences in the process of its creation, production and dissemination of hybrid films with Chinese features. The tactic of including Chinese features is in practice the critical Hollywood strategy for understanding how they conceive the implied Chinese audience.

When it comes to the types of Chinese elements that Hollywood includes, in this thesis they are defined as the images, symbols and customs that are recognized by my Chinese respondents as embodying both the traditional and modern cultural spirit of Chinese national culture, national identity, and national interests. These can be mainly grouped into the two categories discussed in Chapter 4, namely concrete, tangible materials, on the one hand, and abstract, intangible values on the other. Tangible materials include totemic Chinese buildings and other architecture, objects, food, clothes, actors and so on. The more intangible aspects in this study refer to invention and creation, folk customs, folk-art forms, and especially recognizably Chinese stories, which in various ways express Chinese values or beliefs and spiritual cultural elements. It can be seen in the empirical audience research described in the thesis that not only Western but also Chinese people generally reduce the concept of Chinese-ness to stereotypes, especially when defining the Chinese cultural elements appearing in international or global cultural products. As I concluded in Chapter 4, Chinese audiences are able to recognize modern Chinese elements, but it is difficult for them to identify and reduce Chinese culture to modern Chinese elements because it is now a hybrid and full of Western elements and influences, given the current global circumstances. This may indicate why some Hollywood filmmakers are keen to include traditional Chinese cultural characteristics in their films, in a specific and iconic way.

## 8.3 The interaction between Chinese elements and Chinese audiences: appreciation and non-acceptance

Hollywood thus conceives of the Chinese audience as an implied audience and employs the strategy of featuring Chinese elements to appeal to these implied Chinese audiences. However, the actual reception of these films and how effective this strategy is should be examined by researching real Chinese audiences. In this respect, my study is inspired by Iser’s concept of the real or empirical audience and Allen’s (1995) argument about the need to understand the real viewers’ active attributes in interpreting the media content, which are in accordance with their own knowledge and circumstances. I thus engaged with empirical audience research to look at whether the representation of Chinese elements imposed by Hollywood is symmetric with the understandings and interpretations of the real Chinese audience. As I noted in Chapter 2, current film audience research is inspired by the paradigm of cultural studies, which has shifted from the encoding/decoding model proposed by Stuart Hall (1973, 2005) to a reflexive sociological approach that addresses the question of how media content is interpreted by viewers in terms of their own personal and socio-cultural context. This paradigmatic shift suggests a crucial trend in conducting critical film and television audience research. As mentioned previously, serious discussion about the real Chinese audience’s engagement with Hollywood’s hybrid films has yet to be formulated in the context of both Western and Chinese academic contexts. This, in my opinion, is explained by the literary background of most Chinese media and culture scholars and the lack of sociological knowledge or the minimal awareness of the importance of integrating media audience research with sociological perspectives. In this study, I have engaged with the cultural studies approach by researching actual Chinese audiences, with the focus on the influence of socio-cultural factors on their interpretation of Chinese elements. In particular, I adopt John Corner’s framework and apply these Western media and cultural theories to the Chinese situation. The key finding here is that Chinese audiences’ engagement with Chinese elements in foreign films is far more complex than Hollywood conceives and general thought allows.

In Chapter 4, I identified four dimensions to the audience’s textual engagement with Hollywood films with Chinese elements: the use of analogy to explain how things seem; understanding and sureness on the part of some audiences about at least some of the Chinese elements in Hollywood films; uncertainty and non-committal attitudes towards other elements; and a sense of failing to understand the expression of Chinese elements, especially those that suggest a more inferential, intangible layer of meaning. I give emphasis to the first, second and final modes of response in this study. I found that my respondents used analogy, including a comparison between Hollywood films with Chinese elements and those without Chinese elements, and a different comparison between Hollywood films with Chinese elements and recent popular Chinese action or fiction films which are seen as similar in style to Hollywood.

My research also suggests that at least some members of the Chinese audience experience a sense of sureness about and understanding of Chinese elements in Hollywood films in some cases. Thus, they are pleased with the inclusion of tangible material aspects and appreciate the superficial, denotative meanings of elements such as Chinese scenery, actors, food, clothes and so on. Such elements give rise to a sense of cultural proximity in foreign films and help to establish a shared cultural and national identity for Chinese audiences. They also help to narrow the geographical distance between Hollywood and China in terms of making it less difficult for Hollywood to bypass the censorship process and get permission from the Chinese government to import the films. The benign feelings generated by those tangible Chinese elements are able to narrow but cannot absolutely fill the sense of cultural distance or cultural difference. As one of my respondents argued:

Chinese elements such as some actors or scenery can make Chinese audiences feel a sense of belonging across different generations. We feel proud of Chinese cultural elements around us that have entered the Hollywood platform and show off the characteristics of China (Shen-30-Male).

As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, from the perspective of the macro-level, by employing the first level of Corner’s interpretative framework, I found that Chinese audiences can be considered as endowed with a shared sense of cultural and national identity; as such, they are able to share a similar denotative interpretation of a certain body of Chinese culture. Using Corner’s second and third levels of interpretation, however, it also becomes clear that some Chinese audiences also fail to understand the expression of Chinese elements in relation to deeper, more intangible meanings, such as Confucian values and collectivism. On the one side, Chinese audiences sharing a similar cultural identity are able to recognize some of the intangible elements as Chinese. On the other side, they are also able to assess the extent to which the more inferential and associated meanings of such intangible aspects are distorted by Hollywood films. This is because they share the same extra-textual codes, knowledge and cultural background that are necessary to make sense of these more intangible elements.

Moving beyond textual engagement with Chinese elements, it was also found that my respondents actively and physically engaged with some of the more tangible aspects of Chinese scenery and, in some cases, Chinese products or characters. This is what I discussed in terms of derivative behaviour in Chapter 6, adding a fourth step to Corner’s three-step interpretive framework, pointing out the special physical activities that developed as a different response to Chinese elements in Hollywood films. Combining the interpretation of Chinese elements with the concept of film-induced tourism in sociology, I identified four types of Chinese film-related tourists, including serendipitous, general, specific and potential or virtual film tourists. The first three refer to those who actually visit Chinese places featured in Hollywood films, while potential or virtual film tourists are based on my investigations, referring to those who express their intention towards a place but virtually rather than physically visit it. As discussed in Chapter 6, the first dimension indicates that my respondents actually travel to Chinese places appearing in films without any particular motivation or plan. General film tourists do film-related activities, but they are not specifically drawn to the place by the film such as taking photos when visiting film locations. Specific film tourists specifically seek out the particular places portrayed in a film, while some Chinese audiences also actively interacted physically with films by purchasing tie-in merchandising. To some extent, this active appreciation and purchasing of products and experiences by some Chinese audiences is another positive influence of and response to Hollywood’s more tangible Chinese elements.

It is also possible to identify more complex audience responses by looking from the perspective of the micro-level, as developed particularly in Chapter 5. Different ages and occupations are two demographic factors that result in subtle differences in how audiences engage with Chinese elements, but no obvious distinctions or general trends can be identified in relation to other demographic factors. This, in my opinion, can be explained by the relatively similar chances offered to all demographic groups through the process of globalisation and China’s gradual opening up and development. However, rather than insist on a literal interpretation of the dramatic text, Chinese audiences still engage with Hollywood films in divergent ways due to their socio-cultural circumstance and personal knowledge. Based on Hall’s second level of the concept of cultural identity and Corner’s third interpretive step, which both focus on personal response in accordance with a viewer’s own circumstances, I propose three types of interpreters. These are cultural authorities, film professionals, and nationalists and traditionalists. In order to examine this relationship between Chinese audience agency and the knowledge of Chinese elements, I demonstrate the usefulness of employing Bourdieu’s (1984) concept of cultural competence and Morley’s (1992) ideological problematic. As delineated by Bourdieu, media content has meanings for those “who possess the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (Bourdieu, 1984: 2). By the same token, I argue that the ways in which Chinese audiences understand the specific representation of Chinese elements is determined and influenced by the extent to which they possess the relevant cultural competences.

Guided by the concept of cultural competence, the first type of respondents, the cultural authorities, make sense of and respond to Chinese cultural elements in some Hollywood film examples from a perspective that connects with literary issues, history and culture. The second type of respondent, which I describe as film professionals, understands the representation of Chinese elements from the perspective of filmmaking. The third type of respondent, the nationalists and traditionalists, refers to those who either cannot accept or are unwilling to support the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films.

One significant factor that determines the non-acceptance or misunderstanding of Chinese elements in Hollywood films by some Chinese audiences can be ascribed to the conflict between Chinese collectivism and the individualism of the typical Western narrative structure and organisation. I explore this issue by analysing the analogy between popular Chinese action and fiction films (so-called “main melody” films) such as *Operation Read Sea*, *Wolf Warriors II* and *The Wandering Earth* and Hollywood films with Chinese tangible or intangible elements.I argue that Hollywood decorates some of its films with Chinese elements which may produce a “Chinese skin”, while the theme and motif still express American values, thereby keeping an “American core” to those films. Even though some of Hollywood films include tangible Chinese elements, the intangible values of individualism that are at the heart of American national identity also fill the narrative heart of those films. In many ways, as Olson (1999) reminds us, Hollywood’s global success can be reduced to the “narrative transparency” of its storytelling; to this, as (Miller et al., 2001) suggest, we can add the way that Hollywood integrates a diversity of international cultural resources.

There are two main observations that I would like to make about the conflict between American and Chinese values, building on my analysis of Chinese films. The first one concerns the obvious point that the trait of individualism applies to Hollywood narratives, while the trait of collectivism tends to be presented in Chinese films. The former demonstrates the narrative organized around an individual, goal-directed hero, who drives the narrative forward by trying to achieve his or her goals. The latter emphasizes decentralization. It is the power of the group and the nation rather than the individual that is disseminated in Chinese films, as seen in the analysis of *Operation Read Sea* and *Wolf Warriors II*. The second observation is the sense of affection and home conveyed by Chinese values, as in *The Wandering Earth*, and in the traditional Chinese lyrics telling the Mulan story, but dismissed in the Hollywood version of *Mulan* or in*.* As one of my respondents put it:

Wolf Warriors II and Operation Red Sea gave me a sense of patriotic feelings. Particularly Operation Red Sea fits with the collectivist values of Chinese people (Ding-28-Female).

In conclusion, Hollywood’s construction of an implied Chinese audience and the actual Chinese audience’s perception and interpretation of Chinese elements, to a large extent, confirm Crane’s four dimensions of cultural globalization. From the perspective of Hollywood, it seeks Chinese cultural resources and materials in order to enter the Chinese market, by appealing to Chinese audiences and expanding its cultural influence in the global market. This is what some scholars (for example Tomlinson, 1991; Salwen, 1991) see as cultural imperialism. The strategy of hybridizing Chinese elements paves the way for Hollywood’s relatively easier entrance to the Chinese market. From the Chinese position, drawing on Hall’s (1973, 2005) encoding and decoding model, I argue that, in some cases, the understanding and interpretation given to Hollywood’s Chinese elements by real Chinese audiences is asymmetrical with how Hollywood conceives those elements. It displays the way real Chinese audiences sometimes appreciate, sometimes negotiate and sometimes resist transnational products for which they are the implied audience.

## 8.4 Beyond textual analysis and future research directions

As noted above, Chinese media and culture scholars have in the past explored the association between the inclusion of Chinese elements in Hollywood films and the export of American values and ideology by means of textual analysis. They have commented in particular on what they see as the erosion of Chinese national culture. But virtually no empirical research has been done to explore how actual Chinese audiences relate their engagement with Hollywood films with Chinese elements to their cultural and national identity and to their own personal, social and cultural situations.

In this study, by combining empirical audience research and textual analysis, two key conclusions can be drawn here. Firstly, Hollywood’s strategy of including locally specific, in this case, Chinese cultural elements, does to some extent contribute to its success in other national markets, by appealing to local audiences in the process of its transnational dissemination. As Song (2018) notes, one approach to globalization is that it poses challenges to national culture, giving impetus to the process of denationalization (Zurn, 2003), and to some degree promoting the dominance of Hollywood in the global film market (Jin, 2012). This, Song argues, “homogenizes the cinema culture worldwide” (Song, 2018: 179; Braester, 2015; Gao, 2009). However, my audience research suggests that, in the context of globalization, the outward or superficial inclusion of local Chinese elements may not always be an effective way to attract Chinese audiences, due to the way that such films still assert an American core and demonstrate a lack of understanding of deep Chinese values. Such films cannot therefore be easily accepted by those attached to a Chinese cultural identity. My audience research thus challenges one of the claims of cultural imperialism, that the erosion of less powerful local cultures results from the globalization of culture. Based on my empirical research, I argue that not only do Chinese audiences recognize and identify with some of the more tangible aspects of Chinese culture in Hollywood films, but more significantly, they have the ability to criticize those more intangible aspects of Chinese culture that are distorted by Hollywood. Those audiences are thus able to negotiate and resist certain aspects of transnational culture. This can be seen in the comments of several of my respondents:

If Hollywood films want to add Chinese elements, they need an in-depth understanding of traditional Chinese culture instead of adding superficial elements (Lv-44-Male).

We cannot experience the culture of a nation from a short-lived display of an element. If there is no more display of aspects of the national culture, perhaps we will not know the local customs and practices, let alone those have never been to the country (Bin-30-Male).

When first seeing Chinese elements in Hollywood movies, Chinese viewers were quite surprised. But now we are not curious and amazed. I want to see more localized films which can make Chinese audiences understand the real living conditions of people in other countries (Fang-38-Female).

On the one hand, Lv and Bin show their awareness of the difficulties of defining Chinese culture without resorting to superficial tangible materials, and what Song calls “the revival of Chinese local cultures’ self-definition and self-identification” (Song, 2018: 179; Featherstone, 1990). On the other hand, what Fang says indicates her appreciation of the cultural diversity that can result from globalization (Yoshimoto, 2003). Rather than merely insisting that attraction is due to cultural proximity in cultural products, Straubhaar (2007) also believes in the effect of cultural diversity on audiences, stating that audiences are also attracted by “some amount of diversity and difference”. The reason why some cultural products far away from the audiences seem to be popular partly lies in their presentation of “novelty and new ideas” (Straubhaar, 2007: 27).

Martin Barker’s transnational project, *Watching the Lord of the Rings* (2008), Liebes and Katz’s work on *Dallas*, and Athique’s (2018) discussion of transnational audiences all suggest the importance of research on the reception of transnational media products. This study has responded to their call, by examining how Chinese audiences engage with Hollywood films with Chinese elements from the perspective of real audiences. Looking beyond this study, I suggest pushing my research agenda related to Hollywood films with Chinese elements in two directions.

Inspired by the transnational projects mentioned above, the first is to carry out a transnational project on Hollywood films with Chinese elements to look at how a range of different global audiences understand and interpret Chinese elements and Chinese culture. For example, there could be a comparison between the way Chinese audiences make sense of Chinese elements with the understanding of Western audiences, such as those in the UK or the USA. By doing so, I could explore how different national and cultural identities perceive Chinese culture in transnational products, and further investigate and distinguish what I suggest in this study is a conflict between American individualism and Chinese collectivism.

Secondly, the global release of *Wolf Warriors II* and some other popular Chinese films in recent years has caused debate among Western publics. Moving beyond the concept of a core-periphery model, which suggests a one-way dissemination of Western cultural and media products to the rest of the world, for example, China, it would be interesting to examine what and how Chinese film products are disseminated to Western countries and how Western audiences understand Chinese film content. Such studies would be expected to provide insight into the increasingly more complicated question of the different ideology between Western countries and China and look in a different way at the complex issue of globalization.

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# Filmography and television drama

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| **English title** | **Chinese title** | **Producer** | **Release time in China** |
| *Arrival* | 降临 | US/Canada | 2017 |
| *Avatar* | 阿凡达 | US/UK | 2010 |
| *Broken Blossoms* | 凋谢的花朵 | US | 1919（released in US） |
| *Captain America series* | 美国队长 | US | 2011/2014/2016 |
| *Crazy Rich Asians* | 摘金奇缘 | US | 2018 |
| *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* | 卧虎藏龙 | US/China | 2000 |
| *Dream of the Red Mansions* | 红楼梦 | China | 1989 |
| *Farewell Atlantis* | 2012 | US/Canada | 2012 |
| *Feng Shen Bang* | 封神榜 | China | 2001 |
| *Flower Drum Song* | 花鼓歌舞 | US | 1961 |
| *Gravity* | 地心引力 | US/UK/Mexico | 2013 |
| *Harry Potter series* | 哈利波特 | UK/US | 2001/2002/2004/2005/2007/2009 |
| *Hero* | 英雄 | China | 2002 |
| *House of Flying Daggers* | 十面埋伏 | China | 2004 |
| *Judge Dredd* | 特判警官 | UK/US | not released in China |
| *Kings of Kung Fu* | 功夫之王 | US | 2008 |
| *Kill Bill (Vol1/2)* | 杀死比尔 | US | 2003/2004 |
| *Kiss of the Dragon* | 龙之吻 | US/France | 2001 |
| *Kung Fu Panda* | 功夫熊猫1 | US | 2008 |
| *Kung Fu Panda 2* | 功夫熊猫2 | US | 2011 |
| *Kung Fu Panda 3* | 功夫熊猫3 | US/China | 2016 |
| *Like fog, Like Rain and Like Wind* (television drama) | 像雾像雨又像风 | China | 2001 |
| *Looper* | 环形使者 | US/China | 2012 |
| *Longmen Feijia* | 龙门飞甲 | China | 2011/2015 |
| *M. Butterfly* | 蝴蝶君 | US | 1993 |
| *Mission: Impossible III* | 碟中谍3 | US/Germany | 2006 |
| *Mulan1998* | 1998动画版花木兰 | US | 1998 |
| *Mulan2020* | 2020真人版花木兰 | US/China | 2020 |
| *Operation Red Sea* | 红海行动 | China | 2018 |
| *Pride and Prejudice* | 傲慢与偏见 | US/UK/France | 2005 (released in UK) |
| *Red Sorghum* | 红高粱 | China | 1988 |
| *Roman Holiday* | 罗马假日 | US | 1987 |
| *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (television drama) | 三国演义 | China | 1994 |
| *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* | 星球大战3：西斯的复仇 | US | 2005 |
| *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* | 三块广告牌 | US/UK | 2018 |
| *Titanic* | 泰坦尼克号 | US | 1997/2012 |
| *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* | 颜将军的伤心茶 | US | 1932(released in US) |
| *The Good Earth* | 大地 | US | 1937(released in US) |
| *The World of Suzie Wong* | 苏丝黄的世界 | US/UK | 1960 |
| *The Great Wall* | 长城 | US/China | 2016 |
| *The Martian* | 火星救援 | US/UK/Hungary/Jordan | 2015 |
| *The Painted Veil* | 面纱 | US/China/Canada | 2006 |
| *The Lord of the Rings series* | 指环王 | US | 2002/2003/2004 |
| *The Karate Kid* | 功夫梦 | US/China | 2010 |
| *The Last Airbender* | 最后的风之子 | US | 2010 |
| *The Matrix* | 黑客帝国 | US/Australia | 1999 (released in US) |
| *The Bridges of Madison County* | 廊桥遗梦 | US | 1995 (released in US) |
| *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* | 木乃伊3 | US/Germany | 2008 |
| *The Wandering Earth* | 流浪地球 | China | 2019 |
| *Transformer: Age of Extinction* | 变形金刚4：绝迹重生 | US/China | 2014 |
| *White Snake: Origin* | 白蛇：缘起 | US/China | 2019 |
| *With You* | 和你在一起 | China | 2002 |
| *Wolf Warriors II* | 战狼2 | China | 2017 |
| *Yearn* (television drama) | 渴望 | China | 1990 |

# Appendix 1a Questionnaire survey: information sheet

**What is this project about?**

My name is LI NAI, and I’m a PhD student at the University of York in the United Kingdom. I am researching the reception by Chinese audiences of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. This project is being supervised by Professor Andrew Higson.

To do this, I will be firstly conducting online questionnaires with various Chinese audiences about their personal information like gender, age, cultural background and occupation as well as preference of Hollywood films and so on.

This project is designed to give me an insight into Hollywood films with Chinese elements and open up more possibility for more collaboration between Hollywood and Chinese film industry and trigger the thinking of Chinese filmmaking in the future.

**What is involved in participating in this project?**

I would like to ask you questions about whether you like to watch Hollywood films with Chinese elements, how you make sense of this kind of film and what you think about such films.

This questionnaire will last around 15 minutes and your response will be recorded; a written transcript may then be developed.

You will be given the option to a pseudonym, when I use sections of your response in my academic writing. This will mean that your information can remain anonymous and your identity protected.

**How will my information be used?**

Your information and responses may be used in a variety of academic contexts:

1. A research report
2. My PhD thesis
3. Conference papers
4. Journal articles

You may use a pseudonym rather than your own name.

Any information which may identify you will not be used without your consent.

This is anonymised information and responses.

**How will my information be stored?**

The recording of the questionnaire and any information I collect about you will be stored on a secure data storage device and a copy will remain with The University of York for a minimum of 10 years.

No one will be able to access this information without my consent, and without following the confidentiality procedures which I will also follow.

**What if I want to withdraw from the survey?**

You can withdraw from the study at any point, without prejudice and without providing a reason. If you decide to withdraw, your data will be removed from the survey and be destroyed.

**How can I contact you?**

You can email LI NAI at: nl833@york.ac.uk

You can also write to: LI NAI, Department of Theatre, Film and Television University of York, Baird Lane, Heslington East, York YO10 5GB, UK

Supervisor Andrew Higson: [andrew.higson@york.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.higson@york.ac.uk)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Appendix 1b Questionnaire survey: consent form | | |
| **Please tick the appropriate box** | **Yes** | **No** |
| Taking part | | |
| I have read and understood the project information sheet | □ | □ |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project | □ | □ |
| I agree to take part in the project and to do online questionnaire, and I agree that my interview(s) can be recorded | □ | □ |
| I understand my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part | □ | □ |
| Use of the information I provide for this project only | | |
| I understand my personal details such as country and nationality will not be revealed to people outside the project | □ | □ |
| I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs | □ | □ |
| Use of the information I provide beyond this project | | |
| I agree for the data I provide to be archived at the University of York | □ | □ |
| I understand that I understand that only Li Nai and Andrew Higson will have access to the data in its raw format only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form | □ | □ |
| I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form | □ | □ |
| So, we can use the information you provide legally | | |

Name of participant: Signature: Date:

Researcher: Signature: Date:

Contact details for further information: LI NAI Email: nl833@york.ac.uk

Supervisor: Andrew Higson Email: andrew.higson@york.ac.uk

# Appendix 1c Questionnaire survey (English and Chinese version) - Chinese Audiences’ Reception of Hollywood Films with Chinese

**What is the survey about?**

This survey is being carried out to gather information for a larger study investigating the ways in which Chinese audiences make sense of Hollywood films that are specifically designed to appeal to those audiences. This initial study is to collect data on the viewing habits of Chinese audience, to test questioning techniques, and to gather data on films which may be used in the full study.

**Section 1: Personal information**

1. What is your name? (You do not have to provide this.)
2. How old are you?
3. Under 18 years old（If you are under 18 years old, please do not do anymore）(If the respondent select A, he/she is not able to do the following part)
4. 18-30
5. 31-40
6. 41-50
7. 51-60
8. Over 60
9. What is your occupation?
10. Manual Labour
11. Professional
12. Retired
13. Student
14. Self-employed
15. Other
16. In which country do you live?
17. China
18. UK
19. US
20. In which city do you live?

**Section 2: What kind of films do you watch?**

1. How often do you watch films?
2. More than once a week
3. Once a week
4. Once a month
5. Once a year
6. Hardly at all
7. Where do you usually watch films? (Multiple choice)
8. Theatre
9. Online
10. Download or DVD
11. TV
12. Why do you watch movies? (Multiple choice)
13. For leisure and relaxation
14. As a personal habit
15. To keep company with others
16. Nothing better to do
17. Other
18. What kind of films do you like? (Multiple choice)
19. Comedy
20. Action
21. Animation
22. Romance
23. Science Fiction
24. Horror
25. Adventure
26. Musical
27. Other
28. What elements will attract you to a film? (Multiple choice)
29. Star
30. Story
31. Scenery
32. Director
33. Poster
34. Genre
35. Recommended by others
36. Other
37. Are you a film fan? Do you know a lot about film?
38. Yes, I am very knowledgeable about film. (For instance, I read about films, I watch documentaries, I write film reviews...)
39. I know a little about films, but only know about the latest popular successes.
40. I really don't know much about films. I just like to watch them occasionally.

**Section 3: Chinese films**

1. Do you like Chinese films?
2. Yes, I really like Chinese films.
3. No, I do not like Chinese films.
4. No strong opinion
5. I prefer foreign films.
6. Why do you like Chinese films? Or why do not you like Chinese films? (I left a line for this kind of question, but respondents can expand the space if their answer is long.)
7. Which Chinese film most deeply impressed you?

**Section 4: Foreign films**

1. Do you like foreign films?
2. Yes, I really like foreign films.
3. No, I do not like foreign films.
4. No strong opinion
5. I prefer Chinese films.
6. If you like foreign films, which countries’ films do you like?
7. European or American films
8. Japanese or Korean films
9. Indian films
10. Other
11. Why do you like foreign films? Or why do not you like foreign films?
12. Which foreign film most deeply impressed you?

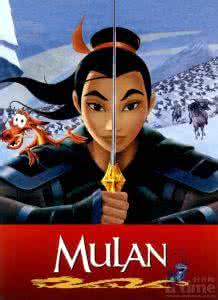
**Section 5: Hollywood films**

1. Do you like Hollywood films?
2. Yes, I really like Hollywood films.
3. No, I don’t like Hollywood films.
4. No strong opinion
5. Why do you like Hollywood films?
6. The Hollywood brands
7. Stars
8. High technology and stunt in films
9. Stories
10. Well-made
11. Individualism showed in films
12. Other
13. Can you name any Hollywood films that have included Chinese elements?
14. Which Hollywood films with Chinese elements most deeply impressed you? Please explain why they impressed you.

**Section 6: Have you seen the following films?**

Below is a list of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. Please indicate which ones you have seen or are aware of. For each one you that you have seen, please indicate how much you enjoy it.

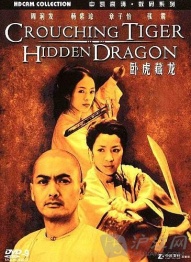
1. *Mulan* (1998)



1. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of it.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

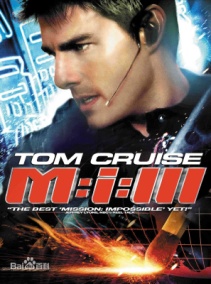
1. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000)



1. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of it.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Mission: Impossible III* (2006)



1. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of it.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Avatar* (2009)



1. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of it.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *2012*/*Farewell Atlantis* (2009)



1. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of it.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Kungfu Panda Series* (2008, 2011, 2016)



1. I have seen at least one of these films (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen any of these films but am aware of them (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of them.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014)



1. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of it.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *The Great Wall* (2016)



1. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
2. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have never heard of it.
4. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

**Section 7: Hollywood films with Chinese elements**

1. Have you noticed any changes in the use of Chinese elements in Hollywood films?
2. Yes, I have noticed some changes.
3. No, I have not noticed any.
4. I am not sure.
5. When Chinese elements appear in a poster for a Hollywood film, would you pay more attention to that film?
6. Yes, I would.
7. No, I would not.
8. I am not sure.
9. When Chinese elements appear in Hollywood films, how would you feel?
10. Feeling kind and happy with the way the Chinese elements are presented. (Qin qie)
11. Not a true representation of the original Chinese element
12. Absolutely beyond recognition, not familiar with it
13. Have no feelings
14. Other
15. What sort of Chinese elements do you recognize in Hollywood films? (Multiple choice)
16. Landscape and scenery
17. Traditional craft
18. Clothing
19. Food
20. Star
21. Language and dialect
22. Chinese products
23. Communist
24. Confucian
25. Chinese story
26. Other
27. Do you feel a stronger engagement with Hollywood films that include Chinese elements?
28. Yes
29. No
30. No strong opinion
31. Compared with other foreign films, do you prefer Hollywood films with Chinese elements?
32. Yes
33. No
34. No strong opinion

**Section 8: Your feelings about Hollywood films with Chinese elements**

1. What is your feeling about the phenomenon of adding Chinese elements to Hollywood films?
2. It indicates that Chinese culture has gradually launched into the world
3. It is a means of aggression towards Chinese culture
4. it demonstrates the convergence and recreation of culture
5. It is simply a technique and method of film expression
6. What effects do you think Chinese elements have on Hollywood? (Multiple choice)
7. Increasing box office of Hollywood films
8. Becoming the new story and highlight of Hollywood films
9. Making more Hollywood fans realize and like Chinese culture
10. No effects
11. Other

**Thank you for your participation!**

**调查问卷(中文版)——你对好莱坞电影怎么看**

此调查是关于中国受众对好莱坞电影的认知和态度，初步了解中国电影受众对包含中国元素的好莱坞电影的感受和态度，从而为深入了解中国受众对好莱坞电影中的文化融合现象的认知和解读搜集信息。此问卷中问及您的职业以及居住地等旨在简要了解不同区域不同职业等的中国受众的观影习惯，喜好等等。感谢您的参与。

**第一部分：个人信息**

1. 您的姓名？(可不提供)
2. 您的年龄？
3. 18岁以下（如您不满18岁，请不必完成下面的内容)
4. 18-30
5. 31-40
6. 41-50
7. 51-60
8. 60岁以上
9. 您的职业？
10. 手工业劳动者
11. 专业技术人员（如老师，医生， 警察等等）
12. 退休
13. 学生
14. 自由职业者
15. 其他
16. 您现在生活居住的国家
17. 中国
18. 英国
19. 美国
20. 您现在居住的城市？

**第二部分：您喜欢看什么类型的电影？**

1. 您多就看一次电影？
2. 一周超过一次
3. 一周一次
4. 一个月一次
5. 一年一次
6. 很少（几乎不看）
7. 您通常在哪里看电影？（多选题）
8. 影院
9. 在线看
10. 下载或DVD
11. 电视上
12. 您为什么看电影？（多选题）
13. 放松，休闲娱乐
14. 个人喜好
15. 陪同他人
16. 无聊
17. 其他
18. 您喜欢看什么类型的电影？（多选题）
19. 喜剧片
20. 动作片
21. 动画片
22. 爱情片
23. 科幻片
24. 恐怖片
25. 冒险类
26. 文艺片
27. 其他
28. 您看中电影的什么方面？（电影的哪些方面吸引您去选择它？）（多选题）
29. 演员
30. 故事情节
31. 场景
32. 导演
33. 广告海报
34. 电影类型
35. 别人推荐
36. 其他
37. 您认为您是电影狂热爱好者吗？（您对电影了解多少？）

A．是的，我非常了解电影 (我经常看电影方面的书，看电影，写影评)

B．我了解的很少，只知道最新的大片

C．我基本不了解，只是偶尔看电影

**第三部分：国产电影**

1. 您喜欢看国产电影吗？
2. 是的，我很喜欢国产电影
3. 不，我不喜欢
4. 无所谓
5. 我更喜欢外国电影
6. 您为什么喜欢国产电影？或者您为什么不喜欢国产电影？
7. 哪部国产影片给您的印象最深？

**第四部分：外国电影**

1. 您喜欢看外国电影吗？
2. 是的，我很喜欢外国电影
3. 不，我不喜欢
4. 无所谓
5. 我更喜欢国产电影
6. 如果您喜欢外国电影，您喜欢哪个国家的电影？
7. 欧美电影
8. 日韩电影
9. 印度电影
10. 其他
11. 您为什么喜欢外国电影？或者您为什么不喜欢外国电影？
12. 哪部外国影片给您印象最深？

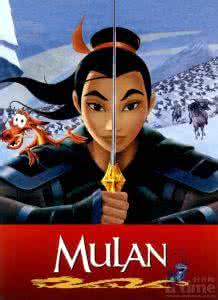
**第五部分：好莱坞电影**

1. 您喜欢好莱坞电影吗？
2. 是的，我很喜欢
3. 不，我不喜欢
4. 无所谓
5. 您为什么喜欢好莱坞电影
6. 好莱坞品牌效应
7. 演员
8. 高科技和特效
9. 故事情节
10. 制作精良
11. 影片中展现的个人主义
12. 其他
13. 您能列举几个包含中国元素的好莱坞电影吗
14. 哪部有中国元素的好莱坞电影给您印象最深？为什么？

**第六部分：您看过下面这些影片吗？**

下面是几部由中国元素的好莱坞电影，请填写您是否看过或您是否知道？如果您看过，您喜欢的程度是怎么样的？

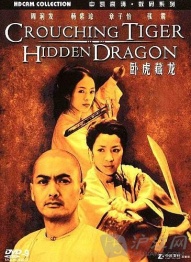
1. 花木兰（1998）



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

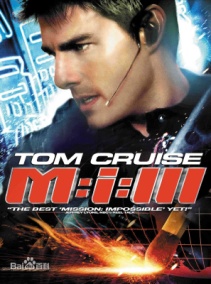
1. 卧虎藏龙（2000）



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

1. 碟中谍3



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

1. 阿凡达（2009）



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

1. 2012 （2009）



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

1. 功夫熊猫系列 （2008，2011，2016）



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

1. 变形金刚4（2014）



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

1. 长城（2016）



1. 我看过这个影片 (请回答下一个问题)
2. 我没看过但是了解它 (请回答下一个问题)
3. 我没听说过这个影片
4. 如果您看过或了解，您对它的感觉是？（量表题）

1 (非常不喜欢)—5 (非常喜欢它)

**第七部分：有中国元素的好莱坞电影**

1. 您能感觉到好莱坞电影中中国元素的变化吗？
2. 是的，我感觉到了变化
3. 跟以前比没有什么变化
4. 我不确定
5. 当好莱坞电影的海报上出现中国元素，您会特别关注它吗？
6. 是的，我会关注
7. 不，我不会关注
8. 我不确定
9. 当好莱坞电影中出现中国元素时，您什么感受？
10. 感觉很亲切
11. 跟平时了解到的中国元素不一样
12. 完全辨认不出是中国元素
13. 没什么感觉
14. 其他
15. 您在好莱坞电影中见过哪些中国元素？（多选题）
16. 拍摄场景
17. 传统手工艺品
18. 服饰道具
19. 食物
20. 演员
21. 语言和方言
22. 中国产品
23. 共产主义
24. 孔文化（中国传统文化思想）
25. 中国故事
26. 其他
27. 您对包含中国元素的好莱坞电影会有更深刻的印象吗？
28. 会的
29. 不会
30. 不确定
31. 跟其他外国电影相比，您会更喜欢由中国元素的好莱坞电影吗？
32. 是的，我更喜欢有中国元素的好莱坞电影
33. 不是的
34. 不确定

**第八部分：您对有中国元素的好莱坞电影的感受**

1. 您对中国元素加入到好莱坞电影中是什么看法？（多选题）
2. 暗示中国文化走向世界
3. 这是对中国文化的入侵和挑战
4. 是对文化的融合和重建（形成新的文化
5. 只是一种电影的制作和表达方式
6. 其他
7. 您认为中国元素对好莱坞电影有什么影响？（多选题）

A． 提高了好莱坞电影的票房

1. 中国元素成为好莱坞电影新的关注点，为好莱坞电影提供新故事
2. 让更多电影受众了解中国文化
3. 没什么影响

谢谢您的参与！

# Appendix 2a In-depth interview: information sheet

**What is this project about?**

My name is LI NAI, and I’m a PhD student at the University of York in the United Kingdom. I am researching the reception by Chinese audiences of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. This project is being supervised by Professor Andrew Higson.

To do this I will be conducting interviews with various Chinese audiences about their selection and interpretation of and their feelings towards selected Hollywood films. Therefore, I will ask various questions around these key areas.

This project is designed to give me an insight into Hollywood films with Chinese elements and open up more possibility for more collaboration between Hollywood and Chinese film industry and trigger the thinking of Chinese filmmaking in the future.

**What is involved in participating in this project?**

I would like to have a conversation with you, in Chinese, in which I ask you questions about whether you like to watch Hollywood films with Chinese elements, how you make sense of this kind of film and what you think about such films.

This conversation will last around 50 minutes and your voice will be recorded; a written transcript of the interview may then be developed.

You will be given the option to a pseudonym, when I use sections of our conversation in my academic writing. This will mean that your information can remain anonymous and your identity protected.

**How will my information be used?**

Your information and responses may be used in a variety of academic contexts:

1. A research report
2. My PhD thesis
3. Conference papers
4. Journal articles

You may use a pseudonym rather than your own name.

Any information which may identify you will not be used without your consent.

This is anonymised information and responses.

**How will my information be stored?**

The recording of the interview and any information I collect about you will be stored ona secure data storage device and a copy will remain with The University of York for a minimum of 10 years.

No one will be able to access this information without my consent, and without following the confidentiality procedures which I will also follow.

**What if I want to withdraw from the survey?**

You can withdraw from the study at any point, without prejudice and without providing a reason. If you decide to withdraw, your data will be removed from the survey and be destroyed.

**How can I contact you?**

You can email LI NAI at: nl833@york.ac.uk

You can also write to: LI NAI, Department of Theatre, Film and Television University of York, Baird Lane, Heslington East, York YO10 5GB, UK

Supervisor Andrew Higson: andrew.higson@york.ac.uk

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| **Please tick the appropriate box** | **Yes** | **No** |
| Taking part | | |
| I have read and understood the project information sheet | □ | □ |
| I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project | □ | □ |
| I agree to take part in the project and to being interviewed, and I agree that my interview(s) can be recorded | □ | □ |
| I understand my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part | □ | □ |
| Use of the information I provide for this project only | | |
| I understand my personal details such as country and nationality will not be revealed to people outside the project | □ | □ |
| I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs | □ | □ |
| Use of the information I provide beyond this project | | |
| I agree for the data I provide to be archived at the University of York | □ | □ |
| I understand that only Li Nai and Andrew Higson will have access to the data in its raw format, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form | □ | □ |
| I understand that other researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form | □ | □ |
| So we can use the information you provide legally | | |

Name of participant: Signature: Date:

Researcher: Signature: Date:

Contact details for further information: LI NAI Email: [nl833@york.ac.uk](mailto:nl833@york.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Andrew Higson Email: andrew.higson@york.ac.uk

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# Appendix 2c Interview guide (English and Chinese version)

Thank you for taking the time to participate my research. I would like to talk to you about your perceptions of popular Hollywood films with Chinese elements, and the reasons why you may or may not like them. The interview should take about ***50*** *minutes*. I will tape the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. Could I ask you to fill in consent form in advance?

**Interview Questions**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your occupation?
4. In which city do you live?
5. Do you like Hollywood movies?
6. Why do/do not you like Hollywood movies?
7. What elements will attract you to Hollywood film?
8. Which Hollywood movies do you know that have Chinese elements like Chinese actors, Chinese stories or Chinese scenery?
9. What is your feeling about that? Or what is your opinion about Hollywood movies with Chinese elements?
10. Did you watch at least one film in the following film list?

(*Kung Fu Panda* series (Gong Fu Xiong Mao), *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Wo Hu Cang Long), *Mission: Impossible III* (Die Zhong Die 3), *Avatar* (A Fan Da), *The Great Wall* (Chang Cheng), *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (Bian Xing Jin Gang 4), *PacificRim: Uprising* (Huan Tai Ping Yang2)) (If you did not watch anyone, could you please talk about other Hollywood films with Chinese elements? More options)

1. What is your opinion about them respectively?
2. Do you have any special story or experience with them? (I would like to know whether the film has influence on the audience. For example, travel)
3. Do you remember what you look forward to seeing in this film before watching it? Or what makes you watch this film?
4. Could you remember the story of the films? Or could you tell me something about it?
5. Could you remember what Chinese elements these films have? And what makes you familiar and sincere or what most attracts you?
6. What is your feeling about the Chinese elements appearing in these films after watching it? (If you prefer other films with Chinese elements which are not mentioned, please talk about it.)
7. What is your opinion about the expression of the Chinese culture in this film?
8. Do you tend to watching Hollywood film that is related to Chinese culture?
9. Do you know the popular Chinese films (Red Sea and Wolf Warriors)?
10. Do you like it? Why?
11. Some people said they are like Hollywood action movies, what do you think about it?
12. What differences do you think of Hollywood films with Chinese elements compared with other Hollywood films?
13. What is your opinion about the phenomenon that Hollywood films are combined with Chinese culture?
14. What is your opinion about “Chinese style” and “Americanization” in films?

I have no further questions. Do you have anything more you would like to add, or ask about, before we finish the interview?

An additional opportunity should be given to the respondents to ask me something they worry about during the interview. At the end of the interview, as the interviewees interested, the more detailed analysis of the research is likely to discuss after the tape recorder has been turned off. If you are interested with the further analysis of your perceptions, I will be happy to send you a copy later.

**Thank you for your time!**

**采访提纲 (中文版)**

谢谢您愿意参与我的研究。我们将讨论关于您如何理解有中国元素的好莱坞电影以及你喜欢或者不喜欢的原因的有关问题。采访将持续50分钟。由于不希望遗漏您的回答，我将对采访内容进行录音。请您先签署同意书，谢谢！

**采访问题**

1. 您的姓名是？
2. 您的年龄？
3. 您的职业？
4. 您居住的城市是？
5. 您喜欢看好莱坞电影吗？
6. 您为什么喜欢/不喜欢好莱坞电影？
7. 什么原因吸引您去看好莱坞电影？
8. 您知道哪些有中国元素（比如：中国演员，中国故事或场景等等）的好莱坞电影？
9. 您对他们的感受是什么？（您对有中国元素的好莱坞电影的看法是什么？）
10. 您是否看过以下至少一部电影吗？（如果您没看过或是记得其他的，您知道其他有中国元素的好莱坞电影吗，任何时间放映的都可以）

功夫熊猫，卧虎藏龙，碟中谍3，阿凡达，长城，变形金刚4，环太平洋2

1. 您对这些电影的看法是什么？（您喜欢/不喜欢以上电影？为什么？您怎么认为上面您看过的电影的？）
2. 您跟以上电影有什么特别的故事或者经历吗？（您是否受到过您所看电影的影响做了什么事情，比如看到电影中好看的场景希望去旅游等等）。
3. 您记得当时为什么去看这部电影吗？（是什么吸引您去看这部电影的？）
4. 您还记得这部电影的故事吗？（或是能告诉我您记得这部电影的什么吗？）
5. 您能记得以上提到的电影中有哪些中国元素吗？（哪些中国元素最吸引你？）
6. 您对以上电影中出现的中国元素有什么样的感受？（如果您知道其他有中国元素的电影，很高兴跟您讨论）
7. 您对这些电影中中国元素中国文化的表达有什么看法？
8. 您会倾向于去看与中国或中国文化相关的好莱坞电影吗？
9. 您知道近几年受欢迎的国产电影（战狼，红海行动等）吗？
10. 您喜欢吗？为什么？
11. 许多人认为这两部电影像好莱坞动作片，您怎么认为的呢？
12. 您认为有中国元素的好莱坞电影和其他好莱坞电影有什么样的不同吗？
13. 您对好莱坞电影结合了中国文化，加入中国元素这一现象有什么看法？
14. 您对电影中“中国风”和“美国化”的说法有什么看法？

我没有其他的问题了，再次感谢您的参与，针对以上问题，从您的角度有什么建议欢迎提出指正，如果您有什么其他问题与观点，很期待与您讨论。您的观点将用于我的论文分析中，

谢谢您的宝贵时间！

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# Appendix 3 Master’s Dissertation Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to participate my research. I would like to talk to you about your perceptions about the Kung Fu Panda which is a popular Hollywood film and the reasons why you choose and like Kung Fu Panda. The interview should take about 30 minutes. I will tape the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. All responses will be kept confidential.

**Interview Questions**

1. What is your name and age?
2. What is your occupation?
3. What is your living city?
4. Do you like Hollywood movies and why you like Hollywood movies?
5. Which Hollywood movies do you know that have Chinese elements like Chinese actors, Chinese stories or Chinese scenery? And what is your feeling about that?
6. What is your opinion about Hollywood movies with Chinese elements?
7. What is your opinion about the favor of Kung Fu Panda?
8. Do you have any special story or experience about Kung Fu Panda?
9. Do you like Kung Fu Panda? And why do you like/dislike this film?
10. What do you look forward to seeing in this film before watching it? Or what makes you watch this film?
11. What Chinese elements does this film have? And what makes you familiar and sincere or what most attracts you?
12. What is your feeling about this film after watching it?
13. What is your opinion about the expression of the Chinese culture in this film?
14. Do you tend to watch Hollywood film that is related to Chinese culture?
15. What differences do you think of Kung Fu Panda compared with other Hollywood films?
16. What is your opinion about the phenomenon that Hollywood films are combined with Chinese culture?

I have no further questions. Do you have anything more you would like to add, or ask about, before we finish the interview?

**Thank you for your time!**

# Appendix 4 Questionnaire Survey (Pilot Study)

**What is the survey about?**

This survey is being carried out to gather information for a larger study investigating the ways in which Chinese audiences make sense of Hollywood films that are specifically designed to appeal to those audiences. This initial study is to collect data on the viewing habits of Chinese audience, to test questioning techniques, and to gather data on films which may be used in the full study.

**Section 1: Personal information**

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Under 18 years old（If you are under 18 years old, please do not do anymore）(If the respondent select A, he/she is not able to do the following part)
4. 18-30
5. 31-40
6. 41-50
7. 51-60
8. Over 60
9. What is your occupation?
10. Manual Labour
11. Professional
12. Retired
13. Student
14. Self-employed
15. In which country do you live?
16. China
17. UK
18. US
19. In which city do you live?

**Section 2: What kind of films do you watch?**

1. How often do you watch films?
2. More than once a week
3. Once a year
4. Once a month
5. Once a week
6. Hardly at all
7. Where do you usually watch films? (Multiple choice)
8. Theatre
9. Online
10. Download or DVD
11. TV
12. Why do you watch movies? (Multiple choice)
13. For leisure and relaxation
14. As a personal habit
15. To keep company with others
16. Nothing better to do
17. What kind of films do you like? (Multiple choice)
18. Comedy
19. Action
20. Animation
21. Romance
22. Science Fiction
23. Horror
24. Adventure
25. Musical
26. What elements will attract you to a film? (Multiple choice)
27. Star
28. Story
29. Scenery
30. Director
31. Poster
32. Genre
33. Recommended by others
34. Are you a film fan? Do you know a lot about film?
35. Yes, I am very knowledgeable about film. (For instance, I read about films, I watch documentaries, I write film reviews...)
36. I know a little about films, but only know about the latest popular successes.
37. I really don't know much about films. I just like to watch them occasionally.

**Section 3: Chinese films**

1. Do you like Chinese films?
2. Yes, I really like Chinese films.
3. No, I do not like Chinese films.
4. I prefer foreign films.
5. Why do you like Chinese films? Or why do not you like Chinese films?
6. Which Chinese film most deeply impressed you?

**Section 4: Foreign films**

1. Do you like foreign films?
2. Yes, I really like foreign films.
3. No, I do not like foreign films.
4. I prefer Chinese films.
5. If you like foreign films, which countries’ films do you like?
6. European or American films
7. Japanese or Korean films
8. Indian films
9. Why do you like foreign films? Or why do not you like foreign films?
10. Which foreign film most deeply impressed you?

**Section 5: Hollywood films**

1. Do you like Hollywood films?
2. Yes, I really like Hollywood films.
3. No, I don’t like Hollywood films.
4. Why do you like Hollywood films?
5. The Hollywood brands
6. Stars
7. High technology and stunt in films
8. Stories
9. Well-made
10. Individualism showed in films
11. Can you name any Hollywood films that have included Chinese elements?
12. Which Hollywood films with Chinese elements most deeply impressed you? Please explain why they impressed you.

**Section 6: Have you seen the following films?**

Below is a list of Hollywood films with Chinese elements. Please indicate which ones you have seen or are aware of. For each one you that you have seen, please indicate how much you enjoy it.

1. *Mulan* (1998)
2. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of it.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000)
2. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of it.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Mission: Impossible III* (2006)
2. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of it.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Avatar* (2009)
2. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of it.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *2012*/*Farewell Atlantis* (2009)
2. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of it.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Kungfu Panda Series* (2008, 2011, 2016)
2. I have seen at least one of these films (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen any of these films but am aware of them (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of them.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014)
2. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of it.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

1. *The Great Wall* (2016)
2. I have seen it (please answer the additional question below).
3. I have not seen it but am aware of it (please answer the additional question below).
4. I have never heard of it.
5. If you have seen it, how much did you enjoy it? If you just know about it, but have not seen it, how much did you like the idea of the film?

1 (Really did not enjoy it)—5 (Really enjoy it)

**Section 7: Hollywood films with Chinese elements**

1. Have you noticed any changes in the use of Chinese elements in Hollywood films?
2. Yes, I have noticed some changes.
3. No, I have not noticed any.
4. When Chinese elements appear in a poster for a Hollywood film, would you pay more attention to that film?
5. Yes, I would.
6. No, I would not.
7. When Chinese elements appear in Hollywood films, how would you feel? (I left a line)
8. What sort of Chinese elements do you recognize in Hollywood films? (Multiple choice)
9. Landscape and scenery
10. Traditional craft
11. Clothing
12. Food
13. Star
14. Language and dialect
15. Chinese products
16. Communist
17. Confucian
18. Chinese story
19. Do you feel a stronger engagement with Hollywood films that include Chinese elements?
20. Yes
21. No
22. Compared with other foreign films, do you prefer Hollywood films with Chinese elements?
23. Yes
24. No

**Section 8: Your feelings about Hollywood films with Chinese elements**

1. What is your feeling about the phenomenon of adding Chinese elements to Hollywood films?
2. What effects do you think Chinese elements have on Hollywood?

**Thank you for your participation!**

1. All quotations from Chinese have been translated by myself, and I will explain this issue in more detail in Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hua Mulan released in 2020 in China was directed by Niki Caro. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hua Mulan released in 1998 in China was directed by Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Gong Fu Xiong Mao 1 released in 2008 in China was directed by Mark Osborne; Gong Fu Xiong Mao 2 released in 2011 in China was directed by Jennifer Yuh; Gong Fu Xiong Mao 3 released in 2016 in China was directed by Jennifer Yuh and Alessandro Carloni. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Chinese names are respectively Diao Xie De Hua Duo; Yan Jiang Jun De Shang Xin Cha; Da Di; Su Si Huang De Shi Jie; Hua Gu Ge Wu; Hu Die Jun [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mian Sha released in 2006 in China was directed by John Curran. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Huan Xing Shi Zhe released in 2012 in China was directed by Rian Johnson. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bian Xing Jin Gang 4 released in 2014 in China was directed by Michael Bay. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Wo Hu Cang Long released in 2000 in China was directed by Ang Lee. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hong Hai Xing Dong released in 2018 in China was directed by Lin Chaoxian. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Zhan Lang 2 released in 2017 in China was directed by Wu Jing. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Gang Tie Xia 3 released in 2013 in China was directed by Shane Black. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ying Xiong released in 2002 in China was directed by Zhang Yimou. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Shi Mian Mai Fu released in 2004 in China was directed by Zhang Yimou. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Chang Cheng released in 2016 in China was directed by Zhang Yimou. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Gong Fu Meng released in 2010 in China was directed by Harald Zwart. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 2012 released in 2009 in China was directed by Roland Emmerich. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. One of the game series produced by Crystal Dynamics in 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Die Zhong Die 3 released in 2006 in China was directed by J.J.Abrams. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. A Chinese soap Opera named Ke Wang which was released in 1990 and directed by Lu Xiaowei and Zhao Baogang. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Bai She: Yuan Qi released in 2019 in China was directed by Huang Jiakang and Zhao Qi. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Hong Gao Liang released in 1987 in China was directed by Zhang Yimou. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Zhai Jin Qi Yuan released in 2018 in China was directed by Zhu Haowei. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. San Kuai Guang Gao Pai released in 2018 in China was directed by Martin McDonagh. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Zui Hou De Feng Zhi Zi released in 2010 in China was directed by M.Night Shyamalan. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Hei Ke Di Guo released in 1999 in China was directed by Lilly Wachowski and Lana Wachowski. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Sha Si Bi Er released in 2003 in China was directed by Quentin Tarantino. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Long Zhi Wen released in 2001 in China was directed by Chris Nahon. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. A spectacular science-fiction film named Liu Lang Di Qiu which was released in 2019 in China and directed by Guo Fan. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Tui Shou released in 1991 in Tai Wan, China was directed by Ang Lee. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Xi Yan released in 1993 in USA was directed by Ang Lee. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Su Du Yu Ji Qing 7 released in 2015 in China was directed by James Wan. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Zhen Shi De Huang Yan released in 1995 in China was directed by James Cameron. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. A famous Chinese soap opera named Hong Lou Meng which was released in 1987 and directed by Wang Fulin. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. A Fan Da released in 2009 in China was directed by James Cameron. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Huo Xing Jiu Yuan released in 2015 in China was directed by Ridley Scott [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Di Xin Yin Li released in 2013 in China was directed by Alfonso Cuaron. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Jiang Lin released in 2017 in China was directed by Denis Villeneuve. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The Chinese names of the three films are respectively Ha Li Bo Te, Fu Er Mo Si, Ao Man Yu Pian Jian. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Luo Ma Jia Ri released in 1953 in USA was directed by William Wyler. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Lang Qiao Yi Meng released in 1995 in USA was directed by Clint Eastwood. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Mu Nai Yi 3 released in 2008 in China was directed by Rob Cohen. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Xing Qiu Da Zhan 3 – Xi Si De Fu Chou released in 2005 in China was directed by George Lucas. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Gong Fu Zhi Wang released in 2008 in China was directed by Rob Minkoff. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. A Chinese soap opera named Xiang Wu, Xiang Yu You Xiang Feng was released in 2001 in China. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. A Chinese soap opera named He Ni Zai Yi Qi was released in 2004 in China. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Shi Jian Gui Hua Ju released in 2011 in China was directed by Andrew Niccol. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. All quotations are extracted from an interview with one of the directors of *Mulan* 1998, Tony Bancroft, talking about the issues of cultural globalization. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)