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Faculty of Arts and Humanities

School of Humanities

**Cross-Cultural Box Office Performance:
The Reception of British Films in Mainland China Between 2017 and 2022**

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/PG/T280>

by

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ERGO Reference Number 79184

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2026

Abstract

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Ruixuan Wu

The film industry's inherent uncertainty necessitates ongoing research into the factors that influence box office performance, especially in overseas markets where the influencing factors are more diverse and complex. Existing research on cross-cultural box office performance has primarily focused on American films and employed quantitative methods, which are insufficient to fully explore the complexities of cultures and films around the world. This thesis aims to analyse the factors that affect the box office performance of British films in mainland China, with a particular focus on the influence of cultural discount. This concept refers to the diminished appeal of media products in other cultural contexts. The mixed-methods case study design is used in this project to investigate eight British films that were theatrically released in China between 2017 and 2022. This research timeframe provides insights into the performance tendency of British films before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. By using content analysis, textual analysis, and secondary data analysis, a total of 400 reviews from Chinese viewers on these eight British films are collected and analysed to explore the factors that influence their box office performance in China. This thesis argues that, in addition to the impact of cultural discount, the competitive Chinese film market and the viewing preferences of Chinese audiences have also affected the box office performance of British films in China. The cultural discount decreased the appeal of British films' culturally specific themes and content, as well as the attractiveness of their stars and franchises to Chinese viewers. The policy initiatives and competitions in the Chinese film market influenced the number of screenings and audience attention that British films could receive. The distinctive narratives, style, and genres of British films were also not well-suited to the viewing preferences of most Chinese consumers.

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List of Accompanying Materials

Dataset DOI <https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/PG/D280>

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: Ruixuan Wu

Title of thesis: Cross-Cultural Box Office Performance: The Reception of British Films in Mainland China Between 2017 and 2022

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. Parts of this work have been published as:
 - Wu R. (2024) Unpredictable Box Office Performance of Franchise Blockbusters: The Fading “Magical” Appeal of the “Fantastic Beasts” Series in Mainland China ISSN: 2186-5906 – The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2024: Official Conference Proceedings (pp. 139-154)
 - <https://doi.org/10.22492/issn.2186-5906.2024.12>

Signature: Date: 09/04/2026

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Huw Jones, Dr. Ruby Cheung, and Prof. Michael Williams, for their consistent support and guidance throughout my doctoral journey. Their expertise, patience, and encouragement have been invaluable in the development of my academic and research capabilities.

With the oversight of my main supervisor, advice on the use of language has been sought from a professional proofreader. No changes of intellectual content were made as a result of this advice.

Definitions and Abbreviations

BFI.....British Film Institute. It is a cultural charity, a National Lottery distributor, and the UK's lead organisation for film and the moving image. It is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport of the United Kingdom.

CCP Chinese Communist Party. The party that established the People's Republic of China and is the sole governing entity.

CFGC.....China Film Group Corporation. A film corporation that is owned by the state and is the largest in the People's Republic of China.

MOU.....Memorandum of Understanding. An agreement between two or more parties outlined in a formal document.

Pre-sold IP Pre-sold Intellectual Property. This terminology is used in this thesis as one of the factors that influence cross-cultural box office performance. It refers the works that have already achieved commercial success in the market and are used in the production of films, such as sequels, prequels, remakes, and adaptations of other forms of media.

WTO World Trade Organization. It is the only international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. The fundamental goal of the WTO is to use trade as a means to improve people's living standards, create better jobs and promote sustainable development.

The definitions of key film industry terminology used in this thesis are sourced from the British Film Institute (BFI), which can be found in the Glossary section of the BFI Statistical Yearbooks. The latest BFI Statistical Yearbook is available here: <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/39347/download>

Parallel to most research about the film industry, this thesis cites film budgets and box office revenue in US dollars (\$) to facilitate comparisons.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

At the 2011 Academy Awards, the British film *The King's Speech* (2010) received 12 nominations and won four awards: Best Motion Picture, Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role, Best Achievement in Directing and Best Writing Original Screenplay.¹ In addition to its critical acclaim within the film industry, it also achieved commercial success in the domestic and global markets. It was the second-highest-grossing film in the UK in 2011, with an estimated gross of £46 million (\$74 million).² With its release in 53 countries, the film generated nearly \$412 million in global revenues and ranked 13th in the 2010 worldwide box office ranking.³ This indicates the film's outstanding quality, as it is rare for a film to get acclaim from both critics and audiences. However, when it was released in mainland China on February 24, 2012, *The King's Speech* only attracted roughly 190,000 cinema attendance and garnered approximately ¥6.5 million (about \$1 million) at the Chinese box office.⁴ The reasons for the failure of this high-quality film at the Chinese box office are worth considering.

Investigation of films' box office performance is important in global film industries. While the theatrical release window is not the sole revenue source for films, it remains a crucial part of a film's life cycle. Given that a film's box office earnings are quantifiable, they could serve as an indicator of audience demand and ascertain its likely economic

¹ IMDb, 'The King's Speech (2010)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1504320/?ref=fn_all_ttl_1, [accessed 22 Jan 2025]

² BFI, 'BFI Statistical Yearbook 2012', (2012), p.21, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/922/download>, [accessed 12 Apr 2025]; Box Office Mojo, 'British Box Office For 2011', https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2011/?area=GB&ref=bo_yl_table_15, [accessed 22 Jan 2025]

³ Box Office Mojo, 'The King's Speech (2010)', https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt1504320/?ref=bo_tt_tab#tabs, [accessed 22 Jan 2025]; Box Office Mojo, '2010 Worldwide Box Office', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/world/2010/>, [accessed 22 Jan 2025]

⁴ Maoyan Pro, 'The King's Speech (2010)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/moview/95/boxshowna?barTheme=594828>, [accessed 22 Jan 2025]; Dengta Pro, 'The King's Speech (2010)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=1115&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 22 Jan 2025]

Chapter 1

value in secondary markets, such as television and video streaming services.⁵ Nevertheless, films are uncertain products.⁶ The demand and preferences of audiences are constantly and rapidly changing, making the box office revenue unpredictable.⁷ In overseas markets, the appeal of a film may be diminished for a number of reasons, one of which is the possible 'cultural discount'. This concept indicates that foreign viewers may lack the necessary background knowledge to fully understand and appreciate the films.⁸ The film industry is, as Hollywood screenwriter William Goldman famously stated, 'nobody knows anything'.⁹ Therefore, understanding the factors that influence films' box office performance in different countries and territories is essential.

This project aims to examine the factors that influence the box office performance of British films in mainland China. I seek to answer the following questions: How did British films perform at the Chinese box office? How did Chinese viewers respond to British films? How did the cultural elements that were portrayed in British films affect their box office performance in China? Upon analysing the Chinese box office data and Chinese viewers' reviews of British films, I argue that the box office performance of British films in mainland China was influenced by the competitive environment of the

⁵ C. Samuel Craig, William H. Greene, and Susan P. Douglas, 'Culture Matters: Consumer Acceptance of U.S. Films in Foreign Markets', *Journal of International Marketing*, 13:4(2005), 80-103(83); Andrew Ainslie, Xavier Drèze, and Fred Zufryden, 'Modeling Movie Life Cycles and Market Share', *Marketing Science*, 24:3(2005), 508-517(508); Paul McDonald, 'What's On? Film Programming, Structured Choice and The Production of Cinema Culture in Contemporary Britain', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 7:2(2010), 264-298(264); David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 11th edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2017), p.42; Barrie Gunter, *Predicting Movie Success at the Box Office*, (Gewerbstrasse: Springer International Publishing, 2018), p.3

⁶ Wayne E. Baker, and Robert R. Faulkner, 'Role as Resource in the Hollywood Film Industry', *American Journal of Sociology*, 97:2(1991), 279-309(286); Arthur S. De Vany, and W. David Walls, 'Uncertainty in the Movie Industry: Does Star Power Reduce the Terror of the Box Office?', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 23(1999), 285-318(285); Roy Stafford, *Understanding Audiences and the Film Industry*, (London: British Film Institute, 2007), p.7; Norbert Morawetz, Jane Hardy, Colin Haslam, and Keith Randle, 'Finance, Policy and Industrial Dynamics—The Rise of Co-productions in the Film Industry', *Industry & Innovation*, 14:4(2007), 421-443(426); Jordi McKenzie, 'Predicting Box Office With and Without Markets: Do Internet Users Know Anything?', *Information Economics and Policy*, 25(2013), 70-80(71)

⁷ Richard De Zoysa, and Otto Newman, 'Globalization, Soft Power and the Challenge of Hollywood', *Contemporary Politics*, 8:3(2002), 185-202(200); Mark Lorenzen, 'Internationalization vs. Globalization of the Film Industry', *Industry & Innovation*, 14:4(2007), 349-357(351); Nobuko Kawashima, 'Are the Global Media and Entertainment Conglomerates Having an Impact on Cultural Diversity? A Critical Assessment of the Argument in the Case of the Film Industry', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 17:5(2011), 475-489(480)

⁸ Colin Hoskins, and Rolf Mirus, 'Reasons for the US Dominance of the International Trade in Television Programmes', *Media, Culture and Society*, 10(1988), 499-515(500)

⁹ McKenzie (2013), p.71; Morawetz, et al. (2007), p.426; Peter Debruge, 'With One Line, William Goldman Taught Hollywood Everything It Needed to Know', *Variety*, 16 November, 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/film/opinion/william-goldman-dies-appreciation-1203030781/>, [accessed 22 Apr 2022]

Chinese film market, the viewing preferences of the Chinese audience, and the phenomenon of cultural discount. The cultural discount not only diminished the appeal of culturally specific content and themes in British films but also weakened the allure of their franchises and stars to Chinese consumers. The film viewing preferences and tastes of many Chinese viewers were not particularly aligned with the distinct stories, styles and genres of certain British films. The policy initiatives and the competitions within the Chinese film market also decreased the number of screenings allocated for these British films and the audience attention they could attract. Hence, audience preference, cultural discount, and market environment present obstacles for British films to achieve significant success at the Chinese box office.

My research contributes to the current body of research on box office performance. First, I employ the mixed-methods case study design to investigate the factors influencing the box office performance of specific films. Since the 1980s, scholars, such as Litman, Prag and Casavant, as well as Chang and Ki, have employed statistical analysis to identify the factors that influence the box office of American films in their domestic market.¹⁰ In the light of the increase in international media flows, more recent research has focused on cross-cultural box office performance, which is the box office performance of a film in a country with a different cultural background from that of the film. Examples include Lee's research on American films' performance in Hong Kong, Fetscherin's research on Bollywood films' performance in the US and UK, and Jones' research on European films' performance in the UK.¹¹ The literature on box office performance has primarily employed quantitative methods from the Media Economics field, which seeks to establish a model for risk reduction grounded in a large

¹⁰ Barry R. Litman, 'Predicting Success of Theatrical Movies: An Empirical Study', *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 16:4(1983), 159-175; Barry R. Litman, and Linda S. Kohl, 'Predicting Financial Success of Motion Pictures: The '80s Experience', *Journal of Media Economics*, 2:2(1989), 35-50; Jay Prag, and Jame Casavant, 'An Empirical Study of the Determinants of Revenues and Marketing Expenditures in the Motion Picture Industry', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 18:3(1994), 217-235; Byeng-Hee Chang, and Eyun-Jung Ki, 'Devising a Practical Model for Predicting Theatrical Movie Success: Focusing on the Experience Good Property', *Journal of Media Economics*, 18:4(2005), 247-269

¹¹ Francis L. F. Lee, 'Cultural Discount and Cross-Culture Predictability: Examining the Box Office Performance of American Movies in Hong Kong', *Journal of Media Economics*, 19:4(2006a), 259-278; Francis L. F. Lee, 'Audience Taste Divergence Over Time: An Analysis of U.S. Movies' Box Office in Hong Kong, 1984-2004', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 83:4(2006b), 883-900; Marc Fetscherin, 'The Main Determinants of Bollywood Movie Box Office Sales', *Journal of Global Marketing*, 23:5(2010), 461-476; Huw David Jones, 'The Box Office Performance of European Films in The UK Market', *Studies in European Cinema*, 14:2(2017), 153-171

number of samples. However, every film is a unique product. The quantitative approach in previous research does not always consider the complexity of film, culture and audience reception. The lack of qualitative evidence is a significant research gap in the current studies on cross-cultural box office performance. Thus, the mixed-methods case study design is advantageous for addressing the current literature gap and offering new insights into this topic.

Second, this project focuses on the box office performance of British films in mainland China. The field of international media flows has been primarily driven by the concept of cultural and media imperialism as well as concerns about cultural homogeneity.¹² Previous studies have predominantly focused on the performance of Hollywood films, such as the research conducted by Craig et al., Chon et al., and Fu and Govindaraju.¹³ Although British films are also English-language films, their performance in the international market has not been adequately examined in the existing research. Previous studies concerning the global reception of British films have focused predominantly on the American market, such as the works of Street, Landy and Diffrient.¹⁴ Some studies also examine the reception of British films on European markets. For instance, Tirtaine and Augros's research explores the reception of British comedies in France, and Jones and Higson's research analyses the reception of Bond films in Europe.¹⁵ Yet, the performance of British films in non-Western countries has been insufficiently addressed in the existing research. It is imperative to investigate

¹² Stuart Cunningham, and Elizabeth Jacka, 'Neighbourly Relations? Cross-Cultural Reception Analysis and Australian Soaps in Britain', *Cultural Studies*, 8:3(1994), 509-526(510)

¹³ Craig, et al. (2005); Bum Soo Chon, George Barnett, and Young Choi, 'Clustering Local Tastes in Global Culture: The Reception Structure of Hollywood Films', *Sociological Research Online*, 8:1(2003), 1-12; W. Wayne Fu, and Achikannoo Govindaraju, 'Explaining Global Box-Office Tastes in Hollywood Films: Homogenization of National Audiences' Movie Selections', *Communication Research*, 37:2(2010), 215-238

¹⁴ Sarah Street, 'Stepping Westward: The Distribution of British Feature Films in America, and the Case of the Private Life of Henry VIII', in Justine Ashby, and Andrew Higson, (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.51-62; Sarah Street, 'The 1970s to 2000: British Films and the "New" Hollywood', *Transatlantic Crossings: British Feature Films in the United States*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002), pp.193-217; Marcia Landy, 'The Other Side of Paradise: British Cinema from an American Perspective', in Justine Ashby, and Andrew Higson, (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.63-79; David Scott Diffrient, '"Half the World Away": Cultural Distance and Intertextual Incompetence in the American Reception of British TV Comedy', *Journal of Popular Television*, 8:1(2020), 45-69

¹⁵ Cecilia Tirtaine, and Joël Augros, 'Carry on Laughing: Selling English Humour in France', in Nolwenn Mingant, Cecilia Tirtaine, and Joël Augros, (eds.), *Film Marketing into the Twenty-First Century*, (London: British Film Institute, 2015), pp.65-75; Huw D. Jones, and Andrew Higson, 'Bond Rebooted: The Transnational Appeal of the Daniel Craig Bond Films', in Jaap Verheul, (ed.), *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Spectres of 007*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), pp.103-124

the effects of the identified factors of the English-language films' box office earnings in previous studies that were conducted within Western countries in the context of non-Western countries, such as that of the People's Republic of China (PRC or China in short). The country boasts one of the largest and fastest-growing film markets globally. Nonetheless, existing studies on the reception of foreign films in China have also predominantly focused on Hollywood films, such as the works of Gao et al., Su, and Zhang.¹⁶ The reception of British films in China represents a gap in the current research. In addition, the British Film Institute (BFI) enacted the International Strategy from 2013 to 2017, with the aim of facilitating the maximum economic growth and cultural reach of British films in the world. China was listed as one of the Tier One territories due to its greatest growth potential.¹⁷ Although this report did not delineate specific strategies for improving the influence of British films in China or provide its subsequent achievements, it could still indicate that China is a significant export market for British films and suggest the need for additional in-depth research. Therefore, the investigation of the box office performance of British films in mainland China also addresses the existing gap in the literature and provides further understanding about international media flows.

In this thesis, the term 'Chinese audiences' specifically refers to audiences in mainland China, excluding those in Taiwan, Hong Kong and other overseas Chinese communities, as all the conditions and policies addressed in this thesis apply exclusively to mainland China. Throughout this thesis, I use the terms 'audience', 'consumers' and 'viewers' interchangeably without making nuanced distinctions in their implications. The term 'British films' refers to the definition used by the BFI, which includes films that receive British certification via the British cultural test, the UK's Official Bi-Lateral Co-

¹⁶ Weihe Gao, Li Ji, Yong Liu, and Qi Sun, 'Branding Cultural Products in International Markets: A Study of Hollywood Movies in China', *Journal of Marketing*, 84:3(2020), 86-105; Wendy Su, 'From Visual Pleasure to Global Imagination: Chinese Youth's Reception of Hollywood Films', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 31:6(2021), 520-535; Xiwen Zhang, 'Why Most Chinese Fans of American Superhero Movies Are Girls: A Gendered Local Fandom of a Global Hollywood Icon', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 15:2(2022), 148-164

¹⁷ BFI, 'The Wide Angle: The BFI's International Strategy', (2013)
<https://www.screendaily.com/download?ac=1181343>, [accessed 13 Apr 2025]

Production Treaties, and the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production.¹⁸

This chapter will be divided into five sections. Following this Background section, the Literature Review section comprises three sub-divisions: theoretical framework, research subjects, and existing studies on film's box office performances. Subsequently, the Research Aim and Questions section will be introduced. It will be followed by the Methodology section, which will explain the research methods and the collected data. The final section will be the Thesis Overview.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Theoretical Framework: Local Reception and Cultural Discount in International Media Flows

When analysing films' cross-cultural box office performance, it is essential to consider the influence of audience reception and the cultural discount that films may encounter in the target market. As pointed out by Fu, the flow of international media content 'does not occur in a vacuum but in economic, cultural, linguistic, and political contexts.'¹⁹ Understanding the international media flows necessitates comprehending the reception theory, which originated in British Cultural Studies in the late 1970s. Reception theory presents a critique of cultural imperialism by asserting that audiences have the ability to actively engage in the reaction and interpretation of foreign media content.²⁰ One of the most fundamental concepts in reception theory is the encoding and decoding model, which was proposed by Stuart Hall. Hall argues that

¹⁸ BFI, 'BFI Statistical Yearbook 2018', (2018), p.232, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/903/download>, [accessed 08 Sep 2024]; BFI, 'BFI Statistical Yearbook 2019', (2019), p.248, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/888/download>, [accessed 08 Sep 2024]; BFI, 'BFI Statistical Yearbook 2020', (2020), p.236, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/12815/download>, [accessed 08 Sep 2024]; BFI, 'BFI Statistical Yearbook 2021', (2021), p.226, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/24979/download>, [accessed 08 Sep 2024]; BFI, 'BFI Statistical Yearbook 2022', (2022a), p.227, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/33469/download>, [accessed 08 Sep 2024]; BFI, 'BFI Statistical Yearbook 2023', (2023a), p.210, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/39347/download>, [accessed 13 Apr 2025]

¹⁹ W. Wayne Fu, 'Concentration and Homogenization of International Movie Sources: Examining Foreign Film Import Profiles', *Journal of Communication*, 56:4(2006), 813-835(816)

²⁰ Diana Crane, 'Culture and Globalization: Theoretical Models and Emerging Trends', *Global Culture: Media, Arts, Policy, And Globalization*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp.1-25(p.4)

although media content might be encoded with specific meaning, people from various backgrounds (such as nationalities, ages and social classes) could decode the same content differently, depending on their own knowledge frameworks.²¹ A well-known early study that is often cited in research on cross-cultural reception is that of communication scholars Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, titled *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*. Through focus group interviews with Americans, Israelis and Japanese about *Dallas* (a popular American television series), their findings indicate that foreign audiences are unlikely to passively embrace the values and beliefs encoded in American media products. On the contrary, audiences tend to rely on the knowledge and experiences embedded in their cultural backgrounds to engage with the narrative in foreign media products, which supports the claims of reception theory.²² Consequently, media products that travel across cultures would be received in 'locally specific ways'.²³

However, cultural boundaries can serve as barriers, hindering the flow of thoughts, information and products across cultures.²⁴ Differences in audiences' respective backgrounds inevitably lead to distinct patterns of demand and consumption for foreign materials. The influence of culture on the international media flows has also piqued the interest of media economists, but their main emphasis is on economic values rather than cultural meaning.²⁵ In 1988, media economists Colin Hoskins and Rolf Mirus coined the term 'cultural discount'. This theory describes the phenomenon in which the value of a media product, which is rooted in a particular cultural context, 'will have a diminished appeal elsewhere as viewers find it difficult to identify with the style, values, beliefs, institutions and behavioural patterns of the material in question'.²⁶ To put it simply, the appeal of media products will be decreased in overseas markets because foreign consumers lack the necessary background

²¹ Stuart Hall, 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse [originally 1973; republished 2007]', in David Morley, (ed.), *Essential Essays, Volume 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, (New York: Duke University Press, 2018), pp.257-276

²² Tamar Liebes, and Elihu Katz, *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)

²³ Lee (2006a), p.259

²⁴ Craig, et al. (2005), p.80

²⁵ Lee (2006a), p.261

²⁶ Hoskins & Mirus (1988), p.500

knowledge, language competence or other forms of cultural capital to fully understand and appreciate it.²⁷ The receptiveness of the members of a culture to the objects and ideas that originate from other cultures becomes a central issue in an increasingly global economy. The cultural factors should be considered when media products seek success in overseas markets.²⁸ Therefore, media products encounter difficulties in achieving success in international markets, as each market has distinct preferences rooted in its cultural context.

1.2.2 Research Subjects: British Films and the Chinese Market

To understand the box office performance of British films in China, it is fundamental to comprehend the obstacles encountered by foreign films in the Chinese market and the difficulties faced by British films in overseas markets from the whole picture.

1.2.2.1 Foreign Films in the Chinese Market

As a result of its substantial population and rapid economic growth, China has emerged as one of the largest markets for film consumption in the world. Yet, despite this optimistic economic backdrop for the film industry in China, institutional challenges persist.²⁹ According to film scholar Darrell William Davis, marketisation in China is a market economy with Chinese characteristics, wherein state control differentiates it from neoliberal market economies in the West.³⁰ The Chinese film industry is characterised by the persistent continuation of economic protectionism and ideological safeguards.³¹ Rather than bending towards capitalism, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) preserves its central authority by enacting protectionist policies that maximise domestic profits and force foreign players to comply with the

²⁷ Francis L. F. Lee, 'Hollywood Movies in East Asia: Examining Cultural Discount and Performance Predictability at the Box Office', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 18:2(2008), 117-136(119)

²⁸ Craig, et al. (2005), p.80

²⁹ Caroline Elliott, Palitha Konara, Haiyi Ling, Chengang Wang, and Yingqi Wei, 'Behind Film Performance in China's Changing Institutional Context: The Impact of Signals', *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 35:1(2018), 63-95(64)

³⁰ Darrell William Davis, 'Marketization, Hollywood, Global China', *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 26:1(2014), 191-241(193)

³¹ Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, and Darrell William Davis, 'Re-Nationalizing China's Film Industry: Case Study on the China Film Group and Film Marketization', *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 2:1(2008), 37-51(38)

complex regulatory system in China.³² Several film policy initiatives exist that safeguard the sustainable growth of the Chinese film industry while also restraining the excessive prosperity of foreign films. Given the opportunities and challenges in this lucrative market, it is important to comprehend the factors that influence films' performance within the distinctive institutional environment of China.

The import quota is one of the most prominent trade restrictions in China. In 1994, the Chinese government enacted a revenue-sharing scheme on importing ten foreign films every year to revitalise the film industry.³³ In 2001, China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and agreed to expand the annual quota for revenue-sharing imports to 20 films.³⁴ In 2012, China signed the WTO dispute Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the US and agreed to add 14 more IMAX or 3D films for a total of 34 revenue-sharing import quotas. The gross box office receipts share has also increased from 13% to 25%.³⁵ In addition to the revenue-sharing imports, China also purchases foreign films for a flat-fee. Under this scheme, Chinese distribution companies negotiate a singular set charge with foreign companies for the rights to release films in China in return for keeping all the revenue generated at the Chinese box office. Approximately 30 to 40 films per year are imported on a flat-fee basis, but the exact number is unclear.³⁶ In terms of the market performance, revenue-sharing films significantly outperform flat-fee films.³⁷ Generally, most films under the revenue-sharing scheme are blockbusters, which tend to be widely distributed and yield higher box office returns to the Chinese importers and copyright holders of the films. Conversely, films purchased under the flat-fee scheme might be distributed less

³² Jeremy Geltzer, 'Censoring the Silk Screen: China's Precarious Balance Between State Regulation and a Global Film Market', *Journal of International Media & Entertainment Law*, 6:2(2017), 123-168(124)

³³ Sean O'Connor, and Nicholas Armstrong, 'Directed by Hollywood, Edited by China: How China's Censorship and Influence Affect Films Worldwide', *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, (2015), p.21; Wendy Su, *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry, 1994-2013*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2016), p.15

³⁴ Yeh & Davis (2008), p.42; Su (2016), p.29; Shiyong Liu, 'The China Film Co., Ltd. and the Stock Market: Financialization with Chinese Characteristics', in Paul Bevan, Anne Witchard, and Da Zheng, (eds.), *Chinese Cinema: Identity, Power, and Globalization*, (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2023a), pp.185-203(p.189)

³⁵ Su (2016), p.42; Elliott, et al. (2018), p.69; Liu (2023a), p.193; Ruby Cheung, *New Hong Kong Cinema: Transitions to Becoming Chinese in 21st-Century East Asia*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), p.179

³⁶ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.69; Jimmyn Parc, Patrick Messerlin, and Kyuchan Kim, 'The Impact of Protectionism on Cultural Industries: The Effect of China's Film Policies on Imported Films', *Journal of Media Economics*, 34:2(2022), 117-133(123)

³⁷ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.69

frequently and are not anticipated to yield substantial box office income. Thus, it is difficult for foreign films to secure import opportunities in China because of the restricted annual quotas.

Moreover, foreign films must undergo stringent censorship by the Chinese authorities to be allowed for screening. The China Film Bureau, which was established in 2018, is the current film regulatory body in China. It is directly overseen by the Communist Party's Ministry of Propaganda. According to media scholar Ying Zhu, the reorganisation could be perceived as an official reminder and reinforcement of film's function as a party organ.³⁸ Failure to successfully navigate China's censorship process may be due to the film's content not aligning with the Party's ideology, Confucian morality and social harmony.³⁹ However, Chinese film censorship is usually opaque, characterised by ambiguous details and immature procedural operations.⁴⁰ The non-transparent censorship procedure gives the authority the greatest degree of flexibility and efficiency.⁴¹ Foreign filmmakers usually need to navigate vague feedback to modify their film content.⁴² The lack of a classification system in China likewise requires all released films to be appropriate for audiences of all ages. Nevertheless, in practice, the standard of appropriateness is also not uniform for every film.⁴³ Because of the strict censorship, modifying or deleting an inappropriate scene from a film may occasionally be required. As noted by Zhou, any improper representation might 'hit a raw nerve with the government' and result in the delay of release.⁴⁴ Consequently, the rigorous and ambiguous censorship in China also presents obstacles for the release of foreign films.

³⁸ Ying Zhu, *Hollywood in China: Behind the Scenes of the World's Largest Movie Market*, (New York: The New Press, 2022), p.255, 256

³⁹ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.64; Parc, et al. (2022), p.123

⁴⁰ O'Connor & Armstrong (2015), p.9; Geltzer (2017), p.124, 158; Yanqiu Guan, 'Impact of the Film Industry Promotion Law on the Significant Growth of the Chinese Film Industry', in Qiao Li, Yanqiu Guan, and Hong Lu, (eds.), *Development of the Global Film Industry: Industrial Competition and Cooperation in the Context of Globalization*, (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2021), pp.204-213(p.210)

⁴¹ Jessica Grimm, 'The Import of Hollywood Films in China: Censorship and Quotas', *Syracuse J. Int'l L. & Com*, 43(2015), 155-188(163)

⁴² O'Connor & Armstrong (2015), p.9

⁴³ O'Connor & Armstrong (2015), p.9; Geltzer (2017), p.158

⁴⁴ Yuxing Zhou, 'Pursuing Soft Power Through Cinema: Censorship and Double Standards in Mainland China', *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 9:3(2015), 239-252(246)

The distribution and exhibition of foreign films is likewise subject to strict regulation in China. In mainland China, foreign studios are not permitted to distribute their films directly. The exclusive rights to distribute foreign films in mainland China are held by the state-owned China Film Group Corporation (CFGC) and Huaxia Film Distribution, of which CFGC controls a 20% share.⁴⁵ In addition, it is the Chinese authority rather than foreign film companies that determines the release date of films in China. According to Zhou, the release date of foreign films may be postponed until the end of the golden holiday season (which includes Chinese New Year, summer holiday and National Day) in order to protect the revenue of domestic films.⁴⁶ Moreover, foreign films may be prohibited during blackout periods, such as Domestic Film Protection Month (July and August), which can last from a few weeks to several months, in order to prioritise the revenues of domestic films. Yet, the Chinese government has never officially acknowledged the existence of such a programme.⁴⁷ As stated by Brzeski from *The Hollywood Reporter*, 'modeling box office potential in China during the greenlighting process has always been a matter of guesswork for the studios.'⁴⁸ Despite the fact that the Chinese film market is large and lucrative, foreign films suffer from entry restrictions, and even those that make it into the market experience challenges in achieving success. Thus, it is imperative to consider the influence of these contextual factors on the box office performance of foreign films when discussing China as a target market in international media flows.

1.2.2.2 British Films in the International Market

It is essential to acknowledge the constantly evolving concept of British cinema and the challenges in defining it, stemming from complexities arising from both domestic and global contexts. First, the diversity of cultures and identities within the country complicates the definition of the British national cinema. In 1989, film scholar Andrew

⁴⁵ Yeh & Davis (2008), p.42; Su (2016), p.81; Cheung (2016), p.179; Parc, et al. (2022), p.123; Matthew D. Johnson, 'Propaganda and Censorship in Chinese Cinema', in Yingjin Zhang, (ed.), *A Companion to Chinese Cinema*, (Malden, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp.153-178(p.173)

⁴⁶ Zhou (2015), p.245

⁴⁷ Parc, et al. (2022), p.125; Zhu (2022), p.191

⁴⁸ Patrick Brzeski, 'Does Hollywood Need to Rethink Its China Strategy', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 31 March, 2022, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/china-box-office-1235121616/>, [accessed 02 Jan 2023]

Chapter 1

Higson published an article titled 'The Concept of National Cinema', in which he defined British national cinema as films that produce nationally specific materials to proclaim a unique identity, sustain indigenous coherence and resist cultural invasion. He argued that 'the construction of an imaginary homogeneity of identity and culture' in national cinema produces Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined community'.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the long-held notion of a homogeneous national identity is now being replaced by a notion of cultural diversity and a recognition of the numerous ethnic identities that have developed in the regions that comprise the UK.⁵⁰ On the one hand, the conventional concept of British national cinema was challenged by film productions developed in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland.⁵¹ In addition to being a part of British national cinema, Welsh, Northern Irish, Scottish, and English cinema could be regarded as national cinemas of their own.⁵² For example, Higson's book titled *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking Since the 1990s* discusses various films that depict England, English characters, and English history. The books edited by Jonathan Murray, such as *Scottish Cinema Now* and *The New Scottish Cinema*, investigate the development of Scottish cinema in recent decades and address its distinctive characteristics, which may diverge from those traditionally associated with British cinema.⁵³ On the other hand, British cinema was also enriched and broadened by the development of films representing a variety of ethnic and cultural communities within Britain. For instance, Sarita Malik's work explores the rise of British-Asian films (produced by filmmakers who can trace their ancestry to the Indian subcontinent or those dealing specifically with the British-Asian experience) and Black British films (produced by filmmakers of Black African or African Caribbean heritage or films focusing on the lives of Black British people) in the 1980s and 1990s. She contends that these innovative areas of British filmmaking not only re-examined the concept of British national cinema but also raised significant issues of ethnicity, identity, and the

⁴⁹ Andrew Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen*, 30:4(1989), 36-47(37, 44)

⁵⁰ Andrew Higson, *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking Since the 1990s*, (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), p.46

⁵¹ Higson (2011); Hill (2006), p.12; Street (2009), p.2

⁵² Street (2009), p.2

⁵³ Jonathan Murray, Fidelma Farley, and Rod Stoneman, *Scottish Cinema Now*, (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009); Jonathan Murray, *The New Scottish Cinema*, (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015)

cultural politics of difference.⁵⁴ Accordingly, owing to the diversity and hybridity of British cinema, Higson acknowledged the limitations of the concept of British national cinema and stated: 'There is no core identity to British cinema – it is far too diverse, far too rich to be reduced to a fixed essence'.⁵⁵ In 2000, Higson published 'The Instability of the National' and proposed a developed concept of 'British post-national cinema' to 'better describes films that embrace multiculturalism, difference and hybridity'.⁵⁶ Film scholars Sarah Street and William Brown also agree that British cinema is in the 'post-national' era.⁵⁷ Films that depict a diverse range of nationalities, cultures, and identities within Britain collectively comprise the British post-national cinema.

The development of globalisation has resulted in a heightened participation of foreign investment and personnel, which also complicates the definition of British cinema. BFI identifies British films as those that receive British certifications through the British cultural test, the UK's Official Bi-Lateral Co-Production Treaties and the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production; or a film that has not applied for certification yet is obviously British based on its content, producers, financing, and talent.⁵⁸ To be specific, the cultural test consists of four sections: cultural content (18 points, include: film set; lead characters; subject matter; indigenous language), cultural contribution (4 points, include: creativity; heritage and/or diversity), cultural hubs (5 points, include: principal photography; audio-visual effects; post-production) and cultural practitioners (8 points, include: director; scriptwriter; producer; composer; lead actors; majority of the cast/crew). To pass, a project must receive 18 out of 35 points.⁵⁹ Alternatively, films can receive British certifications by conforming to one of

⁵⁴ Sarita Malik, "'Beyond the Cinema of Duty'? The Pleasures of Hybridity: Black British Film of the 1980s and 1990s", in Andrew Higson, (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, (London, New York: Cassell, 1996), pp.202-215(p.202, 203, 214)

⁵⁵ Andrew Higson, *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema, Rethinking British Cinema*, (London, New York: Cassell, 1996), p.2

⁵⁶ Andrew Higson, 'The Instability of the National', in Justine Ashby, and Andrew Higson, (eds.), *British Cinema, Past and Present*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.35-47(p.35, 38)

⁵⁷ Sarah Street, *British National Cinema*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), p.2; William Brown, 'Not Flagwaving but Flagdrowning, or Postcards from Post-Britain', in Robert Murphy, (ed.), *The British Cinema Book*, (London: BFI Publishing, 2009), pp.600-612(p.600)

⁵⁸ BFI (2018), p.232; BFI (2019), p.248; BFI (2020), p.236; BFI (2021), p.226; BFI (2022a), p.227; BFI (2023a), p.210

⁵⁹ BFI, 'The Cultural Test', <https://www.bfi.org.uk/apply-british-certification-tax-relief/cultural-test-film>, [accessed 08 Apr 2022]

the co-production agreements, which the UK currently has with 12 countries; or the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production, which requires a film to have at least three co-producers from three different Parties to the Convention.⁶⁰ Yet, the primary incentive for obtaining certificates for these three programmes is the eligibility for tax relief.⁶¹ These films, according to Higson, could be classified as 'industrially British films', as they are produced in the UK and utilise British production resources, locations and personnel, but do not necessarily deal with distinctly British subject matters.⁶² To better understand the influence of culture on cross-cultural box office performance, my research exclusively concentrates on what Higson refers to as 'culturally British films', which are largely set in the UK or which focus on British lead characters.⁶³ As Kim argues, the term 'culturally-British film' emphasises the nationality/locality of British cinema as a cultural product designed to reach a broader and more diverse international audience.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, the cultural discount that British films may encounter in overseas markets may differ due to the various cultural representations that they portray. For example, in his book about *Culturally English Filmmaking*, Higson argues that the involvement of foreign investment can influence their locus of creative control and mode of representation. Domestic UK productions that necessitate fewer foreign investments are usually capable of maintaining creative control within the UK. These films, such as *This Is England* (2006), are more likely to enable innovative representations of a broader spectrum of social types, but they enjoy restricted availability in the worldwide market. In contrast, British films targeted at international markets generally require financial investment from other countries. British films that are dependent on substantial foreign funds (such as the *Harry Potter* franchise) may compromise their creative control and often represent more conventional

⁶⁰ BFI, 'Co-production', <https://www.bfi.org.uk/apply-british-certification-tax-relief/co-production>, [accessed 08 Apr 2022]; Council of Europe, 'Details of Treaty No.147', <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=147>, [accessed 08 Apr 2022]

⁶¹ Higson (2011), p.57; Street (2009), p.27

⁶² Higson (2011), p.6, 43

⁶³ Higson (2011), p.6

⁶⁴ Jeongmee Kim, 'The Funding and Distribution Structure of the British Film Industry in the 1990s: Localization and Commercialization of British Cinema Towards a Global Audience', *Media, Culture & Society*, 25:3(2003), 405-413(406)

perspectives on British identity.⁶⁵ Higson maintains that, to attain success in the global market, culturally English filmmaking often 'rely on the most familiar, established traditions and identities'.⁶⁶ Russell articulates a comparable perspective, suggesting that although British films, such as the *Harry Potter* series and *James Bond* series, are generally rooted in a relatively conservative version of British culture, international viewers may regard them 'as quintessentially British', much as action films and Westerns appear quintessentially American to European audiences. Britishness 'of a slightly unreal, regressive stripe' may be a commercially viable and valuable characteristic to derive British films' marketability on the international stage.⁶⁷ However, none of these scholars offers a more precise understanding of the concept of Britishness. It is undeniable that defining Britishness is a challenging task, as its meanings are contentious and have evolved over time.⁶⁸ According to Prabhat, a scholar of law, Britishness is unlikely to become a concrete set of values that gains widespread acceptance across the UK.⁶⁹ The purpose of this research is not to conduct an in-depth investigation of the diverse cultural and ethnic identities in Britain or to define Britishness. Building upon the aforementioned arguments of Higson and Russell, the notion of 'Britishness' in this research is used as a commercial national brand image for British films in the global marketplace, rather than an exhaustive exposition of the intricate contemporary British identities.⁷⁰ In other words, the term 'Britishness' used in this research does not refer to the complicated British identities as understood within Britain. Rather, it primarily refers to the perceptions and stereotypes held by most international audiences concerning Britain and British culture. Nevertheless, the representations of 'Britishness' still vary across British films and elicit differing responses from foreign viewers. As media scholar Shani Orgad asserts in her book *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*, media representations play a crucial role in providing the primary cultural resources that nourish the global

⁶⁵ Higson (2011), p.27, 28, 29

⁶⁶ Higson (2011), p.247

⁶⁷ James Russell, 'Hollywood Blockbusters and UK Production Today' in I. Q. Hunter, Laraine Porter, and Justin T. Smith, (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to British Cinema History*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2017), pp.377-386(p.384)

⁶⁸ Rosemary Sales, 'What Is "Britishness", and Is It Important?', in Gideon Calder, Phillip Cole, and Jonathan Seglow, (eds.), *Citizenship Acquisition and National Belonging: Migration, Membership and the Liberal Democratic State*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), pp.123-140(p.124)

⁶⁹ Devyani Prabhat, *Britishness, Belonging and Citizenship*, (Bristol: Policy Press, 2018), p.15

⁷⁰ Higson (2011), p.47, 218; Russell (2017), p.384

imagination.⁷¹ Therefore, to understand the cultural discount encountered by British films in overseas markets, it is essential to examine how foreign viewers perceive the textual factors, particularly the diverse cultural representations depicted in these films.

1.2.2.3 Chinese Perceptions of Foreign Culture

Beyond the media representations themselves, the viewers' viewing experiences, which are shaped by their indigenous cultural and social framework, also have an impact on the interpretation of foreign media products. According to Orgad, global imagination is a complex process shaped by audiences' active interaction and contestation with various media representations.⁷² Nonetheless, the aim of this research is not to conduct a thorough investigation of the diverse identities of China, as China is a multiethnic and multicultural country. To generally comprehend the cultural discount that British films may encounter in the Chinese market, this research analyses it through the lens of Sinocentrism. According to cultural critic Rey Chow, who specialises in Chinese cinema, Sinocentrism 'draws an imaginary boundary between China and the rest of the world'.⁷³ In 2009, Martin Jacques, a British journalist and academic who is an expert in economics and interested in East Asia, published *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*. In this book, he considers Sinocentrism as the 'Middle Kingdom Mentality'. Jacques elucidates Middle Kingdom Mentality as the view that China was the centre of the world, the 'belief in their own universalism, the relevance and applicability of their culture to all peoples and societies, and its inherent superiority in relation to others'.⁷⁴ He claims that this sense of cultural self-confidence and superiority is deeply rooted in the lengthy and rich history of China as a civilisation-state.⁷⁵ Song and Sigley point out that this can be detected not just in the Chinese name of the country, *zhongguo* 中国 (which means the Middle Kingdom), but also in the age-old Chinese

⁷¹ Shani Orgad, *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), p.30

⁷² Orgad (2012), p.23

⁷³ Rey Chow, 'Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem', *boundary 2*, 25:3(1998), 1-24(6)

⁷⁴ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), p.274, 283

⁷⁵ Jacques (2009), p.313

habit of calling non-Chinese people 'barbarians', 'foreign devils' or 'ghosts'.⁷⁶ In a separate paper, Jacques asserts that Chinese people often perceive Western culture with a mixture of respect and envy, superiority and inferiority, as they recognise the West's historical accomplishments while simultaneously resenting its hegemony and disparaging certain elements of Western culture, convinced that the intrinsic virtues of Chinese civilisation will ultimately prevail.⁷⁷ Hence, the Middle Kingdom Mentality could serve as a valuable framework for analysing how Chinese individuals perceive British culture in British films, which may reveal the cultural differences between the two countries and indicate the potential reasons for the cultural discount that British films encounter in China.

1.2.3 Previous Research: Box Office Performance and Its Influencing Factors

The film industry is characterised by uncertainty due to the variability of demand. Films, as Chang and Ki point out, are experience goods for which the consumption of experience is an end in and of itself. It is hard for consumers to evaluate the quality of a film until they have experienced it.⁷⁸ The expansion of understanding of the factors that affect films' box office performance and the interrelations among these factors is deemed essential in reducing failures within the film industry.⁷⁹ Previous research has been primarily conducted in the Media Economics field, where statistical analysis is mainly employed to analyse a substantial number of films as samples, such as the works of Litman, Prag and Casavant, as well as Chang and Ki.⁸⁰ In these studies, box office revenue is regarded as the dependent variable, while numerous factors that may impact it are regarded as independent variables. This method aims to develop a regression model to identify the correlation between these variables and box office revenue, thereby elucidating the relative significance of each independent variable in

⁷⁶ Xianlin Song, and Gary Sigley, 'Middle Kingdom Mentalities: Chinese Visions of National Characteristics in the 1990s', *Communal/Plural*, 8:1(2000), 47-64(48)

⁷⁷ Martin Jacques, 'The Middle Kingdom Mentality', *The Guardian*, 16 April, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/apr/16/china.usa>, [accessed 03 Oct 2024]

⁷⁸ Chang & Ki (2005), p.249

⁷⁹ Thorsten Hennig-Thurau, Mark B. Houston, and Gianfranco Walsh, 'Determinants of Motion Picture Box Office and Profitability: An Interrelationship Approach', *Review of Managerial Science*, 1:1(2007), 65-92(66)

⁸⁰ Litman (1983); Litman & Kohl (1989); Prag & Casavant (1994); Chang & Ki (2005)

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accounting for revenue disparities among various films.⁸¹ According to media scholar Francis L.F. Lee, these previous studies ‘conceptualize the box office as the output generated by a combination of inputs’ that is interested in ‘maximizing the predictive power of the empirical model’.⁸² Through understanding these factors, the film industry intends to regroup the factors that contributed to past successes in future films in order to mitigate risks and uncertainty as much as possible.⁸³

The most pioneering papers are those of Barry R. Litman and his colleagues, which established an early basis for the statistical analysis of factors influencing box office revenue.⁸⁴ Litman and Kohl propose genres, MPAA ratings, the presence of stars (actors and directors), production budget, the use of well-known ideas (adaptations, remakes, sequels or prequels), critics’ reviews, the type of distributors (major or independent), the release timing, number of screens, marketing intensity, and any awards or nominations as factors that potentially affect American films’ box office performance in their domestic market.⁸⁵ Subsequent studies further test the correlations between these variables and the box office revenue, such as Eliashberg and Shugan’s research about critics’ reviews, Albert’s research about stars, and Basuroy and Chatterjee’s research about sequels.⁸⁶ While Litman and Kohl did not conduct measurements, they acknowledged the significance of word-of-mouth advertising in influencing films’ box office income.⁸⁷ With the advancement of the Internet, a growing number of studies are interested in examining the impact of word-of-mouth, namely audiences reviews, on box office performance, such as the works of

⁸¹ Litman (1983), p.167

⁸² Lee (2006a), p.263, 275

⁸³ Frederick Wasser, ‘Is Hollywood America? The Trans-nationalization of the American Film Industry’, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 12:4(1995), 423-437(431)

⁸⁴ Litman (1983); Litman & Kohl (1989)

⁸⁵ Litman & Kohl (1989)

⁸⁶ Jehoshua Eliashberg, and Steven M. Shugan, ‘Film Critics: influencers or Predictors?’, *Journal of Marketing*, 61(1997), 68-78; Steven Albert, ‘Movie Stars and the Distribution of Financially Successful Films in the Motion Picture Industry’, *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 22(1998), 249-270; Suman Basuroy, and Subimal Chatterjee, ‘Fast and Frequent: Investigating Box Office Revenues of Motion Picture Sequels’, *Journal of Business Research*, 61:7(2008), 798-803

⁸⁷ Litman (1983), p.166; Litman & Kohl (1989), p.44

Lee and Choeh, He and Hu, and Fan et al.⁸⁸ Moreover, more studies are interested in analysing films' box office performance in international markets. The phenomenon of cultural discount is evidenced in the literature regarding cross-cultural box office performance, such as Lee's analysis of American films in East Asia, Volz et al.'s study of foreign films in the US, and Park's examination of foreign films in Australia.⁸⁹ Factors involving cultural specificity, cultural distance and language are suggested as potential determinants of cross-cultural box office performance in further studies, such as the works of Lee, Fu and his colleagues, as well as Craig et al.⁹⁰

Regarding foreign films' box office performance in China, the research conducted by Kwak and Zhang indicates a positive relationship between their revenue and the following factors: the timing of their release, the involvement of Chinese personnel, the reputation of the actors, and the presence of China-related content.⁹¹ McMahon offers a critique of Kwak and Zhang's quantitative approach, arguing that it is situated within the framework of a free market and neglects the political factors that significantly impact the Chinese film market.⁹² Although the subsequent research by Elliott et al. considers China's unique institutional and cultural context, it still employs regression analysis to examine the correlations between different variables and the box office revenue. They find that enhanced format films (3D or IMAX), large budgets, star presence, sequels, and high online ratings are factors that have a significant and positive influence on Chinese box office revenues.⁹³

⁸⁸ Sangjae Lee, and Joon Yeon Choeh, 'The Interactive Impact of Online Word-of-Mouth and Review Helpfulness on Box Office Revenue', *Management Decision*, 56:4(2018), 849-866; Qi He, and Bin Hu, 'Research on the Influencing Factors of Film Consumption and Box Office Forecast in the Digital Era: Based on the Perspective of Machine Learning and Model Integration', *Wireless Communications and Mobile Computing*, (2021), 1-10; Liu Fan, Xiaoping Zhang, and Laxmisha Rai, 'When Should Star Power and EWOM Be Responsible for the Box Office Performance? –An Empirical Study Based on Signaling Theory', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 62(2021), 1-11

⁸⁹ Lee (2008); Yong Volz, Francis L.F. Lee, Ge Xiao, and Xianglin Liu, 'Critical Events and Reception of Foreign Culture: An Examination of Cultural Discount of Foreign-Language Films in the US Before and After 9/11', *The International Communication Gazette*, 72:2(2010), 131-149; Sora Park, 'Changing Patterns of Foreign Movie Imports, Tastes, and Consumption in Australia', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 39(2015), 85-98

⁹⁰ Craig, et al. (2005); Lee (2006a); Lee (2008); Fu & Govindaraju (2010); W. Wayne Fu, and Tracy K. Lee, 'Economic and Cultural Influences on the Theatrical Consumption of Foreign Films in Singapore', *Journal of Media Economics*, 21:1(2008), 1-27; W. Wayne Fu, 'National Audience: Tastes in Hollywood Film Genres: Cultural Distance and Linguistic Affinity', *Communication Research*, 40:6(2012), 789-817

⁹¹ Jooyoung Kwak, and Liyue Zhang, 'Does China Love Hollywood? An Empirical Study on the Determinants of the Box-Office Performance of the Foreign Films in China', *International Area Studies Review*, 14:2(2011), 115-140(135)

⁹² James McMahon, 'Selling Hollywood to China', *Forum for Social Economics*, 50:4(2021), 414-431(416)

⁹³ Elliott, et al. (2018)

However, it is problematic to rely on regrouping the factors that have contributed to success in the past into future productions since ‘past success does not predict future success’.⁹⁴ As De Vany and Walls criticise:

It is such an uncertain business that the distinction between causal factors, luck, or the sheer sweep of events is blurred. In a complex system, where there are many interacting parts and complicated stochastic dynamics, there is no simple form of causality. Everything depends, in some way, on almost everything else and it will usually be impossible to attribute an outcome to a cause or complex of causes.⁹⁵

It is important to note that existing research has produced contradictory results due to the varying characteristics of the datasets used in different models.⁹⁶ Eliashberg and Shugan state that the success or failure of a film can be affected by a variety of variables and difficult to disentangle causality from correlation completely.⁹⁷ These factors often engage in dynamic interactions that, in certain cases, amplify their respective influences and, in others, balance them.⁹⁸ As pointed out by Lee, ‘conventional quantitative methods alone are inadequate for tackling the dynamic and interactive processes of meaning construction, the nuances in the constructed meanings, and key metaphors such as cultural hybridity.’⁹⁹ In a similar vein, Gunter also emphasises that, although econometric tests can investigate the statistical correlations between specific characteristics of films and box office revenues, this methodology generally fails to directly address the subjective reactions of the public to films.¹⁰⁰ Hence, while previous research offers significant insights into various factors affecting films’ box office success, the quantitative methods that are employed are insufficient to investigate the cultural complexity of films and audience reception.

⁹⁴ De Vany & Walls (1999), p.315

⁹⁵ De Vany & Walls (1999), p.314

⁹⁶ Dean Keith Simonton, ‘Cinematic Success Criteria and Their Predictors: The Art and Business of the Film Industry’, *Psychology and Marketing*, 26:5(2009), 400-420(401); N. A. Pangarker, and E.v.d.M. Smit, ‘The Determinants of Box Office Performance in the Film Industry Revisited’, *South African Journal of Business Management*, 44:3(2013), 47-58(51)

⁹⁷ Eliashberg & Shugan (1997), p.72

⁹⁸ Gunter (2018), p.256

⁹⁹ Lee (2006b), p.885

¹⁰⁰ Gunter (2018), p.255

Nevertheless, it remains essential to identify and understand the factors examined in previous quantitative studies. By compiling the box office performance literature published between 1977 and 2006, Hadida divides the influencing factors into: intrinsic creative components (production), marketing (distribution), availability (exhibition), individual spectator traits, and third-party information sources.¹⁰¹ Individual spectator traits are more associated with the psychological approach, which is not the subject of my research. I will follow the remaining categories to classify and introduce the relevant factors stated in the previous literature.

1.2.3.1 Intrinsic Creative Components

Cultural Distance

Cultural distance is a term that denotes the cultural differences between nations.¹⁰² To measure cultural distance, social psychologist Geert Hofstede formulates the cultural dimensions theory, which employs six cultural dimensions to represent the shared tendencies or preferences at the national level. The dimensions include Power Distance Index, Individualism versus Collectivism, Masculinity versus Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Long-Term Orientation versus Short-Term Normative Orientation, and Indulgence versus Restraint.¹⁰³ The rough cultural distance between two countries could be assessed by comparing various indexes in these dimensions. Straubhaar's concept of 'cultural proximity' suggests that audiences exhibit a preference for media materials that are culturally similar to them, which may be a consequence of small cultural distances between nations.¹⁰⁴ In other words, it is presumed that people are more capable of understanding and appreciating films that incorporate values and beliefs that are familiar to them.¹⁰⁵ For instance, the research

¹⁰¹ Allègre L. Hadida, 'Motion Picture Performance: A Review and Research Agenda', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11:3(2009), 297-335(304, 319)

¹⁰² Oded Shenkar, 'Cultural Distance Revisited: Towards A More Rigorous Conceptualization and Measurement of Cultural Differences', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 43:1(2012), 1-11(1)

¹⁰³ Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1980), p.65, 110, 148, 176; Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*, (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001), p.351; Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, and Michael Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind: Intercultural Cooperation and Its Importance for Survival*, 3rd edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), p.277

¹⁰⁴ Joseph D. Straubhaar, 'Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8:1(1991), 39-59

¹⁰⁵ Fu & Govindaraju (2010), p.217; Fu (2012), p.791

of Huang and Noh, which analyses the reception of a South Korean film *My Sassy Girl* (2001) in China, reveals that cultural proximity has significantly enhanced the local reception, especially with the portrayal of love and family values.¹⁰⁶ Conversely, when cultural distance increases, cultural difference and cultural discount also increase. Local demand for audiovisual exports would be diminished as a result of any cultural incompatibility, which would in turn diminish their cross-market appeal.¹⁰⁷ Previous research, such as the works of Fu and his colleagues, Craig et al., as well as Kim and Jensen, has employed Hofstede's model and indicates that a greater cultural distance would impede the film trade between the two nations.¹⁰⁸ Thus, cultural distance serves as a standardised, tangible and straightforward tool for measuring cultural differences, an approach frequently implemented in quantitative research.¹⁰⁹

While cultural differences indeed influence international media flows, culture is an intangible and subtle concept that has always been challenging to conceptualise and scale. Measuring the distance between cultures is even harder.¹¹⁰ Park criticises Hofstede's model as a non-inclusive measurement that failed to capture a comprehensive national cultural picture.¹¹¹ Moon et al. also point out that Hofstede's model is limited to capturing the specific cultural content embedded in individual cultural products.¹¹² In a similar vein, Sousa and Bradley argue that Hofstede's model is limited to evaluating individual perceptions of cultural differences.¹¹³ To put it simply, cultural distance theory oversimplifies the complexities of cultures within a single nation, instead of sufficiently capturing the diversity of cultures, products and audiences. Every film is a unique product that is highly intricate and imbued with

¹⁰⁶ Ying Huang, and Kwang Woo Noh, 'Cultural Proximity and Distance: The Reception of Korean Films in China Through the Lens of *My Sassy Girl*', *Asian Cinema*, 20:2(2009), 193-205(201, 202)

¹⁰⁷ Fu (2012), p.792; W. Wayne Fu, and Clarice Sim, 'Examining International Country-to-Country Flow of Theatrical Films', *Journal of Communication*, 60(2010), 120-143(122)

¹⁰⁸ Craig, et al. (2005); Fu & Lee (2008); Fu & Govindaraju (2010); Fu & Sim (2010); Fu (2012); Heeyon Kim, and Micheal Jensen, 'Audience Heterogeneity and the Effectiveness of Market Signals: How to Overcome Liabilities of Foreignness in Film Exports?', *Academy of Management Journal*, 57:5(2014), 1360-1384

¹⁰⁹ Shenkar (2012), p.1

¹¹⁰ Shenkar (2012), p.1

¹¹¹ Park (2015), p.95

¹¹² Sangkil Moon, Arul Mishra, Himanshu Mishra, and Moon Young Kang, 'Cultural and Economic Impacts on Global Cultural Products: Evidence from U.S. Movies', *Journal of International Marketing*, 24:3(2016), 78-97(86)

¹¹³ Carlos M.P. Sousa, and Frank Bradley, 'Cultural Distance and Psychic Distance: Two Peas in a Pod?', *Journal of International Marketing*, 14:1(2006), 49-70(61)

cultural meanings.¹¹⁴ An exclusive focus on cultural distance is insufficient for comprehending the reception of films in cross-cultural markets. Hence, even though this concept offers valuable insights into the influence of cultural differences on international film trade, the factor 'cultural distance' is excluded from my research.

Cultural Specificity

Cultural specificity refers to the degree to which cultural content reflects the distinctive characteristics inherent to a particular culture. It acknowledges that each film is a unique product that can depict a specific culture to different extents and may experience various levels of cultural discount in foreign markets. The capacity of highly culturally specific films to transcend cultural barriers is limited since they necessitate a higher level of cultural literacy for foreign audiences to fully comprehend and enjoy their content.¹¹⁵ Otherwise, audiences may encounter a greater extent of alienation, which could reduce the film's appeal and lead to cultural discount. Conversely, the less culturally specific a film is, the lower the cultural discount it may experience in foreign markets.¹¹⁶ It is a common practice for films targeting global audiences to reduce their cultural specificity in order to enhance their accessibility for viewers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. For example, communications theorist Scott Robert Olson argues that the widespread appeal of American can be attributed to their 'narrative transparency'. Olson contends that the multicultural and ethnically diverse domestic market has prompted Hollywood studios to produce transparent texts.¹¹⁷ The transparent texts draw upon certain mythotypes, which could be seen in 'the narratological devices of circular storytelling, archetypal characters, open-ended narratives, audience inclusion strategies, negentropy, high production values, and omnipresence'.¹¹⁸ This approach facilitates audience comprehension of texts by projecting their indigenous frameworks, thereby potentially improving a film's accessibility and expanding its global reach.¹¹⁹ Thus, cultural specificity could be a

¹¹⁴ Craig, et al. (2005), p.81

¹¹⁵ Fu (2012), p.795

¹¹⁶ Lee (2006a), p.261

¹¹⁷ Scott Robert Olson, *Hollywood Planet: Global Media and the Competitive Advantage of Narrative Transparency*, (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999), p.5-6, 18

¹¹⁸ Scott R. Olson, 'The Globalization of Hollywood', *International Journal on World Peace*, 17:4(2000), 3-17(15)

¹¹⁹ Olson (1999), p.113; Olson (2000), p.10, 14, 15

more suitable term for investigating the cultural discount that a specific film may face in foreign markets.

Language

As a vital way of transmitting meanings, linguistic proximity is a crucial aspect of cultural proximity.¹²⁰ The linguistic barrier could hinder the effective transmission of messages, ideas and emotions across cultures.¹²¹ Fu argues that, when a film is exported to other markets, dubbing and subtitling can only moderate but not eliminate the linguistic frictions that already exist. The findings of his research suggest that Hollywood penetration is more closely associated with English comprehension than with cultural distance. This indicates that the spoken language presents a more formidable obstacle for imported media content to overcome in order to penetrate the local markets.¹²² Similarly, the study of Craig et al. finds that American films perform better in other English-speaking countries than in non-English-speaking countries.¹²³ The research conducted by Alaveras et al. also identifies that the largest supplier of films to the European Union, excluding the US, is either domestic productions or films from countries with a shared language. Their findings further support that cultural and linguistic proximity could be deemed as the primary driver of international film trade.¹²⁴ Hence, the linguistic disparity may exacerbate the cultural discount experienced by films in foreign markets.

Genre

A film's genre is an efficient and essential way for consumers to classify and differentiate its style and story.¹²⁵ Plots are frequently at the centre of genre

¹²⁰ Thomas B. Ksiazek, and James G. Webster, 'Cultural Proximity and Audience Behavior: The Role of Language in Patterns of Polarization and Multicultural Fluency', *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 52:3(2008), 485-503(486)

¹²¹ Craig, et al. (2005), p.82

¹²² Fu (2012), p.792, 810

¹²³ Craig, et al. (2005), p.98

¹²⁴ Georgios Alaveras, Estrella Gomez-Herrera, and Bertin Martens, 'Cross-border Circulation of Films and Cultural Diversity in the EU', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 42(2018), 645-676(657, 664)

¹²⁵ Stafford (2007), p.104; Gunter (2018), p.89; Kalpesh Kaushik Desai, and Suman Basuroy, 'Interactive Influence of Genre Familiarity, Star Power, and Critics' Reviews in the Cultural Goods Industry: The Case of Motion Pictures', *Psychology & Marketing*, 22:3(2005), 203-223(206)

conventions.¹²⁶ When consumers are going to watch a film, they have certain expectations regarding the genre's specific characteristics.¹²⁷ In international markets, as Barthel-Bouchier points out, 'the concept of genre carries with it expectations about exportability'.¹²⁸ Films of various genres exhibit different levels of cultural specificity and are thus more or less subject to the challenges of cultural discount.¹²⁹ For example, action films that feature fewer dialogues and more special effects may be more comprehensible and easier to export, whereas comedies that employ culturally-bound witticisms may be less comprehensible and more difficult to export to a different cultural context.¹³⁰ In previous quantitative studies of box office performance, genre is commonly used as a factor to differentiate among different story types that may exhibit various levels of cultural specificity. For instance, Lee's research investigates the box office performance of American films in Hong Kong. He finds that American comedies experience a relatively high cultural discount in comparison to other genres, while American action, family and science-fiction films experience a lower cultural discount and perform better than others.¹³¹ Regarding the performance of foreign films in mainland China, Kwak and Zhang suggest that the drama genre has an adverse influence on their box office income.¹³² In a similar vein, Elliott et al. indicate that enhanced format films (3D and IMAX) exert a positive and significant influence on Chinese box office earnings. They maintain that Chinese viewers may exhibit enthusiasm for watching these films at cinemas, as the special effects are likely to be less impressive when seen on a computer or television.¹³³ Therefore, these findings could provide further evidence that a less culturally specific genre may mitigate the cultural discount that a film may experience in foreign markets.

¹²⁶ Bordwell, et al. (2017), p.329

¹²⁷ Desai & Basuroy (2005), p.206; Gunter (2018), p.89

¹²⁸ Diane Barthel-Bouchier, 'Exportability of Films in a Globalizing Market: The Intersection of Nation and Genre', *Cultural Sociology*, 6:1(2012), 75-91(80)

¹²⁹ Lee (2006a), p.275

¹³⁰ Barthel-Bouchier (2012), p.80

¹³¹ Lee (2006a), p.273, 274

¹³² Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135

¹³³ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.88

Budget

A large budget usually allows films to recruit a stronger cast, film in more exotic geographical locations, employ more impressive special effects, and implement extensive marketing campaigns, thereby enhancing the overall quality and appeal to international viewers.¹³⁴ A representative example of high-budget films is blockbusters, which are specifically designed for commercial utilisation in the worldwide market. These films usually employ relatively simple narrative structures and numerous visual spectacles that serve to reduce their cultural specificity.¹³⁵ Many previous studies have examined the correlation between budget and box office revenue. For instance, Simonton's research shows that, while substantial budgets cannot guarantee critical acclaim or best picture awards, they are feasible for films aiming to maximise opening weekend attendance and attain blockbuster status.¹³⁶ This relationship pattern indicates that high-budget films frequently allocate resources to elements favoured by audiences rather than critics.¹³⁷ Lee also finds that Hollywood blockbusters could attain popularity in Hong Kong, as audiences are willing to put aside their own social, cultural and aesthetic preferences to appreciate these 'event films'.¹³⁸ Consequently, large budgets could be beneficial for the production of films that feature fewer culturally specific elements and include components that appeal to global audiences.

Stars

Stars in my thesis denote well-known directors, actors and actresses. Given that films are experience goods, Treme and Craig suggest that consumers frequently purchase tickets based on the popularity of the stars in a film.¹³⁹ The existence of famous stars who possess a solid and huge fanbase could be deemed as built-in advertising and a brand asset for films. As Levin et al. point out, in the competitive film industry, the

¹³⁴ Litman (1983), p.160; Pangarker & Smit (2013), p.54; Gunter (2018), p.14, 25

¹³⁵ Marco Cucco, 'The Promise is Great: The Blockbuster and the Hollywood Economy', *Media, Culture & Society*, 31:2(2009), 215-230(218, 219, 220)

¹³⁶ Dean Keith Simonton, 'Cinematic Creativity and Production Budgets: Does Money Make the Movie?', *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, 39:1(2005), 1-15(10, 11)

¹³⁷ Simonton (2009), p.407, 408

¹³⁸ Lee (2006b), p.894

¹³⁹ Julianne Treme, and Lee A. Craig, 'Celebrity Star Power: Do Age and Gender Effects Influence Box Office Performance?', *Applied Economics Letters*, 20(2013), 440-445(440)

presence of an established star can distinguish a film and attract larger audiences.¹⁴⁰ The research conducted by Wallace et al., Levin et al., and Albert shows that stars commonly serve as a beneficial selling point for films.¹⁴¹ However, the effects of star power have been contested in previous studies. According to Simonton, 'an A-list celebrity who is a big box-office draw in one year might become box-office poison in the next'.¹⁴² Fan et al. also argue that stars could draw viewers' interest and attention in the early phases of a film's release, but fade or even disappear as the film's run continues.¹⁴³ Moreover, as Moon et al. point out, the application of a specific Hollywood star's image in films may be effective in the US, but its efficacy may diminish in other countries due to the consumers' unfamiliarity with those stars.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, in the Chinese market, Elliott et al. suggest that star power serves as a more effective signal for domestic films than for imported ones, as Chinese consumers often have limited familiarity with foreign actors.¹⁴⁵ Kwak and Zhang also indicate that the reputation of foreign actors is a verified but weak determinant of the performance of foreign films at the Chinese box office.¹⁴⁶ In addition, concerning the influence of directors, most previous studies, such as those by Hennig-Thurau et al., Chang and Ki, and Fetscherin, do not find a significant effect of this factor on box office revenue.¹⁴⁷ Kwak and Zhang's study also does not identify any association between the impact of directors and the foreign films' box office performance in China, as the names of foreign directors may not pique the interest of Chinese consumers.¹⁴⁸ Thus, while the presence of stars may serve as a selling point for a film, the influence of stars on the film's worldwide box office performance and their appeal to foreign viewers may remain uncertain.

¹⁴⁰ Levin, et al. (1997), p.175

¹⁴¹ Albert (1998), p.264; Timothy Wallace, Alan Seigerman, and Morris B. Holbrook, 'The Role of Actors and Actresses in the Success of Films: How Much is a Movie Star Worth?', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 17:1(1993), 1-27(23); Aron M. Levin, Irwin P. Levin, and C Edward Heath, 'Movie Stars and Authors as Brand Names: Measuring Brand Equity in Experiential Products', *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24(1997), 175-181(179)

¹⁴² Simonton (2009), p.410

¹⁴³ Fan, et al. (2021), p.8

¹⁴⁴ Sangkil Moon, Barry L. Bayus, Youjae Yi, and Junhee Kim, 'Local Consumers' Reception of Imported and Domestic Movies in the Korean Movie Market', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 39(2015), 99-121(101, 105)

¹⁴⁵ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.84

¹⁴⁶ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135

¹⁴⁷ Hennig-Thurau, et al. (2007), p.83; Chang & Ki (2005), p.265; Fetscherin (2010), p.474

¹⁴⁸ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.132

Pre-Sold Intellectual Property

Litman and Kohl use the term ‘well-known ideas’ to denote films that are adaptations, remakes, or sequels, which feature themes, storylines, or characters that are familiar to the public. They suggest that these films have a built-in advantage in the marketing stage, which can be used to increase box office revenue.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, Cucco employs the term ‘pre-sold identity’ to denote these productions.¹⁵⁰ Other studies have separately investigated the impact of these productions on box office revenue. For example, Basuroy and Chatterjee have assessed the influence of sequels, while Ryu has examined the influence of adaptations.¹⁵¹ In order to be more precise and inclusive, I refer to the works that have achieved commercial success and are used in the production of films as films’ pre-sold intellectual property (IP) in this thesis. In other words, the use of pre-sold IP indicates the production of sequels, prequels, remakes and adaptations of other forms of media. Generally, commercially successful films tend to have the opportunity to produce sequels, prequels or remakes, while adaptations are also based on successful novels, comic books or television series. If an earlier story was successful in generating substantial profits, it is presumed that the audience is eager for additional content.¹⁵² Accordingly, as Cucco claims, using the subject that characters and stories are already well-known and well-liked by the public could be considered as a guarantee for certain success for the film.¹⁵³ However, the influence of pre-sold IP on box office revenue has been debatable in previous research. According to Basuroy and Chatterjee, sequels usually fail to generate comparable box office income to their predecessors, and their weekly box office income falls more rapidly compared to contemporaneous non-sequel competitors.¹⁵⁴ Ryu suggests that the popularity of the source material in a film adaptation only contributes to the film’s early stage, but it has a limited effect on its overall box office performance.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the research of De Vany and Walls also indicates that sequels, although opening on

¹⁴⁹ Litman & Kohl (1989), p.40

¹⁵⁰ Cucco (2009), p.220

¹⁵¹ Basuroy & Chatterjee (2008); Sunghan Ryu, ‘How Does Film Adaptation Influence Box Office Performance? An Empirical Analysis of Science Fiction Films in Hollywood’, *Arts and the Market*, 10:3(2020), 125-143

¹⁵² Gunter (2018), p.162

¹⁵³ Cucco (2009), p.220

¹⁵⁴ Basuroy & Chatterjee (2008), p.803

¹⁵⁵ Ryu (2020), p.137

nearly twice as many screens as the average film, experience a declining advantage over the duration of their exhibition run.¹⁵⁶ This may be due to the fact that, as Gunter points out, heightened expectations for new products may lead to an increased likelihood of subsequent disappointment.¹⁵⁷ Hence, although the impact of the productions of sequels, remakes, and adaptations on box office performance may be uncertain, previous research has generally shown that they have a positive effect during the early stages of a film's release.

Classification

Given that numerous previous studies have concentrated on the US film market, the influence of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) Film Ratings on box office performance is also to be considered as a significant factor. For example, the research of Sochay, Chang and Ki, as well as Elliott and Simmons indicate that an appropriate MPAA film rating could assist a film to attract more viewers and perform better at the box office.¹⁵⁸ However, due to the absence of a film classification system in mainland China, the factor 'Classification' is excluded from my research.

1.2.3.2 Marketing

It is crucial to implement effective marketing strategies to achieve box office success, as the film market is exceedingly competitive because of the weekly release of new films.¹⁵⁹ In addition, because films are experience goods, consumers also require more information before choosing a film to watch at cinemas. Marketing, in this way, offers a diverse array of communication tactics that establish a connection between products and audiences.¹⁶⁰ Nowadays, the advent of the digital era has drastically transformed film marketing and promotion, since Internet-based marketing materials have the

¹⁵⁶ De Vany & Walls (1999), p.305

¹⁵⁷ Gunter (2018), p.164

¹⁵⁸ Chang & Ki (2005), p.266; Scott Sochay, 'Predicting the Performance of Motion Pictures', *Journal of Media Economics*, 7:4(1994), 1-20(16); Caroline Elliott, and Rob Simmons, 'Determinants of UK Box Office Success: The Impact of Quality Signals', *Review of Industrial Organization*, 33:2(2008), 93-111(106)

¹⁵⁹ Xuefei Li, Hua Lu, and Chengzhong Wu, 'The Destiny of Movies' Box Office Performance in China: An Expectation-Evaluation Model', *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 52:2(2022), 1-19(16)

¹⁶⁰ Angus Finney, *The International Film Business: A Market Guide beyond Hollywood*, 2nd edition, (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), p.106

potential to instantaneously reach a large number of users.¹⁶¹ Previous studies, such as the works of Prag and Casavant, Hennig-Thurau et al., as well as Elliott and Simmons, provide evidence that marketing has a positive impact on films' box office performance.¹⁶²

The marketing strategy for each film is tailored to its distinctive characteristics.¹⁶³ According to Basuroy et al., Fan et al., and Li et al., it would be beneficial to convey some market signals (such as the director, main actors, genre, release date and a brief synopsis of the film's plot) via the marketing channel to more effectively inform audiences about the appeal of a specific film.¹⁶⁴ Consumers can make a purchase decision after conducting a thorough comparison of a variety of potential films. As Fan et al. claim, in an environment consisting of numerous films, certain signals could be necessary to make a film stand out from others.¹⁶⁵ These market signals are also indispensable for films in international markets. From a commercial standpoint, a film may not be imported into another market if it is deemed unable to generate sufficient demand and profit.¹⁶⁶ Kim and Jensen suggest that the positive market signals can aid distributors in determining which foreign films to import and consumers in choosing which foreign films to watch.¹⁶⁷

The power of the distribution companies is likewise a frequently discussed factor in previous research, including the studies conducted by Zuckerman and Kim, Pangarker and Smit, and Kim and Jensen.¹⁶⁸ However, it is challenging to evaluate the impact of distribution companies in China, because CFGC and Huaxia owned the exclusive distribution rights for foreign films in mainland China. Although it would be interesting to investigate the criteria that these two companies employ to import films, no publicly

¹⁶¹ He & Hu (2021), p.9

¹⁶² Prag & Casavant (1994), p.227; Hennig-Thurau, et al. (2007), p.84; Elliott & Simmons (2008), p.108

¹⁶³ Finney (2015), p.106

¹⁶⁴ Fan, et al. (2021), p.2; Li, et al. (2022), p.2; Suman Basuroy, Kalpesh Kaushik Desai, and Debabrata Talukdar, 'An Empirical Investigation of Signaling in the Motion Picture Industry', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(2006), 287-295(288)

¹⁶⁵ Fan, et al. (2021), p.4

¹⁶⁶ Fu & Govindaraju (2010), p.221

¹⁶⁷ Kim & Jensen (2014), p.1362

¹⁶⁸ Pangarker & Smit (2013), p.54; Kim & Jensen (2014), p.1379; Ezra W. Zuckerman, and Tai-Young Kim, 'The Critical Trade-off: Identity Assignment and Box-Office Success in the Feature Film Industry', *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 12:1(2003), 27-67(56)

available information or documentation explicitly discloses their preferences. Thus, my research only analyses the effects of marketing, whereas the influence of the distribution company on films' box office performance would not be addressed.

1.2.3.3 Availability

Considering that price competition is uncommon in the film industry, the release date and screening arrangement serve as indicators of the competitive environment. The timing of releases and the allocation of screens may influence films' box office success by drawing target audiences and altering competition dynamics.¹⁶⁹

Release Date

As Simonton points out, release timing can be everything in the film industry.¹⁷⁰ The distribution of attendance for films is not uniform throughout the year; rather, it is clustered around major holidays.¹⁷¹ Peak release dates in the film industry tend to coincide with an increase in the number of consumers who are on vacation and have more time to engage in leisure activities.¹⁷² Previous studies, such as those conducted by Litman and Kohl, Kwak and Zhang, and Hennig-Thurau et al., reveal a positive correlation between releases during peak seasons and the box office incomes.¹⁷³ However, as Li et al. highlight, 'a movie and its rivals constantly compete with each other in a dynamic environment'.¹⁷⁴ Given the restricted market share, the simultaneous release of many films may adversely affect their revenue.¹⁷⁵ A film that could potentially perform exceptionally well at the box office may be overshadowed by an abundance of competing films that were released during the same weekend or shortly before.¹⁷⁶ Accordingly, films usually postpone or advance their release date to

¹⁶⁹ Li, et al. (2022), p.5

¹⁷⁰ Simonton (2009), p.414

¹⁷¹ Litman (1983), p.161; Gunter (2018), p.54

¹⁷² Gunter (2018), p.51, 52

¹⁷³ Litman (1983), p.173; Litman & Kohl (1989), p.46; Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.134; Hennig-Thurau, et al. (2007), p.84

¹⁷⁴ Li, et al. (2022), p.5

¹⁷⁵ Gunter (2018), p.59; Yi Liao, Yuxuan Peng, Songlin Shi, Victor Shi, and Xiaohong Yu, 'Early Box Office Prediction in China's Film Market Based on a Stacking Fusion Model', *Annals of Operations Research*, (2020), 1-18(7)

¹⁷⁶ Simonton (2009), p.414

prevent direct competition with other formidable films.¹⁷⁷ Yet, while numerous films vie for market share during peak seasons, their performance may still be superior to that of films released during the rest of the year, when the pool of potential cinema attendance may be highly diminished. Hence, a film's release date and the prevailing competitive landscape should be considered as crucial factors influencing its box office performance.

Screening Arrangement

McMahon asserts that the number of opening screens can serve as a proxy, as each commitment to the scale of a film's theatrical release fundamentally reflects an anticipation of its future profits.¹⁷⁸ An increase in the number of screens on which a film is screened usually results in a larger number of consumers.¹⁷⁹ A positive correlation between the number of screens and box office revenue has been indicated by previous research, such as the works of Litman and Kohl, Chang and Ki, and Fetscherin.¹⁸⁰ However, due to the fixed number of screens, film releases must compete for those screens in real time.¹⁸¹ Li et al. note that exhibitors tend to seek maximum profit, which causes cinemas to continually adjust their screening arrangements to showcase films with higher evaluations and better market performance.¹⁸² This fact is supported by the research of Basuroy and Chatterjee, who find that the number of screens on which films are exhibited has a positive correlation with their box office revenue. However, this correlation diminishes as market saturation is achieved.¹⁸³ Therefore, it is essential to investigate the number of screenings assigned to a film, since the opening and subsequent screening allocations might indicate fluctuations in the film's appeal and box office performance.

¹⁷⁷ Ainslie, et al. (2005), p.508; Gunter (2018), p.53; Robert E. Krider, and Charles B. Weinberg, 'Competitive Dynamics and the Introduction of New Products: The Motion Picture Timing Game', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 35(1998), 1-15(2)

¹⁷⁸ McMahon (2021), p.426

¹⁷⁹ Gunter (2018), p.60

¹⁸⁰ Litman & Kohl (1989), p.48; Chang & Ki (2005), p.264; Fetscherin (2010), p.472

¹⁸¹ Finney (2015), p.6

¹⁸² Li, et al. (2022), p.9

¹⁸³ Basuroy & Chatterjee (2008), p.802

1.2.3.4 Third-Party Information Sources

As films are regarded as experience goods, consumers also depend on the opinions of critics, awards and other audiences to make informed decisions.¹⁸⁴ Reviews from both audiences and critics, as well as the awards and nominations received, are considered third-party information sources that are deemed more reliable than the information acquired from marketing campaigns.¹⁸⁵

Awards

In addition to acknowledging a film's artistic achievements, the receipt or nomination of awards may also bring in additional economic interest for the film. Generally, films nominated for or awarded a significant prize, such as the Oscar, are likely to garner greater publicity, attention and income.¹⁸⁶ However, the tastes and preferences of viewers and critics may differ.¹⁸⁷ Rather than celebrating the bestseller in the market, film awards have to uphold a strict aesthetic standard.¹⁸⁸ The influence of awards on box office performance has been contested in previous research. Deuchert et al. find that the positive effect of an Oscar on films' box office revenue is mostly attributed to the nominations, whilst the award itself brings relatively little to this extra revenue.¹⁸⁹ Yet, the time at which the awards or nominations are issued should be considered. The awards may have a limited impact if they were bestowed upon a film after its theatrical run. Additionally, Lee examines the correlation between the Academy Award and the box office performance of American films in nine East Asian countries. He finds that nominations for drama awards (such as best director and best screenplay) are negatively correlated with revenues, whereas nominations for non-drama awards (such as best picture) are positively correlated with films' performance in nearly all East Asian countries. Lee points out that Academy Awards are culturally specific and do not serve as a culturally neutral evaluation of cinematic achievement or artistic

¹⁸⁴ Chang & Ki (2005), p.251; Cucco (2009), p.223

¹⁸⁵ Hadida (2009), p.319

¹⁸⁶ Gunter (2018), p.198

¹⁸⁷ Stafford (2007), p.1; Harry M. Benshoff, *Film and Television Analysis, An Introduction to Methods, Theories, and Approaches*, (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2016), p.12

¹⁸⁸ Stafford (2007), p.1

¹⁸⁹ Eva Deuchert, Kossi Adjamah, and Florian Pauly, 'For Oscar Glory or Oscar Money?', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 29:3(2005), 159-176(161, 172)

merit.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, according to Elliott et al., the films' box office revenues in China are not significantly influenced by either major Asian or Western awards. This scepticism among Chinese viewers may stem, in part, from frequent criticisms of major film awards in China over their fairness and transparency.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, Ng's interviews with numerous Singaporean directors and analysis of certain Singaporean media outlets suggest that the Taipei Golden Horse Film Awards (GHA), which are considered credible and authoritative in the realm of Chinese-language cinema, appear to be held in higher regard than the Cannes Film Festival. Although the Singaporean film *Ilo Ilo* (2013) was awarded both the Best Feature Film at the GHA and the Golden Camera at the Cannes Film Festival, the prestige and influence of GHA in Singapore seem to have a direct impact on its domestic box office performance.¹⁹² Hence, the impact of different awards and nominations on specific films may vary, necessitating a case-by-case analysis of the impact of an award on a film's box office revenue.

Audiences' Reviews

To make better-informed decisions, potential consumers likewise rely on the opinions of other consumers.¹⁹³ Elliott et al. suggest that Chinese consumers may place greater emphasis on online ratings rather than awards when determining which film to watch.¹⁹⁴ The ratings and reviews of audiences, which may also be deemed as word-of-mouth, are crucial for reducing the uncertainty associated with the consumption of experience goods like films.¹⁹⁵ As Finney argues, 'word of mouth is one of the most important market phenomena that cannot be bought, no matter how much money is spent on a film's budget or its marketing launch'.¹⁹⁶ Generally, audiences' enthusiasm

¹⁹⁰ Francis L. F. Lee, 'Cultural Discount of Cinematic Achievement: The Academy Awards and U.S. Movies' East Asian Box Office', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 33:4(2009), 239-263(248, 259, 260)

¹⁹¹ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.84, 89

¹⁹² How Wee Ng, 'Taipei Golden Horse Film Awards and Singapore Cinema: Prestige, Privilege and Disarticulation', *Asian Cinema*, 31:1(2020), 99-122(101, 106)

¹⁹³ Jong Hyup Lee, Sun Ho Jung, and JaeHong Park, 'The Role of Entropy of Review Text Sentiments on Online WOM and Movie Box Office Sales', *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 22(2017), 42-52(42); Noi Sian Koh, Nan Hu, and Eric K. Clemons, 'Do Online Reviews Reflect a Product's True Perceived Quality? An Investigation of Online Movie Reviews Across Cultures', *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 9(2010), 374-385(374); Haoxiang Ma, Jong Min Kim, and Eunkyung Lee, 'Analyzing Dynamic Review Manipulation and Its Impact on Movie Box Office Revenue', *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications*, 35(2019), 1-13(4)

¹⁹⁴ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.84, 89

¹⁹⁵ Fan, et al. (2021), p.2

¹⁹⁶ Finney (2015), p.99

for a film may be diminished by negative reviews, while its allure may be enhanced by positive reviews.¹⁹⁷ In the contemporary digital era, online word-of-mouth, which is referred to as e-word-of-mouth (eWOM) by Hu et al., He and Hu, and Fan et al., or word-of-mouth by Hadida, has been further enhanced in its effectiveness.¹⁹⁸ Individuals can publicly express and easily access opinions about various films online at any time and from anywhere.¹⁹⁹ According to Hu et al., the most substantial influence on box office performance is the quantity of first-week film reviews. The box office would continue to perform well as long as the number of film reviews remained high, even if the content of the reviews was negative.²⁰⁰ This conclusion is supported by the study conducted by Fan et al., which indicates that box office performance has a positive association with eWOM volume, but eWOM valence (attitudes) does not.²⁰¹ In the same vein, the work of Duan et al. shows that the number of posts is significantly associated with film sales rather than higher ratings.²⁰² On the contrary, Elliott et al. find that online review ratings serve as a signal of a film's reputation, which is positively and significantly correlated with films' box office revenues in China.²⁰³ Thus, the ratings and reviews that films receive from Chinese viewers may both be significant in influencing the purchasing decisions of potential consumers and films' box office performance in China.

Critics' Reviews

The influence of critics' reviews on box office performance has also been contentious in previous studies. A positive correlation is found in the research conducted by Sochay, Reinstein and Snyder, as well as Elliott and Simmons.²⁰⁴ Conversely, the studies of King, Suominen, as well as Pangarker and Smit do not identify any correlation

¹⁹⁷ Li, et al. (2022), p.4

¹⁹⁸ Hadida (2009), p.319; He & Hu (2021), p.2; Fan, et al. (2021), p.2; Ya-Han Hu, Wen-Ming Shiao, Sheng-Pao Shih, and Cho-Ju Chen, 'Considering Online Consumer Reviews to Predict Movie Box-Office Performance Between the Years 2009 and 2014 in the US', *The Electronic Library*, 36:6(2018), 1010-1026(1012)

¹⁹⁹ Lee, et al. (2017), p.42; Gunter (2018), p.228

²⁰⁰ Hu, et al. (2018), p.1024

²⁰¹ Fan, et al. (2021), p.8

²⁰² Wenjing Duan, Bin Gu, and Andrew B. Whinston, 'Do Online Reviews Matter? –An Empirical Investigation of Panel Data', *Decision Support Systems*, 45(2008), 1007-1016(1015)

²⁰³ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.89

²⁰⁴ Sochay (1994), p.16; Elliott & Simmons (2008), p.109; David A. Reinstein, and Christopher M. Snyder, 'The Influence of Expert Reviews on Consumer Demand for Experience Goods: A Case Study of Movie Critics', *The Journal of Industrial Economics*, 53(2005), 27-51(48)

between critics' reviews and box office revenues.²⁰⁵ Eliashberg and Shugan published a key study asserting that critics may function as either influencers, who exercise significant impact on box office success, or predictors, who are capable of forecasting long-term box office successes without exerting influence. At the aggregate box office revenue level, their findings offer more support to the hypothesis that critics are predictors rather than influencers.²⁰⁶ In contrast, the research conducted by Basuroy et al. indicates that the critics could function as both influencers and predictors. Their results show a positive correlation between the critics' reviews and the box office performance for eight weeks, irrespective of whether these reviews are positive or negative.²⁰⁷ However, since there are presently no publications or websites in China which are exclusively designed for film critics' reviews, the factor 'Critics' Reviews' is excluded from my research.

Therefore, in accordance with China's specific market environment, the 'Cultural Distance', 'Classification', and 'Critics' Reviews' factors are excluded from my thesis. The following factors are included: 'Cultural Specificity', 'Language', 'Genre', 'Budget', 'Stars', 'Pre-sold IP', 'Marketing', 'Release Date', 'Screening Arrangement', 'Awards', and 'Audiences' Reviews'.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

1.3.1 Research Aim

My research aims to analyse the factors that influence the box office performance of British films in mainland China. I define the research scope from 2017 to 2022, encompassing three years before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The data from the China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association reveals a significant decline in both

²⁰⁵ Pangarker & Smit (2013), p.56; Timothy King, 'Does Film Criticism Affect Box Office Earnings? Evidence From Movies Released in the U.S. in 2003', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 31:3(2007), 171-186(185); Seppo Suominen, 'Critics Review or Preceding Week's Admissions Explaining Movie Admissions', *Liiketaloudellinen Aikakauskirja*, 60:3(2011), 290-315(307)

²⁰⁶ Eliashberg & Shugan (1997), p.77

²⁰⁷ Suman Basuroy, Subimal Chatterjee, and S. Abraham Ravid, 'How Critical Are Critical Reviews? The Box Office Effects of Film Critics, Star Power, and Budgets', *Journal of Marketing*, 67(2003), 103-117(116)

the annual amount of imported films in China and their share of box office revenue in China since 2020.²⁰⁸ Similarly, the BFI Statistical Yearbooks indicate that British films' market share and total box office revenue in China have both experienced comparable declines since 2020.²⁰⁹ The decreases correlate with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which profoundly affected the Chinese film industry. Consequently, examining the performance trends of British films in China before and after the epidemic may yield valuable insights.

1.3.2 Research Questions

In accordance with my research aim and timeframe, the subsequent research questions are formulated:

1. Which British films were theatrically released in China between 2017 and 2022? How did these films perform at the Chinese box office?
2. How did the Chinese audience respond to these British films? What impact did these responses have on the box office revenue of British films in China?
3. How did these films represent Britain? To what extent did they reinforce or mitigate the cultural discount within the context of Chinese culture?

1.4 Methodology

To address these research questions, I used the mixed-methods case study design. As discussed in the previous section, the cross-cultural box office performance is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to a quantitative model. The factors affecting cross-cultural box office performance vary from film to film, since every film has distinct characteristics, every factor has varying influences, and every target market has different receptions. While findings of previous quantitative studies have contributed to a deeper comprehension of various influencing factors, they have not

²⁰⁸ China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association, 'Film Release Schedule', <https://www.chinafilm.org.cn/schedulereleas>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]

²⁰⁹ BFI (2018), p.9, 54; BFI (2019), p.10, 60; BFI (2020), p.11, 53; BFI (2021), p.9, 50; BFI (2022a), p.11, 51; BFI (2023a), p.9, 47

sufficiently explored the complexity of cultural discount and local reception. In addition to the factors that have been mentioned in the previous research, I argue that the box office performance of British films in China is also influenced by the textual factors of British films and the contextual factors of the Chinese market. The qualitative research and case studies are thus necessary for the analysis of cross-cultural box office performance. A design that is based on case studies could offer a more in-depth understanding of different British films and the cultural discount they encountered in China. It enables the comparison and understanding of the complexities of the cases, both within and between them. The mixed-methods approach enables the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence, thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness of the findings to better understand the reception of British films in China. Specifically, I employed quantitative content analysis to explore the reviews from Chinese consumers, followed by qualitative textual analysis to analyse the mentioned narrative components and cultural representations, and secondary data analysis to assess the impact of the mentioned factors on British films' box office performance in China. Detailed explanations of data collection, research methods, and analysis processes will be provided in the subsequent sections.

1.4.1 Case Study: Quintessentially British Films in the Eyes of Chinese Viewers

To obtain a more precise list of British films, my project adhered to the BFI's definition of British films, which are those that obtain British certification via the British cultural test, the UK's Official Bi-Lateral Co-Production Treaties and the European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production.²¹⁰ By comparing the film database on the BFI and the release information in China, Table 1.1 reveals that 35 films released in China meet the BFI's criteria for British films between 2017 and 2022.²¹¹ This addresses the first part of Research Question 1, which pertains to the British films that were theatrically released in China within the researched period.

²¹⁰ BFI (2020)

²¹¹ BFI, 'Films Certified as British Through Co-Production Treaties', (<https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/41/download>, [accessed 03 Jan 2023]; BFI, 'Films Certified as British Through Film Cultural Test', <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/18/download>, [accessed 03 Jan 2023]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking', <https://zgdyf.zgdypw.cn/movie?tab=1&secondTab=1>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]

Chapter 1

Table 1.1 Theatrical Released British Films in China Between 2017 and 2022

	Title	Director
1	<i>Kingsman: The Golden Circle</i> (2017)	Matthew Vaughn
2	<i>Dunkirk</i> (2017)	Christopher Nolan
3	<i>Murder on the Orient Express</i> (2017)	Kenneth Branagh
4	<i>Paddington 2</i> (2017)	Paul King
5	<i>Baby Driver</i> (2017)	Edgar Wright
6	<i>Loving Vincent</i> (2017)	Dorota Kobiela; Hugh Welchman
7	<i>47 Metres Down</i> (2017)	Johannes Roberts
8	<i>Darkest Hour</i> (2017)	Joe Wright
9	<i>Eye in the Sky</i> (2015)	Gavin Hood
10	<i>Genius</i> (2016)	Michael Grandage
11	<i>Bridget Jones's Baby</i> (2016)	Sharon Maguire
12	<i>Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald</i> (2018)	David Yates
13	<i>Johnny English Strikes Again</i> (2018)	David Kerr
14	<i>A Street Cat Named Bob</i> (2016)	Roger Spottiswoode
15	<i>The Titan</i> (2018)	Lennart Ruff
16	<i>All the Money in the World</i> (2017)	Ridley Scott
17	<i>Early Man</i> (2018)	Nick Park
18	<i>Patrick</i> (2018)	Mandie Fletcher
19	<i>Bohemian Rhapsody</i> (2018)	Bryan Singer
20	<i>Downton Abbey</i> (2019)	Michael Engler
21	<i>Shaun the Sheep: Farmageddon</i> (2019)	Will Becher; Richard Phelan
22	<i>Yesterday</i> (2019)	Danny Boyle
23	<i>Serenity</i> (2019)	Steven Knight
24	<i>1917</i> (2019)	Sam Mendes
25	<i>The Aeronauts</i> (2019)	Tom Harper
26	<i>47 Meters Down: Uncaged</i> (2019)	Johannes Roberts
27	<i>Fighting with My Family</i> (2019)	Stephen Merchant
28	<i>Widows</i> (2018)	Steve McQueen
29	<i>No Time To Die</i> (2021)	Cary Joji Fukunaga
30	<i>The Father</i> (2020)	Florian Zeller
31	<i>Wrath of Man</i> (2021)	Guy Ritchie

Chapter 1

	Title	Director
32	<i>A Gift from Bob</i> (2020)	Charles Martin Smith
33	<i>Death On the Nile</i> (2022)	Kenneth Branagh
34	<i>Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore</i> (2022)	David Yates
35	<i>Downton Abbey: A New Era</i> (2022)	Simon Curtis

Sources: BFI and Chinese Film Box Office

It is evident that many of the films listed in Table 1.1 do not deal with distinctly British subject matter, which Higson refers to as ‘industrially British films.’²¹² For example, *Loving Vincent* (2017), *47 Metres Down* (2017), and *Wrath of Man* (2021) do not feature British characters or take place in the UK. To address my research questions, I excluded ‘industrially British films’ and solely focused on ‘culturally British films’, as defined by Higson, which focus on British lead characters or settings.²¹³ However, owing to the dominance of American films in the global film industry and their shared use of the English language, British films with high production values are frequently misclassified as American films by non-English-speaking audiences.²¹⁴ According to Christie:

All audiences, we are reminded, bring preconceptions and expectations to their viewing, many of which involve stereotypes that have developed over long periods. What makes a film “British,” or “American” or “French” in the eyes of a specific audience is the result of both a prior history of representation, necessarily selective, and a set of cues that determine the reading by members of this audience.²¹⁵

Hence, to achieve the aim of this thesis and to conduct an in-depth investigation of the cultural discount encountered by British films in China, I focused exclusively on feature films deemed quintessentially British in the eyes of Chinese viewers. Documentary and animation films were excluded. To be specific, films perceived as quintessentially British by Chinese viewers would primarily reflect the perceptions and stereotypes that most Chinese viewers associate with Britishness. To reiterate, in this research, the notion of Britishness is primarily used as a commercial national brand

²¹² Higson (2011), p.6

²¹³ Higson (2011), p.6

²¹⁴ Higson (2011), p.250

²¹⁵ Ian Christie, ‘What Do We Really Know About Film Audiences?’, *Audiences: Defining and Researching Screen Entertainment Reception*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp.225-234(p.227)

image for British films in the global marketplace, rather than an exposition of British identities.²¹⁶ Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no research has yet investigated Chinese people's perceptions of Britishness. I chose to explore the stereotypes that global audiences associate with Britain. According to Richards and Medhurst, foreigners commonly misuse the terms Britain and England interchangeably.²¹⁷ Richards contends that this may be attributed to England's position as 'the centre, the seat of power, the hub of the Empire', which provided the character of the new Britain.²¹⁸ Although I do not intend to use the terms 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' interchangeably within this thesis, nor disregard the diverse cultural identities of Northern Irish, Welsh, and Scottish communities, it is necessary to acknowledge that, for most Chinese viewers, the dominant perception of 'Britishness' similarly limited by the narrow stereotypes associated with 'Englishness', which does not fully represent the broad spectrum of contemporary British identities.

While films featuring British people or set in Britain are classified as 'culturally British films', I would argue that the stereotyped characters and settings could further facilitate Chinese viewers in identifying the films' British identity. First, regarding the characters, Richards references a survey conducted by Peabody in the 1980s that examined how first-year university students or final-year secondary school students in England, France, Germany, Italy, Austria, Finland, Greece, and the Philippines perceived and categorised different nationalities based on various characteristics. Richards argues that, aside from the lack of humour, the result of 'reserved, practical, peaceful, serious, calm, sceptical and self-controlled' Britain was largely adhered to the conventional image of the phlegmatic, stiff-upper-lipped English gentleman.²¹⁹ Undoubtedly, the 'gentleman' constitutes one of the most readily identifiable figures within English culture for international audiences.²²⁰ Andrew Spicer's book, titled *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, also

²¹⁶ Higson (2011), p.47, 218; Russell (2017), p.384

²¹⁷ Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.3; Andy Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), p.8, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/soton-ebooks/detail.action?docID=214700>, [accessed 27 Sep 2025]

²¹⁸ Richards (1997), p.8

²¹⁹ Richards (1997), p.4-5

²²⁰ Philip Tsang, 'Long Live the English Gentleman', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 40:3(2017), 178-180

examines the enduring and prominent role of the gentleman archetype in British films, as well as its evolving variants over recent decades.²²¹ Moreover, as Street and Higson emphasise, the prevailing gentleman archetype in British films is predominantly white and comes from the middle and upper classes.²²² The racial and class background should also be considered regarding the stereotyped English gentleman for Chinese viewers. Second, regarding the settings, Higson identifies three prominent *mises-en-scène* of Englishness: a pre-industrial, semi-rural vision of England; an urban village vision; and a monumental metropolitan version, which may be primarily associated with an internationally recognisable London. He contends that the urban village version of England predominantly focuses on the working class and lower-middle class, with limited representation of the upper classes.²²³ Given the prevalent depictions of white, middle- and upper-class gentlemen, I argue that settings featuring English rural landscapes and London landmarks would be the most distinctive and easily identifiable representations of Britishness for the majority of Chinese viewers.

In addition, Richard suggests that a sense of humour has been regarded as a characteristic of the English since at least the Middle Ages.²²⁴ The 2021 BFI survey about international perceptions of UK screen content also reveals that global consumers described British humour as dry, dark, and quirky, while also highlighting its recognition and appreciation across diverse genres, not exclusively within comedy.²²⁵ Nevertheless, I would not employ 'British humour' as a criterion for selecting cases. As Andy Medhurst explores in his book *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities*, the national sense of humour is ambiguous, and the humour of the English, Welsh, Northern Irish, and Scottish communities is varied.²²⁶ Moreover, individuals perceive and appreciate British humour differently. For domestic viewers, for example, the works of Alexander and Friedman suggest that perceptions of humour differ among British people from different backgrounds, such

²²¹ Andrew Spicer, *Typical Men: The Representation of Masculinity in Popular British Cinema*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001)

²²² Street (2009), p.160; Higson (2011), p.35, 80, 84, 251

²²³ Higson (2011), p.81-82

²²⁴ Richards (1997), p. 4-5, 12

²²⁵ BFI, 'International Perceptions of and Engagement with UK Screen Content', (2022d), p.23, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/15374/download>, [accessed 13 Oct 2022]

²²⁶ Medhurst (2007)

as class, gender, and nationality.²²⁷ For international viewers, for instance, Chen and Dewaele reveal that, despite both using the English language, American viewers perceived British humour as less funny and exhibited a reduced ability to appreciate the ironic and sarcastic elements.²²⁸ Similarly, Chen and Zhang find that language, culture, emotions, and cognition affect the appreciation of British humour among Chinese-English bilinguals.²²⁹ In other words, British humour that is based on language, such as wit, understatement, and puns, would be culturally specific in the global market, thereby diminishing its appeal for international audiences due to the lack of common cultural references.²³⁰ Accordingly, although British humour is a significant aspect of 'Britishness' and its reception among Chinese viewers would be examined within this research, this characteristic would not be employed as a selection criterion for the case studies analysed in this thesis due to the discrepancies in perception.

Therefore, the most prevalent and identifiable stereotypes that Chinese viewers associate with Britishness may encompass white English people from the middle and upper classes, gentlemanly and ladylike behaviour, English rural landscapes, and renowned London landmarks. BFI's 2021 survey on the Chinese audience's perceptions of UK screen content reveals that the most prominent attributes of British film/TV were being 'cultured' and 'intelligent', which fundamentally correspond with these suggested attributes.²³¹ To address my research questions, I chose to focus exclusively on the British films that explicitly and strongly represent these stereotypes to underscore their British identity to Chinese viewers. Films that may be considered quintessentially British for British viewers but exhibit a weaker British identity for Chinese viewers, such as *Bridget Jones's Baby* (2016), *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018), and *1917* (2019), were excluded. Eventually, I selected eight films representing different genres that align with my research aim as cases, including *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*

²²⁷ Richard Alexander, 'British Comedy and Humour: Social and Cultural Background', *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 9:1(1984), 63-83; Sam Friedman, 'The Cultural Currency of A "Good" Sense of Humour: British Comedy and New Forms of Distinction', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 62:2(2011), 347-370

²²⁸ Xuemei Chen, and Jean-Marc Dewaele, '"We Are Not Amused". The Appreciation of British Humour by British and American English L1 Users', *Language & Communication*, 79(2021), 147-162

²²⁹ Xuemei Chen, and Tiefu Zhang, 'Individual Variations in British Humour Appreciation Among Chinese-English Bilinguals: Role of Socialisation and Acculturation', *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 27:1(2023), 3-21

²³⁰ Tirtaine & Augros (2015), p.52; Diffrient (2020), p.46

²³¹ BFI, 'International Perceptions of and Engagement with UK Screen Content China Report', (2022b), p.15, <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/22041/download>, [accessed 13 Oct 2022]

(2017); *Dunkirk* (2017); *Paddington 2* (2017); *Darkest Hour* (2017); *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018); *Downton Abbey* (2019); *No Time to Die* (2021); and *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022). According to information provided by IMDb, the genres of these films encompass action, adventure, comedy, crime, thriller, drama, history, war, family, biography, and romance.²³² As discussed in the Literature Review section, various genres may exhibit differing degrees of cultural specificity, which can result in varying levels of cultural discount.²³³ The varied genres of these cases could facilitate a more thorough examination of how various British films experience cultural discount within the Chinese market. By categorising these cases based on their most prominent features, I classified them into four genres for analysis: action-adventure films, historical films, fictional period dramas, and family films. This classification facilitates not only the comparison of diverse genres but also the comparison of films within the same genre.

1.4.2 Secondary Data Analysis: Establish a Database for the Cases

Unlike previous quantitative research, my project does not necessitate a substantial number of samples. Collecting pertinent information into a database is sufficient to address the factors that need to be examined for my research. Accordingly, I established a database for recording relevant data regarding the eight cases. The information regarding each case was gathered from multiple websites and platforms.

First, I collected information regarding the director, cast, country of origin, genre, awards, budget and production company of each case from IMDb.²³⁴ I also used the secondary data gathered from the BFI websites, including the information in the

²³² IMDb, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4649466/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_3, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]; IMDb, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5013056/?ref=ttco_co_tt, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; IMDb, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4468740/?ref=ttawd_awd_tt, [accessed 15 Dec 2024]; IMDb, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4555426/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; IMDb, '*Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6921996/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]; IMDb, '*Downton Abbey* (2019)' https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6398184/?ref=tt_sims_tt_i_1, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; IMDb, '*No Time To Die* (2021)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2382320/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]; IMDb, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11703710/?ref=tt_sims_tt_i_2, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

²³³ Lee (2006a), p.275

²³⁴ IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

cultural test certification tables, the co-production treaty certification tables, the statistical yearbooks and other research reports.²³⁵ The data about the box office figures and the release date were collected from Box Office Mojo.²³⁶ To gain a clearer understanding and identify the box office performance of the selected British films in China, I also gathered and compared box office data of American films and Chinese domestic films from comparable genres and released in China in the same year. Presenting a British film's box office revenue alongside its annual box office ranking in China does not clearly clarify the film's performance, as it may occupy a relatively low position in the annual ranking while outperforming other films within similar genres. Based on information from the China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association, within the limits of the annual import quota, the US and UK are two major suppliers of English-language films to the Chinese market every year.²³⁷ To facilitate a clearer comprehension of the performance of British films in China, comparing their box office revenues with those of American and Chinese films within similar genres would be beneficial. It is noteworthy that the American film industry is the most commercially successful globally and frequently serves as a benchmark for evaluating other film industries. They have also significantly surpassed other foreign films in China since the implementation of the annual import quota scheme in 1994.²³⁸ The purpose of the comparison was not to elucidate the reasons behind the difficulties faced by British films in competing with American films in China, a goal that may also be beyond the intent of British filmmakers. By comparing the box office revenues of British films with those of American and Chinese films, the analysis aims to facilitate readers' comprehension of a British film's performance in China and to provide fresh insights into the factors that may influence its appeal to Chinese consumers.

Second, I collected audiences' ratings from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, which are two major ticketing applications in China. These two platforms collectively dominate nearly

²³⁵ BFI, 'Industry Data and Insights', <https://www.bfi.org.uk/industry-data-insights>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

²³⁶ Box Office Mojo, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

²³⁷ China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association, 'Film Release Schedule', <https://www.chinafilm.org.cn/scheduleleas>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]

²³⁸ Wendy Su, 'Resisting Cultural Imperialism, or Welcoming Cultural Globalization? China's Extensive Debate on Hollywood Cinema from 1994 to 2007', *Asian Journal of Communication*, 21:2(2011), 186-201(189)

80% of the Chinese film ticketing market.²³⁹ Maoyan, which is cooperated with Tencent and Meituan, is China's largest online film ticketing website with over 600 million users in 2022.²⁴⁰ Taopiaopiao, which was previously known as Taobao Movie, is owned by Alibaba Pictures. The latest data, which is from 2019, indicates that Taopiaopiao has a user base of over 300 million.²⁴¹ Users who purchase tickets on these two platforms are encouraged to rate and review the films after watching them. Accordingly, ratings on these two platforms are relatively representative of the perspectives of Chinese consumers. Additionally, the ratings for each case on Douban, the major film review platform in China that provides information on films, books, and music while supporting social interaction through user ratings and comments, were collected for comparison with the ratings on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao.²⁴²

Third, I gathered information regarding the number of screenings and the number of cinema admissions for each case from Maoyan Pro, Dengta Pro and Chinese Film Box Office. Maoyan Pro, which is produced by Maoyan, is an application for providing timely analysis of box office data in China.²⁴³ Similarly, Dengta Pro is a data analysis application of Taopiaopiao.²⁴⁴ Since more than 80% of film tickets in China are sold online or via mobile devices, which is one of the highest penetration rates in the world, these two applications have relatively accurate information regarding audience behaviour and film performance tracking.²⁴⁵ Chinese Film Box Office is an official application provided by the Stand Office of Government Fund of National Film Development. It is currently the most timely, accurate and authoritative source of film box office data for the public in China.²⁴⁶ The number of cinema admissions, screening

²³⁹ Patrick Frater, 'China to Ban Movie Ticket Subsidies', *Variety*, 20 September, 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/film/asia/china-ban-movie-ticket-subsidies-1202950197/>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

²⁴⁰ Maoyan Entertainment, <https://ir.maoyan.com/html/index.php>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]; Maoyan Entertainment, 'Announces Interim Results for the First Half of 2022', (2022), http://media-maoyan.todayir.com/202208191033591704135536_en.pdf, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]; Maoyan Entertainment, '2022 Annual Report', (2023), <https://ir-en.maoyan.com/image/Annual+Report+2022.pdf>, [accessed 12 Jan 2025]

²⁴¹ Taopiaopiao, <https://www.taopiaopiao.com>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]; Patrick Frater, 'Alibaba Touts Online Advantages', *Variety*, 06 November, 2019, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/alibaba-touts-online-advantages/docview/2313319260/se-2>, [accessed 02 Jan 2023]

²⁴² Douban, 'Douban Movies', <https://movie.douban.com/explore>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

²⁴³ Maoyan Pro, <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/box-office?ver=normal>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

²⁴⁴ Dengta Pro, <https://dengta.taopiaopiao.com>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

²⁴⁵ Patrick Frater, 'Maoyan Looks to Strong Chinese New Year Holiday Box Office (EXCLUSIVE)', *Variety*, 10 February, 2021, <https://variety.com/2021/film/asia/maoyan-predicts-strong-chinese-new-year-holiday-box-office-1234904756/>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

²⁴⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, <https://zgdyf.zgdyfw.cn/movie?tab=1&secondTab=1>, [accessed 03 Dec 2022]

arrangement and box office revenues are displayed on a daily basis throughout the duration of films' theatrical run on these three platforms.

Therefore, all the relevant factors that have been identified as influencing films' cross-cultural box office performance were collected from these platforms and imported into a database for analysis. This assists in addressing the second part of Research Question 1, which pertains to the performance of the selected cases in China.

1.4.3 Content Analysis and Textual Analysis: Analyse Audience Reviews

To address Research Questions 2 and 3, my research decided to use audiences' reviews as primary resources to gain an in-depth grasp of the reception of British films in China. According to Moon et al., text reviews can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind the success of specific products, as they have the potential to disclose the intimate experiences and detailed thoughts of consumers.²⁴⁷ The works of Moon and his colleagues use reviews to assess viewers' reactions to the cultural elements embedded in different films.²⁴⁸ Moon and Song employ web-scraping and text mining techniques to extract cultural content from consumers' reviews of American films on IMDb in order to determine how culturally American and how culturally un-American each film is. They then incorporate the inferred categorisation results into a regression model to elucidate the factors that influence the performance of films in international marketplaces. Their findings indicate that overseas viewers receive culturally un-American films more positively and culturally American films more negatively than domestic viewers.²⁴⁹ Although I did not adopt their methodologies, my research was inspired by their idea of investigating how viewers perceive a foreign film through the analysis of their online reviews. Hence, I used content analysis to examine the reviews of the eight British films that Chinese consumers published on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao. To gain insights into the evaluation

²⁴⁷ Moon, et al. (2016), p.86

²⁴⁸ Moon, et al. (2016), p.91; Sangkil Moon, and Reo Song, 'The Roles of Cultural Elements in International Retailing of Cultural Products: An Application to the Motion Picture Industry', *Journal of Retailing*, 91:1(2015), 154-170(158)

²⁴⁹ Moon & Song (2015), p.166-168

of these films and the influence of various factors on their box office performance, I investigated which factors were mentioned and how frequently they were mentioned in Chinese viewers' comments. Since the research involves social media post analysis, I submitted the application to the University of Southampton's Arts and Humanities faculty ethics committee. The application was approved before commencing the research.

The unit of analysis for the content analysis was one user's review. The film reviews were gathered from two major ticketing platforms in China, Maoyan and Taopiaopiao. As mentioned earlier, they collectively control almost 80% of the Chinese film ticketing market.²⁵⁰ Although Douban is the largest film review platform in China and numerous previous studies have utilised Douban as the primary source to analyse how audiences' reviews influence films' performance in the Chinese market (such as the works of Wu et al., Choua and Lin, and Fang et al.), I did not collect reviews posted on Douban, as this platform does not indicate whether the user has actually purchased a ticket or watched the film.²⁵¹ Conversely, Maoyan and Taopiaopiao clearly show, after the username, whether the user who posted the review has purchased a ticket for the film. The database that depends on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao would exhibit greater reliability, as it could verify that the reviews were authored by actual consumers of a specific film. However, these two sources are not without their limitations. All Chinese social media are licensed by the state and are subject to media controls.²⁵² Maoyan and Taopiaopiao likewise claim the right to censor, modify and delete the content published by users in accordance with the relevant Chinese laws and regulations. Consequently, all the reviews displayed on these two platforms are deemed appropriate for the general public to read, which may result in relatively conservative

²⁵⁰ Frater (2018)

²⁵¹ Ting Wu, Fei Hao, and Mijin Kim, 'Typical Opinions Mining Based on Douban Film Comments in Animated Movies', *Entertainment Computing*, 36(2021), 100391; Xi Fang, Aihua Han, Yifang Luo, WonHo Choi, and Fan Zhang, 'Linguistic Factors in Digital Entertainment Success: How Review Readability Affects Movie Outcomes on Chinese Online Platforms', *Entertainment Computing*, 52(2025), 100911; Yuntsai Choua, and Wei Lin, 'Sequential Film Marketing in China: The Study of Social Platforms and Their Impacts', *Digital Business*, 5(2025), 100107

²⁵² Florian Schneider, 'The Cultural Governance of Mass Media in Contemporary China', in Keane Michael, (ed.), *Handbook of Cultural and Creative Industries in China*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2016), pp.189-206(p.202)

samples. Yet, analysing these reviews could still offer valuable insights into the reception of British films in China.

Moreover, I collected 50 reviews (25 reviews per platform) for each case for a total of 400 reviews. Considering the constraints of time, personnel, and financial resources, a total of 400 reviews is a feasible quantity to assess. To improve the representativeness of the database, samples were only collected from the reviews written by users who bought tickets and posted during the film's theatrical window. Nevertheless, it needs to acknowledge that there may be certain reviews that were written by marketing companies. Distinguishing between comments posted by ordinary viewers and marketing personnel on these two platforms can be challenging. To enhance the credibility of the database, I excluded reviews that not only gave a full mark but also duplicated information from the film's promotional materials to prevent the potential inclusion of reviews written by marketing personnel. Despite the potential limitations associated with pseudonymous reviewers, gathering 50 reviews for each case could still yield a relatively diverse array of perspectives from Chinese viewers, thereby allowing an investigation of the general attitude of Chinese consumers towards a specific British film. Additionally, when gathering reviews, I did not sort reviews by popularity on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, as it may be subject to manipulation by marketing personnel. By applying the convenience sampling method, I sampled the first 25 reviews that satisfied the criteria on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao under the 'default mode' in the 'sort by' tool. There is no apparent explanation for why these reviews are chosen to appear at the top. While non-probability sampling frequently faces criticism due to its increased susceptibility to sampling bias, convenience sampling was beneficial for my research for two reasons.²⁵³ First, while probability sampling has the potential to enhance the representativeness of the database, its implementation on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao (applications exclusively accessible on smartphones or tablets) presents challenges. Employing this method necessitates the use of third-party software for content extraction, an action explicitly prohibited by

²⁵³ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 4th edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.188; Erin Ruel, William E. Wagner III, and Brian Joseph Gillespie, *The Practice of Survey Research: Theory and Applications*, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016), p.258; Kimberly A. Neuendorf, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, 2nd edition, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2017), p.130

the Terms and Conditions of both Maoyan and Taopiaopiao.²⁵⁴ Second, as discussed in the Literature Review section, audience reviews (online word-of-mouth) exert a significant effect on a film's box office performance by shaping the purchasing decisions of prospective viewers.²⁵⁵ The purpose of performing the content analysis is not only to investigate Chinese consumers' perspectives about a particular British film but also to analyse the influence of these comments on the purchasing decisions of potential consumers. Consequently, the sampled reviews need to be easily available to most users on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao. Although I must acknowledge that I was unclear of how the algorithms functioned on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, and why these 25 reviews appeared first, I have confirmed on other accounts and smartphones that the same 25 reviews were the first to appear. These reviews were most likely to be read by others and functioned as word-of-mouth to influence potential consumers. Therefore, although I acknowledge the limitations of the sampling method and recognise that the samples used in this research reduced the generalisability of the findings, the convenience sampling approach remains valuable for addressing the research questions of my thesis. The sampled reviews could still provide important insights into how Chinese viewers responded to these British films and how the perceptions may impact their box office performance in China.

As Gunter emphasises, viewers' responses to a film are typically multifaceted, meaning that they may appreciate all of it or, as is more frequently the case, they may prefer certain aspects over others.²⁵⁶ To ensure that the analysis properly reflects the variations in the opinions expressed by Chinese viewers, the category rule for the content analysis was based on the typical opinions in reviews. Since there is no comparable existing research, I conducted a subset of representative opinions based on the factors introduced in the Literature Review section. In addition, I argue that the previous quantitative studies did not sufficiently consider the cultural representations and narrative components of films, because they did not regard each film as a distinct

²⁵⁴ Maoyan, 'The Terms and Conditions', <https://www.maoyan.com/rules/agreement>, [accessed 01 Dec 2022]; Taopiaopiao, 'The Terms and Conditions', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/dianying/pages/alfheim/content.html?spm=a1z21.3046609.0.0.32c0112aMxCKrR&id=924&interact=no&hsb=yes&displayType=plain&hidetitle=yes>, [accessed 01 Dec 2022]

²⁵⁵ Hu, et al. (2021), p.1024; Fan, et al. (2021), p.8

²⁵⁶ Gunter (2018), p.238

product. As film theorist David Bordwell claims, the primary purpose of film viewing activities is to build a meaningful whole story from the plot.²⁵⁷ It could be assumed that the overall impression of a film's narrative would be the most important aspect for the general public who watch films without professional knowledge or training in film interpretation. I referenced the argument put forth by visual rhetoric scholar Trischa Goodnow, who outlines that the components of visual narrative include characters, places, narrators and plots.²⁵⁸ Since none of the cases include narrators, I refined the categories into 'Genre', 'Stars', 'British Culture', 'Language', 'Pre-sold IP', 'Audio-visual effects' (which could be considered a manifestation of the budget), 'Marketing', 'Awards', 'Characters in story', 'Places in story' and 'Plot'. I also included 'Country of origins' as a separate category to check whether Chinese users mentioned the cultural identity of the British film in their reviews. The operational definitions of the categories are presented in Table 1.2 to serve as a guideline for subsequent coding procedures. In accordance with these categories, the coding process also involved an assessment of comments' general sentiments on these factors, which were classified as 'Positive', 'Negative' or 'Neutral'. Generally, the sentiments are rather overtly conveyed in audience reviews. This may be attributed to the limited word count of comments on the two ticketing platforms, which encourages users to express their perspectives concisely and directly. Hence, the comments that expressed strong appreciation for a particular factor of the film were classified as 'Positive'. Conversely, comments that expressed a strong dissatisfaction with a particular factor were classified as 'Negative'. 'Neutral' is the classification given to comments that did not express strong sentiments towards the factor they mentioned or simply indicated that a particular factor of the film was neither positive nor negative.

I used the research software NVivo to manage and analyse the content analysis data. Each case was entered to investigate the various factors by adhering to the protocol. The frequency of positive, neutral and negative attitudes towards these categories in the reviews was then counted and analysed. As the audience's interpretation is

²⁵⁷ Bordwell, et al. (2017), p.72

²⁵⁸ Trischa Goodnow, 'Narrative Theory: Visual Storytelling', in Sheree Josephson, James D. Kelly, and Ken Smith, (eds.), *Handbook of Visual Communication: Theory, Methods, and Media*, 2nd edition, (New York, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), pp.265-274(p.266)

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situated within specific social contexts, I analysed the reviews by relating them to the broader Chinese socio-cultural environment. In this way, the various influencing factors in different British films and their impact on the Chinese box office income could be comprehended. The reception of British films in China could likewise be comprehended through analysing the various perspectives and concerns of Chinese viewers regarding these films. A pilot study was implemented on a small sample to ensure the categories are exclusive and the coding sheet is feasible.²⁵⁹ The inadequacies or inconsistencies in the category systems of the coding schedule were adjusted before the full-scale content analysis.²⁶⁰

Table 1.2 Coding Categories for Analysing Audience Reviews

Category	Details
Platform	Record whether the review was published on Maoyan or Taopiaopiao.
Username	Every user is assigned a code number to ensure anonymity in the presentation of the results.
Publish date	The date that the review was published.
Rating	One to three stars are perceived to have a negative attitude. Four to six stars are perceived to have a neutral attitude. Seven to ten stars are perceived to have a positive attitude.
Genre	Any statement about the genre or style of the film.
Stars	Any statement about the directors, actors and actresses themselves, such as their names and acting. (Discussion about the characters in the story is excluded from this category.)
Characters in story	Any statement about the characters in the story, such as their behaviour and emotions. (Discussion about the actors or actresses is excluded from this category.)
British culture	Any statement about the British ideology, such as the discussion about the British society, class, beliefs, norms and values. (Language and places are excluded from this category.)
Language	Any statement about English language, the British accent or English language learning.
Places in story	Any statement about locations or sightseeing in the story.
Pre-sold IP	Any statement about the source material, original work, adaptation, sequels, prequels or remakes.
Plot	Any statement about the story, narrative or plot of the film.

²⁵⁹ Máire Messenger Davies, and Nick Mosdell, 'Content Analysis', *Practical Research Methods for Media and Cultural Studies: Making People Count*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp.98-107(p.106)

²⁶⁰ Anders Hansen, and David Machin, 'Content Analysis', *Media and Communication Research Methods*, (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2013), pp.126-162(p.152)

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Category	Details
Audio-visual effects	Any statement about the special effects, spectacles, audio effects or visual effects in the film.
Marketing	Any statement about promotional activities, such as posters, trailers and marketing campaigns. (Any reference to the social media platform on which the marketing activities took place is also included in this category.)
Awards	Any statement about the awards that the film has won or been nominated for, or the awards that audiences expect the film to win or be nominated for.
Country of origins	Any statement on the country that Chinese viewers believe this film is from. If the user perceives the film originates from Britain, it is classified as a positive attitude. If the user perceives the film originates from a country other than Britain, it is classified as a negative attitude.

Based on the results of the content analysis, I implemented textual analysis to further explore the cultural representations and narrative components referenced by Chinese consumers in their reviews, aiming to evaluate the cultural specificity of the film and its impact on cultural discount. According to media scholar Sonia Livingstone and Ranjana Das, 'Audiences are always situated, and situate themselves, between text and context'.²⁶¹ Previous knowledge and experience of narratives and the social world would establish certain expectations and assumptions, which would guide audiences in their interpretation of texts.²⁶² Thus, I employed a semiology lens to investigate the various narrative components and British cultural elements mentioned by Chinese users in their reviews. I assessed how these symbols and signs may generate meaning from the perspectives of Chinese viewers and whether they may mitigate or exacerbate the cultural discount that the film may encounter in China.

Regarding other factors mentioned by Chinese users in their reviews, including genre, stars, pre-sold IP, marketing and awards, which were collected through the preceding content analysis, I employed secondary data analysis to collect and examine relevant

²⁶¹ Sonia Livingstone, and Ranjana Das, 'The End of Audiences? Theoretical Echoes of Reception Amid the Uncertainties of Use', in John Hartley, Jean Burgess, and Axel Bruns, (eds.), *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), pp.104-121(p.106)

²⁶² Marie Gillespie, 'Narrative Analysis', in Marie Gillespie, and Jason Toynbee, (eds.), *Analysing Media Texts*, (Maidenhead, New York: Open University Press, 2006), pp.79-118(p.102)

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information from IMDb, Box Office Mojo, Maoyan Pro, Dengta Pro and the Chinese Film Box Office. The factors were gathered and analysed as follows:

Genre: By collecting information about the genres of each case on IMDb, a comprehensive understanding could be obtained about which genres of British films were frequently imported to China and which genres performed better than others. At the case study level, analysing the genres of the case could also facilitate an understanding of the potential audience in China and its impact on the box office performance.

Stars: I examined whether Chinese users referenced a particular star in their reviews and assessed if these stars served as a main incentive for viewers to watch the film. The recognition that Chinese consumers possessed regarding British stars was traced to the popularity of previous films and television dramas in which these stars had prominent roles before the release of the case. Information about the casts in each case was collected on IMDb. The information about the popularity of their previous works in China was collected from Box Office Mojo, Douban, Maoyan Pro, Dengta Pro and the Chinese Film Box Office.

Pre-sold IP: If the case is a sequel, prequel, remake or adaptation from other media, I analysed the viewpoints of Chinese users regarding the current film and its predecessor or source material. The familiarity of the predecessor or source material was examined through assessing its popularity in China, utilising data from Box Office Mojo, Douban, Maoyan Pro, Dengta Pro and Chinese Film Box Office.

Marketing: Although data regarding some of the promotional campaigns of these British films is accessible through Maoyan Pro and Dengta Pro, it remains challenging to evaluate the actual impact of these marketing initiatives on their box office performance in China, unless Chinese viewers specifically referenced such marketing activities in their reviews. In instances where users did not reference relevant marketing activities, I focused on the analysis of the Chinese film posters, which may

be the first visual component of the film that consumers can encounter.²⁶³ As an important part of marketing, posters usually convey the key selling points of the film in a straightforward way. Thus, through the perspective of semiology, I examined how the signs present in the poster of each case, encompassing both textual and visual components, generate connotative interpretations within the Chinese context.

Awards: By collecting the awards information on IMDb and the release date on Box Office Mojo, I investigated whether Chinese consumers were attracted to a case that was nominated or won any influential awards (such as the Oscar and the BAFTA Film Award).

These investigations address Research Question 2, which enquires about the responses of the Chinese audience and their influence on these British films' box office performance in China, as well as Research Question 3, which enquires about British cultural representations and their impact on the cultural discount experienced by these films in China.

Although interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires may also be effective methods for gathering the perspectives of Chinese consumers on British films, the timeframe I selected encompasses films that have already been released, and participants may not recall the details of the films. It may be feasible to re-screen the films for participants before the survey, but this may result in less reliable research findings because the researcher's influence is present in the viewing environment, rather than an authentic cinematic setting. Consequently, to investigate the Chinese audience's responses and comprehend the factors influencing the box office performance of British films in China, employing content analysis, textual analysis, and secondary data analysis to evaluate Chinese audience reviews and relevant information is a valid research methodology. However, this methodology is not without its limitations. Content analysis is criticised on the grounds that the meaning of texts is too inexpressible to be calculated. The

²⁶³ Finney (2015), p.110

frequently cited variables cannot always be elevated in importance.²⁶⁴ In other words, the frequently mentioned factors in reviews can only represent the perspectives of Chinese consumers but cannot imply that they have a greater impact on box office performance. Nevertheless, by examining the factors mentioned in each case, instructive information can still be obtained about the factors that Chinese consumers were concerned about in British films. Therefore, the results of my research still yield insights into Chinese viewers' reception of British films, which could improve the understanding of the cultural discount and the various factors influencing cross-cultural box office performance.

1.5 Thesis Overview

There are seven chapters in this thesis. This chapter serves as the Introduction, while Chapter 7 serves as the Conclusion, which summarises the findings of my research and the contribution to the research field. As delineated in the Methodology section, I selected eight British films as case studies for this research, since they may be deemed quintessentially British in the eyes of Chinese viewers. To efficiently solve the three research questions through analysing the eight cases, Chapter 2 functions as an overview, while Chapters 3 to 6 present the findings and discussions of these cases, which are categorised by genre.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the performance of the eight selected British films in China. The findings help in addressing Research Question 1 by showing that none of these cases attained a particularly high ranking in China's annual box office rankings. This chapter elucidates this fact from both the market environment and audience preferences perspectives. It examines the unique contextual factors in China between 2017 and 2022, including alterations in policy initiatives regarding imported films, the development of the Chinese film industry and the adverse impacts of the pandemic, thereby providing a thorough understanding of the challenges encountered by British

²⁶⁴ Diana Rose, 'Analysis of Moving Images', in Martin W. Bauer, and George Gaskell, (eds.), *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook*, (London, Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE, 2001), pp.246-262(p.258)

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films in China. Moreover, this chapter analyses the consumption preferences of Chinese consumers about British films, revealing that they have not yet developed a viewing habit for British films, thereby positioning British films as a niche market in China with potential for further exploration. This chapter offers expanded comprehension of the influence of contextual factors within the target market on box office performance, which is an aspect that previous research did not sufficiently elucidate.

Chapter 3 discusses the box office performance of three British action-adventure films: *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017), *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018) and *No Time to Die* (2021). Action-adventure films are considered a genre that is less culturally specific, experiences a reduced cultural discount and is more likely to achieve relatively higher box office revenues in the international market. The findings of this chapter reveal that this genre was the most frequently imported into China and attained the most favourable box office results among the eight cases examined in my research. The adverse effects of cultural discount were mitigated since these films diminished their cultural specificity by primarily relying on action spectacles and portraying British cultural elements through well-known landmarks and familiar stereotypes. Despite being sequels to popular films, featuring renowned stars and impressive audio-visual effects that could have aided in attracting Chinese consumers during their early release phase, these three films still faced challenges in achieving high positions in China's annual box office rankings. In addition to the reduced appeal of the franchise and stars in these British films in China, their storytelling abilities also failed to satisfy the expectations of many Chinese viewers, which further contributed to the decline in their box office revenue. This chapter offers valuable insights into the influence of the distinctive narrative components of each film on box office performance, which is a factor that previous studies did not adequately address.

Chapter 4 discusses two historical films: *Dunkirk* (2017) and *Darkest Hour* (2017). Historical films are usually regarded as a culturally specific genre, as foreign audiences often lack familiarity with the depicted historical period and characters, thereby presenting difficulties in attaining commercial success in the international market. The

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reception and performance of these two films further suggest that the culturally specific British historical background would result in a significant cultural discount in China. While both films depict the same historical period in Britain, they achieved different box office results in China due to their various budgets. During its early release stage, *Dunkirk*'s audio-visual effects and the director's reputation attracted a large audience in China. Nevertheless, some consumers expressed complaints about the film's values and beliefs, which led to a decrease in box office revenues during the subsequent stages of its release. In contrast, while the theme of *Darkest Hour* did not contradict Chinese cultural values, the film's unfamiliar historical context and stars were unappealing to most Chinese viewers, which resulted in a limited number of screenings and cinema admissions in China, thereby adversely affecting its box office revenue. This chapter provides evidence that films within the same genre can be subject to different levels of cultural discount in a foreign market, which is a finding that has not been addressed in previous research.

Chapter 5 discusses two fictional period dramas: *Downton Abbey* (2019) and *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022). Although period dramas fall within the historical film genre, they often exhibit a more casual tone and may not necessitate extensive historical knowledge for audiences to understand and appreciate the narrative. In comparison to historical films, they may be less culturally specific and experience lower cultural discount in the global market. Despite being spin-offs of the renowned television series *Downton Abbey*, these two films' box office revenues in China were the lowest among the eight cases examined in my research. Aside from the popularity of its original TV series, these two films lacked further factors capable of enticing the general public in China. The portrayals of captivating English landscapes and the aristocratic lifestyle appear to appeal primarily to Chinese viewers who were already interested in British culture. Additionally, the cultural specificity of these films was particularly apparent in the characters and stories that were unfamiliar to non-fans, which made it difficult to pique their interest in watching the films. This chapter provides supplementary qualitative evidence to elucidate the cultural discount faced by the drama genre encountered in China and to identify the potential factors contributing to its struggle to attract Chinese viewers.

Chapter 6 discusses one family film: *Paddington 2* (2017). This chapter is much shorter than the others because it contains only one film, which is the sole quintessentially British family film that was released in China during the researched period. Family films are often considered a genre that is less culturally specific, since they are generally understandable and enjoyable for both adults and children, which is anticipated to experience less cultural discount and achieve a relatively better box office performance in overseas markets. *Paddington 2* received positive reviews from most Chinese viewers. However, it did not attain significant commercial success in China, ranking fourth among the eight cases examined in my research. The cultural discount encountered by the film in China was not attributable to its textual factors, which displayed a 'transparent' narrative and values that were compatible with Chinese culture, but rather to the contextual factors that were present in the Chinese market. The family film genre has a comparatively limited appeal in China, as most domestic family films are only appealing to children and struggle to attract adult viewers. In addition, it encountered formidable competition from Disney's picture, *Coco* (2017). British family films have not established comparable recognition to American family films, which may hinder their ability to attract substantial attention within the Chinese market. This chapter presents an in-depth investigation of the influence imposed by the market environment on films' box office performance, which is a factor inadequately examined by previous research.

Chapter 7 concludes the key findings of this thesis and addresses the theoretical, methodological and industrial contributions of this project to the study of cross-cultural box office performance. The results indicate that British films were not frequently released in mainland China and did not achieve significant commercial success at the Chinese box office between 2017 and 2022. Chinese viewers often discussed the narrative components of British films, particularly 'Character in story' and 'Plot' in their reviews, since the quality of narrative substantially impacted their viewing experiences. They also frequently mentioned the market signals of British films, including 'Pre-sold IP', 'Stars', 'Audio-visual effects', and 'Genre', as these factors could potentially pique their interest in viewing a film. The factors of 'Marketing',

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'Awards', and 'Language' were either infrequently mentioned or not mentioned at all in the reviews. The discussions about 'Country of origin' and 'British culture' indicate that Chinese viewers had a stereotypical and limited imagination of British culture, primarily focusing on British humour, British gentleman, and London landmarks. Although my project has certain limitations, such as the restricted number of cases and review samples, it still offers a valuable analysis of the Chinese audience's reception of British films and the cultural discount these films encountered in China.

Therefore, my project makes the following contributions to the literature:

1. The significance of this study lies in its mixed-methods case study design, which analysed both qualitative and quantitative evidence for every film. This approach addressed the gap in the existing research on box office performance, which has predominantly relied on quantitative methods that cannot adequately elucidate the complexities of cultures, films and audience reception.
2. By offering an in-depth analysis of the box office performance of British films in China, my research addressed the gap in the literature on international media flows, which has primarily analysed Hollywood films and cannot sufficiently capture the intricacies of the global landscape.

Chapter 2 British Films in China Between 2017 and 2022: An Overview

Introduction

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the cultural discount encountered by British films in the Chinese market and the factors affecting their box office performance in China from 2017 to 2022, it is necessary to begin by analysing the contextual factors associated with the Chinese film market during this period and the attitudes of Chinese consumers towards British films. This chapter argues that the box office performance of British films in China was influenced by unfavourable contextual factors unique to the Chinese market and the underdeveloped viewing preferences of the Chinese audience. On the one hand, the number of British films that were imported into China and their box office revenue in China had gradually decreased because of the heightened protective measures of Chinese policy incentives for domestic films, the growing enthusiasm of the Chinese audience for domestic films, and the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the limited interest of Chinese consumers in British culture and the limited distribution of British films in China impeded the development of a viewing habit for British films among Chinese viewers. Therefore, the challenging market conditions in China and the lack of viewing habits of Chinese consumers could account for the infrequent release of British films and their unremarkable performance at the Chinese box office from 2017 to 2022.

This chapter will commence with an examination of the Chinese box office performance of the eight British films selected as case studies in this research. Based on the results, it will then investigate the general market conditions in the Chinese film industry from 2017 to 2022 and evaluate the possible effects on the import quantity and box office income of British films. Subsequently, it will explore the Chinese audience's attitudes and preferences towards British films and assess the potential impacts on the box office performance of British films in China.

2.1 Overall Performance of Case Study Films

To reiterate, my research employs eight British films as case studies to investigate the factors that affect their box office performance in China. These films are culturally British films that centre on British lead characters or settings and could be regarded as quintessentially British in the eyes of Chinese viewers. Although each case will be thoroughly examined in subsequent chapters, it is important to provide a comprehensive overview of the performance of these British films in China. Table 2.1 summarises the pertinent information of these eight films to enable better comparisons of the similarities and differences between these cases.²⁶⁵ Information

²⁶⁵ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking', <https://zgdyf.zgdyfw.cn/movie?tab=1&secondTab=1>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]; IMDb, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4649466/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_3, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]; Box Office Mojo, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr4226437637/>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyfw.cn/movie/detail/07401712017?from=movie>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/341173/boxshowna?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://dtpo.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=164219&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; IMDb, 'Dunkirk (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5013056/?ref=ttco_co_tt, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Box Office Mojo, 'Dunkirk (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3929100805/>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Dunkirk (2017)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyfw.cn/movie/detail/07401492017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Dunkirk (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/342598/boxshowna?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Dunkirk (2017)', <https://dtpo.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=198714&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; IMDb, 'Paddington 2 (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4468740/?ref=ttawd_awd_tt, [accessed 15 Dec 2024]; Box Office Mojo, 'Paddington 2 (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr99635717/>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Paddington 2 (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/343905/box?barTheme=401D1D&curTab=1>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Paddington 2 (2017)', <https://dtpo.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=221226&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; IMDb, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4555426/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Box Office Mojo, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr509170181/>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/346625/boxshowna?barTheme=262640>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', <https://dtpo.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=225197&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; IMDb, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6921996/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]; Box Office Mojo, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1340363269/>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/1207271/boxshowna?barTheme=593636>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', <https://dtpo.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=332041&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; IMDb, 'Downton Abbey (2019)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6398184/?ref=tt_sims_tt_i_1, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Box Office Mojo, 'Downton Abbey (2019)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2932756997/>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Downton Abbey (2019)',

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regarding these films was gathered from IMDb, Box Office Mojo, and three Chinese platforms: Maoyan Pro, Dengta Pro and Chinese Film Box Office. Yet, the annual box office rankings in China were slightly different in Box Office Mojo and Chinese Film Box Office. Evaluating the accuracy of the data from the two platforms is challenging, as is ascertaining if one platform yields more accurate statistics than the other. I decided to use data from Chinese Film Box Office as a reference, given that Box Office Mojo's 2022 annual box office rankings in China encompassed just 22 titles, but the former covered rankings for all films released in China in that year.²⁶⁶

Table 2.1 Information and Performance of Case Study British Films in China

Title	Country of Origin	Genre	Gross UK Box Office	Gross Chinese Box Office	Gross Global Box Office	Release Date in China	Opening Screens in China	Cinema Admission in China	Annual Box Office Rankings in China
<i>Kingsman: The Golden Circle</i> (2017)	UK US Italy	Action Adventure Comedy Crime Thriller	\$33 million	\$72 million	\$411 million	20.10.2017	103,000	13 million	35
<i>Dunkirk</i> (2017)	UK Netherland France US	Action Drama History Thriller War	\$81 million	\$51 million	\$525 million	01.09.2017	87,000	10 million	43

<https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/1203825/box?barTheme=264040&curTab=1>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Downton Abbey (2019)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=514968&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; IMDb, 'No Time To Die (2021)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2382320/?ref=nm_sr_srg_0, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]; Box Office Mojo, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1812943365/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/338384/boxshowna?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=139529&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; IMDb, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11703710/?ref=tt_sims_tt_i_2, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Box Office Mojo, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3435090437/>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/1324996/box?barTheme=594D36>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=1380854&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

²⁶⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office For 2022', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2022/?area=CN&grossesOption=totalGrosses>, [accessed 10 Apr 2025]

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Title	Country of Origin	Genre	Gross UK Box Office	Gross Chinese Box Office	Gross Global Box Office	Release Date in China	Opening Screens in China	Cinema Admission in China	Annual Box Office Rankings in China
<i>Paddington 2</i> (2017)	France UK	Adventure Comedy Family	\$60 million	\$33 million	\$228 million	08.12.2017	75,000	7 million	65
<i>Darkest Hour</i> (2017)	UK US China	Biography Drama History War	\$33 million	\$6 million	\$151 million	01.12.2017	13,000	1 million	140
<i>Johnny English Strikes Again</i> (2018)	UK France US China	Action Adventure Comedy	\$23 million	\$25 million	\$159 million	23.11.2018	59,000	6 million	62
<i>Downton Abbey</i> (2019)	UK China US	Drama Romance	\$34 million	\$3 million	\$192 million	13.12.2019	21,000	630,000	157
<i>No Time to Die</i> (2021)	UK US	Action Adventure Thriller	\$128 million	\$65 million	\$774 million	29.10.2021	109,000	10 million	26
<i>Downton Abbey: A New Era</i> (2022)	UK US	Drama Romance	\$18 million	\$2 million	\$92 million	20.05.2022	28,000	373,000	93

Sources: IMDb, Box Office Mojo, Chinese Film Box Office, Maoyan Pro, and Dengta Pro

On the one hand, this table reveals that, while the revenue from China represented a significant portion of the global box office earnings for these British films, their performance in China was not notably remarkable. To gain a clearer understanding of their performance in China, it would be advantageous to compare them with the performance of American films. Among the top 20 highest-grossing films at the Chinese box office annually from 2017 to 2022, twelve American films ranked within the top 20 in 2017, nine in 2018, eight in 2019, two in 2020, three in 2021, and three

in 2022.²⁶⁷ In contrast, no British film examined in this research achieved a position within the top 20 box office rankings in China. These findings suggest that these British films were not particularly favoured by Chinese consumers and did not attain significant commercial success in the Chinese market.

On the other hand, the quantity of quintessentially British films that were imported into China during the researched period was limited. The table shows that four out of the eight cases were released in China in 2017, with no releases in 2020, and one film released in each of the remaining years. It is notable that China permits imports of approximately 30 to 40 films annually under the flat-fee scheme and 34 films under the revenue-sharing scheme.²⁶⁸ According to the official film distribution notifications of these British films in China, all of them were jointly distributed by China Film Group Corporation (CFG) and Huaxia Film Distribution, the only two state-owned companies authorised to distribute foreign films in mainland China. *Darkest Hour* (2017) was imported under the flat-fee scheme, whereas the remaining seven films were imported via revenue-sharing schemes.²⁶⁹ In comparison to the annual import quantity of foreign films, the quantity of quintessentially British films that were imported into China was underrepresented between 2017 and 2022.

Moreover, the table reveals that China is a country of origin for three films: *Darkest Hour*, *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018) (henceforth referred to as *Johnny English 3*),

²⁶⁷ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'

²⁶⁸ Cheung (2016), p.179; Su (2016), p.42; Elliott, et al. (2018), p.69; Zhu (2022), p.192; Liu (2023a), p.193

²⁶⁹ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/341173/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/342598/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Paddington 2* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/343905/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=401D1D>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Darkest Hour* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/346625/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=262640>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/1207271/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=593636>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Downton Abbey* (2019)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/1203825/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=264040>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *No Time to Die* (2021)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/338384/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/1324996/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=594D36>, [accessed 02 Feb 2024]

and *Downton Abbey* (2019) (referred to as *Downton Abbey 1*), all of which were funded by the private Chinese company Perfect World Pictures.²⁷⁰ Perfect World Pictures is one of the most successful Chinese private companies, which was established in 2008 and specialises in investing, talent management, production, distribution, and marketing of film and television content.²⁷¹ The company's expansion of international film investments has benefited from China's 'going out' strategy implemented in the early 2010s. Zhu asserts that this initiative promotes the development of private businesses in their endeavours to develop international operations. Due to the limited appeal of Chinese films to international audiences, Chinese film companies are strategically investing in foreign films to generate money and broaden their portfolios for global market access.²⁷² Considering that three of the eight cases received funding from the Chinese company, Chinese investment may enhance the likelihood of British films securing the limited yearly import quotas from China. However, the comparatively weak performance of these three films implies that investments from Chinese companies may not be beneficial for their screening allocations and box office revenue in China.

Furthermore, the box office revenues of the eight cases in China indicate that the cultural specificity of the films significantly influenced their performance. The highest-grossing films were three action blockbusters with the highest budgets (all over \$100 million) among the cases: *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017) (referred to as *Kingsman 2*), *No Time To Die* (2021), and *Dunkirk* (2017).²⁷³ This finding is consistent with the claim of Lee, who maintains that action blockbusters usually outperform other genres in the global market.²⁷⁴ Additionally, the fact that *Kingsman 2* and *No Time To Die* were the sole 3D films in the cases supports the findings of Elliott et al., which suggest that the enhanced formats (3D and IMAX) have a positive and significant influence on films' box office earnings in China.²⁷⁵ More importantly, these three films also received the

²⁷⁰ IMDb, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'; IMDb, '*Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)'; IMDb, '*Downton Abbey* (2019)'

²⁷¹ Perfect World Pictures, 'About Perfect World Pictures', https://pictures.games.wanmei.com/about/en_about.html, [accessed 13 Feb 2024]

²⁷² Zhu (2022), p.240, 252

²⁷³ IMDb, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)'; IMDb, '*No Time To Die* (2021)'; IMDb, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'

²⁷⁴ Lee (2006a), p.274-276

²⁷⁵ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.88

highest number of opening screens among the eight cases, aligning with the argument of Litman and Kohl, Chang and Ki, and Fetscherin, which finds a positive correlation between the number of screens and box office revenue.²⁷⁶ These three films in the Chinese market could benefit from their status as high-budget blockbusters and their low cultural specificity, which contributed to increased audience attraction, larger screening allocations, and, as a result, enhanced box office performance. On the contrary, the least successful films were three dialogue-driven dramas situated in British history: *Darkest Hour*, *Downton Abbey 1*, and *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022) (referred to as *Downton Abbey 2*). It supports the findings in Kwak and Zhang's research, which reveal that the Chinese box office performance of foreign films is adversely affected by the drama genre.²⁷⁷ These three films were allocated a tiny percentage of screenings in China, amounting to around one-fifth to one-sixth of the aforementioned three blockbusters. Their lacklustre performance can be ascribed to the higher cultural specificity they exhibited in comparison to others, which cannot persuade Chinese distributors and exhibitors to believe in their commercial potential and arrange additional screenings or attract a large number of Chinese consumers, thereby impeding their box office success. It is in accordance with Fu's argument, which posits that the capacity of films that are highly culturally specific to transcend cultural barriers is limited.²⁷⁸ Hence, the findings support the cultural discount theory and provide further evidence to indicate that increased cultural specificity in British films is associated with a stronger cultural discount and a reduced probability of box office success in China.

2.2 Chinese Film Market Between 2017 and 2022

2.2.1 Changes in the Film Industry

Contextual factors within the Chinese market could potentially influence the import quantity and box office performance of British films in China. It is imperative to provide

²⁷⁶ Litman & Kohl (1989), p.48; Chang & Ki (2005), p.264; Fetscherin (2010), p.472

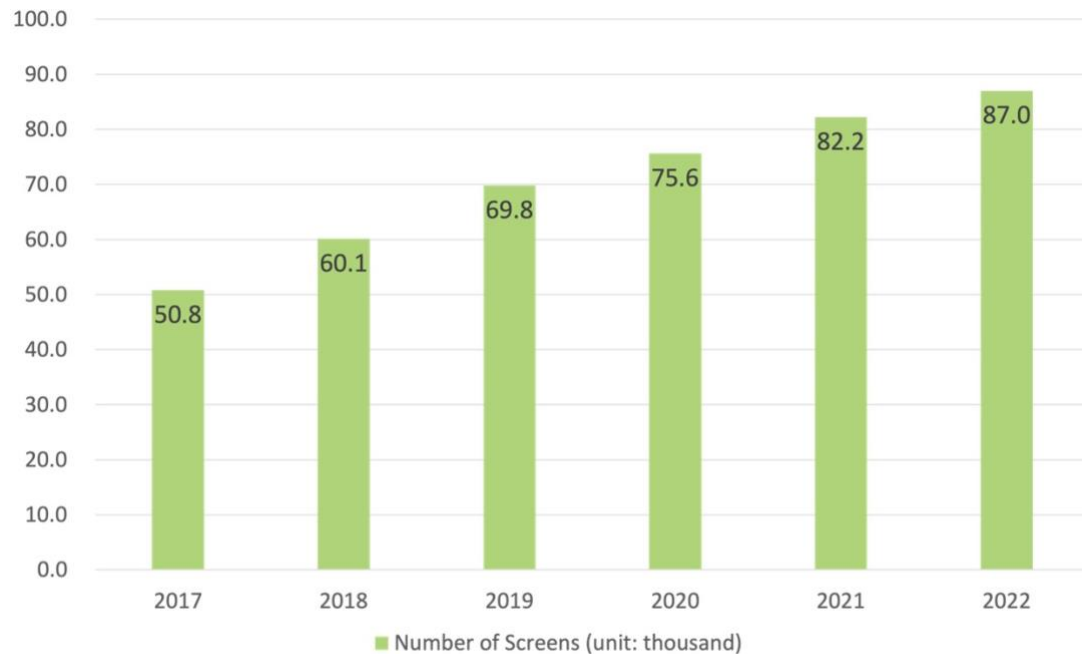
²⁷⁷ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135

²⁷⁸ Fu (2012), p.795

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an overview of the developments and transformations that occurred in the Chinese film market from 2017 to 2022. The growth of the Chinese film industry during the researched period is depicted in Figure 2.2.1 and Figure 2.2.2.²⁷⁹

Figure 2.2.1 Number of Screens in China (2017-2022)

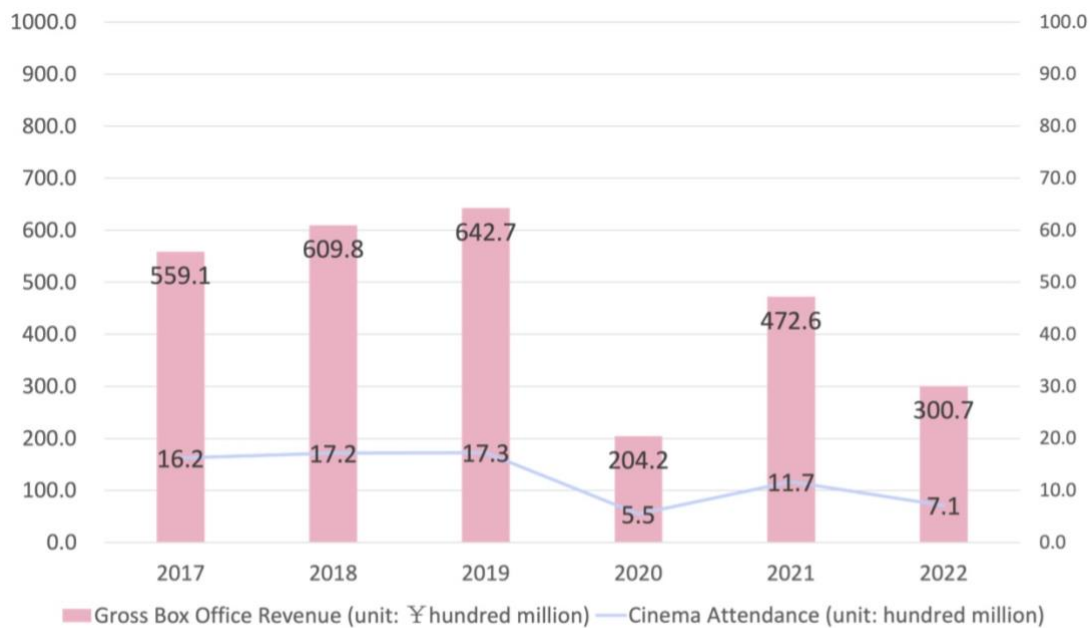


Sources: China Film Administration, National Film Special Fund Office, Xinhua News Agency

²⁷⁹ Yang Liu, and Shanshan Ren, 'The Total Box Office of National Films in 2022 Exceeded 30 Billion Yuan', *China Film Administration*, 04 January, 2023, https://www.chinafilm.gov.cn/xwzx/gzdt/202301/t20230106_666706.html, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [刘阳, 任姗姗, "2022 年度全国电影总票房超三百亿元", 中国电影局, 2023.01.04, https://www.chinafilm.gov.cn/xwzx/gzdt/202301/t20230106_666706.html]; National Film Special Fund Office, '2021 China Film Market Data Report', 08 February, 2022, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/MHNBjSxWmzvsljnS2D-tkw>, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [国家电影专资办, "2021 年度中国电影市场数据报告", 2022.02.08, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/MHNBjSxWmzvsljnS2D-tkw>]; National Film Special Fund Office, '2020 China Film Market Data Report', 07 February, 2021, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/uu57WKyQzr6W4vsvyzx59DQ>, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [国家电影专资办, "2020 年度电影市场数据报告", 2021.02.07, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/uu57WKyQzr6W4vsvyzx59DQ>]; Xinhua News Agency, '2019 Chinese Movies Show "Report": 64.266 Billion Yuan Box Office Hits New High', *Chinese Government Website*, 31 December, 2019, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-12/31/content_5465531.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [新华社, "2019 中国电影亮出'成绩单': 642.66 亿元票房创新高", 中国政府网, 2019.12.31, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-12/31/content_5465531.htm]; Xinhua News Agency, 'China's Movie Box Office Exceeds 60 Billion Yuan For The First Time in 2018, With Domestic Films Accounting For More Than 60% Of The Market', *Chinese Government Website*, 31 December, 2018, https://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2018-12/31/content_5353863.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [新华社, "2018 年中国电影票房首次突破 600 亿元 国产片市场占比超六成", 中国政府网, 2019.01.01, https://www.gov.cn/guowuyuan/2018-12/31/content_5353863.htm]; Xinhua News Agency, 'China's Movie Box Office Revenue Reached 55.9 Billion Yuan in 2017, A Year-On-Year Increase of 13%', *Chinese Government Website*, 31 December, 2017, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-12/31/content_5252077.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [新华社, "2017 年中国电影票房 559 亿元 同比增长 13%", 中国政府网, 2017.12.31, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-12/31/content_5252077.htm]

According to the Chinese film industry's annual reports, China was the world's second-largest film market for most of the period between 2017 and 2022, behind only North America.²⁸⁰ Yet, the growth in cinema attendance has not kept pace with the expansion of cinema screens. It indicates that the film-watching habits of the general public in China have not yet been fully established, with the average consumer watching fewer than one film in cinemas per year.²⁸¹

Figure 2.2.2 Gross Box Office Revenue and Cinema Attendance in China (2017-2022)



Sources: China Film Administration, National Film Special Fund Office, Xinhua News Agency

²⁸⁰ Hanwen Liu, and Jiajia Lu, 'The Analysis Report of 2017 Chinese Film Industry Development', *Contemporary Cinema*, 3(2018), 17-23, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/85P4WNUFhWY4zYqbwsnnjw> [刘汉文, 陆佳佳, "2017 年中国电影产业发展分析报告", 当代电影, 3(2018), 17-23, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/85P4WNUFhWY4zYqbwsnnjw>]; Jiajia Lu, and Hanwen Liu, 'The Analysis Report of 2018 Chinese Film Industry Development', *Contemporary Cinema*, 3(2019), 13-20, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/9-A3eaNkTcBlnRrblsHLVA> [陆佳佳, 刘汉文, "2018 年中国电影产业发展分析报告", 当代电影, 3(2019), 13-20, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/9-A3eaNkTcBlnRrblsHLVA>]; Hanwen Liu, and Jiajia Lu, 'The Analysis Report of 2019 Chinese Film Industry Development', *Contemporary Cinema*, 2(2020), 15-26, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/N_kqf3dy2gCBxw-LZNIrQ; <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bmcg-ee1IUSMxVwPZpX6hw> [刘汉文, 陆佳佳, "2019 年中国电影产业发展分析报告", 当代电影, 2(2020), 15-26, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/N_kqf3dy2gCBxw-LZNIrQ; <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bmcg-ee1IUSMxVwPZpX6hw>]; Jiajia Lu, and Hanwen Liu, 'The Analysis Report of 2020 Chinese Film Industry Development', *Contemporary Cinema*, 3(2021), 15-26 [刘汉文, 陆佳佳, "2020 年中国电影产业发展分析报告", 当代电影, 3(2021), 15-26]; Hanwen Liu, 'The Analysis Report of 2021 Chinese Film Industry Development', *Contemporary Cinema*, 2(2022), 17-26, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/utimOvuJDmFbfQl6Q3jvng> [刘汉文, "2021 年中国电影产业发展分析报告", 当代电影, 2(2022), 17-26]; Hanwen Liu, and Jiajia Lu, 'The Analysis Report of 2022 Chinese Film Industry Development', *Contemporary Cinema*, 2(2023), 15-25, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/aePF_MqfokLcCSKZB5_5KA [刘汉文, 陆佳佳, "2022 年中国电影产业发展分析报告", 当代电影, 2(2023), 15-25]

²⁸¹ Lu & Liu (2019); McMahon (2021), p.422

The Chinese film market also underwent numerous changes throughout the researched period. According to Lu and Liu, between 2017 and 2019, the Chinese film industry experienced a substantial market transition and made a concerted effort to eliminate the market bubbles that had been created by the rapid development of previous years.²⁸² During this period, China enacted a number of regulations to foster the growth of the domestic film industry and market. Especially, in March 2017, China implemented the 'Film Industry Promotion Law'. This law marked the nation's first policy in the realm of the cultural industry and aimed to regulate the film market and stimulate its vitality.²⁸³ In March 2018, the China Film Bureau was founded as the current regulating body for film in China, directly overseen by the Communist Party's Ministry of Propaganda. The reform was intended to guide the direction of film creation, promote high-quality film development, and enhance film infrastructure under the immediate supervision of the Party.²⁸⁴ Moreover, as shown in the figures, the increase in box office revenue in 2019 was not attributed to a boost in cinema attendance, possibly due to the cancellation of the film 'ticket subsidy' in 2018. The removal of the subsidy increased the average film ticket price to a standard level. The 'market bubbles' caused by the ticket subsidy vanished as a result of the increase in prices, which discouraged many Chinese viewers from attending cinemas.²⁸⁵ These modifications to regulations, institutions, and legislation would undeniably affect the circumstances that films would encounter in the Chinese market since 2017. Additionally, from 2020, the Chinese film industry, like the rest of the globe, experienced substantial declines in development following the COVID-19 outbreak. Particularly, the 'Dynamic Zero COVID' policy had a significant impact on the Chinese film market for nearly three years, from the onset of the pandemic in early 2020 to the termination of the policy in December 2022.²⁸⁶ This policy was intended to prevent

²⁸² Lu & Liu (2019); Lu & Liu (2020)

²⁸³ Xinhua News Agency, 'The Law Escorted The Healthy March of Chinese Films--The Person in Charge of The General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) Talked About the Introduction of The Film Industry Promotion Law of The People's Republic of China', *Chinese Government Website*, 07 November, 2016, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-11/07/content_5129732.htm, [accessed 21 Feb 2024] [新华社, "法律护航中国电影健康前行——新闻出版广电总局有关负责人谈电影产业促进法出台", 中国政府网, 2016.11.07, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-11/07/content_5129732.htm]

²⁸⁴ Lu & Liu (2019)

²⁸⁵ Zenghan Zhuang, 'The Development of Chinese Cinema Circuits and the Chinese Film Market in 2018', in Qiao Li, Yanqiu Guan, and Hong Lu, (eds.), *Development of the Global Film Industry: Industrial Competition and Cooperation in the Context of Globalization*, (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2021), pp.136-148(p.137, 145)

²⁸⁶ Brzeski (2022)

the spread of the pandemic by implementing strict lockdowns in response to any number of COVID cases, conducting extensive testing in affected areas, and mandating quarantine in government facilities or home isolation for those diagnosed with COVID.²⁸⁷ Chinese citizens were forced to reduce their consumer activities due to concerns of being subjected to isolation if they contracted the virus or encountered an infected individual. This is particularly apparent in activities such as attending the cinema, which need a large number of people to congregate in a small space. A substantial impact was observed on the attendance and opening rates of Chinese cinemas.²⁸⁸ Cinema operations in China were halted for 178 days in 2020, and nearly half of all cinemas were closed for 46 days in 2022.²⁸⁹ On the one hand, in response to the challenges faced by cinemas in generating revenue, ticket prices were increased, resulting in a further decline in attendance.²⁹⁰ On the other hand, the pandemic also caused a shift in the balance of power from cinemas to streaming platforms due to the frequent lockdowns and the deteriorating economy.²⁹¹ According to Wong from *Screen Daily*, comparing 2017 to 2019 and 2020 to 2022, average attendance per screening declined from 15.3 to 8.6 in China.²⁹² In the aftermath of the pandemic, the Chinese film market experienced a deceleration in expansion during 2020 and 2022. Neither the total box office revenue nor cinema attendance had recovered to their pre-epidemic levels of prosperity. Consequently, it is evident that the Chinese film market has undergone significant development and transformation throughout the researched period.

2.2.2 Impacts on the Imported Films

The impact of these developments and changes was evident in the overall landscape of imported films in the Chinese market. Figure 2.2.3 illustrates the development trend

²⁸⁷ BBC News, 'China Covid: How Many Cases and Deaths Are There?', 16 January, 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/59882774>, [accessed 21 Feb 2024]

²⁸⁸ Liu & Lu (2023)

²⁸⁹ Silvia Wong, 'China Box Office Fell 36% to \$4.4bn in 2022 Amid Covid-Related Cinema Closures', *Screen Daily*, 09 January, 2023, <https://www.screendaily.com/news/china-box-office-fell-36-to-44bn-in-2022-amid-covid-related-cinema-closures/5177928.article>, [accessed 13 Feb 2024]

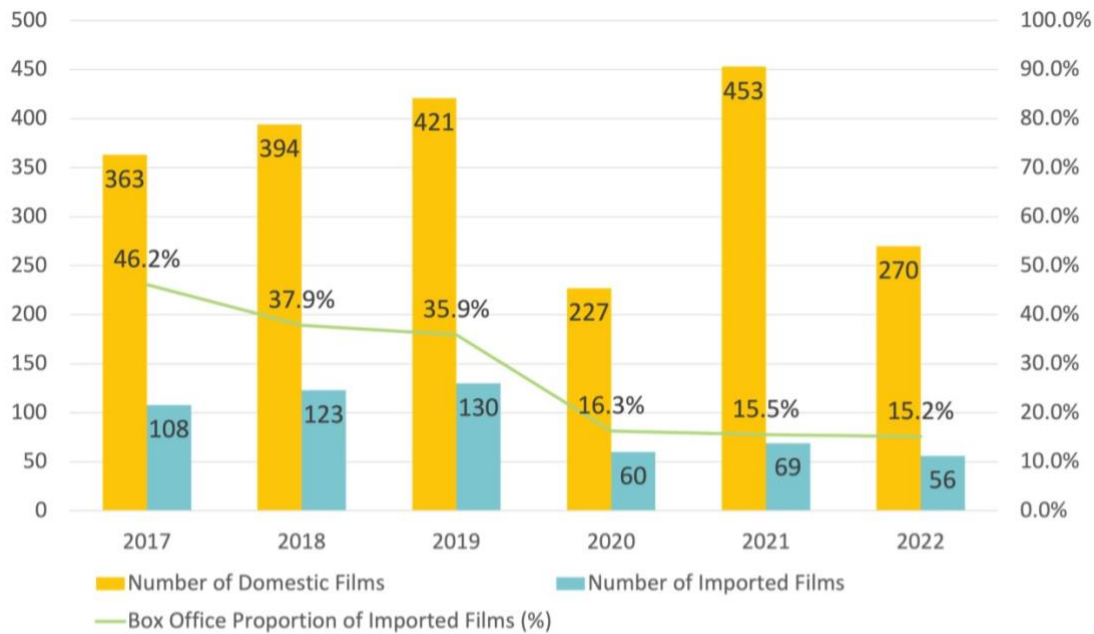
²⁹⁰ Liu & Lu (2023)

²⁹¹ Rebecca Davis, 'China B.O. in High Gear', *Variety*, 21 June, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/china-b-o-high-gear/docview/2563817635/se-2>, [accessed 02 Jan 2023]

²⁹² Wong (2023)

of both domestic and imported films in China from 2017 to 2022.²⁹³ The data indicate that, from 2017 to 2019, while the quantity of imported films in China increased gradually, their box office income experienced a continuous fall over this timeframe. Between 2020 and 2022, the quantity of foreign films imported into China significantly declined, leading to a decrease in their box office proportion, which remained substantially below pre-epidemic levels.

Figure 2.2.3 Box Office Proportion and Number of Imported Films in China (2017-2022)



Sources: China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association, China Film Administration, National Film Special Fund Office, Xinhua News Agency

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the market share of these imported films in China, it is necessary to compare the situation in the five years prior to the research timeframe. Based on the data available on official government websites, the box office proportion of imported films in China from 2011 to 2016 was as follows:

²⁹³ Xinhua News Agency (2017); Xinhua News Agency (2018); Xinhua News Agency (2019); National Film Special Fund Office (2020); National Film Special Fund Office (2021); National Film Special Fund Office (2022); Liu & Ren (2023); China Film Distribution and Exhibition Association, 'Film Release Schedule', <https://www.chinafilm.org.cn/schedule/leas>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]

46.39%, 51.54%, 41.35%, 45.49%, 38.42%, and 41.67%.²⁹⁴ In comparison to the data presented in Figure 2.2.3, the box office share of imported films in China in 2017 was comparable to that of previous years, followed by a noticeable drop in the subsequent two years. In the three years following the pandemic, the box office proportion of imported films reached its lowest point in a decade. Besides, the annual box office proportion of imported films in China showed notable stability from 2018 to 2019 and from 2020 to 2022. Given the complexity of the Chinese film industry, which is characterised by a large number of cinemas, consumers and films, as well as the market's rapid growth, Wu et al. point out that such a continuous market-share split is unlikely to result from a purely organic industry evolution.²⁹⁵ This suggests that other trade restrictions, in addition to quotas, exist and impede the success of foreign films in China.

First, several regulations in the Chinese film industry promote the development of domestic films while restricting the excessive popularity of imported films. The 'Film Industry Promotion Law', enacted in 2017, states that the annual screening duration of domestic films by the projection unit shall not be less than two-thirds of the total

²⁹⁴ Xinhua News Agency, 'Chart: China's Movie Box Office Exceeded 13 Billion Yuan in 2011', *Chinese Government Website*, 10 January, 2012, https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-01/10/content_2040636.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [新华社, "图表: 2011 年中国电影票房过 130 亿元", 中国政府网, 2012.01.10. https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-01/10/content_2040636.htm]; People's Daily Online, 'The Total Box Office Revenue of Chinese Films in 2012 Was 17 Billion Yuan, A Year-On-Year Increase of 30.18%', 10 January, 2013, <http://culture.people.com.cn/n/2013/0110/c22219-20152461.html>, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [人民网, "2012 年全国电影总票房 170 亿元 同比增长 30.18%", 2013.01.10, <http://culture.people.com.cn/n/2013/0110/c22219-20152461.html>]; Xinhua News Agency, 'Chart: The Total Box Office of Movies in China in 2013 Was 21.769 Billion Yuan', *Chinese Government Website*, 04 January, 2014, https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2014-01/04/content_2559663.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [新华社, "图表: 2013 年全国电影总票房 217.69 亿元", 中国政府网, 2014.01.04, https://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2014-01/04/content_2559663.htm]; Xinhua News Agency, 'China's Total Box Office Revenue in 2014 Jumped To 29.6 Billion Yuan, Up More Than 36% Year-On-Year', *Chinese Government Website*, 01 January, 2015, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/01/content_2799288.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [新华社, "2014 年中国电影总票房跃升至 296 亿元 同比增长超过 36%", 中国政府网, 2015.01.01, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-01/01/content_2799288.htm]; Xinhua News Agency, 'China's Total Box Office Revenue in 2015 Jumped To 44.069 Billion Yuan', *Chinese Government Website*, 31 December, 2015, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-12/31/content_5030030.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [新华社, "2015 年中国电影总票房跃升至 440.69 亿元", 中国政府网, 2015.12.31, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2015-12/31/content_5030030.htm]; Chinese Government Website, 'State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television: China's Movie Box Office Revenue in 2016 Was 45.712 Billion Yuan', 03 January, 2017, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-01/03/content_5156125.htm, [accessed 24 Sep 2024] [中国政府网, "新闻出版广电总局: 2016 年中国电影票房 457.12 亿元", 2017.01.03, https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2017-01/03/content_5156125.htm]

²⁹⁵ Chunhua Wu, Charles B. Weinberg, Qiyan Wang, and Jason Y.C. Ho, 'Administrative Trade Barrier: An Empirical Analysis of Exporting Hollywood Movies to China', *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, (2022), 1-22(2, 5)

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annual screening duration of the films.²⁹⁶ Similarly, ‘The 14th Five-Year Plan for China’s Film Development’ (plan for 2021 to 2025), implemented in 2021, likewise stipulates that the annual box office share of domestic films needs to remain above 55%.²⁹⁷ This implies that the government is overseeing the performance disparities between domestic and foreign films.²⁹⁸ Therefore, it seems that the regulations in China have become more supportive of domestic films, whereas foreign films encountered an increasingly challenging climate over the researched period.

Moreover, in recent years, Chinese viewers have shown a growing preference for domestic films rather than foreign films. Figure 2.2.4 illustrates the information regarding the top ten highest-grossing films at the Chinese box office from 2017 to 2022.²⁹⁹

Figure 2.2.4 Top 10 Highest-grossing Films at the Chinese Box Office (2017-2022)

Rank	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	<i>Wolf Warrior 2</i> 《战狼2》	<i>Operation Red Sea</i> 《红海行动》	<i>Ne Zha</i> 《哪吒之魔童降世》	<i>The Eight Hundred</i> 《八佰》	<i>The Battle at Lake Changjin</i> 《长津湖》	<i>The Battle at Lake Changjin II</i> 《长津湖之水门桥》
2	<i>The Fate of the Furious</i>	<i>Detective Chinatown 2</i> 《唐人街探案2》	<i>The Wandering Earth</i> 《流浪地球》	<i>My People, My Homeland</i> 《我和我的家乡》	<i>Hi, Mom</i> 《你好，李焕英》	<i>Moon Man</i> 《独行月球》
3	<i>Never Say Die</i> 《羞羞的铁拳》	<i>Dying to Survive</i> 《我不是药神》	<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	<i>JIANG ZIYA: Legend of Deification</i> 《姜子牙》	<i>Detective Chinatown 3</i> 《唐人街探案3》	<i>Too Cool To Kill</i> 《这个杀手不太冷静》
4	<i>Kung Fu Yoga</i> 《功夫瑜伽》	<i>Hello Mr. Billionaire</i> 《西虹市首富》	<i>My People, My Country</i> 《我和我的祖国》	<i>The Sacrifice</i> 《金刚川》	<i>My Country, My Parents</i> 《我和我的父辈》	<i>Lighting Up The Stars</i> 《人生大事》
5	<i>Journey to the West: The Demons Strike Back</i> 《西游伏妖篇》	<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	<i>The Captain</i> 《中国机长》	<i>Leap</i> 《夺冠》	<i>F9: The Fast Saga</i>	<i>Home Coming</i> 《万里归途》
6	<i>Transformers: The Last Knight</i>	<i>Monster Hunt 2</i> 《捉妖记2》	<i>Crazy Alien</i> 《疯狂的外星人》	<i>Shock Wave 2</i> 《拆弹专家2》	<i>Raging Fire</i> 《怒火·重案》	<i>Nice View</i> 《奇迹·笨小孩》
7	<i>Dangal</i>	<i>Venom</i>	<i>Pegasus</i> 《飞驰人生》	<i>Caught in Time</i> 《除暴》	<i>Chinese Doctors</i> 《中国医生》	<i>Jurassic World: Dominion</i>
8	<i>Youth</i> 《芳华》	<i>Aquaman</i>	<i>The Bravest</i> 《烈火英雄》	<i>Adoring</i> 《宠爱》	<i>Godzilla vs. Kong</i>	<i>Boonie Bears: Back To Earth</i> 《熊出没·重返地球》
9	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales</i>	<i>Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom</i>	<i>Better Days</i> 《少年的你》	<i>Love You Forever</i> 《我在时间尽头等你》	<i>A Little Red Flower</i> 《送你一朵小红花》	<i>Avatar: The Way of Water</i>
10	<i>Kong: Skull Island</i>	<i>The Ex-file: The Return of the Exes</i> 《前任3：再见前任》	<i>Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw</i>	<i>Sheep Without Shepherd</i> 《误杀》	<i>Cliff Walkers</i> 《悬崖之上》	<i>Detective vs. Sleuths</i> 《神探大战》

Note Chinese Film Hollywood Films Bollywood Films

Source: Chinese Film Box Office

²⁹⁶ China Film Administration, ‘Film Industry Promotion Law of the People’s Republic of China’, (2016), <https://www.chinafilm.gov.cn/chinafilm/contents/155/1412.shtml>, [accessed 02 Jan 2023]

²⁹⁷ China Film Administration, ‘The 14th Five-Year Plan for China’s Film Development’, (2021), <https://www.chinafilm.gov.cn/chinafilm/upload/files/2021/11/4402a6c977fcd146.pdf>, [accessed 13 Nov 2022]

²⁹⁸ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.122; Elliott, et al. (2018), p.68; Wu, et al. (2022), p.5

²⁹⁹ Chinese Film Box Office, ‘Yearly Box Office Ranking’

The figure indicates a decrease in the interest of Chinese consumers in foreign films, particularly those from Hollywood. According to Zhu, Hollywood's box office income in China may have attained its saturation point by the conclusion of the 2010s.³⁰⁰ The changing preferences of Chinese viewers about foreign films can be attributed to two aspects. First, young people in China exhibit a greater interest in domestic products. Zhu points out that the Chinese youth's exposure to foreign products has been diminished by the restricted access to foreign materials, the increased regulation over content, and the changing diplomatic and political climates.³⁰¹ Similarly, as mentioned by He, the younger generation in China takes pride in the country's accelerated development.³⁰² Their enthusiasm for patriotism is also a factor in their inclination to purchase domestic products.³⁰³ Second, the majority of citizens in smaller cities also favour domestic films. Liu and Lu's investigations of the Chinese film market from 2017 to 2022 reveal that box office revenue in major cities is primarily saturated, whereas smaller cities are the principal contributors to box office earnings in China.³⁰⁴ Nevertheless, consumers in smaller cities have less exposure to Western culture and therefore tend to prefer domestic films over foreign films.³⁰⁵ Consequently, foreign films encounter an increasingly challenging environment for achieving success at the Chinese box office, since the main demographic of China's film audience—youth and residents of smaller cities—exhibit a heightened inclination to watch domestic films.

The obstacles faced by foreign films in China were also evident for British films. The fluctuations in box office revenue, market share and admissions of British films in China from 2017 to 2022 are illustrated in Figure 2.2.5, which is derived from the Statistical Yearbooks provided by the BFI.³⁰⁶ However, it is important to note that a significant number of UK qualifying films in these BFI yearbooks were not culturally

³⁰⁰ Zhu (2022), p.229

³⁰¹ Zhu (2022), p.282

³⁰² Huifeng He, 'China's Millennials, Generation Z Leading Nation Away From Hollywood Films, American Culture, US Brands', *South China Morning Post*, 20 March, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3126180/chinas-millennials-generation-z-leading-nation-away-hollywood>, [accessed 05 Jan 2024]

³⁰³ He (2021); Lanlan Huang, 'Chinese Gen Z Prefers Domestic Products to Foreign Ones', *Global Times*, 22 January, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202001/1177712.shtml>, [accessed 05 Jan 2024]

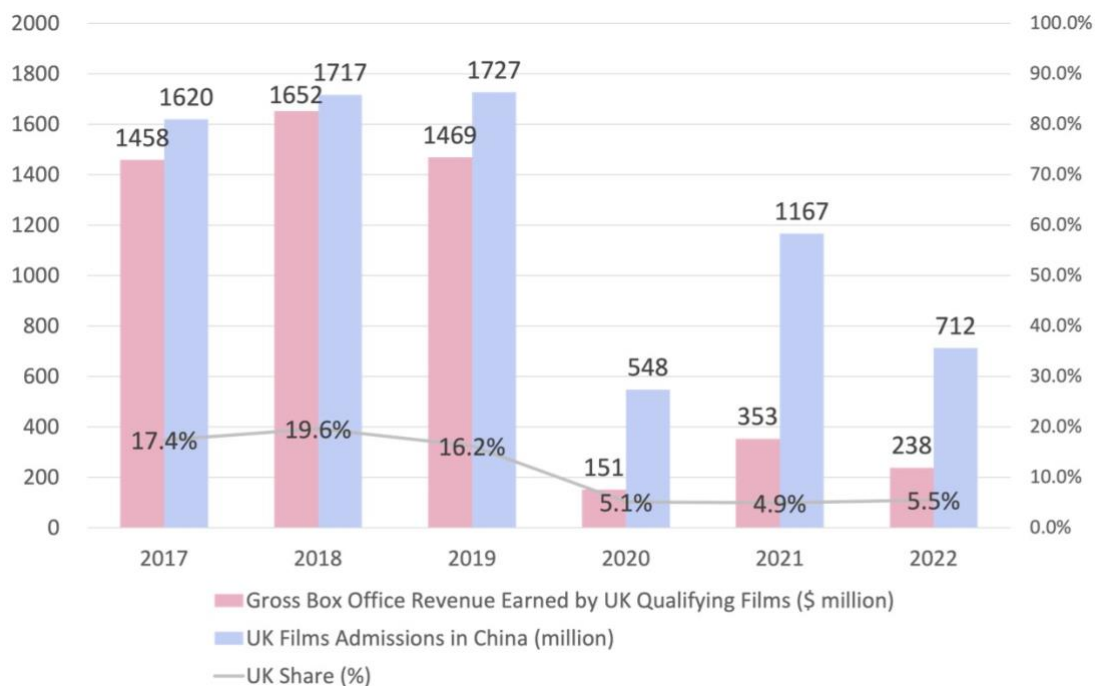
³⁰⁴ Liu & Lu (2018); Lu & Liu (2019); Lu & Liu (2020); Lu & Liu (2021); Liu (2022); Liu & Lu (2023)

³⁰⁵ Zhu (2022), p.258

³⁰⁶ BFI (2018), p.9, 54; BFI (2019), p.10, 60; BFI (2020), p.11, 53; BFI (2021), p.9, 50; BFI (2022a), p.11, 51; BFI (2023a), p.9, 47

British. Rather, they included numerous blockbusters produced by the US and the UK, such as *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), and *Jurassic World: Dominion* (2022).³⁰⁷ These films are industrially British, as defined by Higson. They are produced in the UK and employ British production resources, locations, and personnel, but they do not necessarily address distinctly British subject matter.³⁰⁸ According to Figure 2.2.5, on the one hand, British films had a small market share in China, indicating that their market penetration rate was low and that they were still a niche market. On the other hand, the performance of British films in China can be classified into two separate phases: the period preceding and following the epidemic, both exhibiting a relatively stable trend. It closely mirrored analogous patterns noted in all imported films in China, as illustrated in Figure 2.2.3. This could suggest that British films in China during the researched period were similarly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, changing film regulations, and shifting consumer viewing habits in China. The disparities between these two stages further indicate that the objective of this research, which is to examine the performance of British films in China pre- and post-pandemic, is necessary.

Figure 2.2.5 UK Market Share, Admissions, and Box Office Revenue in China (2017-2022)



Source: British Film Institute

³⁰⁷ BFI (2018), p.48; BFI (2021), p.46; BFI (2023a), p.43

³⁰⁸ Higson (2011), p.6

The cases examined in this research also reflected these changes in the Chinese market. First, most of these films were released in 2017, with four. Subsequently, only one film was released in each of the remaining years of the researched period, except for 2020. This decrease in imports, which began in 2018, seems to correspond to the policy changes and institutional adjustments in the Chinese film industry during that time. Moreover, Table 2.1 indicates that none of these cases was released in China during the peak seasons identified by Zhou, which include the summer holiday, National Day, and Chinese New Year.³⁰⁹ Although some of them were released in the UK during the peak seasons of China, China postponed their release to prioritise the exhibition of domestic films. As previously noted, film viewing habits of the general public in China have not yet been established. The number of potential cinema attendances during non-peak seasons may be restricted to improve the box office income of these British films. Furthermore, the impact of the pandemic was also apparent in the decrease in the number of British films imported and their box office revenue, as demonstrated by the case studies. *No Time To Die* and *Downton Abbey 2* were the only two cases that were released in China during the pandemic. As illustrated in Table 2.1, despite the fact that *No Time To Die* attained the highest place in China's annual box office rankings among the cases examined in my thesis, its box office revenue and cinema attendance were inferior to those of *Kingsman 2*. A similar influence was also evident in the performance of *Downton Abbey 2*. Despite surpassing its predecessor in yearly box office ranking in China, its revenue and attendance were just around half of that of *Downton Abbey 1*. It provides further evidence to suggest that the 'Dynamic Zero COVID' policy resulted in a significant decrease in the number of films released in cinemas and a substantial decrease in attendance at cinemas during the pandemic.

Although the market share and box office revenue of British films in China were limited, the BFI Yearbooks indicate that, with the exception of 2017 and 2022, when China ranked second, China had consistently been the largest export market for British films based on admissions from 2018 to 2021.³¹⁰ Hence, even though the viewing habits of

³⁰⁹ Zhou (2015), p.245

³¹⁰ BFI (2018), p.9; BFI (2019), p.10; BFI (2020), p.11; BFI (2021), p.9; BFI (2022a), p.11; BFI (2023a), p.9

Chinese consumers regarding British films have not yet been established, China is still one of the most significant and lucrative export markets for British films.

2.3 Chinese Audience's Viewing Habits Regarding British Films

2.3.1 Limited Familiarity and Interest

In 2021, the BFI conducted a survey to evaluate disparities in consumption patterns and preferences for UK screen content across various nations worldwide. In China, BFI employed questionnaires and focus groups to inquire about the attitudes, consumption habits, and preferences of 1,011 Chinese adults regarding British films and television.³¹¹ It needs to acknowledge that the BFI's survey had limitations and can only provide a basic understanding of the reception of British films in China. A sample size of roughly 1,000 is inadequate to offer a thorough elucidation of the situation in a country with a population of almost 1.3 billion. However, the survey did offer important and fresh insights into the Chinese audience's viewing habits regarding British films. Based on the results of this survey, the subsequent sections will examine the potential influence of Chinese audience viewing preferences on the box office performance of British films in China.

The BFI's survey reveals that Chinese viewers had a limited familiarity with and interest in British films. The findings show that, apart from domestic films, the most familiar and attractive foreign films for Chinese consumers were American films, which have been frequently exhibited in China, and South Korean films, which share similarities with Chinese culture.³¹² This supports Straubhaar's concept of cultural proximity, which posits that audiences have a preference for media materials that are culturally comparable to them.³¹³ In contrast, Figure 2.3.1 illustrates that 32% of Chinese respondents expressed interest in British films, and 26% stated they were familiar with

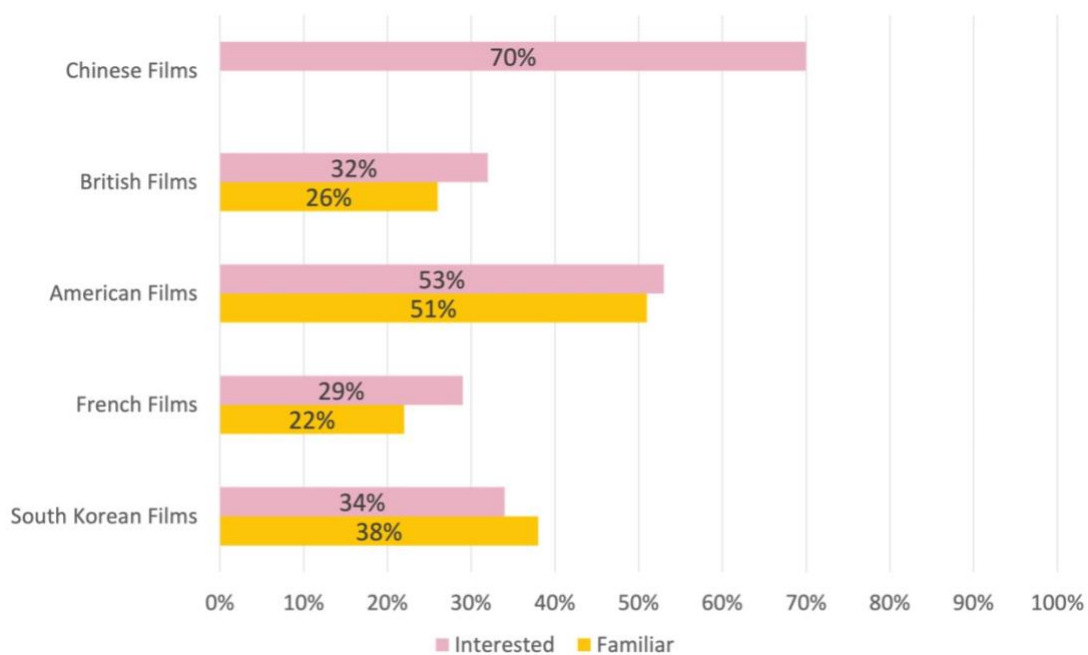
³¹¹ BFI, 'International Perceptions of and Engagement with UK Screen Content China Report', (2022b), <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/22041/download>, [accessed 13 Oct 2022]

³¹² BFI (2022b), p.6

³¹³ Straubhaar (1991)

British films, which was below the global average of 39% and 30%, respectively.³¹⁴ In addition, the majority of Chinese respondents reported that they watched British films on an infrequent basis. The selection of ‘several times a year’ by 32% of respondents was the highest percentage. The option of ‘once a year or less’ was selected by 24% of respondents, while 11% selected ‘Never’. A mere 10% of respondents reported that they watch British films every month, while an additional 10% reported that they watch them every 2-3 weeks.³¹⁵ Thus, watching British films appears to be a niche interest in China. The underdeveloped viewing habits and restricted interest may partially account for the low import quantity of British films and their lacklustre box office performance in China during the researched period.

Figure 2.3.1 Chinese Audience’s Familiarity and Interests in Foreign Films



Source: British Film Institute

2.3.2 Reasons of Interest and Disinterest

To understand the viewing habits regarding UK screen productions in China, the BFI also investigated the reasons for Chinese respondents’ interest or disinterest in British

³¹⁴ BFI (2022b), p.6

³¹⁵ BFI (2022b), p.5

film/TV. Figure 2.3.2 and Figure 2.3.3 illustrate these concerns.³¹⁶ By contrasting the contents of these two figures, it is evident that numerous British film characteristics serve as a double-edged sword in China. Although certain characteristics may be attractive to some Chinese consumers, they may also discourage others. The subsequent sections will elucidate the factors that influence the box office revenue of British films in China from four aspects: narrative, language, British culture and accessibility.

First, Chinese consumers, who were interested in British film/TV, had a high regard for their production quality. Generally, they had a favourable perception of British film/TV in terms of their storyline, performance and production, as illustrated in Figure 2.3.2.³¹⁷ Moreover, for Chinese viewers, the most distinct attributes of British film/TV were being ‘cultured’ and ‘intelligent’. Chinese participants in the subsequent focus groups predominantly associated the term ‘cultured’ with the setting, language, and style of British culture. The term ‘intelligent’ was associated with the connotations conveyed in each scene and the concentration required to enjoy the plot of British films.³¹⁸ These two attributes were also reflected in the statements made by Chinese participants when they compared American and British film/TV:

In the US, it is always at the “peaks” of the story, it’s nervous. British has more pacing and words and dialogues, you can get a lot of information.

In the US, it’s more action based, magnificent skyscrapers but no culture.

US is quite exaggerated, bloody and lots of violence. But in the UK, it is quite delicate.³¹⁹

It indicates that an important distinction between American and British films for many Chinese viewers is that the enjoyment they provide may be derived from different components. American films may depend more on thrilling special effects, whereas British films may depend more on the intricate story. However, this might generate a perception among certain Chinese consumers who are accustomed to the Hollywood

³¹⁶ BFI (2022b), p.9

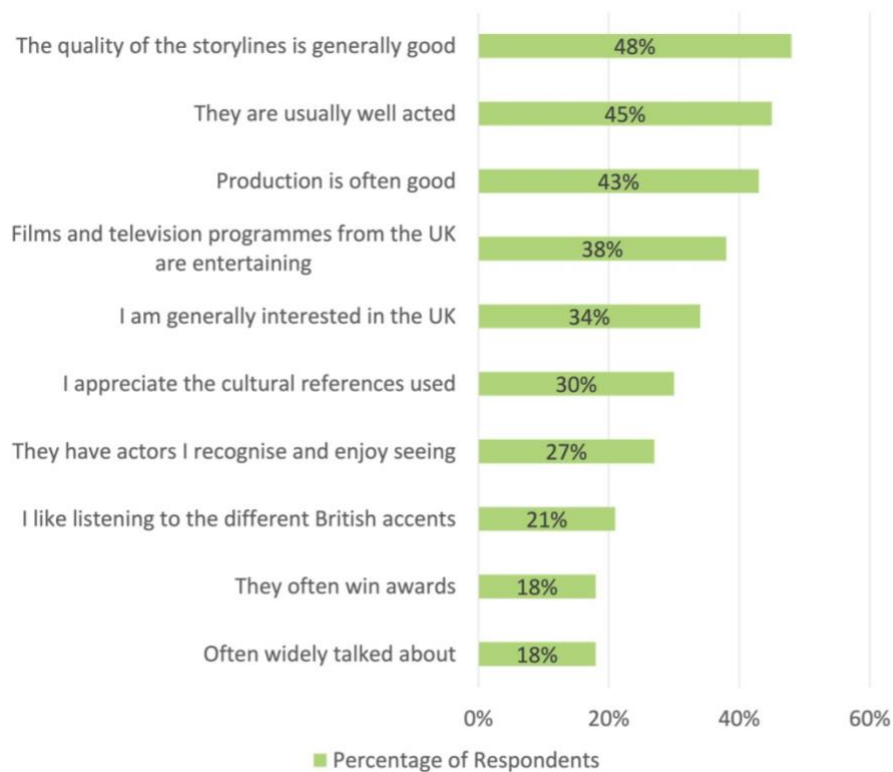
³¹⁷ BFI (2022b), p.9

³¹⁸ BFI (2022b), p.15, 16

³¹⁹ BFI (2022b), p.16

model that British films are complex and difficult to understand. Figure 2.3.3 shows that 22% of Chinese respondents attributed their lack of interest in British film/TV to the fact that ‘The storylines are too difficult to follow/require too much concentration to enjoy’.³²⁰ This impression of British films may deter many Chinese viewers from attending cinemas, especially those consumers who primarily seek films for relaxation and entertainment. It may partially elucidate why 18% of Chinese respondents selected ‘Films and television programmes from the UK are boring’ as the reason for their disinterest in British film/TV, as shown in Figure 2.3.3.³²¹ Consequently, while the high-quality plot in British films serves as a selling point to some Chinese consumers, it may also be seen as an important reason why British films with intricate narratives struggle to attract a large number of viewers in China.

Figure 2.3.2 Top 10 Reasons Why Chinese Viewers Are Interested in British Film/TV



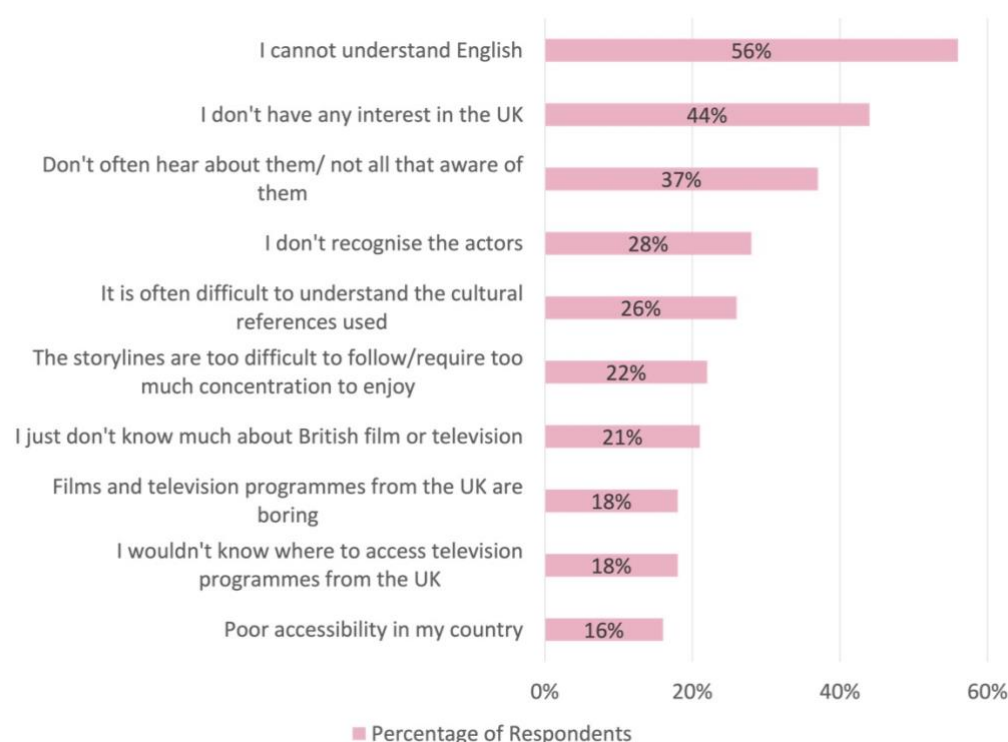
Source: British Film Institute

³²⁰ BFI (2022b), p.9

³²¹ BFI (2022b), p.9

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Figure 2.3.3 Top 10 Reasons Why Chinese Viewers Are Uninterested in British Film/TV



Source: British Film Institute

In the same vein, the English language is a significant factor in discouraging many Chinese consumers from attending the cinema to watch British films. Chinese viewers are usually believed to be accustomed to watching films with subtitles or dubbing, due to the overwhelming influence of Hollywood.³²² Nevertheless, the BFI's China Territory Review report reveals that only about 6% of the Chinese population speaks English well enough for conversation.³²³ Figure 2.3.2 and Figure 2.3.3 show that while 21% of Chinese respondents cited 'I like listening to the different British accents' as a reason for their interest in British film/TV, the most predominant reason for their disinterest, selected by 56% of respondents, was 'I cannot understand English'.³²⁴ In particular, given that Chinese viewers primarily perceived British films as 'intelligent' and 'cultured', it could lead many Chinese consumers to believe that watching British films

³²² Patrick Brzeski, 'Why Foreign-Language Releases Are Thriving in China Recent Movies from India, Thailand and Europe Have Struck Gold in the Middle Kingdom', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 16 March, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/why-foreign-language-movies-are-thriving-china-1092409/>, [accessed 13 Feb 2024]

³²³ BFI, 'International Territory Review China 2022', (2022c), <https://core-cms.bfi.org.uk/media/22120/download>, [accessed 13 Oct 2022]

³²⁴ BFI (2022b), p.9

necessitates a certain degree of concentration to fully comprehend their narratives.³²⁵ It may imply that British films that contain a significant amount of dialogue can be challenging to captivate Chinese viewers who lack proficiency in the English language. The box office performance of the British films examined in my project also corroborated these findings. *Darkest Hour*, *Downton Abbey 1* and *2* could be deemed as ‘cultured’ and ‘intelligent’ British films with extensive dialogue. These three films indeed had the lowest box office revenue in China out of the eight cases in my research. Therefore, although British accents may be appealing to some Chinese viewers, extensive dialogue in British films appears to be hard to pique the interest of Chinese consumers who are not proficient in the English language.

Similarly, cultural elements in British films may serve as both an asset and an obstacle in China. As shown in Figure 2.3.2 and Figure 2.3.3, 30% of Chinese respondents who were interested in British film/TV selected ‘I appreciate the cultural references used’, whereas 26% of respondents who were uninterested selected ‘It is often difficult to understand the cultural references used’. In addition, the figures indicate that 34% of Chinese respondents were interested in British film/TV because they were generally interested in the UK, while 44% of respondents were uninterested in British film/TV because they had no interest in the UK.³²⁶ It is possible to infer that Chinese viewers who enjoy British films and British cultural references in films may be individuals who are also interested in Britain and British culture. These results are also consistent with the Chinese box office earnings of the cases examined in my research. As demonstrated in Table 2.1, the Chinese box office performance of British films shows a decline as their cultural specificity increases. The BFI survey provided further evidence that most Chinese consumers were not interested in Britain and British culture, which presents a challenge for quintessentially British films to captivate their attention and interest. Hence, the cultural discount that British films experienced in China may also be attributed to the limited familiarity and interest of most Chinese consumers in Britain and its cultures.

³²⁵ BFI (2022b), p.15, 16

³²⁶ BFI (2022b), p.9

Moreover, as seen in Figure 2.3.3, an important factor influencing the disinterest of Chinese viewers in British films was the restricted availability of these films in China. 'Don't often hear about them/not all that aware of them', 'I just don't know much about British film or television', 'I wouldn't know where to access television programmes from the UK', and 'Poor accessibility in my country' were selected by 37%, 21%, 18%, and 16% of Chinese respondents, respectively.³²⁷ The limited accessibility can be proved through the findings of my research. As outlined in the Methodology section, while 35 British films were released in China from 2017 to 2022, these films were industrially British films and did not necessarily address British subject matter. While certain Chinese consumers with existing interest in British film/TV may use streaming media platforms or other websites to actively search and watch British film/TV, their restricted availability in China could hinder the cultivation of Chinese viewers' familiarity with and interest in British films. In addition, the Chinese government strictly regulates and monitors the Internet, media outlets, and social media platforms in China.³²⁸ The Chinese government blocks Western social networking and media sharing platforms, like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, while fostering domestic alternatives developed by private enterprises, such as Weibo and WeChat.³²⁹ According to Schneider, these services allow 'domestic discussions to take place in walled gardens that can be monitored and censored for unwanted content.'³³⁰ It not only restricts Chinese viewers from accessing a wider and more diverse spectrum of information regarding Britain and its culture but also constrains their imagination of Britain. Stereotypes about British culture may endure among many Chinese consumers who are unfamiliar with Britain. The constrained imagination of Britain may also impede the cultivation of Chinese viewers' interest in British culture beyond stereotypes. Thus, it could indicate that the restricted access to British films and related information in China may impede Chinese viewers from cultivating an interest

³²⁷ BFI (2022b), p.9

³²⁸ Adrian Athique, *Transnational Audiences: Media Reception on a Global Scale*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p.49; Wilfred Yang Wang, and Ramon Lobato, 'Chinese Video Streaming Services in the Context of Global Platform Studies', *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 12:3(2019), 356-371(361)

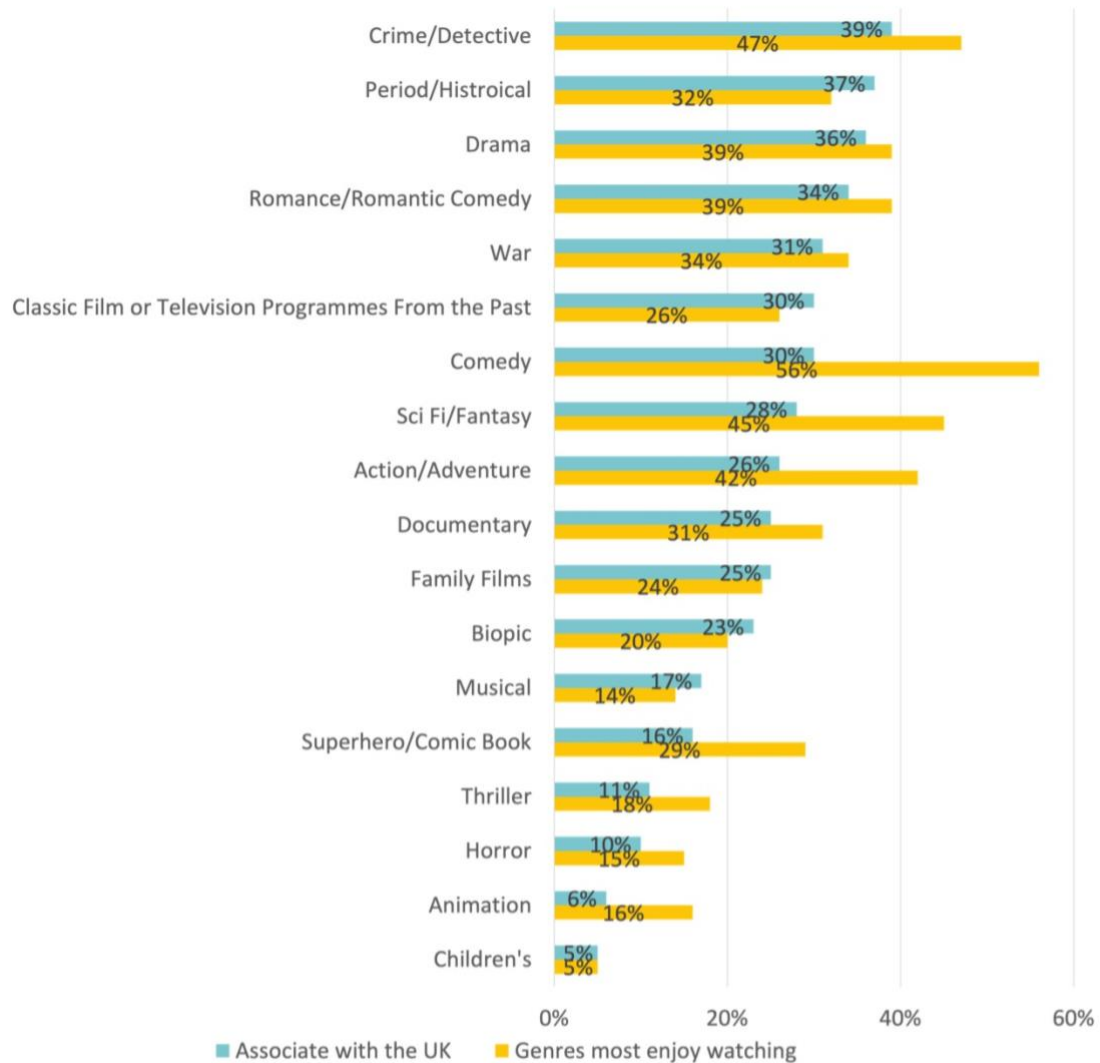
³²⁹ Florian Schneider, 'The Cultural Governance of Mass Media in Contemporary China', in Keane Michael, (ed.), *Handbook of Cultural and Creative Industries in China*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2016), pp.189-206(p.202)

³³⁰ Schneider (2016), p.203

in and habit for viewing British films, which might negatively influence the quantity of British films imported into China and their box office success.

2.3.3 Preferences in Genres

Figure 2.3.4 Chinese Viewers' Perceptions on Genres Associated With British Film/TV and Most Enjoyed Watching Genres



Source: British Film Institute

The box office performance of the eight cases in my research might also be influenced by the genre preferences of Chinese consumers. The genre preferences of Chinese viewers were also examined by the BFI survey, as illustrated in Figure 2.3.4.³³¹ It reveals

³³¹ BFI (2022b), p.18

that the genre preferences of Chinese consumers were not strongly associated with the genres they associated with British film/TV.

First, the figure shows that Chinese viewers mostly associated British content with the genres of crime/detective, period/historical, drama, romance/romantic comedy, and war. According to the data presented in Table 2.1, except for crime/detective, the remaining genres were also represented in the cases examined in this research. Examples of these genres include *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour*, which encompass drama, history, and war genres, as well as the two *Downton Abbey* films, which incorporate drama and romance. Nevertheless, Figure 2.3.4 illustrates that, despite being genres that were most associated with British content, Chinese consumers did not exhibit a particular fondness for these genres. The lack of interest in the genres can also influence the ability of these four British films to attract a large number of Chinese viewers. In addition, the fact that Chinese consumers associated these genres with British content might imply that they perceived these genres as culturally specific. The stories and subject matters of these four films were indeed highly culturally specific, which resulted in cultural discount that diminished their appeal and influenced their box office performance in China. Therefore, even though British content was mostly associated with these genres by Chinese viewers, their cultural specificities could be high, and their audience might be narrow in China, which can impede their potential to achieve remarkable box office success.

On the contrary, as shown in Figure 2.3.4, the most popular genres among Chinese consumers were comedy, crime/detective, sci fi/fantasy, and action/adventure. According to Table 2.1, these genres were also prevalent within the case studies analysed in this research. Examples of these genres include *Kingsman 2*, *Paddington 2* (2017), *Johnny English 3*, and *No Time To Die*. *No Time To Die* includes action/adventure; *Johnny English 3* comprises action/adventure and comedy; *Kingsman 2* incorporates action/adventure, comedy, and crime; while *Paddington 2* encompasses action/adventure and comedy genres. The cultural discount that these four films encountered in China was lower than that of the other four films. However, despite these genres being favoured in China, their capacity to assist the four films in

appealing to Chinese consumers likewise faced obstacles. As illustrated in Figure 2.3.4, although comedy, sci fi/fantasy, and action/adventure were preferred genres within the Chinese market, they were not strongly associated with British content by Chinese consumers. In other words, when Chinese viewers choose to watch films within these genres, they may be less likely to select British productions. This could potentially diminish the competitiveness of these British films in China and have a detrimental effect on their performances at the Chinese box office. Thus, although these genres may assist British films in garnering target audiences, their appeal seems to be restricted in the Chinese market.

Conclusion

To sum up, between 2017 and 2022, the import quantity of British films in China was limited, and the studied British films did not achieve significant success at the Chinese box office. During the researched period, British films encountered an increasingly challenging landscape in China due to the modifications of film industry policies, the evolving viewing preferences of Chinese consumers, and the sluggish market circumstances influenced by the pandemic. These changes could have a negative impact on the market share and box office revenue of British films in China. Moreover, according to the BFI's survey, most Chinese consumers were not particularly interested in or familiar with British films. This indicates that the habit of viewing British films has not yet been cultivated in China, which might negatively impact their prospects for entering the Chinese market and achieving success at the Chinese box office.

The findings of this chapter supported the cultural discount theory.³³² Analysis of the eight cases' box office performance revealed that British films that were less culturally specific usually encountered less cultural discount and generated a higher amount of revenue in China. Additionally, the results contributed to the study of cross-cultural box office performance. The impact of contextual factors in the target market on films' box office performance was not thoroughly examined in the previous research. This

³³² Hoskins & Mirus (1988), p.500

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chapter offered a broader and deeper comprehension of the Chinese film market by investigating the contextual factors that influence the import quantity of British films and their box office revenue in China.

Chapter 3 The Performance of British Action-Adventure Films

Introduction

Action-adventure films are the genre that is frequently exported to international markets. According to *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, action-adventure film is ‘an extremely successful and influential mode of popular cinema that foregrounds spectacular movement of bodies, vehicles and weapons, and state-of-the-art special effects.’³³³ As previously stated in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the appeal of films in foreign markets may be reduced by cultural discount and diverse audience reception. Compared to other genres, action-adventure films are expected to experience less cultural discount and be more successful in global markets because they are usually less culturally specific. The BFI’s 2021 survey, which examined the preferences of the Chinese audience towards British film/TV, reveals that 42% of Chinese respondents selected the action/adventure genre as the genre they enjoy watching, while 26% associated this genre with the UK.³³⁴ It may imply that Chinese viewers might not prioritise the selection of British productions when they intend to watch films in this genre. British action-adventure films may encounter challenges in achieving box office success in the Chinese market.

Between 2017 and 2022, three British action-adventure films were released in mainland China, including *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017) (hereinafter referred to as *Kingsman 2*), *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018) (referred to as *Johnny English 3*), and *No Time to Die* (2021). These three films can also be categorised as spy films, a genre characterised by stories centred on spying and espionage.³³⁵ Although these films were all revolved around British secret agents who travelled around the globe to save the world, they each depicted similar yet different aspects of British culture. *Kingsman 2* portrayed agents who wore decent suits and engaged in ferocious battles

³³³ Annette Kuhn, and Guy Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2691669>

³³⁴ BFI (2022b), p.18

³³⁵ James Chapman, *Hitchcock and the Spy Film*, (London, New York: I.B.Tauris, 2018), p.6

while maintaining their gentlemanly appearance. *Johnny English 3* featured a conservative agent who insisted on using old-fashioned spying techniques to showcase British humour and self-mockery attitude. As part of the *James Bond* series, *No Time to Die* depicted the image of the most impressive and charming British agent on screen, who always maintained calm during missions and shows unwavering loyalty to his nation. The cultural discount that these films faced in China may be alleviated, as they are relatively less culturally specific. *Kingsman 2* and *No Time To Die* were the two highest-grossing films among the eight cases in this research, generating around \$72 million and \$65 million at the Chinese box office, respectively.³³⁶ *Johnny English 3* ranked fifth among the eight cases in this research, generating around \$25 million at the Chinese box office. Although the British action-adventure films were the most successful genre in China during the researched period, their box office earnings were not notably impressive and did not achieve high positions in China's annual box office rankings.

This chapter argues that the box office performance of these three British action-adventure films in China was influenced by the franchises' limited appeal and the narratives' unsatisfactory quality. Despite the franchise, stars and audio-visual effects of these British films being attractive to many Chinese viewers, their allure was limited in reaching a broader audience in China. Moreover, the unsatisfactory narrative quality of these British films adversely affected their word-of-mouth and diminished their attractiveness to potential Chinese consumers. This chapter will be divided into three sections. In accordance with the order in which these three films were released in China, this chapter will commence with an analysis of the box office performance of *Kingsman 2*, followed by *Johnny English 3* and *No Time To Die*.

³³⁶ Box Office Mojo, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr4226437637/>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1340363269/>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*No Time To Die* (2021)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1812943365/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

3.1 *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)

Kingsman 2 is a sequel to *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014) (referred to as *Kingsman 1*). Both films are adaptations of the 2012 comic book series authored by Mark Millar and Dave Gibbons.³³⁷ The plot of *Kingsman 1* revolves around Eggsy, the protagonist, who completed the training program and became an agent of the secret spy agency Kingsman, ultimately thwarting the villain's scheme and saving the world. Upon its release in China in 2015, *Kingsman 1* generated approximately \$75 million in box office revenues and over 14 million cinema admissions in China.³³⁸ It ranked 31st in China's annual box office ranking for 2015, and China was the second-largest source of its global income.³³⁹ Many Chinese consumers commended the film's quality. It has received ratings of 9.2 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.7 on Taopiaopiao, and 8.4 on Douban, from about 484,000, 16,000, and 692,000 users, respectively.³⁴⁰ This indicates that *Kingsman 1*'s performance contributed to cultivating a fanbase and a level of recognition in China that *Kingsman 2* could take advantage of.

In *Kingsman 2*, the antagonist destroyed the Kingsman headquarters and posed a global threat with drugs. Given the assassination of most Kingsman agents, Eggsy travelled to the US to request assistance from the Statesman, an allied spy agency. Eventually, the villain's scheme was thwarted, and the world was saved by the collaboration of the two agencies. According to IMDb, *Kingsman 2* is classified as an action, adventure, comedy, crime and thriller film. With a budget of about \$104 million,

³³⁷ Peter Debruge, 'Spoof Offers "Service" With a Smile', *Variety*, 06 January, 2015, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/spoof-offers-service-with-smile/docview/1648081356/se-2>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

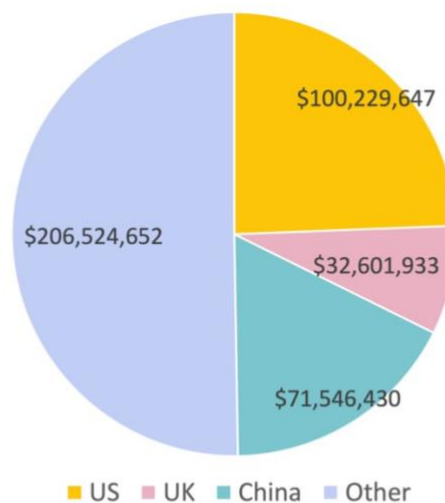
³³⁸ Box Office Mojo, '*Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2858963461/>, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]; Maoyan Pro, '*Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/78589/boxshowna?barTheme=401D1D>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, '*Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=25989&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

³³⁹ Box Office Mojo, '*Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014)'; Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office For 2015', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2015/?area=CN&grossesOption=totalGrosses>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

³⁴⁰ Maoyan, '*Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/78589?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6YpI3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, '*Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=25989>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]; Douban, '*Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2014)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/24405378/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]

the film was produced by the UK, US and Italy. The production companies involved were Twentieth Century Fox (US), Marv Films (UK, a production company owned by Matthew Vaughn, the director of the film), Cloudy Productions (UK), TSG Entertainment (US) and Shangri-La Entertainment (US).³⁴¹ According to its official distribution notification in China, it was jointly distributed by China Film Group Corporation (CFGF) and Huaxia Film Distribution, and was imported into China through the revenue-sharing scheme.³⁴² It was theatrically released in China on October 20, 2017, approximately one month after its release in the UK, on September 22.³⁴³ Given that the Chinese National Day holiday in early October constitutes a peak season for the Chinese film market, film releases during this period are typically allocated to domestic productions. Consequently, the release date for *Kingsman 2* was postponed until late October. This finding aligns with Zhou's claim that the release date of foreign films in China might be delayed until the conclusion of the lucrative holiday season in order to safeguard the earnings of domestic films.³⁴⁴

Figure 3.1.1 Gross Box Office Income of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017) in Different Countries



Source: Box Office Mojo

Eventually, *Kingsman 2* attracted over 13 million cinema admissions, grossed approximately \$72 million at the Chinese box office, and placed 35th in China's annual

³⁴¹ IMDb, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4649466/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_3, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]

³⁴² Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/341173/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 02 Nov 2024]

³⁴³ Box Office Mojo, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)'

³⁴⁴ Zhou (2015), p.245

box office rankings for 2017.³⁴⁵ As illustrated in Figure 3.1.1, China was the second-largest source of its global income, accounting for approximately 17%.³⁴⁶ Although *Kingsman 2* achieved the highest box office revenue in China among the eight cases examined in this research, its income and cinema admissions were slightly lower than those of its predecessor.

Moreover, while China made a substantial contribution to the film's global box office revenue, *Kingsman 2*'s performance in China as an action-adventure film was not notably outstanding. To gain a clearer understanding of its performance, it may be advantageous to compare it with the performance of American and domestic action-adventure films, which usually achieve success at the Chinese box office. For instance, *The Fate of the Furious* (2017), an American action film, was the second highest-grossing film in China in 2017 (and the first among imported films). It earned about \$393 million at the Chinese box office, a figure that was five times greater than that of *Kingsman 2*.³⁴⁷ Another American action-adventure film, *xXx: Return of Xander Cage* (2017), which featured the renowned Chinese actor Donnie Yen, grossed over \$164 million at the Chinese box office.³⁴⁸ In addition, *Wolf Warrior 2* (战狼 2/Zhan Lang 2) (2017), a Chinese action-adventure blockbuster, was the highest-grossing film in China in 2017, which generated over \$854 million at the Chinese box office.³⁴⁹ Another Chinese action-adventure film, *The Foreigner* (英伦对决/Ying Lun Dui Jue) (2017), which was filmed in the UK and starred Jackie Chan, earned over \$81 million at the Chinese box office, slightly surpassing the performance of *Kingsman 2*.³⁵⁰ Hence,

³⁴⁵ Box Office Mojo, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)'; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/07401712017?from=movie>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/341173/boxshowna?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=164219&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie?tab=1&secondTab=1>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]

³⁴⁶ Box Office Mojo, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)'

³⁴⁷ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, 'The Fate of the Furious (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr38949381/>, [accessed 08 Jul 2024]

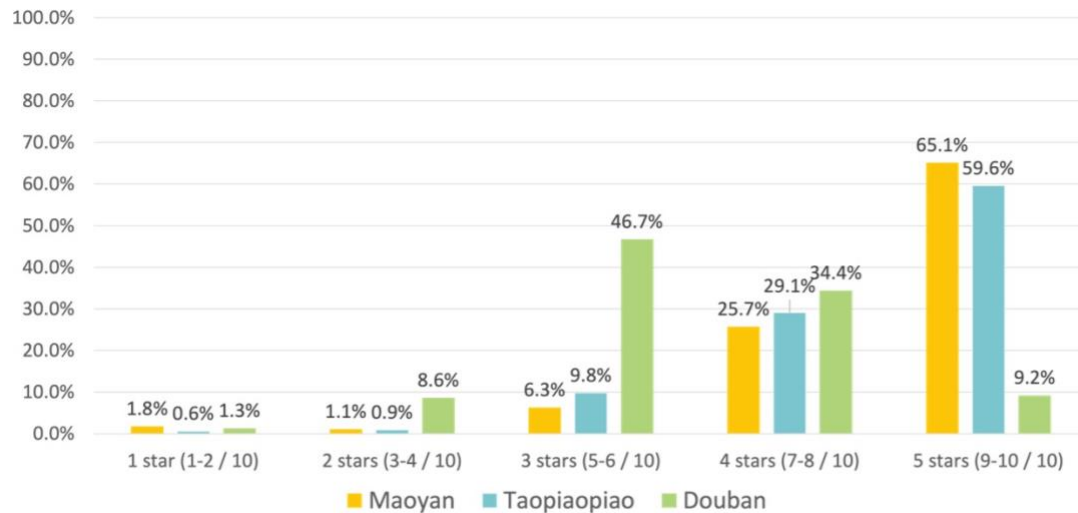
³⁴⁸ Box Office Mojo, 'xXx: Return of Xander Cage (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2351256069/>, [accessed 08 Jul 2024]

³⁴⁹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, 'Wolf Warrior 2 (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3036500485/>, [accessed 08 Jul 2024]

³⁵⁰ Box Office Mojo, 'The Foreigner (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2172342789/>, [accessed 08 Jul 2024]

although *Kingsman 2* outperformed other cases in my research, as an action-adventure film, it remained challenging to attain significant commercial success and widespread appeal in the Chinese market.

Figure 3.1.2 Ratings of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

In terms of audience reception, *Kingsman 2* has received ratings of 8.7 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.6 on Taopiaopiao and 6.8 on Douban, from about 324,000, 519,000 and 349,000 users, respectively. Figure 3.1.2 exhibits the various ratings given by Chinese viewers for the film.³⁵¹ Douban, the largest film review platform in China, is widely regarded as a reliable platform that provides ratings based on the opinions of Chinese moviegoers in general. Maoyan and Taopiaopiao mainly function as ticketing platforms, and the ratings on these two platforms are usually higher in comparison to Douban. As seen in the figure, *Kingsman 2*'s ratings on Douban exhibited a bell-shaped distribution. In contrast, its ratings on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao displayed a negatively skewed distribution, indicating a tendency towards lower ratings. This could indicate that, while most Chinese moviegoers rated it as of average quality, consumers who had just viewed *Kingsman 2* in cinemas may be more inclined to give it a higher rating

³⁵¹ Maoyan, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/341173?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dgV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=164219>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Douban, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/26378579/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]

on ticketing platforms due to its cinematic experiences. In addition, in comparison to other action-adventure films, its rating was lower than that of *Wolf Warrior 2* and *The Fate of the Furious*, but it was comparable to that of *The Foreigner* and higher than that of *xXx: Return of Xander Cage*.³⁵² Consequently, it could imply that most Chinese consumers perceived *Kingsman 2* as a film of comparatively moderate quality within the action-adventure genre in the Chinese film market in 2017.

Table 3.1 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Plot	9	6	8	23
Genre	21	1	0	22
Pre-sold IP	5	11	5	21
Audio-visual effects	19	0	1	20
Country of origins	15	0	1	16
Places in story	9	2	3	14
Characters in story	4	2	7	13
British culture	11	1	1	13
Stars	12	0	0	12
Language	0	0	0	0
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

In the 50 reviews of *Kingsman 2* that were sampled on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, 42 users gave the film a positive rating, 7 users gave a neutral rating, and 1 user gave a

³⁵² Maoyan, 'Wolf Warrior 2 (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/344264?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Wolf Warrior 2 (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=186599>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'Wolf Warrior 2 (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/26363254/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Maoyan, 'The Fate of the Furious (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/248700?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'The Fate of the Furious (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=163989>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'The Fate of the Furious (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/26260853/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Maoyan, 'The Foreigner (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/345420?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'The Foreigner (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=199280>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'The Foreigner (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/25723583/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Maoyan, 'xXx: Return of Xander Cage (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/334590?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'xXx: Return of Xander Cage (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=175882>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'xXx: Return of Xander Cage (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/3230115/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]

negative rating. Table 3.1 outlines the frequency and associated attitudes regarding the factors mentioned by Chinese viewers in their comments.³⁵³ In general, most factors received positive comments from users. Several factors, particularly the 'Pre-sold IP' and narrative components, received considerably varying assessments. A comprehensive analysis of these factors is provided in the subsequent sections.

3.1.1 Illogical Plot and Inconsistent Characters

The 'Plot' of *Kingsman 2* was the most frequently discussed factor among Chinese consumers. According to Table 3.1, this factor was mentioned by 23 users, with 9 users expressing positive attitudes, 6 users expressing neutral attitudes, and 8 users expressing negative attitudes. It shows that Chinese viewers exhibited diverse opinions regarding the narrative quality of the film. Consumers with positive attitudes perceived the plot as compact and exciting. For instance:

The story is not complicated at all. As I said, the most difficult thing is to tell the story well, completely and logically. I think this film has basically achieved this and is able to integrate various elements. (Maoyan user)

It is as exciting as a party, the whole process is smooth without any boring parts, and the ending is very satisfactory. (Taopiaopiao user)

It is worthwhile to note that *Kingsman 2* was also subjected to censorship upon its release in China, and it was requested to omit two minutes from the film that contained violent and sexual content. Given the lack of a film classification system in mainland China, all films are required to undergo censorship to ensure that they are suitable for all age groups before their official release. Despite the deletion of those scenes, the narrative in *Kingsman 2* appears to have remained unaffected, as Chinese viewers did not mention any plot-related inconsistencies. In contrast, users with a negative attitude were dissatisfied with the plot's illogicality. For example:

The entire plot is connected by stiff clues, which are sudden and strange, without any logic at all, which is outrageous. (Maoyan user)

³⁵³ Maoyan, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)'; Taopiaopiao, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)'

The only user who assigned a negative rating to the film likewise complained about the illogical plot:

The beginning is reasonable, but the plot goes completely wrong later?!? I am so angry that I can only type so many words to slightly relieve the two hours wasted by this film. Cherish your life and stay away from this bad film!! (Maoyan user)

In comparison with other genres, action-adventure films usually prioritise visual effects over intricate narratives to attract viewers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, it is evident that many Chinese viewers still anticipated that action-adventure films could have a logical and coherent plot. This supports Bordwell's claim that the main purpose of film viewing activities is to construct an integrated story from the plot.³⁵⁴ One potential explanation for the perception among Chinese viewers that the plot of the film was unreasonable may be attributed to its stance on drugs, which are rigorously prohibited in China. This topic was addressed by one user:

The values it depicted may be incompatible with some people in China. Domestic drug control is so strict, and the number of drug users is far lower than in Europe and the United States, so some plots are difficult to arouse empathy. (Maoyan user)

In *Kingsman 2*, a Statesman offered considerable assistance to the protagonists; however, his aversion to drug addicts and his unwillingness to help those poisoned by drugs ultimately resulted in his betrayal, causing the protagonists to kill him by throwing him into a meat grinder. Many Chinese viewers may find it difficult to agree with the values shown by the protagonists, as the beliefs expressed by this Statesman were more compatible with the attitudes of most Chinese consumers about drugs. Thus, the cultural discount experienced by *Kingsman 2* in China may be ascribed to the difficulties faced by Chinese viewers in comprehending and empathising with the portrayal of drug abuse.

Dissatisfaction with the quality of the narrative was also evident in Chinese users' discussions on the 'Characters in story', which also received divergent evaluations. Among the 13 users who mentioned this factor, 4 users expressed positive attitudes, 2 users expressed neutral attitudes, and 7 users expressed negative attitudes. The

³⁵⁴ Bordwell, et al. (2017), p.72

viewers with negative attitudes mostly expressed their dissatisfaction with the superficiality of the new characters and the inconsistency of those from the previous film:

The film wants to say too much, which results in the characters not being fully fleshed out, and the 2-hour running time fails to establish these characters. As a result, the sequences in which Kingsman was bombed and Tequila was shot left people feeling bland, and I felt neither pity nor sadness at all. (Maoyan user)

In terms of character creation, the new characters that are hyped up in the early stages either sleep throughout the entire film or turn against the protagonists for no apparent reason. It would not affect the plot if they were completely removed. As for the characters in the first film... well, it would not be surprising if the audience who liked the first film wanted to send knives to the screenwriter and director. (Maoyan user)

It indicates that the unreasonable behaviour of the characters in this film contributed to the illogicality of the plot. These findings provide additional evidence that, despite the action-adventure genre's emphasis on visual spectacles rather than narrative, many Chinese viewers expressed disappointment with the illogical progression of the story and the inconsistent portrayal of characters in this film. Given that many Chinese consumers depend on online reviews from other viewers to make informed purchasing decisions, the negative comments about the narrative ability and characterisation competence of *Kingsman 2* could undermine the film's word-of-mouth, discourage further potential viewers and adversely impact its box office performance.

3.1.2 Innovative Genre and Satisfying Audio-Visual Effects

The second frequently mentioned factor was 'Genre', which was mentioned by 22 users, 21 of whom held positive attitudes. The combat sequences in the film were the primary focus of their commendation:

Moreover, some settings are more comic and imaginative. The Alpha Gel and the electric lasso are super cool, and the long shot of the three-person fight at the end is unforgettable. (Maoyan user)

The action is upgraded, and the various carefully choreographed action scenes and photography editing are very exciting. The opening car racing scene and the long shot of the final battle, as well as various other scenes in the film, have pushed the

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action performance to the extreme and are definitely worth a full mark. (Maoyan user)

It suggests that Chinese consumers expected the action-adventure genre to feature visually stunning spectacles, thrilling combat sequences and captivating car chase scenes. This film basically fulfilled their expectations for this genre.



Figure 3.1.3 Combat Scene in *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (UK, US: Matthew Vaughn, 2017). Copyright of Twentieth Century Fox, US; Marv Films, UK; Cloudy Productions, UK; TSG Entertainment, US; and Shangri-La Entertainment, US.

In addition, *Kingsman 2*, as an adaptation of comic books, showcased conventional action elements while integrating interesting comic characteristics, such as imaginative gadgets and novel combat sequences, which impressed many Chinese viewers. Some people noted that the film's comedic elements and creative imagination distinguished it from other spy films and improved its distinctive appeal.

Two users compared *Kingsman 2* to the *James Bond* series and the *Bourne* series:

To put it simply, this is an action comedy, with action scenes and comedy jokes from beginning to end, and of course, thrilling passages. There is no doubt that "Kingsman 2" is a spy film tailor-made for young people. After getting used to Bond's serious gentlemanly style, "Kingsman" is so intense and has a humorous style of making fun of each other, which is obviously more appealing to today's young people! (Maoyan user)

Compared to Bond and Bourne, I prefer this candy-style spy film with purely staged fights and wide-open imagination... (Taopiaopiao user)

As Chen and Liu note, the *Kingsman* films subverted the tense and serious atmosphere typically evoked by other spy films by adopting a more casual and entertaining

narrative approach.³⁵⁵ It could suggest that *Kingsman 2*, as a spy film, met the genre expectations of Chinese viewers and offered them a unique experience characterised by comic-book aesthetics and humorous features.

A comparable discussion was found under the factor of 'Audio-visual effects', mentioned by 20 users, of whom 19 expressed positive attitudes. Special effects, spectacles, soundtrack and editing were the most frequently praised aspects of the film:

The graphics and art style are also super good. The switching between British style, cowboy style, and American retro style is seamless. The shooting technique of the fighting scenes is also quite interesting. The 360-degree camera makes the solemn fighting scenes full of humour. The music is also very good, switching between various styles. (Maoyan user)

The slow and funny handling of the fighting scenes and the dynamic soundtrack are very different from most action films and are more novel. Although the plot development is old-fashioned, it is not boring. It is worth going to the cinema to watch! (Taopiaopiao user)

Although the film's narrative was the subject of complaint from many Chinese viewers, they were primarily satisfied with the film's audio-visual effects. As highlighted by King, spectacular vistas are a persistent source of the allure of the cinematic experience, in contrast to that of small-screen media.³⁵⁶ The audio-visual effects in the action-adventure genre could be perceived as having an inherent advantage in attracting Chinese consumers to the cinema for a more immersive viewing experience. It indicates that the genre and the audio-visual effects in *Kingsman 2*, particularly the visual spectacles and enjoyable viewing experience, were the primary reasons they watched the film in cinemas.

³⁵⁵ Gang Chen, and Shiyang Liu, 'Genre Evolution, Character Reconstruction and Image Narrative: On British Spy Films Today', *Contemporary Cinema*, 3:5(2019), 62-66(64) [陈刚, 刘轼颖, "类型演进、形象重塑和影像叙事——当代英国特工电影研究", 当代电影, 3:5(2019), 62-66]

³⁵⁶ Geoff King, 'Spectacle and Narrative in the Contemporary Blockbuster', in Linda Ruth Williams, and Michael Hammond, (eds.), *Contemporary American Cinema*, (London: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006), pp.334-355(p.334)

3.1.3 Restricted Attraction of Franchise and Stars

Another frequently mentioned factor in *Kingsman 2* was 'Pre-sold IP', which was mentioned by 21 users, with 5 users expressing positive attitudes, 11 users expressing neutral attitudes, and 5 users expressing negative attitudes. Even though this film series was adapted from a comic book series, it did not receive much recognition in China, since none of the viewers mentioned it in their reviews. In this case, the 'Pre-sold IP' of *Kingsman 2* would be considered as its predecessor, *Kingsman 1*. As previously mentioned, *Kingsman 1* earned a relatively favourable rating from Chinese consumers and established a certain level of recognition in China. However, while the acclaim of *Kingsman 1* could assist *Kingsman 2* in attracting its existing fans, the fanbase cultivated by *Kingsman 1* in China was still limited and could not help *Kingsman 2* to achieve significant success at the Chinese box office. Furthermore, the existing fans' expectation for *Kingsman 2* was elevated by the production quality of *Kingsman 1*. The contrasting opinions of Chinese viewers regarding this factor suggest that, while some of them regarded this sequel as equally exceptional as *Kingsman 1*, some believed that it failed to reach the benchmarks set by its predecessor. Meanwhile, most users maintained a neutral stance and noted that, even though this sequel was of inferior quality to *Kingsman 1*, it was still worth watching:

It is not that bad. It is just far below my expectations... The screenwriter of this film is really mean to the fans of the first film. (Maoyan user)

If the first film is a masterpiece, this one is just a passerby. Despite this, this film is still better than all the recent domestic blockbusters. (Maoyan user)

The unsatisfactory quality could partially account for the inferior performance of *Kingsman 2* in comparison to *Kingsman 1*. It aligns with Basuroy and Chatterjee's assertion that sequels typically fail to generate box office revenues that are comparable to those of their predecessors.³⁵⁷ Although Chinese viewers held varying perspectives on whether *Kingsman 2* matched the quality of *Kingsman 1*, it is evident that the reputation of *Kingsman 1* appealed to many Chinese consumers to watch *Kingsman 2*. In other words, its franchise functioned as a selling point in attracting the interest of Chinese viewers to *Kingsman 2*, which in turn had a positive effect on its

³⁵⁷ Basuroy & Chatterjee (2008), p.803

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performance in China. Nevertheless, the neutral and negative reviews about the quality of this sequel may discourage consumers, including both fans who had not made a purchasing decision and people who were unfamiliar with the series, therefore limiting the franchise's potential to attract additional Chinese viewers.



Figure 3.1.4 Chinese Poster for *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)

The Chinese poster for *Kingsman 2* also indicates that Chinese distributors considered the action genre and its franchise as key market signals for the film to attract Chinese consumers. As depicted in Figure 3.1.4, the central region of the poster includes three characters from the previous film and two new characters from this sequel. The images could pique the curiosity of Chinese consumers who were familiar with *Kingsman 1* and enhance their interest in the new story of this film. In addition, a conspicuous sign is the slogan situated at the top section of the poster, denoting 'Higher, Faster, Stronger, Wilder (更高，更快，更强，更浪)'. It resembles the well-known Olympic Motto,

which is 'Faster, Higher, Stronger'.³⁵⁸ This similar slogan may easily captivate the public, and the inclusion of 'Wilder' at the end further underlines the comedic and entertaining aspects of the film. The use of the comparative form in the slogan also indicates that this sequel would surpass the qualities of its predecessor, creating higher expectations among viewers and enticing them to watch this film. At the bottom of the poster, the release date in China is shown, followed by another slogan, 'flip the world upside down (嗨翻世界)'. This also suggests that the film would feature thrilling action sequences and captivating visual spectacles, enticing viewers to watch it in cinemas for a more immersive viewing experience.

Yet, Chinese distributors seem not be particularly optimistic about the potential of stars to attract Chinese viewers to this film, as the names of the actors were only displayed in small print at the bottom of the poster. In the same vein, while 12 users expressed positive attitudes regarding the film's 'Stars', their reviews merely indicate that they can recognise certain actors, rather than that these actors were the main motivation for them to view the film. Colin Firth was the most frequently referenced actor. However, the primary focus of these users was the discussion surrounding Firth's appearance. It was difficult to determine whether his popularity effectively attracted these viewers to watch the film. Furthermore, although *Kingsman 2* featured a greater number of prominent actors compared to its predecessor, their presence did not appear to exert a discernible beneficial influence on the film's box office performance in China. This may confirm the research of Kwak and Zhang, as well as Elliott et al., which suggests that Chinese consumers have limited familiarity with foreign actors, and their image is only a weak determinant of the box office incomes of foreign films in China.³⁵⁹

3.1.4 Appealing Yet Diluted British Culture

The stereotypical British cultural elements depicted in the film enabled 15 Chinese viewers to identify the film's 'Country of origin' as a British production. Only one user

³⁵⁸ The Olympic Motto, <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-motto>, [accessed 23 Aug 2023]

³⁵⁹ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135; Elliott, et al. (2018), p.84

identified it as a Hollywood blockbuster. In 13 users' discussions regarding the 'British culture' represented in the film, they primarily focused on the gentlemanly British agents and British humour. They stated that the comedic aspects of the film were engaging and exhibited a distinctly British style. Like one Taopiaopiao user said, 'Who says the British are serious? They are really good at humour.' It appears to contradict the research findings of Chen and Zhang, which indicate that language, culture, emotions, and cognition influence the appreciation of British humour among Chinese-English bilinguals.³⁶⁰ It is undeniable that, despite linguistic and cultural obstacles, certain Chinese viewers were capable of understanding and enjoying some of the British humour presented in the film. Yet, it is also important to note that *Kingsman 2*, an action-adventure film, may primarily present British humour through actions rather than dialogue, which could potentially increase the accessibility of British humour to some Chinese consumers. In addition, Chinese consumers were impressed by the refined and exquisite attire of the gentleman agents and their calmness during the intense battle:

The success of "Kingsman" is that it combines the romantic British gentleman with the intelligent agent who can fight and kill! They wear expensive custom-made suits, and everything they do is charming. When fighting and killing people are no longer wild but become full of romance, this look is so fresh! (Maoyan user)

A film worth watching, full of British secret agent style. The British style is completely opposite to the American style. There is a sense of accent and ritual. British spy films are different from American films where agents show off their muscles. Instead, they wear tailor-made suits from Savile Row in the UK and the etiquette of British gentlemen to fight the enemy in various dangerous and exciting places. Worth watching! (Taopiaopiao user)

It suggests that the combination of elegant agents and intense combat was a distinctive feature of *Kingsman* films that captivated the interest of many Chinese viewers. As Yin argues, the suits that were consistently emphasised in the *Kingsman* films served as a metaphor for the belief and inheritance of gentleman culture.³⁶¹ Moreover, the film's British cultural identity was further enhanced by the comparison

³⁶⁰ Chen & Zhang (2023), p.15-17

³⁶¹ JiuHong Yin, "'Kingsman' From the Perspective of Western Culture", *Movie Literature*, 11(2018), 158-160(160)
[尹玖红, "西方文化视角下的'王牌特工'", *电影文学*, 11(2018), 158-160]

between Kingsman, who represented British ‘gentlemanly agents’, and Statesman, who represented American ‘cowboy agents’. Like one user stated:

The contrast between Kingsman and Statesman is obvious. One is polite and gentlemanly, while the other is passionate, open and straightforward. The conflict in the film is very clear. (Taopiaopiao user)

This supports Higson’s argument that the banal symbols of British national identity can become exotic signifiers of difference in the global marketplace.³⁶² According to Ju, the image of the gentleman has become an iconic representation of British cultural identity, enabling the British to be easily distinguished from other ethnic groups. She maintains that the gentleman is a crucial manifestation of British national culture and spirit, which may be regarded as a vital attraction of British cinema in global markets.³⁶³ Therefore, the incorporation of stereotypical British cultural elements in *Kingsman 2* was a successful strategy for distinguishing it from American films and attracting Chinese viewers with its own unique allure.

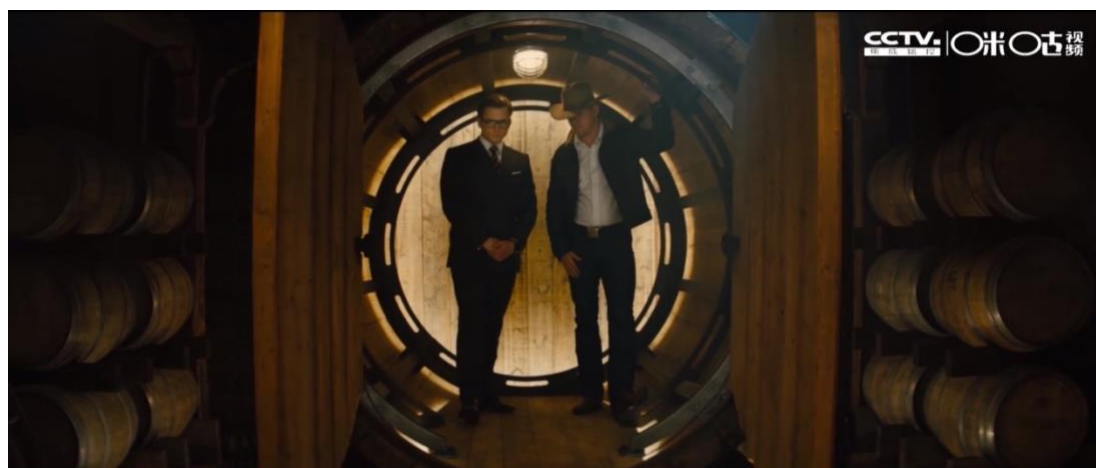


Figure 3.1.5 British Agent and American Agent in *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)

On the contrary, a user held a neutral stance, while another user held a negative stance towards ‘British culture’ in the film and stated:

The combination of American cowboy and British gentleman lacks the contrast between elegance and violence and fails to create the expected sparks. (Maoyan user)

³⁶² Higson (2011), p.71

³⁶³ Wei Ju, ‘The Construction of “Gentleman’s Ideal” and the Imagination of “Global Britain” in Contemporary British Cinema’, *Contemporary Cinema*, 12(2022), 105-111(105,106) [鞠薇, “当代英国电影中的‘绅士理想’建构与‘全球英国’想象”, 当代电影, 12(2022), 105-111]

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The refreshing British style that the first film gave the audience has been weakened into an almost negligible background in this film, and it has lost its own characteristics, which is a pity. (Maoyan user)

It implies that the most distinctive and alluring feature of *Kingsman 1* for many Chinese viewers was its explicit Britishness, which set it apart from other spy films. However, the incorporation of American cultural elements in *Kingsman 2* diluted the presence of Britishness, which disappointed some Chinese consumers. The concern about whether integrating American cultural elements led *Kingsman 2* to lose its own characteristics was also reflected in the discussion about the ‘Places of story’ among Chinese viewers, which was mentioned by 14 users. According to 9 users who evaluated this factor positively, the film’s diversity and exoticism were enhanced by the comparisons between the UK and the US. For instance:

This sequel is a mix of British and American elements, and the addition of new American elements makes this film more diverse. (Maoyan user)

Conversely, certain users expressed their dissatisfaction with the American-set storyline and held negative evaluations. For example:

I want to see gentleman in double-breasted suit, why do you show me American country style? (Taopiaopiao user)

The findings reveal that the inclusion of American cultural elements in *Kingsman 2* led to different outcomes in China. Although some viewers may appreciate the integration of diverse cultures, others who were interested in the Britishness of the franchise may be disappointed, as they may only anticipate seeing the representations of British culture that used to offer them novel experiences. Hence, *Kingsman 2*’s box office performance in China may be adversely affected by this dilution of Britishness.

3.1.5 Word-of-mouth and Reduced Screenings

The influences that are discussed in the previous four sections could also be reflected by the number of daily screenings and the daily box office revenue of *Kingsman 2* in

China, as seen in Figure 3.1.6 and Figure 3.1.7.³⁶⁴ During its first week of release, *Kingsman 2* was allocated approximately 37% of the total screenings, and its earnings accounted for about 50% of the total box office revenue in China.³⁶⁵ According to Box Office Mojo, *Kingsman 2* only topped the box office on its first weekend of release.³⁶⁶ This suggests that the film's market signals, such as its franchise and the action-adventure genre, were effective in attracting Chinese consumers. Yet, as the figures reveal, *Kingsman 2*'s percentage of screenings and box office income experienced a substantial drop from the second week. This decline may be attributed to the release of other competitors and the decline in its word-of-mouth.

On the one hand, two American action films, *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and *Geostorm* (2017), were released one week after *Kingsman 2*. In the first week of release, *Blade Runner 2049* was allocated about 15% of screenings and contributed approximately 10% of box office revenue, while *Geostorm* was allocated over 35% of screenings and contributed around 45% of box office income.³⁶⁷ In contrast, during the same week, *Kingsman 2* received about 10% of screenings and generated roughly 10% of total revenue.³⁶⁸ It is evident that these two American films occupied a segment of the market share in the Chinese market and diverted considerable attention from Chinese consumers, which had a negative impact on the box office performance of *Kingsman 2*. This competitive environment and the loss of screening slots made it challenging for *Kingsman 2* to sustain its appeal in China. On the other hand, the increasing number of negative comments posted by Chinese consumers regarding the film's unsatisfactory narrative, diminished quality and diluted Britishness may discourage potential consumers who had not yet made their purchasing decisions. The unfavourable word-of-mouth may lead to a decrease in consumers' interest in *Kingsman 2* and push them to select alternative films. The finding is consistent with

³⁶⁴ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/07401712017?from=movie>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]

³⁶⁵ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)'

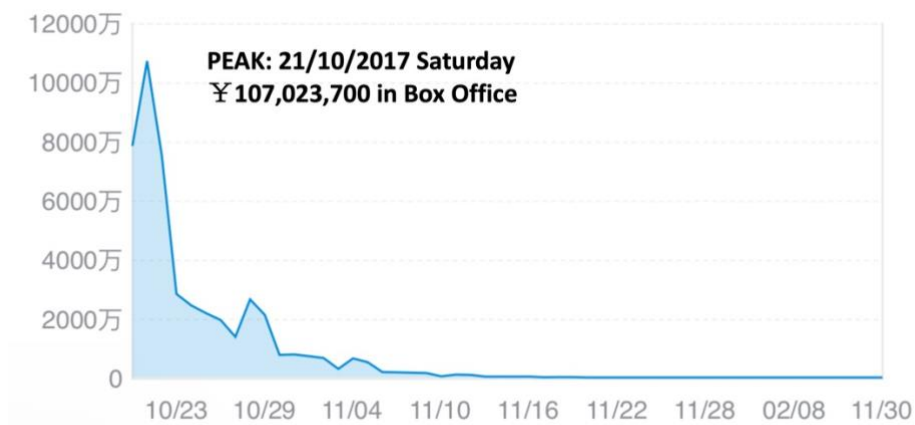
³⁶⁶ Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office Weekends For 2017', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/weekend/by-year/2017/?area=CN>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

³⁶⁷ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Blade Runner 2049 (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/05101782017?from=movie>, [accessed 13 Oct 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Geostorm (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/05101752017?from=movie>, [accessed 13 Oct 2024]

³⁶⁸ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Kingsman: The Golden Circle (2017)'

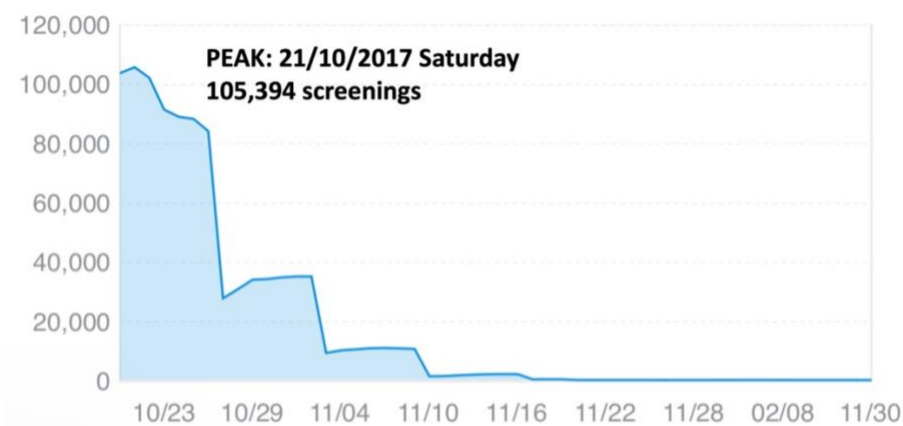
those of DeVany and Walls, who find that the impact of franchise on the total box office revenue of a sequel is limited and diminishes over time throughout its release.³⁶⁹ My research provides further evidence to suggest that, although the franchise and genre could have a positive impact during the first week of the film's release, a favourable word-of-mouth may be more crucial for maintaining its appeal during the subsequent release period.

Figure 3.1.6 Daily Box Office Revenue of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Figure 3.1.7 Daily Number of Screenings of *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

³⁶⁹ DeVany & Walls (1999), p.305

3.2 *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)

Johnny English 3 is a sequel in the *Johnny English* film series, a series of spy comedies that centre on the character of Johnny English, an MI7 agent who was confident but bumbling. He frequently committed mistakes while conducting his espionage tasks, which elicited laughter from the audience. Nevertheless, he always managed to miraculously complete the mission and successfully save Britain and the world. In the first film of this series, *Johnny English* (2003) (referred to as *Johnny English 1*), the protagonist, despite his numerous hilarious mistakes, successfully recovered the stolen British Crown Jewels. However, it has been two decades since the release of *Johnny English 1*, making it difficult to know its exact box office revenue and cinema admissions in China. The second film of the series, *Johnny English Reborn* (2011) (referred to as *Johnny English 2*), was shot in the UK and Hong Kong. The narrative revolves around his actions in preventing the assassination of the Chinese Premier. Yet, this film was not distributed in China. In *Johnny English 3*, a cyber-attack exposed the identities of all active secret agents. Johnny English, a retired agent familiar only with traditional spying techniques, became the final hope of defeating the villain, who was proficient in modern technology. After a series of absurd espionage operations, the protagonist successfully thwarted the villain's plan and protected the world. According to IMDb, *Johnny English 3* is a film that falls under the genres of action, adventure and comedy. It was produced by the UK, France, US and China, with a budget of around \$25 million. The production companies involved were Universal Pictures (US), StudioCanal (France), Working Title Films (UK), Perfect World Pictures (China) and Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (France).³⁷⁰ Perfect World Pictures is one of the most successful Chinese private companies in international film investments.³⁷¹ The investment by the Chinese firm in *Johnny English 3* may facilitate the film's import into China. It was imported under the revenue-sharing program and jointly distributed by CFGC and Huaxia.³⁷² In the UK, the film was released on October

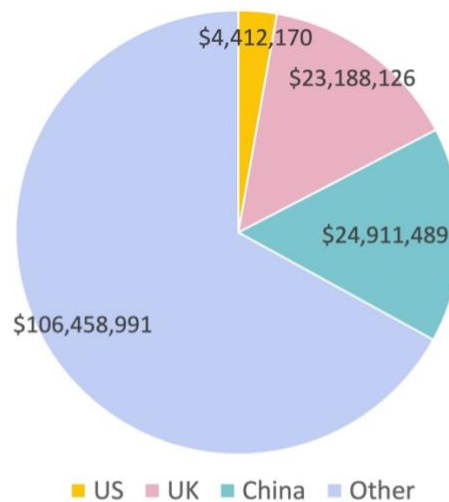
³⁷⁰ IMDb, '*Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6921996/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]

³⁷¹ Zhu (2022), p.252

³⁷² Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/1207271/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=593636>, [accessed 02 Nov 2024]

5, 2018. Nevertheless, the release date of *Johnny English 3* in China was postponed until November 23, as the beginning of October (Chinese National Day) is one of the peak seasons in the Chinese film market, a circumstance similar to that encountered by *Kingsman 2*.³⁷³ This offers further evidence to substantiate Zhou's assertion that the release of foreign films in China may be delayed until the end of the profitable holiday season to protect the revenues of domestic films.³⁷⁴ Eventually, *Johnny English 3* drew nearly 6 million cinema admissions, generated approximately \$25 million at the Chinese box office, and placed 62nd in China's annual box office ranking for 2018.³⁷⁵

Figure 3.2.1 Gross Box Office Income of *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018) in Different Countries



Source: Box Office Mojo

Among the films of similar genres released in China in 2018, the most commercially successful was *Mission: Impossible – Fallout* (2018). It earned over \$181 million at the Chinese box office, exceeding *Johnny English 3* by more than sevenfold.³⁷⁶ In contrast, a domestic middle-budget spy comedy titled *Fat Buddies* (胖子行动队/Pang Zi Xing Dong Dui) (2018) was also released in 2018 and garnered a performance slightly superior to *Johnny English 3*, which earned over \$37 million at the Chinese box

³⁷³ Box Office Mojo, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)'

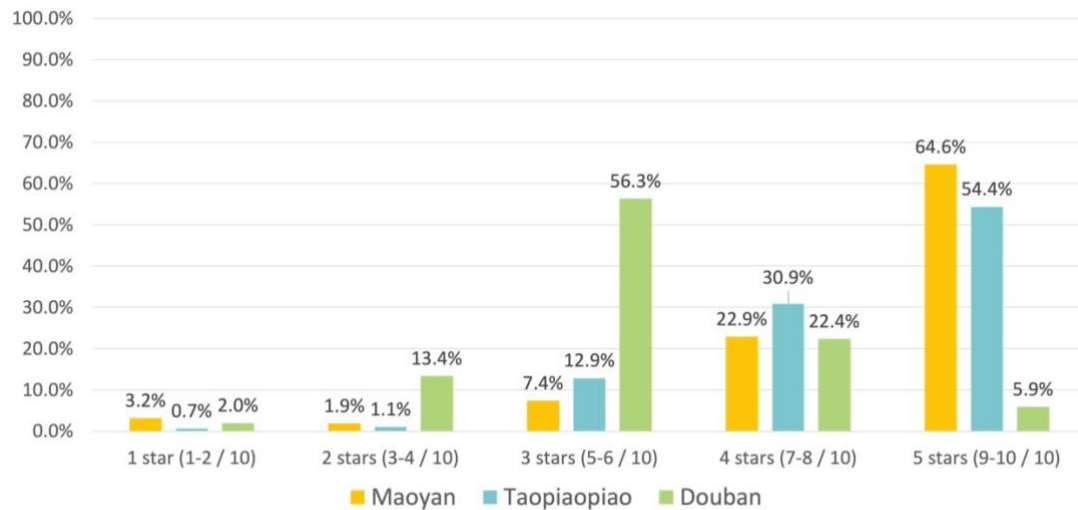
³⁷⁴ Zhou (2015), p.245

³⁷⁵ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)'; Maoyan Pro, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/1207271/boxshowna?barTheme=593636>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=332041&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

³⁷⁶ Box Office Mojo, 'Mission: Impossible – Fallout (2018)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr248533509/>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

office.³⁷⁷ Despite not attaining a remarkable box office ranking in China, as depicted in Figure 3.2.1, its Chinese box office income accounted for the greatest portion of *Johnny English 3*'s total worldwide box office revenue, which accounted for about 16%.³⁷⁸

Figure 3.2.2 Ratings of *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

Johnny English 3 has received ratings of 8.6 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.5 on Taopiaopiao, and 6.3 on Douban, from about 117,000, 242,000, and 85,000 Chinese users, respectively. Figure 3.2.2 exhibits the various ratings given by Chinese consumers for the film.³⁷⁹ The ratings for *Johnny English 3* also exhibited a bell-shaped distribution on Douban and a negatively skewed distribution on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao. Its ratings were inferior to those of *Mission: Impossible – Fallout*, but it surpassed the domestic spy comedy, *Fat Buddies*.³⁸⁰ It seems that most Chinese viewers regarded the

³⁷⁷ Box Office Mojo, 'Fat Buddies (2018)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1090212357/>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

³⁷⁸ Box Office Mojo, 'Johnny English: Strikes Again (2018)'

³⁷⁹ Maoyan, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1207271?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=332041>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/27073234/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

³⁸⁰ Maoyan, 'Mission: Impossible – Fallout (2018)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/341737?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Mission: Impossible – Fallout (2018)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=226591>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'Mission: Impossible – Fallout (2018)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/26336252?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Maoyan, 'Fat Buddies (2018)', <https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1210830?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm>

film as of moderate quality. Based on the BFI survey in 2021, which examines the preferences and attitudes of Chinese consumers towards British film/TV, comedy was the most favoured genre, with 56% of the respondents expressing a preference for it.³⁸¹ Nevertheless, as discussed in the Literature Review section, humour could be culturally specific and subject to cultural discount in international markets. Chinese viewers appeared to be more inclined to view domestic comedy films as a result of the influence of cultural proximity. It might imply that, although *Johnny English 3* received a higher rating than the Chinese domestic spy comedy *Fat Buddies*, it encountered difficulties in attracting a larger audience and achieving higher box office earnings due to the cultural discount that comedy would face in foreign markets.

Table 3.2 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Stars	36	0	0	36
Plot	13	9	10	32
Genre	16	2	2	20
Country of origins	10	0	1	11
Pre-sold IP	9	1	0	10
British culture	9	0	0	9
Characters in story	2	0	2	4
Audio-visual effects	2	1	1	4
Places in story	2	0	0	2
Language	1	0	0	1
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

In the 50 reviews sampled from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, 38 users rated the film positively, 2 users held neutral attitudes, and 10 users rated it negatively.³⁸² *Johnny English 3* received the highest number of negative ratings among the eight cases examined in this research, with six viewers rating it with only one point. As Li et al. claim, the poor word-of-mouth may adversely affect a film's box office performance in China.³⁸³ *Johnny English 3's* box office revenue in China could be negatively impacted

[source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k](#), [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, '*Fat Buddies* (2018)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=1255358>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Douban, '*Fat Buddies* (2018)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/27149818/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

³⁸¹ BFI (2022b), p.18

³⁸² Maoyan, '*Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)'; Taopiaopiao, '*Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)'

³⁸³ Li, et al. (2022), p.3

by these negative film reviews. The frequency of factors mentioned by Chinese viewers is summarised in Table 3.2, accompanied by a more detailed explanation below.³⁸⁴

3.2.1 Star Power of Rowan Atkinson

The most frequently mentioned factor in *Johnny English 3* was 'Stars', which was mentioned by 36 Chinese users. All these reviews referenced Rowan Atkinson and maintained him with a positive attitude. The 2021 BFI survey reveals that Atkinson was the most renowned British actor in China, as indicated by 44% of Chinese respondents.³⁸⁵ The majority of Chinese viewers addressed him as 'Mr. Bean' and expressed their affection, respect and admiration for this comedian:

Watching the respected Mr. Rowan Atkinson getting older day by day, I feel really sad. Just like Master Chaplin, he represents the pinnacle of comedy in the new era! (Taopiaopiao user)

Mr. Bean is an eye-catching title in the laughter world of the new century. If Chaplin is the greatest master of humour and comedy in the 20th century, then Mr. Bean is his successor. (Taopiaopiao user)

It suggests that despite the cultural disparities, Atkinson's popularity and influence in China are indisputable. He even starred in a Chinese domestic comedy that was never released internationally, titled *Top Funny Comedian: The Movie* (欢乐喜剧人/Huan Le Xi Ju Ren) (2017).³⁸⁶ As highlighted by Rose from *The Guardian*: 'Between English and his other Anglo caricature, Mr. Bean, Atkinson is as big a brand as Bond globally'.³⁸⁷ Many Chinese users also stated that they were motivated to watch this film upon noticing Atkinson's name:

Mr. Bean can be said to be a childhood memory, so this is destined to be a film watched for sentimental reasons. Those who like Mr. Bean must support it. (Maoyan user)

To be honest, I am honoured to see Mr. Bean appear on the screen again. This is also the first time I have seen his work in the cinema. In the past two days, I had seen

³⁸⁴ Maoyan, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)'; Taopiaopiao, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)'

³⁸⁵ BFI (2022b), p.19

³⁸⁶ Steve Rose, 'Johnny English V Bond: Who's Cinema's Best Hero for Brexit Britain?', *The Guardian*, 24 September, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/sep/24/johnny-english-v-bond-whos-cinemas-best-hero-for-brexit-britain>, [accessed 17 Jun 2023]

³⁸⁷ Rose (2018)

some of the upcoming films, but when I read the title “Agent Bean”, I was determined to watch it, and I was very excited. He has influenced two generations with his performance for nearly 30 years, which is great! Hats off to him! (Maoyan user)

It indicates that the star power of Atkinson served as the most effective inherent advertising for *Johnny English 3*, as his popularity piqued the interest of many Chinese viewers, which in turn had a favourable impact on the film’s box office performance. This supports the argument of Treme and Craig, who maintain that consumers often purchase tickets based on the reputation of the actors in the film.³⁸⁸ However, it contradicts the conclusions of Elliott et al. as well as Kwak and Zhang, who do not observe a significant and positive correlation between foreign stars and foreign films’ box office revenue in China.³⁸⁹ Hence, these results suggest that foreign actors possess the potential to serve as effective market signals for attracting Chinese viewers, but they have to be among the most prominent people in the industry and possess a considerable fanbase in China to bolster the film’s box office income.

3.2.2 Influence of the *Mr. Bean* TV Series

It is evident that Atkinson possesses an inherent association with Mr. Bean in the perceptions of Chinese consumers. Chinese viewers frequently associated *Johnny English 3* with the *Mr. Bean* series rather than the *Johnny English* series. This is due to the fact that the Chinese distributors renamed the *Johnny English* series in China as ‘Agent Bean (憨豆特工)’ when the first film of the series was released in China. This decision may be made in response to the widespread popularity of Atkinson’s *Mr. Bean* series. Based on the results of the BFI survey, the second most famous British film and TV series among Chinese respondents were *Johnny English 3* and *Mr. Bean – Animated Series*, which were selected by 100% and 60% of the respondents, respectively. Additionally, 63% of the respondents reported that they had watched *Johnny English 3*.³⁹⁰ This result was somewhat dubious as the box office performance of *Johnny English 3* could be significantly better if the substantial number of Chinese consumers had heard of and watched the film. Although they may watch this film on streaming

³⁸⁸ Treme & Craig (2013), p.440

³⁸⁹ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135; Elliott, et al. (2018), p.84

³⁹⁰ BFI (2022b), p.19

platforms, many Chinese respondents may be misled by the Chinese title of this film, supposing it was a film from the *Mr. Bean* series. Accordingly, when discussing the ‘Pre-sold IP’ factor in this film, it refers to both the *Mr. Bean* series and the *Johnny English* series. This factor was mentioned by 10 users, and 9 of them held favourable attitudes:

The film continues the style of the “Mr. Bean” TV series, with an average of one laugh every three or four minutes. Laughter continued. (Maoyan user)

I am a loyal Mr. Bean fan! From “Bean” to “Agent Bean 3”, I have watched each of them twice or more. The reason why the “Agent Bean” series is attractive to me is not only because of Mr. Bean’s humour, but more importantly, the spirit he conveys in the film: “Even if everyone doesn’t trust me, I will never give up easily!” (Taopiaopiao user)

It seems that, by appealing to the fanbase of the *Mr. Bean* series in China, *Johnny English 3* captured the attention of many Chinese viewers. In other words, the modification of the film’s Chinese title could be viewed as advantageous, as it increased Chinese consumers’ interest in watching the film by associating it with the *Mr. Bean* series.

The popularity of the *Mr. Bean* series and the star power of Atkinson in China could also be reflected in the Chinese poster for *Johnny English 3*. As shown in Figure 3.2.3, the primary attribute of the poster is its conspicuous centre location of the character, Johnny English (Rowan Atkinson), with the actor’s name prominently displayed on the left side of the image. It appears that Chinese distributors perceived Atkinson as the primary draw and the leading influence within the cast of the film. In addition, the Chinese slogan that shows at the top of the poster translates to ‘The funnier wins when two meet on a narrow road (狭路相逢，活宝无敌)’. This line is recomposed from a famous Chinese old saying: ‘The braver wins when two meet on a narrow road (狭路相逢勇者胜)’. The initial portion of the sentence stays unchanged, but the latter portion is changed to denote the comedy genre of the film. The film’s release date appears at the bottom of the poster, followed by the phrase ‘launch an attack with a burst of laughter (爆笑出击)’, which further indicates the film’s action and comedy genre. Thus, Atkinson, the *Mr. Bean* franchise, and the spy comedy genre in the poster could be regarded as significant market signals of the film, as they possessed the

potential to attract Chinese consumers and positively influence the film's box office performance.



Figure 3.2.3 Chinese Poster for *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)

3.2.3 Varying Reception of Plot

Although 'Plot' was the second most frequently mentioned factor, Chinese viewers held varying perspectives on it. This factor was mentioned by 32 users, with 13 users expressing positive attitudes, 9 users expressing neutral attitudes, and 10 users expressing negative attitudes. The number of the three attitudes that Chinese viewers held towards the plot of this film was similar, suggesting that the reception of the storyline in China was notably different. Users with positive attitudes commented that the narrative was rich in comedic elements:

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There is constant laughter throughout the whole process. It is a film that can be understood without much thought. (Taopiaopiao user)

The film turns out to be unexpectedly wonderful, very funny, and shows justice and persistence. The plot is great. I like it. (Taopiaopiao user)

These Chinese viewers seem to be capable of comprehending and appreciating certain humour that was presented in the film. According to Diffrient, Tirtaine and Augros, British humour rooted in language—such as wit, understatement, and puns—tends to be culturally specific in the global market, thereby reducing its attractiveness to international audiences due to the lack of common cultural references.³⁹¹ Even though the content that causes laughter is usually culturally specific, the main reason for the *Mr. Bean* series' popularity in a cross-cultural context like China might be that the comedic aspects were conveyed through Mr. Bean's iconic exaggerated facial expressions and strange physical gestures, allowing Chinese viewers to understand his humour despite the cultural barriers. The representations of comedic elements in *Johnny English 3* were comparable, as it continued to use Mr. Bean's iconic sense of humour, rather than relying on culturally specific witticisms. Many Chinese viewers were also expected to experience this type of humour in the film because of their affection for Mr. Bean:

It is so funny, with rich and exaggerated facial expressions and cute movements. I almost died of laughter in the cinema. (Taopiaopiao user)

The "Mr. Bean" series of films is considered a classic among comedy films. It still has Mr. Bean's unique body language and humour. (Taopiaopiao user)

On the contrary, users who held negative attitudes complained that the narrative was boring:

I am very disappointed with Mr. Bean. There is almost no funny point. I did not laugh even though I am easily amused. (Maoyan user)

I really do not want to give it even one point. It is too bad. Or I can say I do not understand it. American comedy is different from Chinese comedy. It is boring to watch. Except for American blockbusters, which are okay, the rest are really bad. (Maoyan user)

³⁹¹ Diffrient (2020), p.46; Tirtaine & Augros (2015), p.52

It appears that the primary reason for Chinese viewers' dissatisfaction with the narrative was that the film was not interesting. It is evident that viewers who gave positive and negative reviews evaluated the humour in the film in a completely different manner. It may be consistent with the results of Alexander and Friedman, who suggest that the perceptions of humour vary among British individuals from different backgrounds, such as class, gender, and nationality.³⁹² This inconsistent allure of the comedy elements of the film in China may also be attributed to the diverse backgrounds of Chinese viewers. In addition, according to the Maoyan user who identified this film as an American comedy, the dissatisfaction with the film may be attributable to cultural differences, as this foreign comedy offered hilarity that was not suitable for Chinese viewers. As Lee indicates, the comedy genre would experience a greater cultural discount in international markets due to the cultural specificity of humour.³⁹³ The following section on genre will address further discussions regarding British humour in this film.

Yet, many critics in British media and film trade press also did not find the film to be particularly interesting. For example, Bradshaw from *The Guardian* said: 'for me Johnny English's wacky misadventures aren't as inventive and focused as Atkinson's silent-movie gags in the persona of Bean'.³⁹⁴ Macnab from *The Independent* stated: 'we have the sense we are being served up a series of comedy sketches from an old sitcom strung together rather than a coherent feature-length narrative'.³⁹⁵ Ward from *Screen Daily* pointed out: 'but laughter is rarely forthcoming in a movie wholly robbed of spontaneity'.³⁹⁶ These statements seem to align with the perspectives of many Chinese viewers who held negative attitudes towards the plot of the film, indicating that the film's disappointing reception in China may not be completely attributable to

³⁹² Alexander (1984); Friedman (2011)

³⁹³ Lee (2006a), p.275

³⁹⁴ Peter Bradshaw, 'Johnny English Strikes Again Review: Another Underpowered Rowan Atkinson Spy Spoof', *The Guardian*, 30 September, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/sep/30/johnny-english-strikes-again-review-underpowered-rowan-atkinson-spy-spoof>, [accessed 19 Jul 2024]

³⁹⁵ Geoffrey Macnab, 'Johnny English Strikes Again Review: A Perfectly Serviceable Spy Spoof', *The Independent*, 04 October, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/johnny-english-strikes-again-review-rowan-atkinson-cast-sequel-comedy-a8567856.html>, [accessed 19 Jul 2024]

³⁹⁶ Sarah Ward, 'Johnny English Strikes Again': Review', *Screen Daily*, 17 September, 2018, <https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/johnny-english-strikes-again-review/docview/2108330064/se-2>, [accessed 08 Jul 2023]

cultural discount, but rather to its unsatisfactory storytelling capability. In any case, these negative comments on the plot would undoubtedly harm the film's word-of-mouth, deter prospective viewers, and adversely influence its box office performance.



Figure 3.2.4 Strange Physical Gestures Scene in *Johnny English Strikes Again* (UK, France, US, China: David Kerr, 2018). Copyright of Universal Pictures, US; StudioCanal, France; Working Title Films, UK; Perfect World Pictures, China; and Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, France.



Figure 3.2.5 Exaggerated Facial Expressions Scene in *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)

3.2.4 British Humour in Spy Comedy

The factor of 'Genre' was addressed by 20 users, with 16 of them expressing positive attitudes, 2 expressing neutral attitudes, and 2 expressing negative attitudes. Many users with positive attitudes highlighted the film's effective integration of the spy and comedy genres. According to Ding, *Johnny English 3* establishes its comedic and satirical tone from the start by drawing a comparison between the old-fashioned agent

and the digital age of technology.³⁹⁷ The comparison of modern technology with classic spying gadgets, as embodied in Johnny English's spying actions, underlined the conservative character of British culture, while simultaneously emphasising the distinct British sense of humour. Some viewers compared this film to other spy film series, claiming that this spy film, which incorporated comedic elements, possesses its own distinctive charm:

Compared to the noble temperament of Kingsman and the extraordinary charm of Tom Cruise in IMF, Mr. Bean does not have the special advantages of other agents. However, he has maintained superb acting skills and extremely challenging body language for decades. Through the screen, we can still feel his sincerity in acting. He is worthy of being the ace of comedy! Such a conscientious masterpiece is really worth watching and cherishing! (Maoyan user)

Old-school jokes, typical British humour. If Kingsman is the British showing off their charm, then Mr. Bean is the British making fun of themselves. (Taopiaopiao user)

It appears that the film's blend of genres could contribute to its appeal to a broader range of Chinese viewers, including those who appreciate comedy as well as those who enjoy spy films. These reviews also indicate that most Chinese viewers were able to identify Britain as the film's 'Country of origin' and found the self-mocking attitude of the British people to be humorous. *Johnny English 3* was identified as British by 10 users, while only one user mistakenly identified it as American. In addition, 9 users addressed 'British culture' in their reviews and particularly mentioned British humour:

The British are very good at making fun of themselves. (Maoyan user)

The funny point of Mr. Bean lies in his self-deprecating skills in the UK, the twists and turns in life, and, of course, his helplessness and struggle in facing life. It can make me laugh happily for two hours in a tense rhythm. (Taopiaopiao user)

The British humour that Chinese viewers discussed was primarily derived from the self-mocking attitude in the film, which was readily recognisable and easily associated with Britain by Chinese viewers. It aligns with the results of the 2022 BFI survey, in which international audiences described British humour as dry, dark, and quirky.³⁹⁸ These findings appear to partially contradict the research findings of Chen and Zhang, which

³⁹⁷ Lin Ding, 'Black Humour: Tragic Undertones Wrapped in a Comic Shell--Take *Johnny English 3* As An Example', *Movie Review*, 16(2020), 58-61(59) [丁琳, "黑色幽默:喜剧外壳包裹下的悲剧色彩——以《憨豆特工3》为例", 电影评介, 16(2020), 58-61]

³⁹⁸ BFI (2022d), p.23

reveal that language, culture, emotions, and cognition affect the appreciation of British humour among Chinese-English bilinguals.³⁹⁹ Despite the fact that many Chinese viewers found the narrative uninteresting, it is evident that some consumers enjoyed the British humour in *Johnny English 3*. One potential explanation is that, as previously discussed, the humour in *Johnny English 3* primarily relied on exaggerated physical gestures and facial expressions rather than language. In addition, it is a spy comedy combined with adventure elements, which allowed it to largely communicate humour through action and espionage instead of dialogue. It may indicate that the theme, genre, narrative, and *Mr. Bean's* comedic approach facilitate the film's ability to convey British humour more effectively in China than other British comedies. Moreover, discussions regarding British humour among Chinese viewers support Higson's claim that the most conventional representations of Britishness in British films could maintain the British national identity and serve as exotic signifiers of difference in the global marketplace.⁴⁰⁰ Nevertheless, it seems that Chinese viewers had a constrained imagination of Britain, since their discussions about British cultures predominantly centred on stereotypes. Although *Kingsman 2* and *Johnny English 3* might incorporate diverse British cultural elements, Chinese consumers were only capable of recognising a certain version of Britain, particularly the gentlemanly character and the self-mocking humour, as it matched their preconceived imagination. It could imply that the cultural discount British films encounter in China can only be alleviated by the cultural elements that have been perceived as stereotypes by Chinese viewers.

3.2.5 Intense Competition During the Theatrical Run

Moreover, *Johnny English 3* encountered competition during its release, not only from foreign films but also from domestic films. The fierce competition for the limited market shares adversely impacted the box office performance of *Johnny English 3* in China. As shown in Figure 3.2.6 and Figure 3.2.7, the daily box office income and screenings of *Johnny English 3* experienced a gradual decline during its theatrical run.

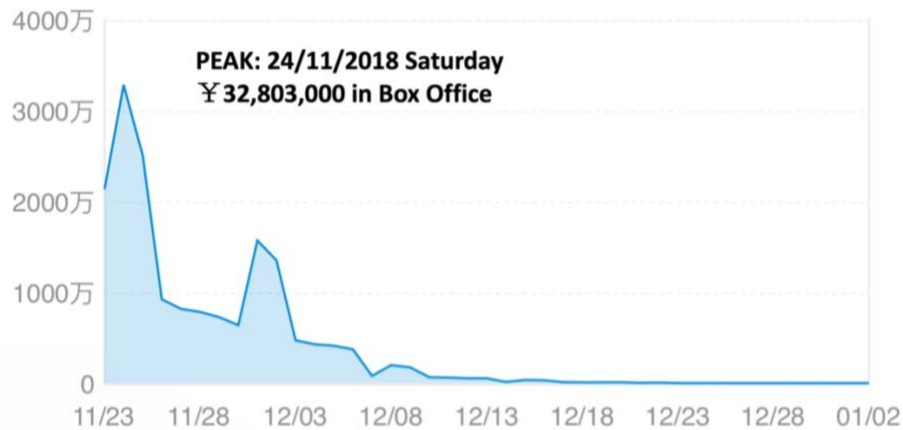
³⁹⁹ Chen & Zhang (2023)

⁴⁰⁰ Higson (2011), p.71

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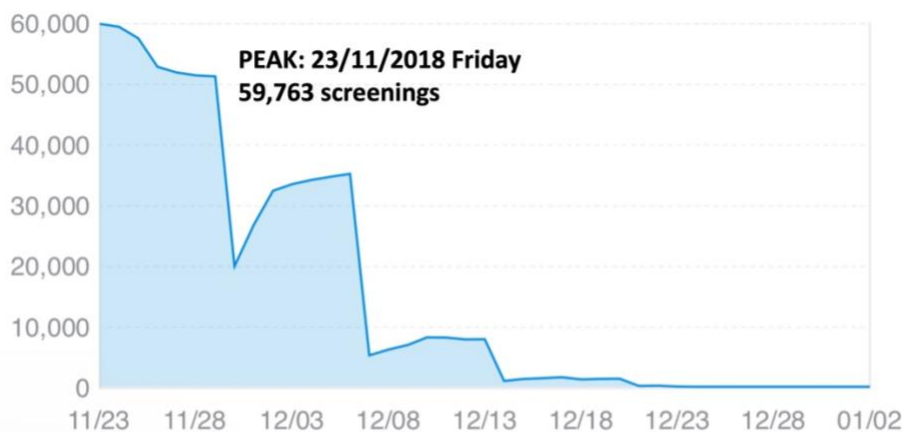
During the initial week of release, it received approximately 15% of the total screenings and accounted for about 12% of the total box office revenue.⁴⁰¹ The number of screenings was limited to draw in viewers and was hard to assist the film in achieving remarkable box office success.

Figure 3.2.6 Daily Box Office Revenue of *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Figure 3.2.7 Daily Number of Screenings of *Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

There were numerous competitors seized these screenings. First, there were two films that were released before *Johnny English 3*, but they continued to be popular after *Johnny English 3* was released. The first one was an American action film, *Venom* (2018), which occupied over 20% of the screenings and contributed more than 20% of

⁴⁰¹ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Johnny English Strikes Again* (2018)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/07402212018?from=movie>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]

the overall box office revenues during the first week of *Johnny English 3*'s release.⁴⁰² The second one was a Chinese comedy, *A Cool Fish* (无名之辈/ Wu Ming Zhi Bei) (2018), which occupied 20% of the available screenings and contributed around 40% of the total box office revenue during the first release week of *Johnny English 3*.⁴⁰³ According to Box Office Mojo, *A Cool Fish* was still the highest-grossing film at the box office for two weekends after the release of *Johnny English 3*.⁴⁰⁴ Despite being released before *Johnny English*, these two powerful competitors achieved remarkable success, thereby limiting the opportunity for *Johnny English 3* to appeal to Chinese consumers. In addition, *Ralph Breaks the Internet* (2018), an American animation, was released on the same day as *Johnny English 3*.⁴⁰⁵ It was allocated about 20% of screenings and generated nearly 20% of the overall box office income during the first week of release.⁴⁰⁶ As there were numerous superior American and domestic alternatives available on the market, Chinese consumers appear to be less interested in *Johnny English 3*. Despite the potential advantages of the fame of Atkinson and the *Mr. Bean* franchise, it was difficult to rescue the film from this competitive environment. Consequently, although China significantly contributed to the global earnings of *Johnny English 3*, the fiercely competitive Chinese film market during its theatrical release largely hindered the film's potential to achieve more box office revenue.

⁴⁰² IMDb, 'Venom (2018)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1270797/?ref=nr_sr_srgs_3_tt_5_nm_3_in_0_q_Venom%2520, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Venom (2018)',

<https://zgdyf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/05102092018?from=movie>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴⁰³ IMDb, 'A Cool Fish (2018)',

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9282616/?ref=nr_sr_srgs_0_tt_7_nm_0_in_0_q_A%2520Cool%2520Fish, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'A Cool Fish (2018)',

<https://zgdyf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/00106212018?from=movie>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴⁰⁴ Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office Weekends For 2018', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/weekend/by-year/2018/?area=CN>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴⁰⁵ IMDb, 'Ralph Breaks the Internet (2018)',

https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5848272/?ref=nr_sr_srgs_0_tt_7_nm_0_in_0_q_Ralph%2520Breaks%2520the%2520Internet%2520, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴⁰⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Ralph Breaks the Internet (2018)',

<https://zgdyf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/05102222018?from=movie>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

3.3 *No Time To Die* (2021)

No Time To Die is a sequel in the *James Bond* series, which is a long-lasting film franchise that was adapted from Ian Fleming's novels. As Chapman states, ever since the release of the first film, *Dr. No* (1962), James Bond has become the most well-known British secret agent depicted on screen, enjoying sustained commercial success and appeal on a global scale.⁴⁰⁷ The *Bond* film series is 'ever present, ever familiar, ever popular with the audience around the world'.⁴⁰⁸ On the one hand, the narrative formula of the *Bond* series remains constant, such as Bond's meeting with M, his visit to Q's workshop to collect his equipment, the seduction of the Bond girl, and the confrontation with the villain. On the other hand, the *Bond* series makes continual renewal, such as the updating of conflicts, the cutting-edge technology, and the adaptation of humour to resonate with contemporary viewers.⁴⁰⁹ The character of James Bond has been portrayed by six different actors. This section focuses on Bond portrayed by the most recent actor, Daniel Craig. Before the release of *No Time To Die*, Craig has starred in four Bond films since 2006, all of which have been released in China. *Casino Royale* (2006) was released in China in 2007 and generated approximately \$12 million in box office revenue.⁴¹⁰ *Quantum of Solace* (2008) was released in 2008 and grossed roughly \$21 million at the Chinese box office.⁴¹¹ It is challenging to estimate the exact number of cinema admissions for these two films in China, as they were released nearly two decades ago. In 2013, the third film, *Skyfall* (2012), was released, attracting around 11 million viewers and garnering over \$59 million at the Chinese box office.⁴¹² *Spectre* (2015) was released in 2015. It garnered over 17 million cinema

⁴⁰⁷ James Chapman, *Licence to Thrill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films*, (London, New York: I.B.Tauris Publisher, 1999), p.13

⁴⁰⁸ James Chapman, 'A Licence to Thrill', in Christoph Lindner, (ed.), *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.91-98(p.91)

⁴⁰⁹ Chapman (2003), p.94, 95

⁴¹⁰ Box Office Mojo, '*Casino Royale* (2006)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr4025700869/>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]

⁴¹¹ Box Office Mojo, '*Quantum of Solace* (2008)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2347520517/>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]

⁴¹² Box Office Mojo, '*Skyfall* (2012)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2379174405/>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]; Maoyan Pro, '*Skyfall* (2012)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/828/boxshowna?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, '*Skyfall* (2012)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=2996&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]

admissions and earned over \$84 million at the Chinese box office.⁴¹³ According to the BFI survey, the *James Bond* films were the third most familiar British film with Chinese consumers. 69% of Chinese respondents claimed that they had heard of this series, and 57% of them claimed that they had watched it. In contrast, these figures were lower than those of the *Harry Potter* films, which were the most familiar British films among Chinese respondents. All Chinese respondents expressed that they had heard of the *Harry Potter* franchise, and 70% of them claimed that they had watched the films.⁴¹⁴ This may suggest that the *Bond* series did not establish a particularly substantial fan base in China.

In this latest *Bond* film, James Bond returned to MI6 after retirement in response to the resurgence of the Spectre. While thwarting the villain, he encountered his former lover, Madeleine, and found that they had a daughter. In the end, Bond once again successfully safeguarded the world and his family through his own sacrifice. According to IMDb, *No Time To Die* is categorised as an action, adventure, and thriller film. It was produced by the UK and US, with an estimated budget exceeding \$250 million. The production companies involved were Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) (US), Universal Pictures (US), EON Productions (UK), and Danjaq (US).⁴¹⁵ Danjaq, which is affiliated with EON Productions, co-owns the copyrights to the existing *Bond* films and has control over the production of future *Bond* films in partnership with MGM.⁴¹⁶ Like the other two British action-adventure films analysed in this chapter, *No Time To Die* was also imported into China via revenue-sharing scheme and jointly distributed by CFGC and Huaxia.⁴¹⁷ It was released in the UK on October 1, 2021. However, as previously mentioned, the beginning of October is Chinese National Day, which usually only

⁴¹³ Box Office Mojo, 'Spectre (2015)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr16273925/>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Spectre (2015)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/78617/boxshowna?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Spectre (2015)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=139534&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 21 Jul 2024]

⁴¹⁴ BFI (2022b), p.19

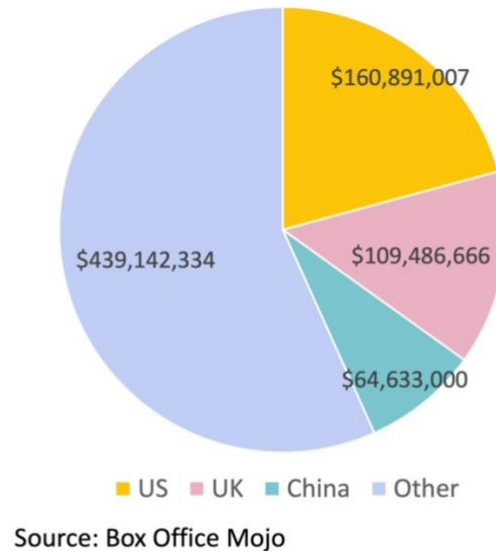
⁴¹⁵ IMDb, 'No Time To Die (2021)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2382320/?ref_=nv_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 15 Jun 2023]

⁴¹⁶ Eon Production, 'About Eon/Danjaq', <https://www.eon.co.uk/about/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴¹⁷ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of No Time To Die (2021)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/338384/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

permits the release of domestic films. Consequently, the release date of *No Time To Die* in China was also postponed to October 29, a circumstance that was comparable to that of the other two British action-adventure films.⁴¹⁸

Figure 3.3.1 Gross Box Office Income of *No Time To Die* (2021) in Different Countries



It is worth noting that the film was released during the COVID-19 pandemic, when China implemented the 'Dynamic Zero COVID' policy to prevent the transmission of the virus. Given the potential for quarantine if they contracted the virus or encountered an infected individual, Chinese consumers were advised to reduce their consumption activities. The opening and attendance rates of cinemas were significantly impacted as a consequence.⁴¹⁹ As reported by Shackleton from *Screen Daily*, during the early stage of *No Time To Die*'s exhibition in China, a total of 1,400 cinemas across 14 provinces had been required to close in response to the outbreaks of COVID.⁴²⁰ Ultimately, *No Time To Die* attracted over 10 million cinema admissions, generated almost \$66 million at the Chinese box office, and placed 26th in China's annual film box office rankings for 2021.⁴²¹ While it had lower figures of box office

⁴¹⁸ Box Office Mojo, 'No Time To Die (2021)'

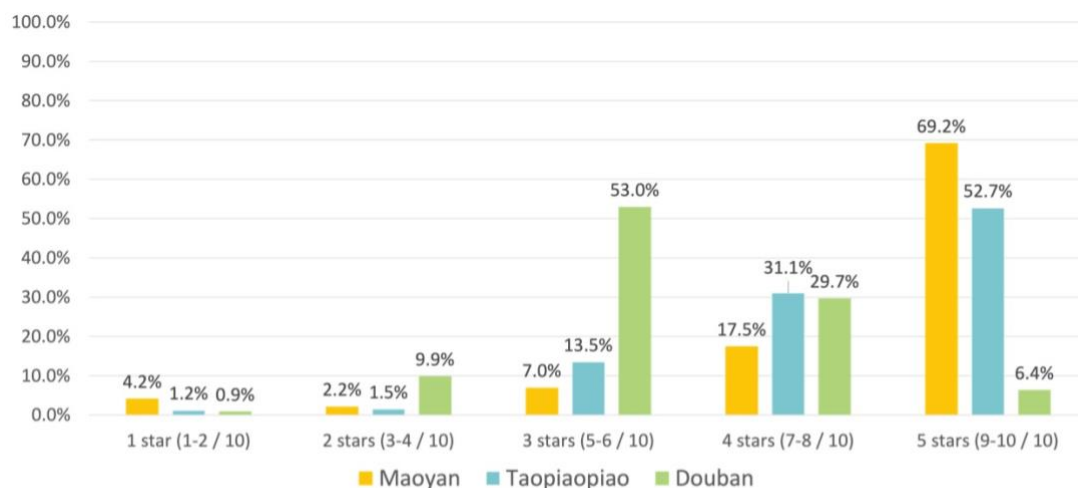
⁴¹⁹ Liu & Lu (2023)

⁴²⁰ Liz Shackleton, 'China Box Office: "No Time To Die" Opens With \$28m As Covid Shuttters Cinemas', *Screen Daily*, 01 November, 2021, <https://www.screendaily.com/news/china-box-office-no-time-to-die-opens-with-28m-as-covid-shuttters-cinemas/5164741.article>, [accessed 19 Jul 2024]

⁴²¹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1812943365/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/338384/boxshowna?barTheme=595936>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=139529&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

income and admission in China than *Kingsman 2*, it achieved the highest annual box office ranking among the eight cases examined in this research. In addition, *No Time To Die*'s performance was inferior to that of its predecessor, *Spectre*.⁴²² This may be partially attributed to the sluggish film market environment in China during the pandemic. As Figure 3.3.1 illustrates, China was the fourth-largest contributor, representing about 8% of its worldwide box office revenue.⁴²³

Figure 3.3.2 Ratings of *No Time To Die* (2021) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

Although *No Time To Die* was the highest-ranked and second-highest-grossing film among the cases in this research, its performance in China in 2021 as an imported action-adventure blockbuster was not particularly impressive. In 2021, the most successful action-adventure film released in China was *F9: The Fast Saga* (2021), the sequel in the *Fast & Furious* series.⁴²⁴ Despite both being sequels to long-lasting film franchises, *F9*'s revenue at the Chinese box office was approximately \$217 million, which was more than three times the revenue of *No Time to Die*.⁴²⁵ Another American action blockbuster, *Godzilla vs. Kong* (2021), also generated nearly \$189 million at the Chinese box office.⁴²⁶ A Chinese action-adventure film, *A Writer's Odyssey* (刺杀小说

⁴²² Box Office Mojo, '*Spectre* (2015)'; Maoyan Pro, '*Spectre* (2015)'; Dengta Pro, '*Spectre* (2015)'

⁴²³ Box Office Mojo, '*No Time To Die* (2021)'

⁴²⁴ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'

⁴²⁵ Box Office Mojo, '*F9: The Fast Saga* (2021)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1590448645/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴²⁶ Box Office Mojo, '*Godzilla vs. Kong* (2021)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3306770949/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

家/Ci Sha Xiao Shuo Jia) (2021), made approximately \$149 million at the box office, exceeding *No Time To Die* by more than double.⁴²⁷ In contrast, *No Time to Die* outperformed another American action-adventure blockbuster, *Dune: Part One* (2021), in China, which earned about \$40 million at the box office.⁴²⁸ Regarding the audience reception in China, *No Time To Die* has received ratings of 8.6 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.4 on Taopiaopiao and 6.6 on Douban, from about 109,000, 175,000 and 294,000 users, respectively. The various ratings that Chinese consumers have assigned to the film are illustrated in Figure 3.3.2.⁴²⁹ Like the other two British action-adventure films, this film's ratings on Douban similarly followed a bell-shaped distribution, whereas its ratings on Maoyan and Taopiaopiao showed a negatively skewed distribution. Its ratings were generally comparable to those of *F9*, *Godzilla vs. Kong*, *A Writer's Odyssey*, and *Dune*.⁴³⁰ This suggests that, despite its similar genre and comparable quality, *No Time To Die*, a British action-adventure film, encountered challenges in achieving a remarkable box office performance in the Chinese market.

⁴²⁷ Box Office Mojo, 'A Writer's Odyssey (2021)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr951734789/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴²⁸ Box Office Mojo, 'Dune: Part One (2021)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3833549317/>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴²⁹ Maoyan, 'No Time To Die (2021)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/338384?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=139529>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'No Time To Die (2021)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/20276229/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

⁴³⁰ Maoyan, 'F9: The Fast Saga (2021)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/343034?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'F9: The Fast Saga (2021)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=362165>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'F9: The Fast Saga (2021)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/25728006/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Maoyan, 'Godzilla vs. Kong (2021)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/343568?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Godzilla vs. Kong (2021)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=318648>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'Godzilla vs. Kong (2021)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/26613692?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Maoyan, 'A Writer's Odyssey (2021)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1048268?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'A Writer's Odyssey (2021)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=1211289>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'A Writer's Odyssey (2021)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/26826330?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Maoyan, 'Dune: Part One (2021)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1164582?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Dune: Part One (2021)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=529182>, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]; Douban, 'Dune: Part One (2021)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/3001114/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 15 Jul 2024]

Table 3.3 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *No Time to Die* (2021)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Pre-sold IP	24	1	0	25
Stars	23	0	0	23
Plot	15	5	2	22
Characters in story	17	1	0	18
Audio-visual effects	11	0	0	11
Genre	7	0	1	8
Country of origins	0	0	2	2
Places in story	2	0	0	2
British culture	0	0	0	0
Language	0	0	0	0
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

Out of the 50 reviews that were sampled from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, 48 users rated it positively, and 2 users rated it negatively. Table 3.3 outlines the frequency of factors that Chinese viewers mentioned in their reviews.⁴³¹ In contrast to the other two British action-adventure films, *No Time to Die* received the highest number of positive ratings, and most factors in this film received positive comments from most Chinese consumers. It seems that this film's production quality was the most satisfying to Chinese viewers among the three British action-adventure films. A more comprehensive explanation is provided below.

3.3.1 Influence of 007 as Franchise, Star and Character

The most frequently referenced factor in this film was 'Pre-sold IP', which was the *James Bond* franchise. This factor was mentioned by 25 Chinese users, 24 of whom expressed positive sentiments. Chinese viewers preferred referring to the *Bond* films as *007* films, probably because the numerical code name was easier to remember compared to the English name of the protagonist. Most users stated that they have been devoted fans of this series for many years:

I have been watching "007" films since I was a child, and they have accompanied the growth of my generation. (Maoyan user)

⁴³¹ Maoyan, '*No Time To Die* (2021)'; Taopiaopiao, '*No Time To Die* (2021)'

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Is 007 really dead? This is the first time I wonder if “007” will continue to make new films. If it really does not make any more sequels, I will really be sad. (Taopiaopiao user)

Moreover, given that this was Craig’s final film as James Bond, some viewers also expressed their anticipation for the upcoming version of Bond. Their enthusiasm for the franchise suggests that there was a fanbase of the *Bond* series in China, which could have a positive impact on the film’s box office performance.

‘Stars’ was the second most frequently referenced factor, with 23 users mentioning it, all of whom expressed positive attitudes. Most of these reviews particularly addressed Daniel Craig. Many users were impressed by Craig’s portrayal of Bond, which was distinct from previous versions in the franchise:

After following the series for many years, I have experienced many actors playing the role of 007, but I still think that Daniel’s 007 is the most impressive. (Maoyan user)

It can be said that Daniel’s Bond has accompanied me throughout my youth. There will be different 007 in the future, but no matter what, in my heart, Daniel will always be the best Bond, no doubt about it. (Maoyan user)

Craig’s Bond is the most familiar version to most Chinese consumers who are of middle or youthful age, as *Casino Royale* was the first *Bond* film to be officially released in mainland China. Apparently, most Chinese fans of the *Bond* franchise were satisfied with Craig’s portrayal. In the same vein, the factor ‘Characters in story’ was mentioned by 18 users, with 17 of them expressing positive attitudes. The protagonist, Bond, was mentioned in most of these reviews. Some users expressed their fondness for the character and perceived Bond as fascinating:

007 is the most handsome man in my mind, full of charm. (Maoyan user)

After watching the film, I can really feel a lot from Bond, his elegance, his responsibility, his wisdom, and his skills. Films do not need to rely on high technology and scenes to attract attention. A real 007 is the best element to attract the audience! (Maoyan user)

As Ju claims, Bond exemplifies the image of the British gentleman, since he always maintains an unwavering calm, possesses the qualities of determination and courage,

and never shows fear when confronted with risky situations.⁴³² It seems that many Chinese consumers perceived the personal charisma of the Bond character, who exhibited unwavering composure and flawless competence, as another factor that contributed to the film's appeal. Hence, according to these findings, it could suggest that the enduring *Bond* franchise, Craig's compelling performance, and the captivating character of James Bond can be regarded as three interconnected and mutually supporting factors that have synergistically and positively impacted the performance of *No Time To Die* at the Chinese box office. In other words, the name of '007' was the most enticing selling point for this film in China, irrespective of whether it denoted the franchise, star or character.



Figure 3.3.3 Chinese Poster for *No Time To Die* (2021)

⁴³² Ju (2022), p.107

The Chinese poster for *No Time To Die* also effectively conveyed the factors about 007. As shown in Figure 3.3.3, the poster prominently features the picture of James Bond (Daniel Craig), making him the most prominent figure. Moreover, the enormous iconic 007 logo at the top of the poster identifies this film as part of the *Bond* franchise. It is also worth noting that the Chinese titles of all five *Bond* films played by Craig appended the number '007' to the beginning of the original title. This film is titled '*007: No Time To Die* (007: 无暇赴死)' in China. Furthermore, under the release date at the bottom of the poster is the slogan 'The final outcome of life and death, revealed with your own eyes' (生死终局, 亲眼解密), which could pique the interest of viewers regarding the conclusion of Craig's Bond. Therefore, the poster could further suggest that the brand of 007 was the most effective market signal for this film in attracting Chinese viewers.

3.3.2 Disputed Plot on Bond's Death

Similar to the analysis of the other two British action-adventure films, Chinese viewers also exhibited varying opinions towards the 'Plot' of *No Time To Die*. Among the 22 users who mentioned this factor, 15 users expressed positive attitudes, 5 users expressed neutral attitudes, and 2 users expressed negative attitudes. The users who had positive attitudes mainly stated that the pace of the narrative was intense and exciting:

The plot seems to be very compact, and the main line is clear. (Maoyan user)

It is unexpectedly good. The plot is exciting and full of surprises. It is better than the previous ones. It has very delicate emotional expressions. Some minor flaws can be ignored. (Maoyan user)

In addition, in the film's conclusion, Bond made the decision to willingly give up his life on the antagonist's island as a means of safeguarding his girlfriend and daughter. Many Chinese viewers were moved by this scenario:

I read film reviews before watching the film, and someone said that the last part of the film made people cry. I did not expect that I would cry too. Love and separation, oh, the tears that I deliberately did not wipe away are salty. (Taopiaopiao user)

The only time it is not a happy ending, the hero is always an ordinary person, which is very sad. But this ending is more realistic. After all, 007 is just a code name, not a

specific individual. They are not supermen with steel bones and invulnerable to weapons. There will always be a day when the hero will retire from the game. (Taopiaopiao user)

However, this sequence was also the most contentious in the film, and viewers with varying attitudes held different perspectives on it. For example, a user who maintained a neutral stance expressed that he/she did not want Bond to die in this way.:

The reason I did not give it a full mark is because of the ending. It is not because he died, but because his death was not splendid enough. We all thought that "his death must be earth-shattering". Maybe the director has his own ideas, but I think his death could be more splendid because he is James Bond! (Maoyan user)

In contrast, the only two users who gave negative evaluations of the film's plot were also the ones who assigned negative ratings to the film. Both of these users expressed their dissatisfaction with the film's conclusion:

In the second half, Bond's ex and daughter were confusing, and Bond's death was also confusing. Yes, according to the plot, it is reasonable, but this is Bond! It is 007! Is this even a little bit legendary? Yes, Bond is a hero in his twilight years, but the 007 legend has not ended yet! Rubbish film ruined 007. I gave it a one point just for Daniel! If you want to watch it, you can wait for the film to be released on streaming platforms. Do not waste your money! (Maoyan user)

The plot is weak, and the dialogue is awkward. I fell asleep and woke up in the middle, woke up and fell asleep several times, and finally watched the ending, but it turned out to be even more rubbish! American blockbusters are really getting worse and worse. (Maoyan user)

The contention surrounding the narrative appears to be a primary factor contributing to the discontent of Chinese viewers with the film. Their dissatisfaction with Bond's conclusion may be attributed to the established image in this enduring *Bond* franchise. According to Chapman, the *Bond* films show a fundamental formula that is consistent throughout the series. Audiences have developed a familiarity with the narrative pattern, character types, and anticipate that they will remain consistent in each subsequent film.⁴³³ The death of Bond may be incongruous with the perceptions of the character held by most Chinese viewers, who believed that Bond embodied omnipotence and deserved a more epic ending. Although the narrative of *No Time To Die* did not receive as many negative comments from Chinese users as the other two

⁴³³ Chapman (1999), p.19

British action-adventure films, these criticisms may still affect the viewing intentions of potential consumers. The discussions surrounding the plots in these three films substantiate Bordwell's claim that the primary purpose of film viewing activities is to construct an integrated story from the plot.⁴³⁴ It indicates that narratives are of significant importance to Chinese viewers and profoundly influence their viewing experience and their evaluation of the quality of the films, even in the action-adventure genre.

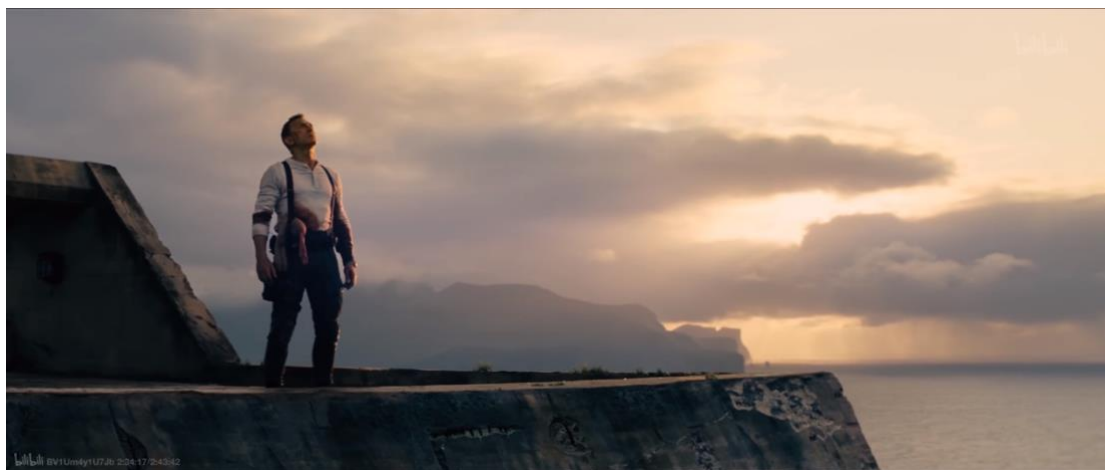


Figure 3.3.4 The Ending Scene in *No Time To Die* (UK, US: Cary Joji Fukunaga, 2021). Copyright of Eon Productions, UK; Danjaq, US; Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc, US; and Universal Pictures Studios, US.

3.3.3 Vague British Cultural Identity

According to the review quoted above, the Maoyan user identified this film as an American blockbuster, indicating that the cultural identity of *No Time To Die* was relatively ambiguous in China. The 'Country of origin' of the film was only mentioned by two users, and they both classified it as an American film. It may be attributed to the popularity of Hollywood in the action-adventure genre and the shared English language. This finding supports Higson's claim that certain British films, because of their high production value and scope, may be misidentified as Hollywood productions by non-English-speaking viewers.⁴³⁵ This is also in accordance with the research conducted by Jones and Higson, who find that the national identity of *Skyfall* (2012) is

⁴³⁴ Bordwell, et al. (2017), p.72

⁴³⁵ Higson (2011), p.250

ambiguous to European consumers as a result of the fast-paced action and visual effects that are typically associated with Hollywood blockbusters. These attributes lead many European viewers to assume that *Skyfall* has a distinctively American style.⁴³⁶ Moreover, out of these three British action-adventure films, *No Time to Die* was the sole film that did not receive any comments about 'British culture' from Chinese viewers. This contradicts Chapman's assertion that the 'Britishness of the Bond films has been one of their main selling points, a factor which differentiates them from all the other action movies which have followed in their wake.'⁴³⁷ Even though the portrayal of Bond, as Jeong points out, embodies the archetype of a classic upper-class English gentleman, characterised by being 'white, chivalrous, courteous, humorous, sporting, and patriotic.'⁴³⁸ Yet, no discussion was found regarding British humour, gentlemen or other stereotypical British cultural elements. It may be attributed to the fact that, in comparison to *Kingsman 2* and *Johnny English 3*, the representations of British culture in *No Time To Die* were less overt for Chinese viewers to identify with Britain. Furthermore, the theory of Middle Kingdom Mentality, which Jacques proposes that Chinese culture perceives itself as universal, relevant and superior to all others, was not supported by the findings of these three British action-adventure films.⁴³⁹ One possible explanation could be that these films featured less culturally specific narratives and depicted British cultural elements that largely matched established stereotypes among Chinese viewers. Hence, the results of these three British action-adventure films suggest that, although the incorporation of British cultural elements into genres that are less culturally specific may increase their appeal and reinforce their national identity, these cultural elements need to be consistent with the stereotypes and sufficiently apparent for Chinese viewers to identify them as British.

⁴³⁶ Jones & Higson (2020), p.118, 119

⁴³⁷ Chapman (1999), p.14

⁴³⁸ Seung-hoon Jeong, 'Global Agency Between Bond and Bourne: Skyfall and James Bond in Comparison to the Jason Bourne Film Series', in Jaap Verheul, (ed.), *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Specters of 007*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), pp.207-225(p.210)

⁴³⁹ Jacques (2009), p.283

3.3.4 Appealing Action Genre and Visual Spectacles

According to Chapman, the success of the *Bond* films in global markets is the consequence of a combination of factors, including the narrative pattern of repetition and variation, the Britishness, the internationalism, and the visual spectacle, which contribute to the films' distinctive style.⁴⁴⁰ While the Britishness of *No Time To Die* may not be apparent to Chinese consumers, reviews from Chinese viewers about the 'Genre', 'Audio-visual effects', and 'Places in Story' could offer additional evidence to partially support Chapman's assertions.

First, as Kuhn and Westwell highlight, the *Bond* films from the 1960s and 1970s are also regarded as precursors of the action-adventure genre.⁴⁴¹ In the *Bond* series, the action-adventure elements have consistently been anticipated and well-received by international audiences. According to Brosnan, the highly visual form of entertainment featured in the *Bond* films, which includes the sheer speed, nonstop action, and fast cutting, enables the films to transcend language and cultural barriers to acquire global popularity.⁴⁴² The seven Chinese users who positively mentioned the action-adventure 'Genre' of *No Time To Die* also stated that the fighting sequences in the film were particularly captivating:

The action sense of the film never seems sloppy! Great! (Maoyan user)

Bond's action scenes, in which he risks his life, are smooth and graceful, keeping the audience's attention focused. (Taopiaopiao user)

However, one user held a negative attitude and expressed dissatisfaction with the scarcity of action-adventure components in the film, stating that:

The whole film is more than two hours long, the action scenes add up to less than half an hour, and the rest is fake and empty. (Maoyan user)

Although this Maoyan user believed that the action scenes in this film were insufficient, it implies that Chinese viewers chose to watch the film because they expected to view

⁴⁴⁰ Chapman (2003), p.98

⁴⁴¹ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

⁴⁴² John Brosnan, *James Bond in the Cinema*, (London: Tntivy, 1981), p.8

exhilarating action scenes in this genre. This could be deemed as one of the most significant components that attracted Chinese viewers to watch the film.



Figure 3.3.5 Action Scene in *No Time To Die* (2021)

Similarly, the factor of 'Audio-visual effects' was mentioned by 11 users, all of whom held positive attitudes. The primary focus of these reviews was the film's special effects, spectacles and soundtrack:

The plot is exciting, as always, and the sound effects are absolutely the best! I like the opening song, and the soundtrack that can interpret the plot really adds scores to the film. I was scared by the mask in the opening! The explosions and motorcycle scenes still provide enough gimmicks. (Maoyan user)

Great, so enjoyable. This is the visual effect of American blockbusters, especially the car racing scenes, which are amazing. In two words, beautiful, perfect! (Maoyan user)

As King posits, spectacular vistas are a persistent source of the allure of the cinematic experience.⁴⁴³ The exceptional audio-visual effects in *No Time To Die* could also be considered as an important factor that motivated Chinese viewers to watch the film on silver screens in order to enhance their viewing experiences. Moreover, *Kingsman 2* and *No Time To Die* were released in China in 3D, which could offer Chinese consumers a more impressive and immersive cinematic experience that was not possible to replicate on small home screens. Given that these two films were also the highest-grossing films among the cases in this research, it is consistent with the

⁴⁴³ King (2006), p.334

findings of Elliott et al., which suggest that enhanced format (3D and IMAX) has a positive and significant influence on films' box office earnings in China.⁴⁴⁴



Figure 3.3.6 Scene of Italy in *No Time To Die* (2021)

Two users also mentioned 'Places in story' with positive attitudes and stated that it was highly appealing to see global locales in the film. For example, one user stated:

There are many scenes that I enjoy visually. The film started with Matera in Italy. It feels like a city on a cliff. It is perfect for a vacation. The beach where Bond retired is also very beautiful. I have not found this filming location yet. It feels like a villa is standard for a retired agent's beach! After that, we saw the magnificent scenery of the parks and plains in the UK, the glacial lakes in Norway, the cliffs and islands in Denmark, and the most beautiful one was the Atlantic Coast Highway in Norway, which is so amazing. The views are all beautiful. (Maoyan user)

The espionage operations in spy films typically occur on a global stage, in addition to the protagonist's home country. These films tend to be filmed in a variety of locations around the world in order to appeal to a broader international audience and reduce cultural specificity. Although *Kingsman 2* and *Johnny English 3* were also filmed in the UK and other countries, *No Time To Die* exhibited the most diverse global landscape in comparison to the other two films. As Chapman asserts, the 'globe-trotting travelogue narratives' add an international and cosmopolitan dimension to the *Bond* films.⁴⁴⁵ Thus, it is evident that the film's exciting action sequences, astonishing special effects, and exotic locales were components that enticed Chinese viewers regardless of culture. The visual spectacles that have been discussed in this section could also be considered

⁴⁴⁴ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.88

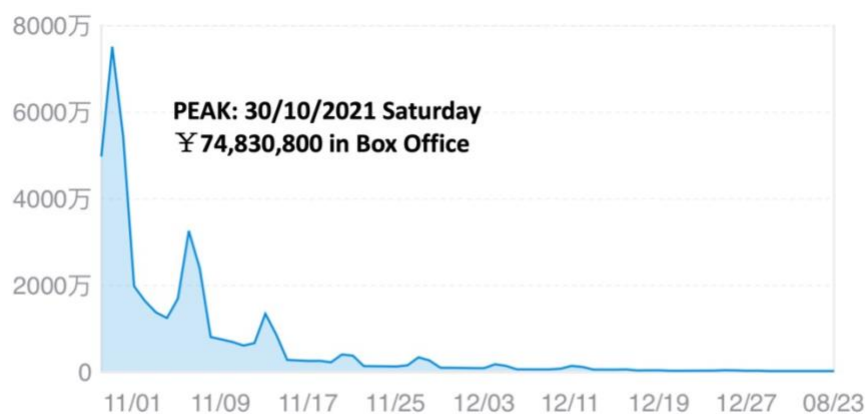
⁴⁴⁵ Chapman (2003), p.97

a primary attraction of the film, which could in turn encourage Chinese viewers to watch it in cinemas, thereby positively affecting the film's box office revenue.

3.3.5 Less Competitive Market Environment

Although the competition that *No Time To Die* faced in the Chinese market during its release period was not particularly intensive, the film's box office income was impacted by the sluggish Chinese film market during the pandemic. During its initial week of release, *No Time To Die* was allocated approximately 35% of the total screenings, and its box office revenue accounted for approximately 40% of the total income.⁴⁴⁶ This satisfactory performance may indicate that the film's market signals, such as its franchise and genre, functioned effectively to attract Chinese consumers. According to Box Office Mojo, *No Time To Die* topped the Chinese box office during its first two weeks of release.⁴⁴⁷ Due to its satisfactory performance in the sluggish film market during the pandemic, China decided to extend its theatrical run until December 28, 2021.⁴⁴⁸ As depicted in Figure 3.3.7 and Figure 3.3.8, the daily box office income and screenings exhibited a gradual decline over the subsequent two months.⁴⁴⁹

Figure 3.3.7 Daily Box Office Revenue of *No Time To Die* (2021) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

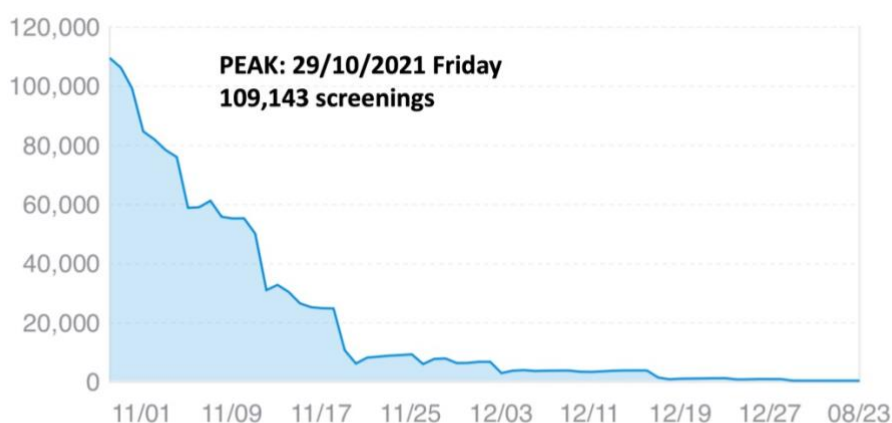
⁴⁴⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, 'No Time To Die (2021)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyf.cn/movie/detail/05101092021?from=movie>, [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

⁴⁴⁷ Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office Weekends For 2021', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/weekend/by-year/2021/?area=CN>, [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

⁴⁴⁸ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of No Time To Die (2021)'

⁴⁴⁹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'No Time To Die (2021)'

Figure 3.3.8 Daily Number of Screenings of *No Time To Die* (2021) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

No Time To Die was subject to competition from two Chinese domestic films during its theatrical release. The first one was *Be Somebody* (扬名立万/Yang Ming Li Wan) (2021), a comedy, drama, and mystery film that was released two weeks after the release of *No Time To Die*.⁴⁵⁰ During its first week of release, *Be Somebody* obtained approximately 30% of the total screenings, and earned almost 55% of the overall box office income in China.⁴⁵¹ After its release, it defeated *No Time To Die* and maintained the top position at the Chinese box office for three consecutive weekends.⁴⁵² The second film was *The Battle at Lake Changjin* (长津湖/Chang Jin Hu) (2021), an action, drama, history, and war film that was released about one month before *No Time To Die*.⁴⁵³ *The Battle at Lake Changjin* was allocated approximately 25% of the screenings during the first week of *No Time To Die*'s release, and it still generated about 25% of the total box office revenue in China.⁴⁵⁴ Despite the fact that these two domestic films occupied a portion of the market share during the theatrical run of *No Time To Die*, the threat they posed seems to be less severe since they belong to different film genres and may have divergent target audiences. The primary reason for *No Time To Die*'s

⁴⁵⁰ IMDb, 'Be Somebody (2021)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt16043930/?ref=nm_sr_srg_4_tt_8_nm_0_in_0_q_Be%2520Somebody, [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

⁴⁵¹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Be Somebody (2021)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyfw.cn/movie/detail/00104132021?from=movie>, [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

⁴⁵² Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office Weekends For 2021'

⁴⁵³ IMDb, 'The Battle at Lake Changjin (2021)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13462900/?ref=nv_sr_srsrg_0_tt_8_nm_0_in_0_q_The%20Battle%20at%20Lake%20Changjin. [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

⁴⁵⁴ Chinese Film Box Office, 'The Battle at Lake Changjin (2021)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyfw.cn/movie/detail/00103312021?from=movie>, [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

inability to generate more box office revenue in China can be attributed to the fact that it was not released on a public holiday, the sluggish Chinese film market during the pandemic, and the franchise lacked substantial appeal in China, rather than its production quality or intense market competition.

Conclusion

To conclude, these three British action-adventure films were sequels to popular films, featured recognisable actors, and exhibited spectacular audio-visual effects. These factors could pique the interest of many Chinese viewers and positively influence their performance at the Chinese box office. However, these three British action-adventure films faced difficulties in reaching a broader audience in China due to the franchises' limited appeal and narratives' unsatisfactory quality.

The findings of this chapter corroborated the cultural discount theory.⁴⁵⁵ It provided additional evidence that less culturally specific films have greater export potential and better box office performance in the global market. Additionally, the Middle Kingdom Mentality theory was not substantiated by the results.⁴⁵⁶ One possible explanation is that this framework may not be necessary for Chinese viewers to perceive Britain and its culture in these less culturally specific films. Additionally, the findings partially confirmed Higson's claim that the use of conventional Britishness in films can preserve British national identity and serve as exotic signifiers of distinction in the global market.⁴⁵⁷ The portrayal of British gentleman and humour in *Kingsman 2* and *Johnny English 3* reinforced the films' British identity for many Chinese viewers. However, no Chinese users engaged in discussions regarding British culture in *No Time To Die*, as the British cultural elements in this film were not as apparent as in the other two films. This could suggest that to effectively preserve the British national identity of films in China, the Britishness need to be sufficiently apparent for Chinese viewers to identify as distinct British.

⁴⁵⁵ Hoskins & Mirus (1988), p.500

⁴⁵⁶ Jacques (2009), p.283

⁴⁵⁷ Higson (2011), p.71

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The results of this chapter contributed to the study of cross-cultural box office performance. The narrative components of various films were not thoroughly examined in most previous quantitative research. My research revealed that the perspectives of Chinese viewers regarding the 'Plot' were the most contentious in all three British action-adventure films. This could imply that the films' unsatisfactory character portrayals and storytelling abilities could lead to an increase in unfavourable word-of-mouth and detrimental effects on the viewing intentions of other potential consumers, making it difficult to improve their box office performance.

Chapter 4 The Performance of British Historical Films

Introduction

Between 2017 and 2022, two British historical films were released in China: *Dunkirk* (2017) and *Darkest Hour* (2017). According to the *Dictionary of Film Studies*, a historical film is a 'fiction film showing past events or set within a historical period', and it 'tends to refer to people and events specific to the history of a particular nation'.⁴⁵⁸ The theoretical framework of this thesis suggests that the cultural discount and varied audience reception may diminish the appeal of films in international markets. Compared to other genres, historical films may encounter higher cultural discount in overseas markets due to their cultural specificity. Foreign viewers may be unfamiliar with the historical events pertinent to a specific country and may lack the necessary background knowledge to fully comprehend and appreciate the narrative and characters represented. The 2021 BFI survey, which examined the viewing habits and preferences of British film/TV in China, reveals that 32% of Chinese respondents expressed interest in the period/historical film genre, in contrast to 42% interested in action/adventure films.⁴⁵⁹ This suggests that the commercial success of British historical films in China may be limited by the significant cultural discount they may suffer, as well as the relatively narrow audience of this genre.

Both *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour* were set in May 1940 and focused on the events surrounding the evacuation of British and Commonwealth troops from mainland Europe after Germany invaded France during the early phase of the Second World War. *Dunkirk* centred around the desperate predicament of British soldiers who were stranded in the French port town of Dunkirk and surrounded by German troops. The story depicted the efforts of British Royal Air Force pilots and civilian boats in successfully evacuating 400,000 British and Commonwealth soldiers back to Britain. *Dunkirk* can also be classified as a war film, a genre characterised by its depiction of combat sequences that influence the fate of the main protagonists.⁴⁶⁰ In contrast,

⁴⁵⁸ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

⁴⁵⁹ BFI (2022b), p.18

⁴⁶⁰ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

Darkest Hour concentrated more on the British government's dilemma, focusing on both internal and external difficulties that Winston Churchill encountered during his early time as British Prime Minister. It portrayed Churchill's arduous decision-making process in the country's darkest hour: whether to initiate a peace negotiation with Germany's leader Adolf Hitler or continue to fight Hitler's Nazi regime. *Darkest Hour* can also be categorised as a biographical film, a genre that narrates the life story of a real person.⁴⁶¹ Compared to other cases examined in this research, the cultural discount that these two films experienced in China was relatively significant, as Chinese consumers were not familiar with the British historical events and figures they depicted. Although these two films were set in the same historical period, their performances at the Chinese box office were different. *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour* generated the third and sixth highest box office revenue among the eight cases examined in this research, with approximately \$51 million and \$6 million, respectively.⁴⁶²

This chapter argues that the box office performance of these two British historical films in China was negatively affected by their culturally specific historical background and subject matter. The renowned director of *Dunkirk* captivated many Chinese consumers upon its release. Yet, the values shown in the film were regarded as incompatible with Chinese culture, which ignited controversy in China and adversely affected its box office earnings. The themes of *Darkest Hour* were not in conflict with Chinese culture. However, the film's potential to increase box office revenue during its theatrical run was hindered by its lack of elements that could appeal to the majority of Chinese viewers. This chapter will be divided into two sections: the first will examine the box office performance of *Dunkirk*, followed by an analysis of the performance of *Darkest Hour* in China.

⁴⁶¹ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

⁴⁶² Box Office Mojo, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3929100805/>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr509170181/>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

4.1 *Dunkirk* (2017)

According to IMDb, *Dunkirk* is a film that falls under the genres of action, drama, history, thriller and war. With an estimated budget of \$100 million, it was produced by the UK, Netherlands, France and US. The production companies involved were Syncopy (a British-American film production company established and operated by Emma Thomas and Christopher Nolan, the director of the film), Warner Bros (US, which has distributed the majority of Syncopy's productions), Dombey Street Productions (UK), Kaap Holland Film (Netherlands), Canal+ (France), Ciné+ (France), and RatPac-Dune Entertainment (US).⁴⁶³ According to its official distribution notification in China, *Dunkirk* was jointly distributed by China Film Group Corporation (CFG) and Huaxia Film Distribution, and was imported into China via the revenue-sharing scheme.⁴⁶⁴ It was released in China on September 1, 2017, almost one month after its release in the UK on July 21.⁴⁶⁵ The postponement of the release may be partially attributed to the Domestic Film Protection Month (July and August), during which the foreign films might be suspended to prioritise the screenings of domestic productions. Nonetheless, as Zhu points out, the Chinese government has never officially acknowledged the existence of such a program.⁴⁶⁶ This finding provides additional evidence to substantiate Zhou's assertion that the release date of foreign films in China may be postponed until the conclusion of the lucrative holiday season in order to protect the profits of domestic films.⁴⁶⁷ Eventually, *Dunkirk* attracted approximately 10 million cinema admissions, generated almost \$51 million at the Chinese box office, and placed 43rd in China's annual box office for 2017.⁴⁶⁸ As

⁴⁶³ IMDb, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5013056/?ref=ttco_co_tt, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Syncopy, 'About Syncopy Films Inc.', <https://syncopyfilms.wordpress.com/about/>, [accessed 30 Oct 2024]

⁴⁶⁴ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/342598/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 02 Nov 2024]

⁴⁶⁵ Box Office Mojo, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'

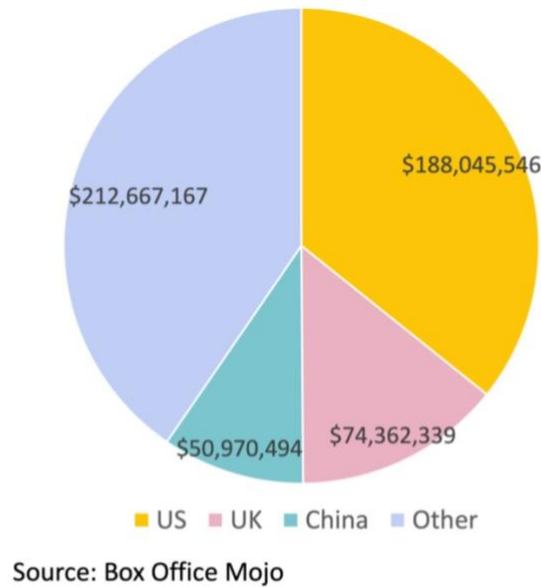
⁴⁶⁶ Zhu (2022), p.191

⁴⁶⁷ Zhou (2015), p.245

⁴⁶⁸ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie?tab=1&secondTab=1>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'; Chinese Film Box Office, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/07401492017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Maoyan Pro, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/342598/boxshowna?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Dengta Pro, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://dtpo.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=198714&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

illustrated in Figure 4.1.1, China was the third-largest source of revenue for the film's global box office, contributing about 10%.⁴⁶⁹

Figure 4.1.1 Gross Box Office Income of *Dunkirk* (2017) in Different Countries



Dunkirk, as a historical war picture, outperformed other Chinese domestic medium-budget historical war films that were released in 2017. For instance, *Battle of Xiangjiang River* (血战湘江/Xue Zhan Xiang Jiang) (2017), *God of War* (荡寇风云/Dang Kou Feng Yun) (2017), and *To Die with Honor* (龙之战/Long Zhi Zhan) (2017), each garnered around \$11 million at the Chinese box office.⁴⁷⁰ However, *Dunkirk*'s box office income in China was less than that of *Wolf Warrior 2* (战狼 2/Zhan Lang 2) (2017), a Chinese domestic war blockbuster that ranked at the top of China's 2017 box office ranking and generated over \$854 million in revenue.⁴⁷¹ This figure was roughly 17 times greater than *Dunkirk*'s revenue at the Chinese box office. Although the success of *Wolf Warrior 2* was influenced by patriotism and nationalism in China, it is undeniable that *Dunkirk* experienced a significant cultural discount in China as a consequence of its culturally specific historical context. *Dunkirk*'s Chinese box office

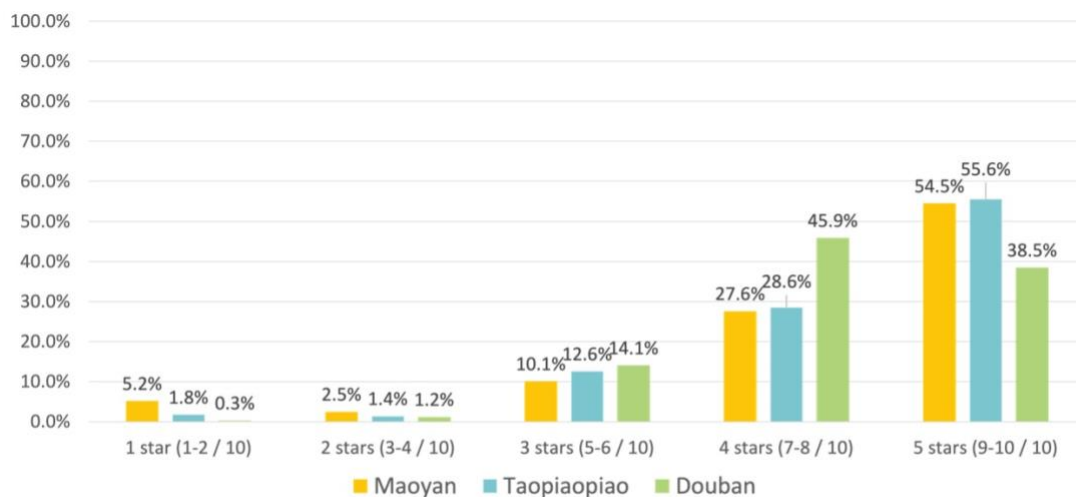
⁴⁶⁹ Box Office Mojo, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'

⁴⁷⁰ Box Office Mojo, '*Battle of Xiangjiang River* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr4283257349/>, [accessed 16 Feb 2025]; Box Office Mojo, '*God of War* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1927631365/>, [accessed 16 Feb 2025]; Box Office Mojo, '*To Die with Honor* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1155486213/>, [accessed 16 Feb 2025]

⁴⁷¹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, '*Wolf Warrior 2* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3036500485/>, [accessed 30 Oct 2024]

revenues (approximately \$51 million) were also lower than *Kingsman 2*'s revenues (approximately \$72 million), despite the fact that both films were released in China in 2017 and had budgets of approximately \$100 million. Nonetheless, *Dunkirk*'s worldwide and UK box office earnings—approximately \$525 million and \$81 million, respectively—substantially surpassed those of *Kingsman 2*—approximately \$411 million globally and \$32 million in the UK.⁴⁷² *Dunkirk*'s box office performance in China was influenced not only by its historical film genre and cultural specificity, but also by the prevailing public opinion environment in China during the film's theatrical run. This could be indicated by the ratings of *Dunkirk* among Chinese viewers. It has received ratings of 8.1 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.4 on Taopiaopiao, and 8.4 on Douban from approximately 240,000, 500,000, and 728,000 users, respectively. Figure 4.1.2 presents the various ratings that Chinese consumers gave to the film.⁴⁷³

Figure 4.1.2 Ratings of *Dunkirk* (2017) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

In general, the ratings on two ticketing platforms are often higher than those on Douban, since Douban users prefer to provide more stringent evaluations compared to ordinary consumers on ticketing platforms. This pattern could be observed in all seven other cases examined in this research. *Dunkirk* was the sole film among the

⁴⁷² Box Office Mojo, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'; Box Office Mojo, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr4226437637/>, [accessed 07 Jul 2024]

⁴⁷³ Maoyan, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/342598?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Taopiaopiao, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=198714>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Douban, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/26607693/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

cases that had comparable or even worse ratings on ticketing platforms relative to Douban. This may be indicative of the negative public response that was generated during the release of *Dunkirk* in China, which resulted in a decrease in its ratings on both ticketing platforms.

Table 4.1 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Dunkirk* (2017)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Plot	33	1	7	41
Audio-visual effects	23	1	4	28
Stars	19	1	3	23
Genre	9	0	1	10
Country of origins	5	0	1	6
British culture	0	3	1	4
Marketing	0	1	0	1
Pre-sold IP	0	0	0	0
Places in story	0	0	0	0
Characters in story	0	0	0	0
Language	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

Out of the 50 reviews that were sampled from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, 42 users rated it positively, 3 users rated it neutrally, and 5 users rated it negatively. The frequency of factors that were mentioned by Chinese viewers is outlined in Table 4.1.⁴⁷⁴ This table shows that most Chinese viewers expressed positive attitudes regarding these factors. Though the quantity of negative comments was not substantial, the severity of their criticism was too severe to be disregarded. The box office performance and word-of-mouth of *Dunkirk* were significantly impacted by the negative comments surrounding it upon its release in China. A thorough examination of these factors is detailed in the subsequent section.

4.1.1 Controversial Values in Plot

The 'Plot' of *Dunkirk* was the most discussed and contentious factor among Chinese viewers. A total of 41 users mentioned it, with 33 users expressing positive attitudes, 1 user expressing a neutral stance, and 7 users expressing negative attitudes. Many

⁴⁷⁴ Maoyan, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'; Taopiaopiao, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'

viewers who held positive attitudes claimed that the narrative of the film evoked a profound sense of immersion, such as the emotions of despair, fear and nervousness that are commonly experienced on the battlefield. *Dunkirk* used three different timelines, including sea, land and air to portray this historical event. Viewers were encouraged to clarify the correlation among these three timelines during the entire viewing process, and it also increased the enjoyment of Chinese consumers watching this historical film that was supposed to be culturally specific to them. For instance:

Nolan skilfully uses three timelines to tell a story. I personally had a wonderful feeling. It was a bit depressing and difficult to understand when I was watching it. But after watching it, it is like an enlightenment. Nolan not only wants to give a realistic description of the battlefield and say how cruel the war is, but also to say that everyone on the battlefield is crucial. There is no American individual heroism. Every character exudes brilliance. (Maoyan user)

The whole process is tense and full of suspense. The three storylines of sea, land and air are like the hands of a clock, proceeding at different speeds but eventually intersecting. (Taopiaopiao user)

Although the storyline revolved around British troops who successfully returned home after enduring numerous hardships, most Chinese viewers were able to empathise. Two sequences in the film received significant attention. The first was the scene where ‘home comes to them.’ After enduring a torturous wait of several days on Dunkirk, the General’s telescope eventually detected a considerable quantity of civilian boats emerging at sea level. When the adjutant asked what the general had seen, the General replied, ‘Home.’ In response to this scene, some Chinese users stated:

This film is also full of love for the country. When I heard the word “home”, I could not help but burst into tears..... (Taopiaopiao user)

I was really touched when I saw the ordinary people driving their own boats to pick up the troops. This is the cohesion of a country. (Taopiaopiao user)

It indicates that, despite differences in historical and cultural contexts, the patriotic emotions conveyed by *Dunkirk* could be comprehensible to many Chinese viewers. China’s patriotic education likewise emphasises principles such as national cohesion and unity. These values are also prevalent in Chinese ‘main melody’ films, a genre that Chinese viewers are commonly acquainted with. According to Chu, the term ‘main melody’ film entered the official lexicon in 1987, which ‘were derived from the musical

term “leitmotif”, referring to “state-sponsored”, “keynote” films with “central themes”.⁴⁷⁵ In the West, these films are known as ‘propaganda films’.⁴⁷⁵ As Su highlights, main melody films are ‘responsible for conveying socialism, patriotism, and collectivism’.⁴⁷⁶ In *Dunkirk*, the solidarity between the people, the army, and the country appears to be comparable to these values. It aligns with Tan’s argument that *Dunkirk* could be considered as a British ‘main melody film’, which has the potential to attract global audiences and introduce them to the British cultural value system.⁴⁷⁷ This could suggest that the theme of patriotism in *Dunkirk* had similarities with Chinese cultural values and thereby had the potential to resonate with Chinese viewers. Thus, the lack of knowledge regarding the historical context of *Dunkirk* may not have a substantial impact on the comprehension and appreciation of the film’s subject matter and plot by most Chinese viewers.



Figure 4.1.3 ‘Home Comes to Them’ Scene in *Dunkirk* (UK, Netherlands, France, US: Christopher Nolan, 2017). Copyright of Syncopy, UK, US; Warner Bros, US; Dombey Street Productions, UK; Kaap Holland Film, Netherlands; Canal+, France; Ciné+, France; and RatPac-Dune Entertainment, US.

⁴⁷⁵ Yiu-Wai Chu, ‘Introduction: Main (Land) Melody Films and Hong Kong Directors’, *Main Melody Films: Hong Kong Directors in Mainland China*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), pp.1-28(p.3, 4)

⁴⁷⁶ Su (2016), p.21

⁴⁷⁷ Jie Tan, ‘Three Tones of Main Melody Movies—Thoughts Behind the Popularity of “The Founding of the Army”, “Wolf Warrior II” and “Dunkirk”’, *Shanghai Art Review*, 05(2017), 82-83(82, 83) [谈洁, “主旋律电影的三种调性——《建军大业》《战狼II》与《敦刻尔克》热映背后的思索”, 上海艺术评论, 05(2017), 82-83]



Figure 4.1.4 'People Welcome Soldiers Home' Scene in *Dunkirk* (2017)

The second frequently discussed scene was the ending scenes. It portrays that the soldiers ultimately arrived back in Britain and were anxious on the train, uncertain about the public's response to their evacuation. When the train was reaching the train station, the public expressed their happiness by applauding and giving them beers, celebrating their safe return home. After watching this scene, some Chinese viewers noted:

In the end, the soldiers were worried about being criticised, but they were greeted with smiles and beer. This is worthy of deep thought by the Chinese people. (Taopiaopiao user)

The strength of a country can be seen from the quality of its ordinary citizens. When the army failed and retreated, the people bravely rushed to the front line to pick up the soldiers in small boats. After the soldiers arrived at the station safely, the people cheered and celebrated. This is very admirable! (Taopiaopiao user)

Many Chinese viewers reflected on their values and beliefs after viewing the scene. This was because, in the eyes of most Chinese people, being a 'deserter' during wartime is a grave problem. The masses would hold this 'deserter' heavily criticised and morally accusatory. In contrast, in *Dunkirk*, the British people's responses to these retreating soldiers were different from the concept that these Chinese viewers previously held. Nevertheless, they seem to be capable of accepting the values

presented in this scenario. This finding is inconsistent with the Middle Kingdom Mentality, which Jacques posits that Chinese culture perceives itself as universal, relevant, and superior to all others.⁴⁷⁸ These comments indicate that some Chinese consumers perceived British culture as more tolerant than Chinese culture.

On the contrary, some perceived the film's celebration of retreat to be incompatible with traditional Chinese values. Although the Dunkirk Evacuation was a crucial military manoeuvre aimed at preserving the strength of British forces for future phases of World War II, some Chinese viewers, who lacked the necessary contextual knowledge, encountered difficulties in comprehending the rationale behind the decision to retreat from the frontline. Users who held negative attitudes towards the plot stated:

And then the theme of the film: Yes, anti-war. People should cherish life. But if they are afraid of death, they should not be soldiers. Such soldiers will only kill their comrades, kill their allies, and expose the people behind them to enemy fire. This is where the fundamental values of this film are incorrect. It must be pointed out. This is also the main reason why I gave it a low score. (Maoyan user)

It was clearly a huge rout at Dunkirk, but it was shamelessly filmed as a victorious retreat! (Maoyan user)

These users expressed doubts about the correctness of 'evacuation' during wartime. In traditional Chinese culture, soldiers are expected to engage in frontline fighting until death to safeguard the civilians behind them. Countless literary and cinematic works in China extol the virtues and greatness of these soldiers. For instance, *The Eight Hundred* (八百/Ba Bai) (2020), a Chinese domestic war film, is frequently acclaimed as the Chinese version of *Dunkirk*, as it also portrays a retreat during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Nevertheless, its narrative primarily focuses on the numerous soldiers who voluntarily and courageously sacrificed in the pursuit of victory in this combat while they awaited permission to retreat to a safe zone. The story and the characters more precisely reflect the depictions of soldiers and battlefields through the lens of traditional Chinese values, which were different from *Dunkirk*. This divergence in values and beliefs could be regarded as the primary factor contributing to the negative response to *Dunkirk's* plot among certain Chinese viewers. This finding substantiates

⁴⁷⁸ Jacques (2009), p.283

Jacques's Middle Kingdom Mentality.⁴⁷⁹ It is evident that some Chinese viewers believed that the British values of encouraging soldiers to retreat in *Dunkirk* were not as superior as the Chinese cultural values that honoured the heroic sacrifice of soldiers for victory in the war. The Middle Kingdom Mentality may lead them to believe that the fundamental values of *Dunkirk* were incorrect. Connor from *Telegraphy* investigates how the major Chinese media described the performance of *Dunkirk* in China. He observes that the *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the CCP, stated, 'The film's tepid performance in the mainland, according to certain media outlets, has been attributed to the theme of the film—which praises an evacuation—not striking a chord with Chinese audiences.' Similarly, the *New Weekly*, a Chinese magazine, remarked, 'Whereas *Dunkirk* is about a disastrous retreat, which is very different from traditional Chinese values, so it will not perform very well at the box office.'⁴⁸⁰ It suggests that the unfamiliar historical event and the different cultural values that *Dunkirk* depicted may have contributed to the cultural discount that the film experienced in China, which had a detrimental effect on its box office performance.

4.1.2 Star Power of the Director

Although *Dunkirk* is a historical film that is culturally specific, it still generated significant expectation and interest among Chinese consumers during its early release period due to the fame of the director, Christopher Nolan. The 'Stars' factor was mentioned by 23 users, with 19 users expressing positive attitudes, 1 user expressing neutral attitudes, and 3 users expressing negative attitudes. Unlike other films, where the primary allure of stars was from actors or actresses, this film stood out with its popularity mostly driven by Nolan, who was addressed by many Chinese users in their reviews:

I like Nolan's down-to-earth narrative without showing off his skills. This film can be seen as a video experiment that breaks through his previous creative thinking and narrative style. This film is destined not to be as widely recognized as Nolan's

⁴⁷⁹ Jacques (2009), p.283

⁴⁸⁰ Neil Connor, 'A Retreat Has No "Chinese Values" – *Dunkirk* Movie Comes Under Fire In China', *Telegraphy*, 04 September, 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/04/retreat-has-no-chinese-values-dunkirk-movie-comes-fire-china/>, [accessed 22 Jan 2024]

previous mainstream commercial films that mainly show off ideas, but I like it. Top ten of the year, full marks. (Maoyan user)

If Nolan lived in a world with superpowers, his title would definitely be 'Time Weaver'. It is probably difficult to find another director in this world who can complete the narrative of multiple time and space as flawlessly as he does. (Maoyan user)

Many Chinese users not only enjoyed the editing techniques employed by Nolan in *Dunkirk* but also revealed their familiarity with his previous works. For example, his work, *Interstellar* (2014), grossed around \$122 million at the Chinese box office and attracted nearly 25 million cinema admissions in China.⁴⁸¹ *Inception* (2010) received more than \$68 million at the Chinese box office and garnered over 16 million cinema admissions in China.⁴⁸² *Interstellar* and *Inception* both placed 5th in China's annual box office rankings in the year that they were released.⁴⁸³ Also, *Interstellar* and *Inception* placed 8th and 9th, respectively, on the list of the highest-rated films on Douban.⁴⁸⁴ This list is one of the most reliable rankings of high-quality films for most Chinese viewers. These achievements and rankings further indicate Nolan's recognition in China. In contrast, some users held negative attitudes and said:

This film is really bad. Nolan showed the audience what it means to be defeated. In fact, this story could be made more tragic and depicted with more details, but the director insisted on portraying this story from his personal perspective. I would like to ask, is it really necessary to deliberately not film the German and French troops? Is it really necessary not to show any bloody battle scenes? I am afraid these are all trying to avoid things that audiences will find offensive. Although they are effective and the angles are fresh, the actual effect is probably far less profound and enjoyable than other characterisation methods. (Maoyan user)

⁴⁸¹ Box Office Mojo, 'Interstellar (2014)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr459297285/>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Interstellar (2014)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/78341/boxshowna?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Interstellar (2014)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=12975&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]

⁴⁸² Box Office Mojo, 'Inception (2010)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1400852997/>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]; Maoyan Pro, 'Inception (2010)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/416/box?barTheme=1D1D40>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Inception (2010)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=4480&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]

⁴⁸³ Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office For 2010', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2010/?area=CN&grossesOption=totalGrosses>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]; Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office For 2014', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2014/?area=CN&grossesOption=totalGrosses>, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]

⁴⁸⁴ Douban, 'Douban Film Top 250', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch?uri=/subject_collection/movie_top250/&dt_dapp=1, [accessed 13 Jan 2024]

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Many people say that this is a special narrative technique. Nolan's filming is amazing, with a different perspective and so on. You do not make films for yourself. You do not make films to show that you are different. You make films for the public to watch. However, when your film comes out, it is completely different from the perspective that the public wants to watch. It is so bad, so bad that I do not want to say anything more. (Maoyan user)

It seems that the primary reason for their dissatisfaction with the film was that the content did not meet their high expectations for Nolan and his works. On the one hand, their expectations regarding the battle scenes in war blockbusters were not satisfied in *Dunkirk*. On the other hand, their expectations regarding the impressive special effects that are typically seen in Nolan's films were not fulfilled in *Dunkirk* as well. These unfulfilled expectations may result in their negative responses to *Dunkirk*. Yet, it is undeniable that Nolan was the most compelling advertisement of this historical film in capturing the interest of most Chinese viewers.



Figure 4.1.5 Chinese Poster for *Dunkirk* (2017)

Moreover, the capacity of Nolan's popularity to allure Chinese viewers was also evident in the poster of *Dunkirk* in China. As illustrated in Figure 4.1.5, the poster prominently displays Nolan's name in large fonts at both the top and bottom. The names of Nolan's previous works, including *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012), *Inception*, and *Interstellar*, are also displayed at the top of the poster to serve as a reminder to Chinese consumers who are not familiar with Nolan's name that *Dunkirk* is this director's most recent work. It may suggest that Chinese distributors had confidence in the potential of 'Nolan's work' to generate significant commercial appeal. Hence, regardless of the subject matter and storyline, the director's reputation alone may already ensure that *Dunkirk* was able to garner attention from many Chinese viewers.

4.1.3 An Unconventional War Film

A similar discussion could be observed regarding the factor of 'Audio-visual effects'. Although it was the second most frequently discussed factor, it was also a contentious factor among Chinese viewers. Of the 28 users who mentioned this factor, 23 users expressed positive attitudes, 1 user held neutral attitudes, and 4 users held negative attitudes. Most users expressed positive impressions of the audio-visual effects in *Dunkirk* and expressed excitement for the film's distinct techniques, specifically highlighting the editing and soundtracks, which enhanced the film's immersive experience:

Whether it is the picture size or the sound effects, this film will be at least half as good if you do not experience it in a cinema. (Maoyan user)

I admire the sound effects very much. The repetitive percussion sounds and the small amount of dialogue did not make the film boring. I think only Nolan can make such a stylish, artistic and sophisticated film. (Taopiaopiao user)

Many users also encouraged potential viewers to watch the IMAX version of *Dunkirk* to obtain a better viewing experience. This supports the results of Elliott et al., who claim that the films' box office revenues in China are significantly and positively impacted by the enhanced formats (3D and IMAX).⁴⁸⁵ It suggests that, for many

⁴⁸⁵ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.88

Chinese consumers, the immersive audio-visual effect could also be regarded as an important selling point of this historical film.



Figure 4.1.6 The War Scene in *Dunkirk* (2017)

Nevertheless, some Chinese viewers were disappointed by the audio-visual effects of *Dunkirk*:

Has anyone seen such a Hollywood blockbuster? There are 5 planes in total, 0 tanks, 2 battleships, 0 Germans, some steel helmets, some rifles, 0 cars, 0 machine guns, 20 civilian ships, 1 Frenchman, and 1,000 British walk-ons. (Maoyan user)

“Dunkirk” is a bad film, not good at all. There are few fierce fighting scenes, and there are no grand scenes of two armies confronting each other. (Maoyan user)

It seems that some Chinese viewers expected that *Dunkirk* would be a conventional war epic that include a plethora of spectacular battlefield scenes. However, the lack of violent and bloody sequences in the film did not meet their expectations. The comment of the only user who referenced ‘Marketing’ in this research further supported this expectation for *Dunkirk*:

It is not as shocking as I had imagined, maybe because the expectations were too high during the promotion, which led to some disappointment when watching the film. Maybe it is just a failed battle and a successful retreat. I feel like there is nothing much to say. (Taopiaopiao user)

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This may be understood as unfulfilled expectations that were partially due to cultural specificity, as the Dunkirk Evacuation was not a widely known event among Chinese viewers. As a result, they may have certain expectations regarding this film that were based on the characteristics of traditional war films. On the contrary, the discussion surrounding the factor of 'Genre' suggests that some Chinese viewers found this innovative war film to be quite enjoyable. This factor was addressed in 10 reviews, 9 of which provided favourable assessments. Users with positive attitudes claimed that *Dunkirk* diverged from the conventional war genre by offering a fresh perspective on human nature during the time of war:

The views and ideologies expressed in this film have nothing to do with traditional war films. The enemy troops are fully marginalized and contextualized, and are replaced by the ultimate presentation of the will and actions of trapped beast-like humans to survive that is suppressed and tense throughout. (Maoyan user)

Unlike previous World War II-themed films, there are no enemies in sight, and there are no fancy special effects in the air combat, but the fear and the feeling of wanting to go home are deeply rooted in people's hearts. A great film, many of the scenes are very Nolan-esque, great! (Taopiaopiao user)

Despite the fact that this unconventional war film may not meet the expectations of certain Chinese consumers in this genre, some Chinese viewers were content with its innovative style. They stated that although the film lacked visual spectacles, it yet allowed viewers to experience the sense of despair and cruelty throughout the war, without relying on bloodshed and atrocious scenes:

If you like watching aeroplanes and cannons, this film is not for you. You can hardly see the enemy. The film uses this depressing feeling to reflect the cruelty of war and human nature. If you think this film is rubbish, it is because you have never experienced war and have been brainwashed by the various domestic anti-Japanese dramas nowadays. You think war films are good only if they have various explosion scenes. The actual scene of the real Dunkirk Evacuation was like this in the film. If you think it is rubbish, please study history first. Do not think that watching a few domestic films means you are patriotic. (Maoyan user)

There is no excessive rendering of bloody scenes. But it still made people feel the urgency, and no one from the enemy camp was seen from the beginning to the end. Do not ask us why we watch foreign war films, because they are real and well-filmed. (Taopiaopiao user)

These reviews can also be interpreted as a response to the controversy surrounding *Dunkirk* at the time, as numerous Chinese people boycotted the film in the name of

patriotism and nationalism. This fact will be more thoroughly analysed in the subsequent section.

4.1.4 Boycott *Dunkirk* in China

Many Chinese viewers were able to identify Britain as the 'Country of origin' of *Dunkirk* due to its British historical background. 5 users identified it as a British production, and one user identified it as a Hollywood film. In addition, the historical context and events depicted in the film were the primary focus of users who engaged in discussions about the 'British culture'. One user maintained positive attitudes, two users maintained neutral attitudes, and one user maintained negative attitudes. These users did not make any explicit reference to other British cultural elements. Yet, the user who held a negative attitude attempted to inform potential Chinese consumers of the story behind the Dunkirk Evacuation:

The greatness of Dunkirk is only for the British because it saved a large number of British troops. Only the British could praise this "Great Escape" as a "Victorious Retreat". The British escaped, and tens of thousands of French troops who stayed behind were captured. Not long after, on the Asian battlefield, the British army commanded by this General Alexander retreated from Burma to India. This time, tens of thousands of Chinese expeditionary forces and General Anlan Dai were left behind as cannon fodder. The British official said that the British army fled from Burma to India and called it "Asia's Dunkirk Miracle". As a Chinese, I have absolutely no reason to praise Dunkirk, let alone applaud this kind of escape regardless of friendly forces. The tens of thousands of heroic souls of the expeditionary force who stayed in Myanmar are the heroes we need to praise and applaud. (Maoyan user)

Irrespective of the historical accuracy, this user's primary objective was to disseminate this information and encourage the Chinese public to boycott *Dunkirk*, since Gen. Alexander's accomplishments were 'built on the blood and bones of the Chinese expeditionary force'.⁴⁸⁶ According to Jacques, 'nations see the world in terms of their own history, values and mindset and seek to shape that world in the light of those experiences and perceptions'.⁴⁸⁷ The divisive stance converted the General's image from a 'hero' to a 'sinner' in the minds of some Chinese viewers. In contrast, users who maintained a neutral stance mostly expressed their opinions with an impartial

⁴⁸⁶ Connor (2017)

⁴⁸⁷ Jacques (2009), p.274

perspective in response to the unfavourable criticisms of *Dunkirk* on the Chinese Internet. For instance, one user said:

There were only ten or eight people in the cinema, thanks to the moral kidnapping of Internet trolls and keyboard warriors. Watching “Wolf Warrior” means being patriotic, but watching this film means being unpatriotic, because in history the commander who commanded this evacuation once abandoned our Chinese Expeditionary Force in Burma, so we must boycott this film resolutely. But what does this have to do with people making this film? In the future, when choosing an actor for a film, do you have to check his background to see if he has done anything that would be unworthy of the country? Nonsense! Good things are always good. Only by learning from other people’s good ideas can we make countless “Wolf Warrior” in the future! (Maoyan user)

It seems that there were some Chinese consumers who believed that boycotting *Dunkirk* was not a rational course of action, as it was still a high-quality film to watch. However, this Maoyan user’s statement shows that the film’s cinema attendance was limited owing to the impact of negative public response, which could imply that the boycott substantially adversely affected *Dunkirk*’s box office performance in China.

In addition, this review also reveals that a debate was initiated online between supporters of *Dunkirk* and *Wolf Warrior 2*, a Chinese war film that broke the Chinese box office record in 2017. *Wolf Warrior 2* was released on July 27, almost one month before *Dunkirk*.⁴⁸⁸ In *Wolf Warrior 2*, by forcefully beating the Americans and successfully rescuing the world, China emerged as the unequivocal world leader and saviour. Zhu argues that *Wolf Warrior 2* reaffirms China’s leading position by depicting its decision to send ‘its people to defend the war-torn African country just as every other country is pulling its people out’.⁴⁸⁹ *Wolf Warrior 2*’s central theme, which for a time became the most popular tagline in China, was ‘Whoever offends China will be hunted down no matter how far away they are (犯我中华者，虽远必诛)’.⁴⁹⁰ As Chen et al. point out, the significant popularity of *Wolf Warrior 2* was related to its creativity and ideology, which resonated with the collective emotion and mentality in China

⁴⁸⁸ Box Office Mojo, ‘*Wolf Warrior 2* (2017)’

⁴⁸⁹ Zhu (2022), p.220

⁴⁹⁰ Patrick Brzeski, “‘Wolf Warrior II’ Star Frank Grillo on How China’s \$780M Blockbuster Was Made (Q&A)”, *The Hollywood Report*, 22 August, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/wolf-warrior-2-star-frank-grillo-how-chinas-780m-blockbuster-was-made-1031929/>, [accessed 22 Jan 2024]

during that period.⁴⁹¹ The national image represented in *Wolf Warrior 2* was related to the ‘cultural confidence’ proposed by President of China, Xi Jinping, at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2016. Cultural confidence means that a nation, a country, and a political party fully acknowledge and actively practice their own cultural principles, while maintaining unwavering faith in the vitality of their culture.⁴⁹² The ideology’s prevalent propagation has encouraged a widespread belief among the Chinese populace that advocating for domestic products can be a viable way of achieving cultural confidence and showing patriotism. It could have potentially prompted certain Chinese people to use nationalism to encourage the public to support *Wolf Warrior 2* and boycott *Dunkirk*. This supports Jacques’s theory of Middle Kingdom Mentality, which posits that the Chinese acknowledge the West’s historical achievements while concurrently harbouring resentment towards its hegemony and denigrating specific aspects of Western culture, believing that the inherent virtues of Chinese civilisation will ultimately triumph.⁴⁹³ In fact, the accusation that Gen. Alexander, who led the Dunkirk Evacuation, abandoned the Chinese Expeditionary Force in Burma, can be perceived as a means by some Chinese to denigrate Britain. This accusation serves as evidence that Britain and British culture depicted in *Dunkirk* were not as virtuous as China’s defence of African countries in *Wolf Warrior 2*. Thus, the increase in cultural confidence, driven by China’s reaffirmed global leadership in *Wolf Warrior 2*, may have caused certain Chinese people to embrace nationalism and opt to boycott *Dunkirk*, which in turn negatively influenced its box office performance in China.

4.1.5 Significant Decline in Screenings

According to Figure 4.1.7 and Figure 4.1.8, the daily box office and screenings for *Dunkirk* were substantial in the first week of release, accounting for approximately 32%

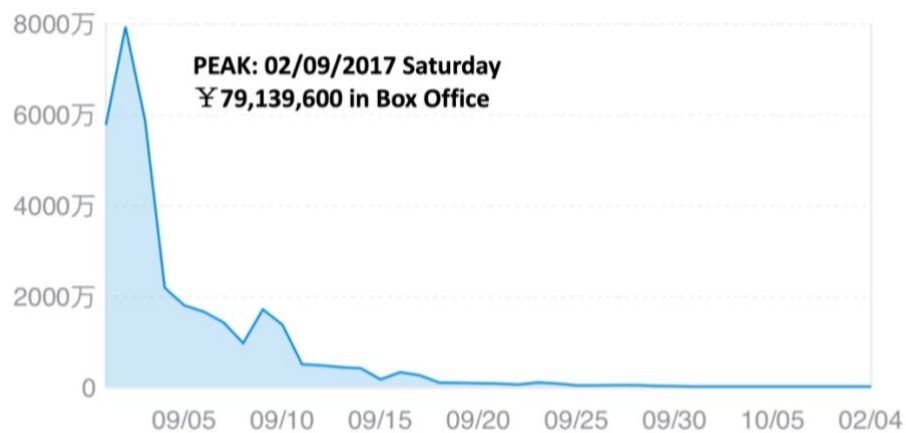
⁴⁹¹ Yanjiao Chen, Gongchang Ge, Ning Li, Xiaofei Li, Katherine Morrow, Raymond Tsang, Belinda Q. He, Ma Wentao, and Kelly Fan, ‘*Wolf Warrior II* (2017) and the Inefficient Main Melody (Zhu Xuanlǔ): Why Do Filmgoers Have to Take Sides?’, *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, 15:2-3(2021), 200-225(203)

⁴⁹² Xinhua News, ‘Cultural Confidence—The Issue of The Times Proposed by Xi Jinping’, 05 August, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-08/05/c_1119330939.htm, [accessed 16 Jan 2024] [新华网, “文化自信——习近平提出的时代课题”, 2016.08.05]

⁴⁹³ Jacques (2005)

of the total screenings and generating approximately 46% of the total box office revenue in China.⁴⁹⁴ As Wong from *Screen Daily* reports, after five consecutive weeks at the top of the Chinese box office, *Wolf Warriors 2* had been displaced by *Dunkirk*, which grossed nearly \$28 million during its three-day opening weekend.⁴⁹⁵ However, *Dunkirk*'s performance declined sharply from the second release week, falling to approximately 10% of screenings and 6% of box office revenue in China.⁴⁹⁶

Figure 4.1.7 Daily Box Office Revenue of *Dunkirk* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Figure 4.1.8 Daily Number of Screenings of *Dunkirk* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

⁴⁹⁴ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Dunkirk* (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/07401492017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

⁴⁹⁵ Silvia Wong, 'China Box Office: "Dunkirk" Dethrones "Wolf Warriors 2"', *Screen Daily*, 04 September, 2017, <https://www.screendaily.com/news/china-box-office-dunkirk-dethrones-wolf-warriors-2/5121960.article> [accessed 17 Jul 2024]

⁴⁹⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'

It is worth noting that the significant decline in the screenings and box office earning of *Dunkirk* did not result in an uptick in the screenings and box office income of *Wolf Warrior 2*, as it had already been in exhibition for over a month at the time of *Dunkirk*'s release. During the week preceding the release of *Dunkirk*, the screenings allocated to *Wolf Warrior 2* were around 20%, while its box office contribution in China was nearly 25%. *Wolf Warrior 2* maintained a 15% share of both the screenings and the revenue during the first week of *Dunkirk*'s release. In the second week of *Dunkirk*'s release, *Wolf Warrior 2*'s screenings and revenue did not experience any growth, with a decrease to approximately 5% of screenings and 8% of revenue.⁴⁹⁷ In *Dunkirk*'s second release week, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017) was released in China and competed with it.⁴⁹⁸ During its first release week, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* received around 50% of the total screenings and accounted for approximately 70% of the box office revenue in China.⁴⁹⁹ Although *Dunkirk* faced fierce rivalry from this American film featuring popular franchise, the public opinion environment in China at the time had an undeniable negative effect on the number of screenings it was allocated and the box office results it achieved. Consequently, the cultural discount that *Dunkirk* encountered in China was could be attributed to the film's culturally specific historical context, incompatible values, and negative public response, which considerably impacted its box office performance.

4.2 *Darkest Hour* (2017)

According to IMDb, *Darkest Hour* (2017) is categorised as a biography, drama, history and war film. It was produced by the UK, US and China, with a production budget of approximately \$30 million. The production companies involved were Focus Features (US, a division of Universal Pictures), Perfect World Pictures (China), Pin3hot (UK), and

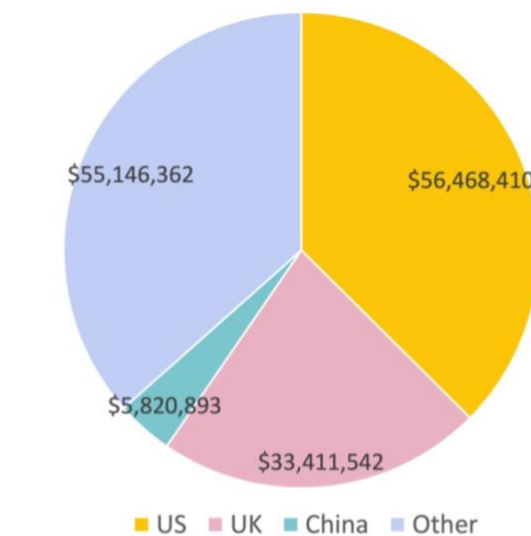
⁴⁹⁷ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Wolf Warrior 2 (2017)', <https://zgdyf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/00104512017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

⁴⁹⁸ Box Office Mojo, 'Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr65032709/>, [accessed 06 Nov 2024]

⁴⁹⁹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Spider-Man: Homecoming (2017)', <https://zgdyf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/05101522017?from=movie>, [accessed 06 Nov 2024]

Working Title Films (UK, a subsidiary of Universal Pictures).⁵⁰⁰ Perfect World Pictures is one of the most successful private companies in China to invest in international films.⁵⁰¹ Possibly as a result of the Chinese company's investment, *Darkest Hour* was released in China on December 1, 2017, one month ahead of its release date in the UK and the rest of the globe (except the US) around January 2018. According to its official distribution notification in China, CFGC and Huaxia jointly distributed *Darkest Hour*. Yet, it was the sole case in this research that was imported into China using the flat-fee scheme.⁵⁰²

Figure 4.2.1 Gross Box Office Income of *Darkest Hour* (2017) in Different Countries



Source: Box Office Mojo

In contrast to the 34 annual quotas on the revenue-sharing scheme, approximately 30 to 40 films are imported into mainland China on a flat-fee basis every year. The flat-fee scheme allows Chinese distribution companies to negotiate a singular set charge with foreign companies for the rights to release films in China in return for keeping all revenue generated at the Chinese box office.⁵⁰³ Eventually, *Darkest Hour* grossed around \$6 million at the box office, garnered about one million cinema admissions in

⁵⁰⁰ IMDb, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4555426/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_0, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

⁵⁰¹ Zhu (2022), p.252

⁵⁰² Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Darkest Hour* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/346625/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=262640>, [accessed 02 Nov 2024]

⁵⁰³ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.69

China, and placed 140th in China's annual box office rankings for 2017.⁵⁰⁴ As seen in Figure 4.2.1, China was the fifth-largest source of its box office income, contributing less than 4% to its total global earnings.⁵⁰⁵

Darkest Hour's annual box office ranking and revenue in China were ranked sixth out of the eight cases examined in this research. It substantiates Elliott et al.'s claim that foreign films imported into China via the flat-fee scheme would perform worse than those imported through the revenue-sharing scheme.⁵⁰⁶ Despite both being British historical films, *Darkest Hour* and *Dunkirk* faced distinct circumstances in China. *Dunkirk* could be seen as benefiting from Nolan's esteemed status. In contrast, despite the exceptional quality of *Darkest Hour*, as evidenced by its nominations for both the Oscars and BAFTA Awards for Best Film in 2018, its unsatisfactory performance in China may be attributed to its lack of competitiveness in comparison to films with stronger marketing assets (such as franchises and stars) or with less cultural specificity.⁵⁰⁷ In addition, the award and nominations were acquired after the film's release in China, which did not have a favourable effect on its box office performance. As a historical film, the box office revenue of *Darkest Hour* in China was lower than that of a Chinese historical film released in the same year, *The Founding of an Army* (建军大业/ Jian Jun Da Ye) (2017), which depicts the establishment of the CCP army in 1927 and generated over \$60 million at the Chinese box office.⁵⁰⁸ *The Founding of an Army* is also a typical Chinese main melody film. Chinese main melody films are mostly difficult to stimulate public interest and encourage voluntary ticket purchases.⁵⁰⁹ This is partly because of the tiredness that many Chinese consumers feel towards this genre and its themes, which are primarily educational rather than the entertainment they seek from cinematic experiences. The challenges faced by *Darkest Hour* in attracting a substantial

⁵⁰⁴ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)'; Maoyan Pro, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/346625/boxshowna?barTheme=262640>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Dengta Pro, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=225197&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

⁵⁰⁵ Box Office Mojo, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)'

⁵⁰⁶ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.69

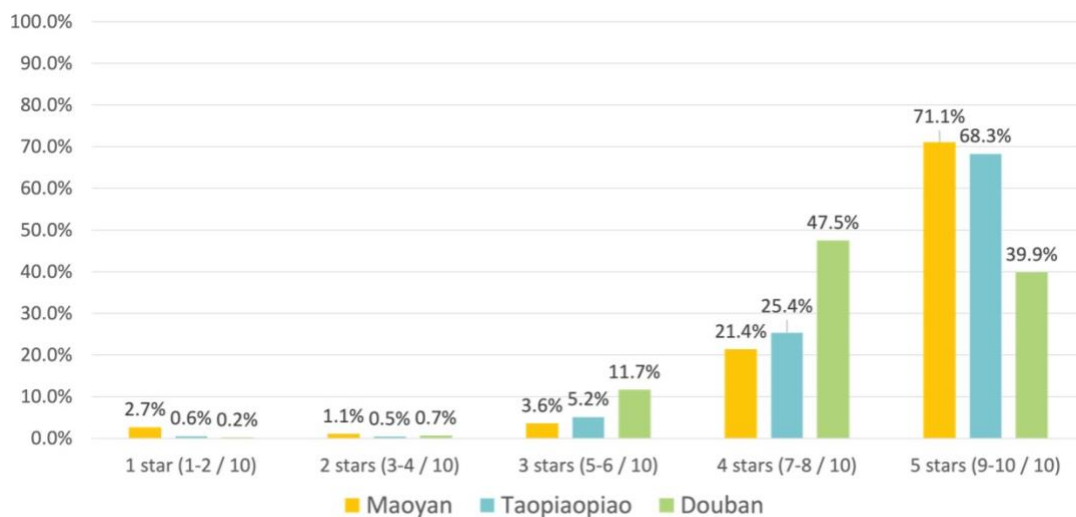
⁵⁰⁷ IMDb, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)'

⁵⁰⁸ Box Office Mojo, '*The Founding of an Army* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr4292039173/>, [accessed 30 Oct 2024]

⁵⁰⁹ Davis (2014), p.202

Chinese audience may also be partially attributed to its format, which was similar to that of the main melody film genre. Its serious subject matter and the unfamiliar historical context could be hard to appeal to most Chinese viewers. However, as a foreign biographical film, the box office earning of *Darkest Hour* surpassed that of *Genius* (2016), which was also released in China in 2017 and imported via the flat-fee scheme.⁵¹⁰ Despite the presence of a star-studded cast that included Colin Firth, Jude Law, and Nicole Kidman, *Genius* only earned over \$2 million at the Chinese box office.⁵¹¹ It seems that foreign biopics, which portray individuals who are unfamiliar to Chinese viewers, would have difficulty in captivating the majority of Chinese viewers. The 2021 BFI survey indicates that 20% of Chinese respondents expressed enjoyment in watching this genre.⁵¹² It could suggest that the genre experiences an inherent disadvantage in achieving commercial success in China.

Figure 4.2.2 Ratings of *Darkest Hour* (2017) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

Despite its potential difficulty in appealing to a wide range of Chinese consumers, *Darkest Hour* received a relatively high rating from its Chinese viewers. It has received

⁵¹⁰ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Genius* (2016)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/344880/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=402626>, [accessed 02 Nov 2024]

⁵¹¹ IMDb, '*Genius* (2016)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1703957/?ref=nm_sr_srsrg_5_tt_5_nm_3_in_0_q_Genius%2520, [accessed 02 Nov 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Genius* (2016)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1996837381/>, [accessed 02 Nov 2024]

⁵¹² BFI (2022b), p.18

ratings of 8.8 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.9 on Taopiaopiao, and 8.5 on Douban from about 25,000, 85,000, and 405,000 users, respectively.⁵¹³ Its rating on Douban was the highest among the eight cases examined in this research. As Figure 4.2.2 illustrates, almost 90% of users on these three platforms rated *Darkest Hour* as either four or five stars.⁵¹⁴ It suggests that box office performance is not necessarily indicative of a film's quality. In other words, a high-quality film may not always be a commercial hit in China.

Table 4.2 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Darkest Hour* (2017)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Stars	29	0	0	29
Plot	24	3	0	27
Characters in story	15	2	0	17
Audio-visual effects	15	0	0	15
Genre	10	3	0	13
Country of origins	13	0	0	13
Pre-sold IP	11	2	0	13
British culture	3	3	0	6
Places in story	0	0	0	0
Language	0	0	0	0
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

Darkest Hour received positive ratings from all 50 reviews that were sampled from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao. Table 4.2 presents an overview of the frequency of factors that were mentioned by Chinese viewers in their reviews.⁵¹⁵ While there were occasional neutral comments on several factors of *Darkest Hour*, the majority were positive, with no negative comments presented. A comprehensive analysis of each factor is presented in the following section.

⁵¹³ Maoyan, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/346625?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=225197>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]; Douban, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/26761416/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

⁵¹⁴ Maoyan, 'Darkest Hour (2017)'; Taopiaopiao, 'Darkest Hour (2017)'; Douban, 'Darkest Hour (2017)'

⁵¹⁵ Maoyan, 'Darkest Hour (2017)'; Taopiaopiao, 'Darkest Hour (2017)'

4.2.1 Fresh Character Construction

The most frequently mentioned factor in *Darkest Hour* was ‘Stars’, which was mentioned by 29 users, all of whom expressed positive sentiments. Gary Oldman’s performance was praised in all of these reviews, with a few users referring to him as ‘the actor who played Churchill’ due to their unfamiliarity with his name. For example:

A masterpiece of Gary Oldman that ought to earn him the Best Actor award! It is as if he is possessed by Churchill’s soul, and he alone illuminates “Darkest Hour”!
(Maoyan user)

The actor who played Churchill delivered an outstanding performance. (Taopiaopiao user)

This is in accordance with the findings of the BFI survey, which indicate that 45% of Chinese respondents selected ‘They are usually well acted’ as the reason for being interested in British film/TV.⁵¹⁶ However, the discussion surrounding the factor of ‘Star’ could only suggest that Oldman’s performance was a highly regarded and commendable element of the film. It does not imply that Oldman’s star power could effectively serve as a market signal to attract Chinese viewers to the film or could positively impact the film’s box office performance in the Chinese market.

A similar discussion can be observed under the factor of ‘Characters’. A total of 17 users noted this factor, with 15 of them expressing positive attitudes. Given that *Darkest Hour* is a biopic of Churchill, many comments focused on Churchill’s image and portrayal. They mostly discussed how the film facilitated the revision of their perceptions about this famous politician, and how it presented viewers with a more authentic and captivating depiction of this legendary figure in history. For instance, one Maoyan user remarked: ‘It broke the label of an iron Prime Minister that history books had given me’, while one Taopiaopiao said: ‘It gave me a glimpse into a more real Churchill.’ Many users used the term ‘lovely’ to describe Churchill in *Darkest Hour*. Moreover, some viewers expressed their admiration for Churchill, who showed sound judgement during the nation’s difficult time:

⁵¹⁶ BFI (2022b), p.9

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In fact, I have no interest in history, and my impression of Churchill was only that of a “warmonger”. But after watching this film, I realised how one-sided and narrow this term is when applied to Churchill! This film completely changed my view of Churchill. Please forgive my ignorance. The courage and belief of an old man who took over at a critical moment for the country are truly worthy of our admiration! (Maoyan user)

Through this film, I saw a paranoid practitioner with extraordinary courage, a greedy and aspiring dreamer, a passionate speaker, a humorous and charming leader, a wise man with clear thinking, a British Prime Minister in history that I was not familiar with before. (Maoyan user)

While Chinese viewers who were interested in the subject matter and genre of this film may have a basic understanding of Churchill based on history textbooks, *Darkest Hour* clearly prompted many of them to develop a greater affection and admiration for this foreign prime minister they were previously unfamiliar with. This may be attributed to the fact that the representation of prominent historical figures in *Darkest Hour* was distinct from that of Chinese main melody films. Chinese main melody films tend to present idealised portrayals of significant figures, devoid of any noticeable flaws. In a sense, Chinese main melody films usually depict influential party leaders from the angle of ‘divinity’, in order to emphasise their magnificent images and their function as public role models.



Figure 4.2.3 The Image of Churchill Scene in *Darkest Hour* (UK, US, China: Joe Wright, 2017). Copyright of Focus Features, US; Perfect World Pictures, China; Pin3hot, UK; and Working Title Films, UK.

An instance of this is the Chinese biopic titled *The Pioneer* (革命者/Ge Ming Zhe) (2021), which focuses on the story of Li Dazhao, one of the co-founders of the CCP. At the film's conclusion, Li was apprehended during the warlord authority's persecution and suppression of communists. He approached the gallows with peace and confronted his death with dignity. He aimed to disseminate the CCP's ideology to a broader segment of the Chinese populace, with the expectation that his sacrifice would motivate a greater number of individuals to rebel against the oppressive rule of warlords. The film depicts Li as a courageous, honourable, devout, intelligent and benevolent character. Whether faced with his family or the revolutionary cause, he embodied perfection without any noticeable flaws. However, as reported by Davis from *Variety*, despite being scheduled for 29% of the total screenings throughout the country, *The Pioneer* saw poor involvement, with attendance figures below 3%.⁵¹⁷ The portrayal of a 'divine' character may create a sense of detachment or unattainability for the viewers. On the contrary, Churchill in *Darkest Hour* exhibited many minor imperfections, which were portrayed from an angle of 'humanity'. As Mou suggests, in the film, Churchill was shown as being an entirely ordinary person, perhaps even slightly below average, and certainly not considered a perfect person in accordance with traditional Chinese standards.⁵¹⁸ The comments from Chinese users also suggest that, despite their lack of familiarity with this British Prime Minister, they still developed an appreciative and respectful perception of him after viewing the film. The imperfections of Churchill that were presented in *Darkest Hour* may enhance the character's authenticity and foster a connection with even the foreign viewer. It indicates that, possibly due to Chinese viewers' familiarity with the 'divinity' representation of famous figures in Chinese main melody films, many Chinese consumers might find this approach to introducing important figures from the perspective of 'humanity' to be fresh. Thus, despite the historical context being culturally specific, the performance of Oldman and the portrayal of Churchill in *Darkest*

⁵¹⁷ Rebecca Davis, 'Chinese Propaganda Film "1921" Has \$13 Million Opening Day, Outperforming Hollywood Releases', *Variety*, 01 July, 2021, <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/1921-opening-day-sales-china-1235010256/>, [accessed 25 Jan 2024]

⁵¹⁸ Weiwei Mou, 'Analysis of the Unique Historical Context and Character Portrayal of the Film "Darkest Hour"', *Movie Review*, 16(2018), 68-70(69) [牟薇薇. "探析影片《至暗时刻》独特的历史语境与人物刻画". 电影评介. 16(2018). 68-70]

Hour were relatively well-received by most Chinese viewers. Yet, in spite of the high regard in which *Darkest Hour*'s depiction of historical figures was held by Chinese consumers, it was still difficult to captivate those who were uninterested in the film's theme and subject matter.

4.2.2 An Engaging British Main Melody Film

The second most often mentioned factor in *Darkest Hour* was 'Plot', which was mentioned by 27 users. This factor was favourably received by 24 Chinese users, who expressed their satisfaction with the film's story. For instance:

The first part of the film is light-hearted and moderately intense, but the middle part is so oppressive and emotionally distressing that it made my heartbeat race wildly, and I was sweating profusely. The ending part is melodious and uplifting, just like the darkest moment has finally ushered in the light, and you have survived the pain and are ready to enjoy the feeling of relief, and the protagonist has already left the scene coolly..... Not enough to watch. A very wonderful film. (Maoyan user)

It indicates that despite the character relationships and story background being culturally specific for many Chinese viewers, they can appreciate the film's high-quality and engaging plot without experiencing obvious cultural discount during the viewing process. Particularly, the 'Conversing with People in the Underground' scene was the most often mentioned by Chinese viewers. In that scene, Churchill was on his way to Westminster. He was contemplating incessantly in the car, uncertain about whether he should engage in peace negotiations with the Nazis or persist in resisting. At that moment, he observed the ordinary people walking on the road. He decided to get out of the car, walked into the Underground station, and solicited the opinions of the masses. Ultimately, he received the answer from the British public: continue fighting regardless of the costs. However, it is necessary to point out that this sequence was a work of fiction. Debruge from *Variety* notes that although Churchill in *Darkest Hour* engaged directly with the public, irrespective of race or class, his actual policies were far less progressive.⁵¹⁹ In reaction to this scenario, several Chinese users perceived it as engaging, while others regarded it as abrupt. For example:

⁵¹⁹ Peter Debruge, 'Film Review: "Darkest Hour"', *Variety*, 02 September, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/film/reviews/darkest-hour-review-gary-oldman-1202545711/>, [accessed 07 Nov 2024]

We should really look at how the other countries' main melody films grasp the rhythm and polish the script. Even the clichéd plot of "go to the masses" can be used in such a moving way without feeling pretentious. (Maoyan user)

The Underground section is said to be fictional. Although it helps advance the storyline in an emotional aspect, it still feels a bit strange overall. The history still needs to be true. (Taopiaopiao user)

This sequence also elicited attention from Western film critics. As Gleiberman from *Variety* states, 'It's the best scene in the movie, or the worst. Or maybe both. But what it does is to out "Darkest Hour" as an Old Hollywood movie in 21st-century clothing.'⁵²⁰ In a similar vein, Barber from *BBC* remarks, 'These hokey sequences, along with a few other clichéd ones, drag *Darkest Hour* down from a great film to a good one.'⁵²¹ It suggests that the main reason for the controversy surrounding the scene was that it was fictional, clichéd and stiff, with the intention of achieving what Debruge refers to as 'political revisionism' through Churchill's interactions with individuals of different classes and races.⁵²² Nevertheless, it is unsurprising that this sequence would attract the attention of many Chinese viewers, given that the message conveyed in this scene aligns with a renowned quote by Mao Zedong, the founder of the People's Republic of China: 'In all practical work of our Party, correct leadership must come from the masses and go to the masses.' Thus, 'come from the masses, go to the masses' (从群众中来, 到群众中去) becomes an important leadership method and working method of the CCP. Due to the widespread popularity of this saying among Chinese viewers, it was relatively easy for them to empathise with this particular scenario in *Darkest Hour*, as exemplified by the review from the Maoyan user that was quoted above. Regardless of whether Chinese viewers enjoyed this scene or not, it seems to have left a profound impression on them. Hence, unlike *Dunkirk*, the values represented in *Darkest Hour* did not appear to contradict traditional Chinese values, but rather revealed similarities to some degree.

⁵²⁰ Owen Gleiberman, 'The London Underground Scene of "Darkest Hour": So False, So Winning, So Slam-Dunk Oscar', *Variety*, 25 November, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/film/columns/darkest-hour-underground-scene-gary-oldman-1202622763/>, [accessed 07 Nov 2024]

⁵²¹ Nicholas Barber, 'Film Review: *Darkest Hour*', *BBC*, 21 November, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20171117-film-review-darkest-hour>, [accessed 07 Nov 2024]

⁵²² Gleiberman (2017)

In addition, this Maoyan user who was quoted above also classified *Darkest Hour* as a main melody film, as the film contained similar themes and values to Chinese films in this genre. The subjects covered in Chinese main melody films usually include the study of biographies of China's leaders and the commemoration of the history of the Party.⁵²³ *Darkest Hour* also depicts the story of a party leader and his contribution to the country. Combined with the scene of 'go to the masses', it is easy for Chinese viewers to categorise this film into the main melody film genre. However, this genre has struggled to attract a substantial domestic audience, particularly among younger generations.⁵²⁴ Although the Maoyan user's comment indicates that the propaganda message in *Darkest Hour* was more acceptable than that of domestic films due to its enticing plot, it is undeniable that its analogous subject matter may deter many Chinese viewers. A lack of interest in domestic main melody films may result in Chinese consumers being uninterested in this British main melody film, which could negatively influence its box office performance.



Figure 4.2.4 'Conversing with People in the Underground' Scene in *Darkest Hour* (2017)

⁵²³ Davis (2014), p.202

⁵²⁴ Chu (2022), p.10

4.2.3 British Aesthetic Yet Unappealing Genre

While *Darkest Hour* lacked the impressive special effects commonly seen in commercial blockbusters, it still received commendation from 15 Chinese users for its 'Audio-visual effects', all of whom expressed positive attitudes. They stated that the whole visual and audio experience of the film was exceptional, with particular mention of the soundtrack, cinematography, costume, make-up and setting, all of which were appropriate for the film's theme and atmosphere:

In terms of cinematography, the tone of the whole film is very consistent with the title. The techniques of light and shadow arrangement, light and dark interlacing, and facial lighting are skilfully used, and they are good at creating a classical charm. The long-shot scheduling of large sections is very ornamental. After the excellent acting, the script, soundtrack and photography of *Darkest Hour* are also extraordinary, and the whole is still an exquisite film. (Maoyan user)

The light and colour are like a classical oil painting, and the soundtrack, editing, and performance are all very natural. It is really beautiful. (Taopiaopiao user)

It suggests that, although the audio-visual effects in *Darkest Hour* may not serve as a selling point to attract Chinese consumers in the same way as they did in the action-adventure genre, their exceptional aesthetic characteristics did improve the viewing experience for many Chinese viewers. A comparable discussion was noted under the factor of 'British culture', referenced by six Chinese users in their reviews. Three users expressed positive perspectives, noting that the film's aesthetic style and classical atmosphere were typically British and fascinating. For example:

The style of the film is the British style of elegance, luxury and sophistication. (Maoyan user)

In other discussions regarding British culture in films, only one user referenced British humour, while numerous other users with neutral attitudes were merely attempting to familiarise other potential viewers with the historical context of the film. There are no additional discussions regarding British cultural elements. Although the British identity of this film was relatively apparent to many Chinese viewers due to its historical characters and events, as 13 users referred to Britain as the 'Country of origin' of *Darkest Hour*, the representations of British cultural elements in this culturally specific genre appear to be culturally specific as well. In other words, the culturally

specific narrative and themes in this film could overshadow the stereotypical British cultural elements, making it challenging for Chinese viewers to identify them separately. The examinations of the box office performance of *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour* in China partly support Higson's claim that selling Britishness—specifically through the production about Britain, British characters, and British history—is a reasonable but highly specialist business strategy for films.⁵²⁵ While some Chinese viewers did find these two films enjoyable, the narratives about British history in culturally specific film genres seem to lack attraction for most Chinese consumers.

Furthermore, a total of 13 Chinese users noted the 'Genre' of the film, 10 of them held positive attitudes. They regarded the film as superior compared to traditional biographical films:

As a biopic, this is not boring or stereotyped, it can even be called interesting. The laughter in the cinema almost never stopped. (Maoyan user)

It is a standard history film, except for the part on the Underground, I do not know if it really happened. What is rare is that it is not boring and has a lot of humour. (Taopiaopiao user)

It suggests that *Darkest Hour* not only met their expectations for the genre but also exceeded them due to its engaging and casual storytelling style. In contrast, the viewers who maintained a neutral stance regarding the genre primarily reminded potential consumers that this film might be hard to fully enjoy and comprehend:

This film has no special effects and is purely about characters' inner changes and a country's political struggles. It will not be easy to understand if you do not understand some of the history at that time. (Maoyan user)

This could further indicate that foreign biopics remain a niche interest in the Chinese market. According to the BFI survey, 32% and 20% of Chinese respondents stated that they enjoy watching historical films and biopics, respectively.⁵²⁶ It implies that these genres would struggle to captivate a large number of consumers in China. Furthermore, the BFI survey also reveals that 56%, 26%, and 22% of respondents, respectively, cited 'I cannot understand English', 'It is often difficult to understand the cultural references

⁵²⁵ Higson (2011), p.25

⁵²⁶ BFI (2022b), p.18

used', and 'The storylines are too difficult to follow/require too much concentration to enjoy' as the reasons for their disinterest in British film/TV.⁵²⁷ Accordingly, the high cultural specificity and extensive English dialogues in *Darkest Hour* might also deter many Chinese consumers who did not appreciate this type of film.

4.2.4 Use *Dunkirk* as Marketing Asset



Figure 4.2.5 Chinese Poster for *Darkest Hour* (2017)

In *Darkest Hour*, the renown of the director and actors, as well as the genre of the film, were challenging to captivate the majority of Chinese viewers. As the inherent factors of this film were difficult to produce sufficient market signals that were appealing, the Chinese distributors shifted their attention to external factors. Fortunately, the

⁵²⁷ BFI (2022b), p.9

backgrounds of *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour* shared the same historical time period. Chinese distributors took advantage of *Dunkirk*'s established fame, which was released three months previously, and used it as a selling point for *Darkest Hour* in China. This idea can be observed in the poster for *Darkest Hour* in China. As Figure 4.2.5 shows, at the top of the poster, there is a sentence that states 'Churchill at the critical time of Dunkirk' (丘吉尔在敦刻尔克生死关头). It establishes a connection between *Darkest Hour* and *Dunkirk*, while emphasising the essential function and significant contribution of the protagonist, Churchill, in the events of the Dunkirk Evacuation. By bridging the stories of these two films, Chinese distributors attempted to entice some Chinese viewers, particularly those who had watched *Dunkirk*, to watch *Darkest Hour*.



Figure 4.2.6 The Dunkirk Evacuation Scene in *Darkest Hour* (2017)

Similarly, 13 Chinese users mentioned *Dunkirk* in their reviews. Despite *Darkest Hour* being an independent film, I categorised the comments that mentioned *Dunkirk* into the factor of 'Pre-sold IP'. Most of the discussions around *Dunkirk* claimed that the storyline of these two films may complement each other, enhancing the comprehension of the historical context of that period:

The plot can be a perfect complement to Nolan's "Dunkirk". One is the perspective of frontline soldiers, and the other is the perspective of national policymakers. (Maoyan user)

The plot of this film is actually very simple, and it is a clean line. Perfectly connected with "Dunkirk", I suddenly understood the ins and outs of the Dunkirk Evacuation in

World War 2! Two films, one about war and one about biography. Two talented directors used different presentation techniques and chose different angles of events. They are actually telling the same battle and bringing about the same film-watching experience. Both of these two films exude a strong brilliance of humanity! (Maoyan user)

Some users stated that they were interested in watching this film because they had seen *Dunkirk*, and some stated that they were interested in re-watching *Dunkirk* after watching this film. Some recommended that the two films could be watched simultaneously for a better viewing experience. This suggests that Chinese viewers who found *Dunkirk* to be enjoyable could also be captivated by *Darkest Hour*, as it offered an alternative perspective on the Dunkirk Evacuation. Hence, linking *Dunkirk* to *Darkest Hour* seems to be a rather effective promotional strategy in the Chinese market. Despite *Darkest Hour*'s performance in China being lacklustre, this marketing asset was important to capture the attention of some Chinese consumers, thereby contributing to its box office revenue to a certain extent.

4.2.5 A Restricted Number of Screenings

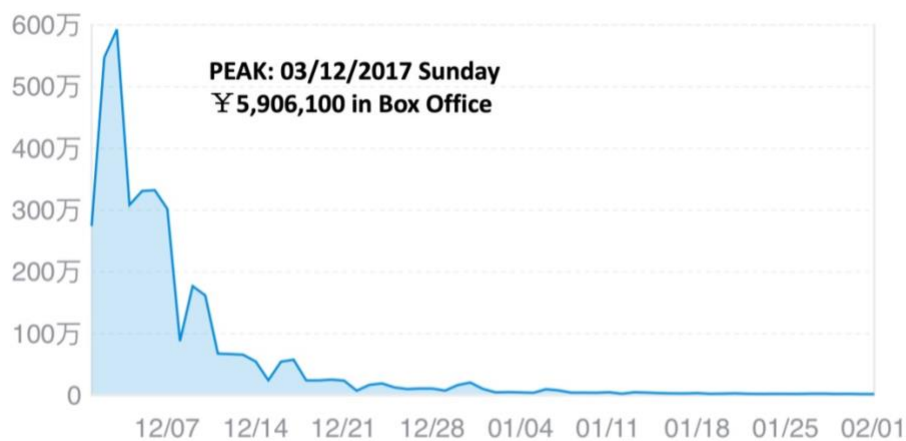
The box office income of *Darkest Hour* in China can also be constrained by restricted screening availability. As Figure 4.2.7 and Figure 4.2.8 illustrate, during its first week of release, *Darkest Hour* opened in about 4% of the total screenings, marking the lowest figure among the examined cases in this research, with its income accounting for just 2% of the overall box office revenue in China.⁵²⁸ In the following week, it may have benefited from its positive word-of-mouth, as it received more screenings, accounting for around 5% of the total screenings and contributing approximately 6% to the total box office revenue. However, in the second weekend of its release, it received less than 1% of the total screenings.⁵²⁹

⁵²⁸ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyfw.cn/movie/detail/05101992017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

⁵²⁹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Darkest Hour (2017)'

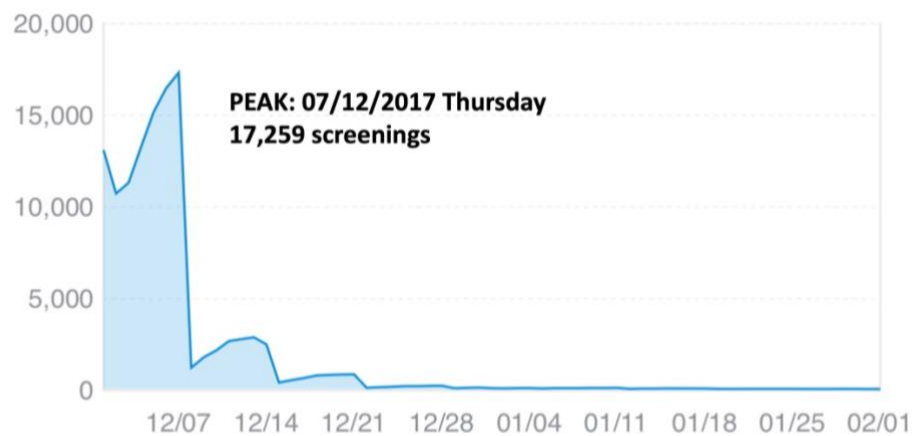
Chapter 4

Figure 4.2.7 Daily Box Office Revenue of *Darkest Hour* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Figure 4.2.8 Daily Number of Screenings of *Darkest Hour* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

A user remarked on the limited screenings of *Darkest Hour* in cinemas:

I am so glad I went to see this film. It is great! It is a pity that there are very few screenings scheduled for the film, but this is understandable when science fiction films are more popular today! (Maoyan user)

It indicates that science fiction films, or those with impressive special effects, tend to be preferred in the Chinese market. Conversely, films with serious themes and limited spectacle may struggle to attract most Chinese viewers. Another user also noted that the film's attendance was similarly limited:

There were 6 people in the screening. Three of them left after a while. My sister and I stayed. My sister thought it was not good and fell asleep. Only another girl and I

were watching attentively. I think only people who do not understand it will leave halfway and give bad reviews. (Maoyan user)

It shows that despite the exceptional performance and production quality, the theme and narrative of *Darkest Hour* lacked appeal to most Chinese consumers. In other words, the culturally specific story and characters of *Darkest Hour* contributed to the cultural discount that the film encountered in China and decreased Chinese viewers' interest in watching the film, which had a negative impact on its box office performance.

Conclusion

In summary, the primary factors that drew Chinese consumers to *Dunkirk* were the audio-visual effects of the war genre and the reputation of director Christopher Nolan. These factors contributed to the film's extensive screening allocation and substantial audience during its early release stage in China. However, the film's performance during its subsequent release stage was significantly affected by its divergent values and the unfavourable public response in China. Conversely, *Darkest Hour* garnered an overwhelming number of positive comments from Chinese viewers regarding its narrative and production quality. Nevertheless, the film's box office revenue was limited due to the challenges it faced in capturing the interest of most Chinese consumers during its theatrical run. Therefore, the results suggested that the culturally specific historical context and subject matter of these two British historical films had a detrimental impact on their box office performance in China.

The findings of this chapter corroborated the cultural discount theory.⁵³⁰ It offered further evidence that the films would have a reduced appeal in foreign markets, as viewers will find it hard to identify with the historical events, values and beliefs depicted in the films. Additionally, the results partially verified Higson's argument.⁵³¹ The results suggested that selling Britishness within the history film genre is a highly niche market in China, as the subject matter was hard to appeal to most Chinese

⁵³⁰ Hoskins & Mirus (1988), p.500

⁵³¹ Higson (2011), p.25

viewers. The findings also partially supported Jacques's Middle Kingdom Mentality theory.⁵³² This mentality was evident when some Chinese viewers called for a boycott of *Dunkirk*, but it was not mirrored in their comments on *Darkest Hour*. One potential explanation could be that values exhibited in *Dunkirk* conflicted with Chinese culture or Chinese interests. The box office performance of *Dunkirk* in China was undoubtedly negatively impacted by the Middle Kingdom Mentality.

The results of this chapter contributed to the study of cross-cultural box office performance. Rather than treating each film as a unique product, most previous quantitative research has used genre as an indicator for narrative categorisation. The results of this chapter indicated that the cultural discount that films of a similar genre might encounter may vary within the same target market. These two British historical films exemplified the diverse circumstances that films in similar genres but with varying budgets may experience in China. Although *Dunkirk* sparked debates in China, it still performed substantially better than *Darkest Hour* due to its high-budget production and renowned director. In contrast, *Darkest Hour* may serve as an illustration of the obstacles that foreign middle-budget historical films generally encounter in China: limited attention from distributors, exhibitors, and consumers.

⁵³² Jacques (2009), p.283

Chapter 5 The Performance of British Period Dramas

Introduction

Between 2017 and 2022, two British period dramas were released in China: *Downton Abbey* (2019) and *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022). I refer to them as *Downton Abbey 1* and *Downton Abbey 2*, respectively. The terms ‘period film’ and ‘costume film’ are occasionally used interchangeably. According to *Dictionary of Film Studies*, a costume film is ‘a film set in the past in which costume is central to the recreation of a particular historical milieu’, while a period film ‘is dependent on the ensemble of details associated with a particular historical period, including but not confined to costume.’⁵³³ Although costume/period films and the historical films discussed in Chapter 4 both depict stories from the past, costume/period films usually prefer personal stories and domestic spaces over grand historical narratives and specific historical events.⁵³⁴ As outlined in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the attraction of films in foreign markets may be diminished by the cultural discount and the diverse audience reception. Period dramas are also subject to substantial cultural discount in overseas markets because of their cultural specificity. The 2021 BFI survey about the viewing preferences of Chinese viewers for British film/TV reveals that Period/historical film and drama were the second and third genres that Chinese respondents ranked as the genres most associated with the UK. In contrast, the period/historical film and drama genres were preferred by 32% and 39% of Chinese respondents, respectively.⁵³⁵ This indicates that most Chinese viewers regarded these genres as distinctly British, and their audience in China was not substantial. The cultural specificity and limited appeal of British period dramas may hinder their commercial success in the Chinese market.

Downton Abbey 1 and *Downton Abbey 2* were spin-offs of the renowned British TV series *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2010–15; PBS, 2011–16). The series follows the aristocratic Crawley family and their domestic servants, residing on the fictitious Yorkshire country

⁵³³ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

⁵³⁴ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

⁵³⁵ BFI (2022b), p.18

estate of *Downton Abbey* in the 1920s. The story's flow is driven by the impact of several significant historical events, such as the sinking of the Titanic and the commencement of the First World War, on the characters' lives and British society. This lavishly produced period drama has garnered critical acclaim, garnering millions of devoted viewers around the globe, as well as numerous prestigious awards.⁵³⁶ The BFI survey shows that *Downton Abbey* ranked as the fourth most famous British TV series in China. However, it did not have a particularly high viewership, as 40% of the Chinese respondents had heard of the series and 25% had watched it.⁵³⁷ Although the two *Downton Abbey* films continued the storyline of the TV series, these two spin-off films generated the lowest revenues at the Chinese box office among the eight cases analysed in this research, with around \$3 million and \$2 million, respectively.⁵³⁸

This chapter argues that the box office performance of these two British period dramas in China was affected by the narrow audience of the original TV series and the limited appeal of the style of these films. Despite the fact that these two spin-offs could be appealing to *Downton Abbey*'s fans in China, the current size of the fanbase made it difficult to boost the films' box office sales. The narratives of these two films, which expanded upon the original TV series, may be culturally specific to non-fans in China, as they were unfamiliar with the background and the characters. Moreover, these films were dialogue-driven and lacked special effects, which diminished their appeal to Chinese consumers for watching in cinemas. Therefore, these two *Downton Abbey* films encountered challenges in captivating the interest of the majority of ordinary Chinese viewers, which negatively impacted their box office income in China. This chapter will be divided into two sections: the first will examine the factors that influenced the box office performance of *Downton Abbey 1*, while the second will analyse the performance of *Downton Abbey 2* in China.

⁵³⁶ Rosalía Baena, and Christa Byker, 'Dialects of Nostalgia: *Downton Abbey* and English Identity', *National Identities*, 17:3(2015), 259-269(260)

⁵³⁷ BFI (2022b), p.19

⁵³⁸ Box Office Mojo, '*Downton Abbey* (2019)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2932756997/>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3435090437/>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

5.1 *Downton Abbey* (2019)

In *Downton Abbey 1*, the Crawleys were informed that the King and Queen planned to visit Downton as part of their royal tour to Yorkshire. The film revolves around this extraordinary and thrilling royal visit, and it portrays how the family and staff prepared for and responded to a variety of incidents that happened during this event. As Higson argues, many films that depict the past of England are transnational co-productions, in which the national functions as a mark of distinction and ‘a marketable brand image’ in the global marketplace.⁵³⁹ The two *Downton Abbey* films were not exceptions. According to IMDb, *Downton Abbey 1* is classified as a drama and romance genre film. It was produced by the UK, China and US, with a production budget of approximately \$13 million. The production companies involved were Focus Features (US, a subsidiary of Universal Studios), Perfect World Pictures (China), and Carnival Film & Television (UK, a subsidiary of Universal Studios).⁵⁴⁰ Perfect World Pictures is among the most successful private enterprises in China in international film investment.⁵⁴¹ The official distribution notification of *Downton Abbey 1* in China indicates that it was jointly distributed by China Film Group Corporation (CFG) and Huaxia Film Distribution, and imported into China through the revenue-sharing scheme.⁵⁴² The annual quota for the revenue-sharing scheme is restricted to 34 films, the majority of which are blockbusters.⁵⁴³ The investment from the Chinese firm may have aided the success of *Downton Abbey 1* in navigating the fierce competition posed by the limited import quotas in China. *Downton Abbey 1* was released in China on December 13, 2019, three months after its release in the UK and the majority of European countries on September 13.⁵⁴⁴ The film’s box office performance may be adversely affected by its postponed release in China, particularly if it lacks special effects, 3D or any other technologies that require viewing in cinemas to obtain a better experience. Some Chinese viewers may have accessed illegal pirated versions of the film through the

⁵³⁹ Higson (2011), p.238

⁵⁴⁰ IMDb, ‘*Downton Abbey* (2019)’ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6398184/?ref=tt_sims_tt_i_1, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

⁵⁴¹ Zhu (2022), p.252

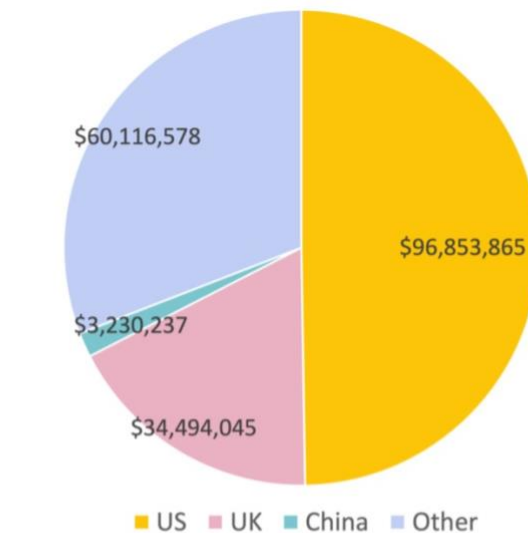
⁵⁴² Maoyan Pro, ‘Distribution Notification of *Downton Abbey* (2019)’, <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/1203825/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=264040>, [accessed 16 Nov 2024]

⁵⁴³ Su (2016), p.42; Cheung (2016), p.179

⁵⁴⁴ Box Office Mojo, ‘*Downton Abbey* (2019)’

Internet before its release in China, and some might have known the plot in advance, thereby diminishing their interest in the film. Eventually, *Downton Abbey 1* garnered approximately 630,000 cinema admissions and generated over \$3 million at the Chinese box office.⁵⁴⁵ Its cinema admissions and box office earnings ranked as the second lowest among the eight cases examined in this research, surpassing only those of its sequel. *Downton Abbey 1* placed 157th in China's annual box office ranking for 2019, which was also the lowest among all cases examined in this research.⁵⁴⁶ As illustrated in Figure 5.1.1, China contributed less than 2% of the film's global box office revenue, ranking it 10th internationally, the lowest share among all cases analysed in this research.⁵⁴⁷

Figure 5.1.1 Gross Box Office Income of *Downton Abbey* (2019) in Different Countries



Source: Box Office Mojo

The performance of *Downton Abbey 1* as a period drama in China was hard to assess due to the lack of relevant references. On the one hand, although domestic period dramas are common and popular in China, as the country has a rich history that includes a diverse multitude of dynasties, each with its own unique traditions,

⁵⁴⁵ Box Office Mojo, 'Downton Abbey (2019)'; Maoyan Pro, 'Downton Abbey (2019)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/jimovie/1203825/box?barTheme=264040&curTab=1>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Dengta Pro, 'Downton Abbey (2019)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=514968&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

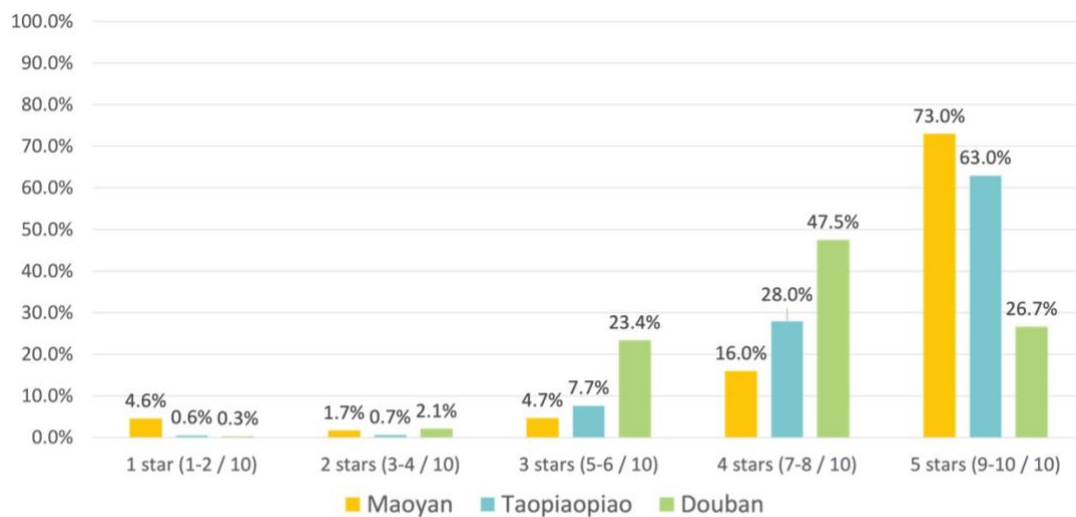
⁵⁴⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie?tab=1&secondTab=1>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]

⁵⁴⁷ Box Office Mojo, 'Downton Abbey (2019)'

costumes, customs, historical figures and events, they are primarily produced as television series rather than films. On the other hand, while period dramas are also produced in other countries, their distribution in China is infrequent. Nevertheless, the two *Downton Abbey* films' subpar performances, which ranked the lowest among all cases examined in this research, could suggest that British period drama was the least competitive British film genre in China.

Despite its lacklustre performance at the box office, *Downton Abbey 1* received positive ratings from most Chinese viewers. It has been rated 8.8 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.8 on Taopiaopiao, and 8.0 on Douban, by about 12,000, 27,000, and 102,000 users, respectively. Figure 5.1.2 displays the various ratings provided by Chinese viewers for the film.⁵⁴⁸ This may suggest that, even though the film failed to garner large cinema admissions in China, most consumers who watched *Downton Abbey 1* expressed a positive assessment of the film's production quality. It could reveal that the box office performance is not necessarily indicative of a film's quality.

Figure 5.1.2 Ratings of *Downton Abbey* (2019) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

⁵⁴⁸ Maoyan, '*Downton Abbey* (2019)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1203825?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Taopiaopiao, '*Downton Abbey* (2019)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=514968>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Douban, '*Downton Abbey* (2019)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/27002635/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

Table 5.1 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Downton Abbey* (2019)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Pre-sold IP	34	0	0	34
Plot	33	1	0	34
British culture	20	0	0	20
Country of origins	20	0	0	20
Characters in story	10	1	0	11
Audio-visual effects	6	0	0	6
Language	6	0	0	6
Genre	2	3	0	5
Places in story	5	0	0	5
Stars	0	0	0	0
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

Out of the 50 reviews that were sampled from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, 49 Chinese users assigned it a positive rating, and 1 user assigned it a neutral rating. According to Table 5.1, which outlines the frequency of factors that were mentioned by Chinese viewers, the prevailing sentiment regarding these factors was predominantly positive.⁵⁴⁹ While a few neutral comments did occasionally appear, none of the comments were negative. It indicates that, despite it did not achieve commercial success at the Chinese box office, most Chinese viewers maintained a generally positive evaluation of the overall quality of *Downton Abbey 1*.

5.1.1 Niche Appeal of the *Downton Abbey* Franchise

As Chapman points out, *Downton Abbey* could be deemed as one of the most successful period dramas of the twenty-first century and the entire history of British TV.⁵⁵⁰ ‘Pre-sold IP’, namely the *Downton Abbey* TV series, was one of the most frequently referenced factors in *Downton Abbey 1*, with 34 Chinese users mentioning it, all of whom held positive attitudes. Most Chinese consumers believed that this spin-off film maintained the style and standards of the original TV series:

⁵⁴⁹ Maoyan, ‘*Downton Abbey* (2019)’; Taopiaopiao, ‘*Downton Abbey* (2019)’

⁵⁵⁰ James Chapman, ‘*Downton Abbey*’, *Contemporary British Television Drama*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), pp.99-114(p.99)

As a die-hard “Downton Abbey” fan, after watching the film, I feel like I am back to the days when I was watching “Downton Abbey” four or five years ago. The film maintains the same high quality as the TV series, and the plot is more interesting. (Maoyan user)

The film maintains the level and excitement of the original TV drama, incorporating tolerance and innovation, tradition and innovation, and the past and new life. If you have watched the original TV drama, I strongly recommend you watch it and get back the feeling of watching the first episode of the first season. (Maoyan user)

On the one hand, it implies that the reputation and popularity of the *Downton Abbey* TV series could be regarded as one of the most effective marketing assets for this spin-off film to attract viewers in China. On the other hand, this also suggests that a considerable portion of *Downton Abbey 1*’s consumers in China were fans of the original TV series. This supports Cucco’s claim that using subjects, which stories and characters are already familiar to consumers, could guarantee a certain success for the film.⁵⁵¹ It is imperative to mention the reception of the *Downton Abbey* TV series in China. It has achieved remarkable ratings over the course of six seasons on Douban, with scores of 9.4 out of 10, 9.1, 8.5, 8.9, and 9.4.⁵⁵² This indicates that the series was perceived as high quality by most Chinese viewers. The consumers’ decisions to watch this spin-off film may be significantly influenced by the exceptional quality of the original TV series. However, it is challenging to estimate the approximate size of the *Downton Abbey* TV series’ fanbase in China. Chinese viewers were able to access the series through a variety of streaming platforms, including both legal and illicit websites. Although the first three seasons of this series were broadcast in dubbing on China Central Television’s Drama Channel (CCTV-8) in 2013 and 2014, no concrete audience measurement was identified. The BFI survey reveals that 40% of Chinese respondents had heard of the *Downton Abbey* TV series, and 25% stated that they had watched

⁵⁵¹ Cucco (2009), p.220

⁵⁵² Douban, ‘Downton Abbey Season 1 (2010)’, https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/4769314?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 20 Nov 2024]; Douban, ‘Downton Abbey Season 2 (2011)’, https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/5990367?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 20 Nov 2024]; Douban, ‘Downton Abbey Season 3 (2012)’, https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/6985315?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 20 Nov 2024]; Douban, ‘Downton Abbey Season 4 (2013)’, https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/6985315?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 20 Nov 2024]; Douban, ‘Downton Abbey Season 5 (2014)’, https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/6985315?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 20 Nov 2024]; Douban, ‘Downton Abbey Season 6 (2015)’, https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/6985315?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 20 Nov 2024]

it.⁵⁵³ The series' viewership in China appears to be rather restricted. As Lü contends, dramas rooted in Western history remain a niche market in China.⁵⁵⁴ Brzeski from *The Hollywood Reporter* also highlights that British TV dramas are highly popular among China's internationally educated elites. As the social class rises, the popularity of British shows in China also increases.⁵⁵⁵ It suggests that, although the original TV series could assist in the attraction of *Downton Abbey 1* to existing fans, it was just a small portion of the market and still needed to attract more ordinary viewers in China to improve its box office performance.

Nevertheless, given that the film's narrative serves as a continuation of the original TV series, Chinese viewers possessed differing opinions on whether individuals unfamiliar with the *Downton Abbey* series can grasp the film's various protagonists and concurrent subplots. Two users found the film to be somewhat challenging for viewers lacking prior information. For instance:

If you have not watched the "Downton Abbey" TV series, you may not understand this film version because there are many characters, and their personalities are directly related to the plot. (Taopiaopiao user)

It indicates that this spin-off film may be culturally specific to ordinary viewers in China. The six previous seasons of the TV series have already established the backstories and characteristics of the approximately 20 main characters in the story. The relationships between these characters and their motivations for taking action could be more easily understood by fans of the original TV series. Non-fans may find it challenging to comprehend and develop an interest in the stories and characters of *Downton Abbey 1*. This may be seen as an unavoidable circumstance related to spin-off films. On the contrary, another user who was a fan of the franchise encouraged potential viewers who had not yet watched the original TV series to watch this film:

⁵⁵³ BFI (2022b), p.19

⁵⁵⁴ Ke Lü, 'Can *Downton Abbey 2* Be a Hit With the Public?', *Global Times*, 20 May, 2022, <https://m.huangniu.com/article/484vKSXR00k>, [accessed 22 Nov 2024] [吕克, "《唐顿庄园 2》能有'大众缘'吗", 环球时报, 2022-05-20, <https://m.huangniu.com/article/484vKSXR00k>]

⁵⁵⁵ Patrick Brzeski, 'David Cameron Gives Chinese Premier Signed "Downton Abbey" Script', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 19 June, 2014, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/david-cameron-gives-chinese-premier-713049/>, [accessed 18 Mar 2024]

Although the film follows the plot of the TV series, it does not affect the viewing of the new audience at all. The film inherits the TV drama version's description of the details of British life in the last century, but it does not stick to the complex character relationships. It tells a brand-new story through the king's visit. In short, original fans can look back on the surprises in TV series, and new viewers can also enjoy an excellent visual feast in the film, which is worth watching multiple times. (Taopiaopiao user)

Meanwhile, two viewers claimed that although they had not watched the original TV series, their understanding of the film's story remained unaffected, and they were fascinated by the film and motivated to watch the previous TV series. For example:

The film is more soothing than imagined. Even if you have not watched the original British drama, there will be no problem at all. Highly recommended! I am going to watch the original TV series. (Taopiaopiao user)

Although there was some disagreement among *Downton Abbey* fans in China regarding the film's suitability for non-fans, the film was likely to be comprehensible and enjoyable for many ordinary viewers who were not familiar with the previous stories in the original TV series. It seems that this spin-off film possessed the potential to captivate ordinary viewers in China, and its narrative may be clear to narrate a captivating tale. However, the scenario of the Taopiaopiao viewer that was mentioned above may be relatively uncommon, as Chinese viewers who had not previously viewed the original TV series may still have a lack of interest in this spin-off film. Consequently, the box office performance of *Downton Abbey 1* may be adversely affected by the film's limited appeal to most ordinary consumers and the niche allure of this franchise in China.

5.1.2 Fan-pleasing Follow-up Plot

Another factor that was frequently mentioned was the 'Plot', which was cited by 34 users, with 33 of them expressing positive attitudes. Most Chinese viewers perceived the film's narrative to be quite lucid:

A fantastic film version that may be considered the closing chapter for most of the characters from the TV series. The primary and supplementary strings of the plot are distinct yet linked. The narrative is perfectly crafted. If there is too much narrative, it will be too long, and if there is too little narrative, it will be a bit boring. (Maoyan user)

This film is very good at telling stories. In such a short time, there are stories about nobles and servants, and the several lines are scattered but not chaotic. (Taopiaopiao user)

In addition, the term ‘happy ending’ was mentioned by many users, who maintained that the film had a heartwarming storyline for each character. Most Chinese fans were generally delighted to see the stories from the *Downton Abbey* TV series that they enjoyed being continued in this film, and were satisfied with the conclusions of each character. It supports the claim of Debruge, a film critic from *Variety*, that this spin-off film served as ‘a kind of fan-service coda, contrived to put a neat bow and tassels on the many characters and intrigues that had been seeded over six seasons of the British TV series.’⁵⁵⁶



Figure 5.1.3 Dinner Scene in *Downton Abbey* (UK, China, US: Michael Engler, 2019). Copyright of Focus Features, US; Perfect World Pictures, China; and Carnival Film & Television, UK.

Moreover, parts of the film’s plot also incited discussion and reflection among some Chinese viewers. This spin-off film expanded its focus beyond the nobles and servants of the manor to include a portrayal of the British royal family and their servants. The film’s historical context may resonate more readily with British local consumers, eliciting nostalgia and offering metaphors for contemporary reflection. As Layne highlights, for Britain, which had severed political ties with the European Union (EU) following the 2016 Brexit referendum, the royal visit depicted in the film served a

⁵⁵⁶ Peter Debruge, “‘Downton Abbey: A New Era’ Review: It’s Time to Say Goodbye, but Not to Everyone’, *Variety*, 25 April, 2022, <https://variety.com/2022/film/reviews/downton-abbey-a-new-era-review-1235238209/>, [accessed 19 Nov 2024]

comparable function in the real world as it did in the film's world. British viewers were encouraged to 'reconfigure their shaken sense of identity' in relation to the long-lasting institution of the Crown.⁵⁵⁷



Figure 5.1.4 Ball Scene in *Downton Abbey* (2019)

However, instead of associating the film's plot with the current social climate in Britain, Chinese viewers were more concerned with the values that were expressed through the plot:

The magnificent manor and castle, the exquisite and luxurious banquet are just the background of this scene, behind which lies the hesitation, confusion, loss, hope, bravery, responsibility..... These spiritual impulses are the only things that are free of class constraints! (Maoyan user)

A wonderful experience: seemingly a series of trivial things, but they vividly reflect a series of contradictions, trends of thought, questions, and thoughts in the entire society. (Taopiaopiao user)

Despite cultural barriers, the film's portrayals of societal transformation and self-exploration were able to resonate with some Chinese viewers. This suggests that, although the narrative was set in 1920s Britain, this historical backdrop did not provide significant comprehension obstacles for many Chinese consumers throughout their viewing experience. They tended to regard the historical representations as mere visual spectacles to create an exotic atmosphere or as essential triggers of dramatic plot developments. As Byrne claims, the *Downton Abbey* TV series could be described

⁵⁵⁷ Bethany Layne, "'Welcome to a New Era'? *Downton Abbey* in 2019', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 48:2(2020), 77-89(80)

as a 'soap-opera-style makeover of period drama,' which provides audiences with its history in the most easily consumable and palatable form.⁵⁵⁸ The soap opera style of the original TV series was effectively maintained in this spin-off film. Although the film was culturally specific, it did not appear to have had a substantial impact on the comprehension of the narrative among viewers in China. In contrast, there was a viewer who maintained a neutral stance on 'Plot':

From a film standpoint, the ensemble cast is very formulaic. There are too many characters, and each character is underdeveloped, showcasing only two positive and negative qualities. (Maoyan user)

This problem might be regarded as a prevalent challenge encountered by many films that are based on TV series. A TV episode can utilise multiple episodes to convey multiple storylines, but a film is limited to a duration of barely two hours. Articulating all the intricate storylines and characters concisely within the given timeframe is quite challenging. As D'Addario from *Variety* claims, in *Downton Abbey 1*, 'there's only time for the resolutions, even before the drama happens.'⁵⁵⁹ Li also brings up a similar statement to argue that the screenwriter's attempt to focus on a multitude of characters has resulted in a hasty plot in *Downton Abbey 1*.⁵⁶⁰ In addition, according to Mai, finding a balance between fans of the original TV series and non-fans is also a challenging task for adapted films' narratives. The disparities in storytelling methods and time constraints between television and film have resulted in the failure of many film adaptations of successful TV shows to attract consumers in cinemas.⁵⁶¹ While many Chinese viewers perceived that the diverse plots in *Downton Abbey 1* were competently conveyed, it is unavoidable that a considerable portion of the general audience may struggle to develop an interest in the narrative. However, if the plot of this film prioritises the viewing experience of non-fans who are not familiar with the

⁵⁵⁸ Katherine Byrne, 'Adapting Heritage: Class and Conservatism in Downton Abbey', *Rethinking History*, 18:3(2014), 311-327(326)

⁵⁵⁹ Daniel D'Addario, 'Film Review: "Downton Abbey"', *Variety*, 09 September, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/film/reviews/downton-abbey-movie-review-1203329044/>, [accessed 19 Nov 2024]

⁵⁶⁰ Fangping Li, 'The Relationship Between "Downton Abbey" and Film and Television Works', *Movie Literature*, 24:3(2020), 145-147(146) [李芳萍, "《唐顿庄园》与影视作品的间性关系", *电影文学*, 24:3(2020), 145-147]

⁵⁶¹ Kaochen Mai, "'Downton Abbey 2': The Curse Behind the Movie Adaptation of the TV Series', *Movie Talk*, 28 May, 2022, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/WhGcvuDAbfOZlHs0o_t_2w, [accessed 10 Apr 2024] [麦考陈, "《唐顿庄园 2》: 剧集改编电影背后的魔咒", *今日影评 Mtalk*, 2022-05-28, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/WhGcvuDAbfOZlHs0o_t_2w]

stories, it may easily disappoint fans. Consequently, as a spin-off film, its narrative is difficult to please a wide range of viewers, which may adversely affect its box office revenue.

5.1.3 Limited Allure of British Cultural Elements

In the global market, British period dramas have acquired a widespread perception of being distinctly 'British' and emblematic of British film and TV.⁵⁶² The British cultural identity of *Downton Abbey 1* was apparent to most Chinese viewers, as 20 users recognised Britain as its 'Country of Origin'. The film's fundamental allure was perceived by many Chinese viewers as its conventional and distinctive Britishness. The aesthetics of the film were also indicative of its Britishness, as evidenced by the comments regarding the film's 'Audio-visual effects' and 'Places in story'. For example:

In addition, many of the pictures are so beautiful and can be used as wallpapers, and the soundtracks are also nice. (Taopiaopiao user)

The pastoral scenery of old-style imperialism is truly beautiful with connotation! (Maoyan user)

Downton Abbey is, according to Baena and Byker, a visual representation of Englishness that is comprised of a variety of non-verbal signals, such as clothing, furniture, tableware, social manners, and landscape.⁵⁶³ While the aesthetic appeal of the audio-visual effects and places in the film may not serve as selling points to draw audiences to cinemas, these reviews show that the audio-visual effects of *Downton Abbey 1* effectively conveyed the essence of British pastoral and aristocracy, enhancing the film's British identity and providing an enhanced viewing experience for the audience.

The factor of 'British culture' was also referenced by 20 users, and all of them expressed a positive attitude. Some consumers expressed appreciation for the film's elegant and dignified atmosphere. As Liu and Yan state, the *Downton Abbey* series

⁵⁶² Claire Monk, 'The British Heritage-Film Debate Revisited', in Claire Monk, and Amy Sargeant, (eds.), *British Historical Cinema*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp.176-198(p.176)

⁵⁶³ Baena & Byker (2015), p.263

provides a luxurious and noble blueprint of British aristocratic life, thereby fulfilling foreign audiences' imaginations regarding British nobles in the past.⁵⁶⁴ Some users noted that the civility and decency portrayed in the film extended beyond the nobility to include the servants as well:

The core of the story is the glory of Downton. Even if they are serving the royal family, they must have Downton's own character. From the atmosphere of the manor, the core of the community, the care of the hostess, the pride of the male servants, maids, and chefs, as well as the confrontation with the arrogance of the royal family and the reflection on self-survival, they can all reveal the culture and elegance that the British aristocracy should have. (Maoyan user)

What impresses me the most is how gentlemanly and ladylike all these servants are, as well as how intelligent and dignified they are. (Taopiaopiao user)

This indicates that many Chinese viewers perceived the traits of elegance and the norms for gentlemanly/ladylike characteristics as typical British cultural elements. An additional aspect of British culture that was frequently cited by Chinese consumers in the film was British humour:

A film full of British humour. The servants' counterattack is so interesting. The anger is also suppressed and restrained. Various problems are solved calmly. Cool! (Taopiaopiao user)

The costumes are really well-designed, the storyline is not bland, and the British humour makes people feel happy. (Taopiaopiao user)

A parallel discussion about British humour can be found regarding the 'Characters' depicted in the film. This factor was mentioned by 11 users, with 10 of them expressing a positive attitude. Among all the characters, the grandmother in the film (Dowager Countess of Grantham, Violet Crawley) was the most frequently referenced. As Pötzsch argues, Violet, despite her background, age and political convictions, does not conform to the typical characteristics of a Victorian lady. Rather, she is modern, outspoken, assertive and dominant.⁵⁶⁵ Similarly, Baena and Byker also point out that while Violet is modern, her humorous tone provides viewers with a sense of irony in the

⁵⁶⁴ Binbin Liu, and Chenlu Yan, 'Creative Marketing of British Dramas and Their Inspiration-Taking "Downton Abbey" and "Sherlock" as Examples', *TV Research*, 06(2015), 78-80(79) [刘彬彬, 颜晨璐, "英剧的创意营销及其启示——以《唐顿庄园》和《神探夏洛克》为例", 电视研究, 06(2015), 78-80]

⁵⁶⁵ Janelle Pötzsch, 'Reframing the Dowager: Nostalgia in Downton Abbey', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 51:3(2023), 146-154(151)

preservation of what appears to be ‘old British ways.’⁵⁶⁶ Many Chinese consumers also liked her wit and sharp tongue:

I like everyone in the film, especially the old lady, who always has a sharp tongue.
(Maoyan user)

My favourite is the old countess, who is stubborn but protects the family and is always arrogant. When I go home, I want to excerpt all the old lady’s golden quotes. It is like “Grandma teaches you how to be a good person.” (Taopiaopiao user)

It seems that the character’s intelligence and sharp tongue contributed to the humorous components of this dialogue-heavy film in many scenes. This might suggest that the satirical implications of some of what Violet said in the film can be understood cross-culturally by certain Chinese consumers. According to Tirtaine and Augros, as well as Diffrient, British humour that is based on language would be culturally specific in the global market, which could reduce its allure for international audiences due to the lack of common cultural references.⁵⁶⁷ However, it is evident from these Chinese viewers’ comments that they found the humour in the film to be amusing when it related to concepts that they could grasp. This finding seems to contradict Chen and Zhang’s argument that the appreciation of British humour among Chinese-English bilinguals can be affected by language, culture, emotions, and cognition.⁵⁶⁸ One possible explanation is that the primary audience for British TV dramas in China was internationally educated elites, who may also be the primary audience of *Downton Abbey 1*.⁵⁶⁹ They were relatively proficient in English and possessed a certain capacity to comprehend the ironic and sarcastic elements of the film. In addition, it is infeasible to assert that every Chinese viewer can comprehend all the British humour featured in this film. Dubbing and subtitles cannot entirely ensure that the original language-based humour is conveyed precisely to Chinese viewers due to the linguistic barrier. Cultural discount is unavoidable.

⁵⁶⁶ Baena & Byker (2015), p.264

⁵⁶⁷ Tirtaine & Augros (2015), p.52; Diffrient (2020), p.46

⁵⁶⁸ Chen & Zhang (2023), p.15-17

⁵⁶⁹ Brzeski (2014)



Figure 5.1.5 The Image of Violet Crawley in *Downton Abbey* (2019)

However, the British cultural elements portrayed in films may not be widely appreciated in China. According to the BFI's survey, 44% of Chinese respondents selected 'I don't have any interest in the UK' as the reason for their lack of interest in British film/TV, while 26% selected 'It is often difficult to understand the cultural references used'⁵⁷⁰ This may imply that an interest in British culture and Britain was a niche market in China. It substantiates Higson's claim that selling Britishness is a viable but specialist business strategy for British films in global markets.⁵⁷¹ In comparison to American, Japanese and Korean cultures, British culture has not experienced a significant influx of cultural products in China. As revealed by the BFI survey, 37%, 21%, 18%, and 16% of Chinese respondents, respectively, selected 'Don't often hear about them/not all that aware of them', 'I just don't know much about British film or television', 'I wouldn't know where to access television programmes from the UK', and 'Poor accessibility in my country' as the reasons they were uninterested in British films/TV.⁵⁷² It suggests that the Chinese people were not widely familiar with British cultural products, which may hinder the cultivation of their interest in British film/TV. Hence, the British cultural elements that were depicted in *Downton Abbey 1* might be hard to attract most ordinary viewers in China, which could negatively influence the film's box office performance.

⁵⁷⁰ BFI (2022b), p.9

⁵⁷¹ Higson (2011), p.25

⁵⁷² BFI (2022b), p.9

5.1.4 Unattractive Dialogue-Driven Film Genre

In addition, the style and genre of *Downton Abbey 1* may have contributed to its failure to attract a significant number of Chinese viewers. ‘Language’ was mentioned by 6 Chinese users, all of whom maintained a positive attitude. For example:

Even a person with poor English can watch it very interestingly. It has accompanied me in my English learning for many years, and I love this singing-like British accent. (Maoyan user)

Elegant British accent. I will always love “Downton Abbey”. (Taopiaopiao user)

As previously mentioned, the main audience for British TV dramas in China is composed of internationally educated elites, who possess a high proficiency in English, enabling them to follow the extensive English dialogues.⁵⁷³ These reviews also reveal that many viewers were proficient in English and enjoyed the British accent that was featured in *Downton Abbey 1* and the original TV series. This finding corresponds to the result of the BFI survey, which found that 21% of Chinese respondents chose ‘I like listening to the different British accents’ as a reason for their interest in British film/TV.⁵⁷⁴ On the contrary, the lack of interest in *Downton Abbey 1* among many Chinese consumers may also be attributed to language barriers, as a significant proportion of Chinese viewers were not proficient in English. According to the BFI survey, ‘I cannot understand English’ was the primary reason for Chinese consumers’ lack of interest in British film/TV, as noted by 56% of respondents. However, the most distinctive attribute of British film/TV for Chinese consumers was perceived as ‘intelligent’, which referred to the connotations conveyed in each scene and the necessary concentration on the narrative. Meanwhile, 22% of Chinese respondents stated that they did not interest in British film/TV because ‘storylines are too difficult to follow/ require too much concentration to enjoy’.⁵⁷⁵ Despite the fact that Chinese consumers are perceived to have become accustomed to subtitled films because of the influence of Hollywood films, this does not necessarily indicate that they enjoy watching films with heavily English dialogue. The viewers with limited proficiency in the English language might find it challenging to follow the plot of *Downton Abbey 1*.

⁵⁷³ Brzeski (2014)

⁵⁷⁴ BFI (2022b), p.9

⁵⁷⁵ BFI (2022b), p.9, 15, 16

Thus, while some viewers enjoy the British accent in the film, the linguistic barriers could potentially limit the allure of *Downton Abbey 1* to most consumers, thereby adversely impacting its box office performance in China.

Similarly, five users mentioned the 'Genre' of the film, two of them expressing positive attitudes and the other three expressing neutral attitudes. Two users with a positive attitude found this genre to be enjoyable. One of them elaborated on the reason why this film resonated with him/her but not with his/her boyfriend:

Give it 9 points. This film is classic but may not suit the tastes of some people. For example, my boyfriend fell asleep while watching it. He likes popcorn commercial films, but I like all genres of films. There are many characters in the story, and it is really necessary to gradually clarify the relationship between the characters. It is like an eloquently narrated song, and it takes a little patience to figure out the connotation of the story. The style is comparable to that of "Gone with the Wind", portraying inner power and character nuances. (Maoyan user)

This could further suggest that the film's cultural specificity and reliance on dialogue did not correspond with the interests of most Chinese consumers. It supports the conclusions of Kwak and Zhang, which suggest that the drama genre has a detrimental effect on the box office performance of foreign films in China.⁵⁷⁶ It is an undeniable fact that the majority of Chinese viewers have a greater inclination to watch popcorn blockbusters in cinemas that offer them an enhanced audio-visual experience, while foreign films that necessitate more concentration to follow the plot appear to be a niche interest in China. This may also serve as supplementary evidence to support Elliott et al.'s finding that films' box office revenues in China are substantially and positively affected by the enhanced format, namely 3D and IMAX.⁵⁷⁷ Many Chinese consumers may be discouraged from viewing this 2D film in cinemas and instead opt to watch it on streaming platforms through home displays, as the lack of spectacular special effects may not produce a significant difference from watching it on a silver screen. Similarly, three users held neutral views on the 'Genre':

In essence, it is not a film but more like a special episode of the TV series. (Maoyan user)

⁵⁷⁶ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135

⁵⁷⁷ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.88

The film itself is not really interesting. It is very much like the Christmas special episode of “Downton Abbey”, but it brings together all the actors, and the ensemble cast distributes everyone’s roles fairly. (Maoyan user)

It supports the claim of Felperin from *The Hollywood Reporter*, which states that ‘It’s a sufficiently knotty tangle of storylines that the film risks playing like a very fancy, extra-long stand-alone episode rather than a coherent, self-contained feature.’⁵⁷⁸ Several film critics also pointed out that producing this film version for viewers to watch in cinemas was unnecessary. For example, Loughrey from *Independent* points out that *Downton Abbey 1* was merely ‘an extended Christmas special’. She notes that, despite the fact that fans may be content to enjoy the presence of their favourite characters for a few more precious hours, it would be difficult to identify any justification for why the ITV series felt compelled to transfer to the big screen beyond the money.⁵⁷⁹ Similarly, Bradshaw from *The Guardian* also asserts that ‘There are some films that you really have to see on the big screen. Not this one, though.’⁵⁸⁰ It may also be considered a significant factor that influenced the film’s box office performance in China, as many consumers might be hesitant to spend money on a film that can be watched at home with a similar viewing experience to that in cinemas. Therefore, the box office performance of *Downton Abbey 1* in China might be negatively impacted by its format and content, which were hard to encourage additional viewers to attend the cinema.

5.1.5 Limited Attention in the Chinese Market

Chinese distributors also mainly targeted fans of the original *Downton Abbey* TV series as the primary market for this spin-off film. The Chinese poster for *Downton Abbey 1* could indicate that the distributors were not exerting considerable effort to convince ordinary viewers to watch the film, as the poster was relatively simple. To denote its

⁵⁷⁸ Leslie Felperin, “‘Downton Abbey’: Film Review”, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 09 September, 2019, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/downton-abbey-review-1238184/>, [accessed 19 Nov 2024]

⁵⁷⁹ Clarisse Loughrey, ‘Downton Abbey Film Review: Nothing More Than an Extended Christmas Special’, *Independent*, 10 September, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/downton-abbey-review-film-michelle-dockery-hugh-bonneville-cast-plot-release-date-a9098521.html>, [accessed 19 Nov 2024]

⁵⁸⁰ Peter Bradshaw, ‘Downton Abbey Review—Ridiculous, Vanilla-Flavoured Fun’, *The Guardian*, 10 September, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/sep/10/downton-abbey-review-imelda-staunton-maggie-smith>, [accessed 19 Nov 2024]

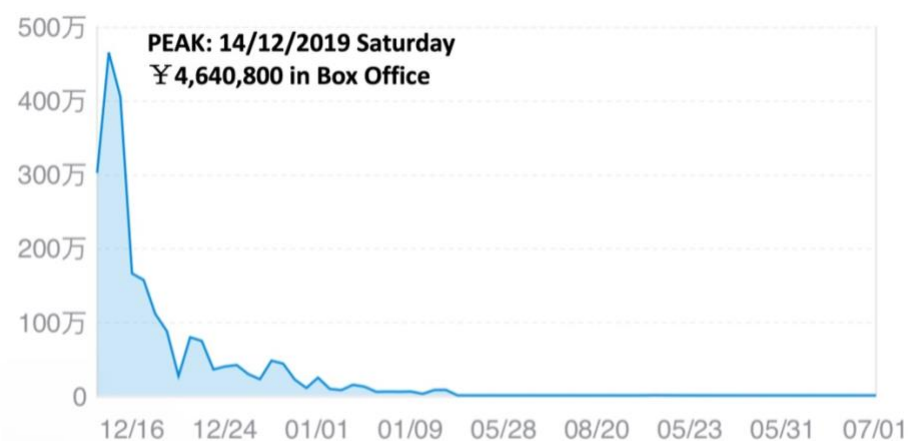
Chapter 5

franchise, the poster's central portion features almost all the main characters wearing costumes that correspond to the specific historical era depicted in the film, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.6. Their images were familiar to fans, but they were unlikely to be attractive to viewers who had not watched the dramas. Moreover, the poster features the release date and a slogan at the top that reads 'Warmly Welcome You' (恭迎尊驾) in a very classical Chinese style of writing to echo the historical setting of the film. There is no indication that the poster has implemented any marketing efforts beyond those already mentioned. In other words, it could imply that Chinese distributors might face difficulties in identifying other selling points for this film that could further captivate ordinary viewers in China, in addition to the allure of the original TV series.



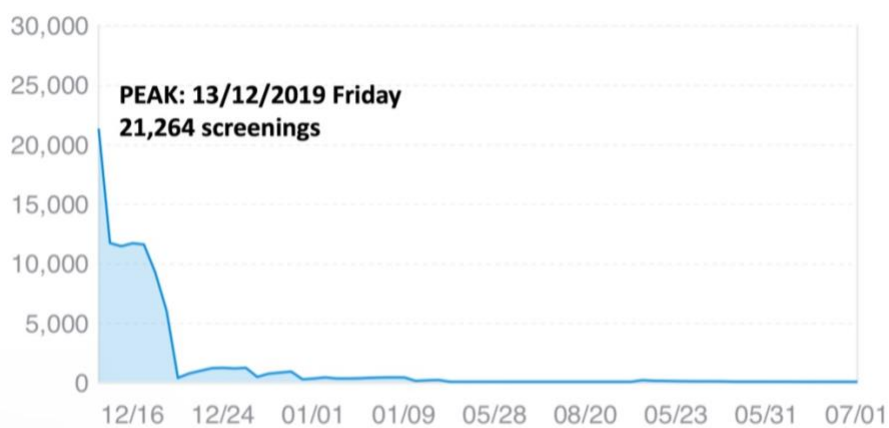
Figure 5.1.6 Chinese Poster for *Downton Abbey* (2019)

Figure 5.1.7 Daily Box Office Revenue of *Downton Abbey* (2019) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Figure 5.1.8 Daily Number of Screenings of *Downton Abbey* (2019) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

The quantity of screenings allocated to *Downton Abbey 1* in China also suggest that Chinese distributors and exhibitors exhibited low expectations for its box office performance. As one user observed:

I am surprised by the limited number of screenings that the film is scheduled for. Ultimately, it only remains a carnival for fans of the TV series. (Maoyan user)

Although jointly distributed by CFGC and Huaxia, *Downton Abbey 1* received only around 3% of the total available screening slots in its first release week, generating around 2% of the overall box office earnings in China. Figure 5.1.7 and Figure 5.1.8 illustrate a significant decline in screenings and income in the following week, with screenings comprising only 0.3% and contributing around 0.3% to box office revenue

in China.⁵⁸¹ The restricted number of screenings undeniably impeded *Downton Abbey 1* from attracting a substantial audience and achieving favourable box office outcomes. This result corroborates the findings of Litman and Kohl, Sochay, Chang and Ki, and Fetscherin, which indicate a positive correlation between the number of screens and box office revenue.⁵⁸² Additionally, a user observed that the number of admissions in one screening was restricted as well:

On a special day, I took a day off to watch this film, thinking that the cinema might be only me, but the ticket collector told me that there were three people. One person left in the middle of the film's screening, and I watched it with another girl. I suppose she also came to see this film because she had watched the TV series. (Maoyan user)

This could imply that the film encountered difficulties in drawing a large number of consumers, particularly ordinary viewers. The majority of those who were interested in watching the film tend to be fans of the original TV series. Thus, the limited screenings and audience could be considered as the primary reason for the disappointing box office performance of *Downton Abbey 1* in China.

5.2 *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)

Downton Abbey 2 primarily depicts the clash between traditional British aristocratic estate life and contemporary society following the arrival of a film team at Downton Abbey. Simultaneously, the old countess fortuitously inherited a villa in Southern France, forcing the family to travel to France, where they also encountered cross-cultural conflicts. This sequel is also categorised as a drama and romance film by IMDb. It was produced by the UK and US, with a comparatively greater budget of \$40 million. The production companies involved were Focus Features (US, a subsidiary of Universal Studios) and Carnival Film & Television (UK, a division of Universal Studios).⁵⁸³ The official distribution notification in China reveals that *Downton Abbey 2* was jointly distributed by CFGC and Huaxia, and imported into China via the revenue-sharing

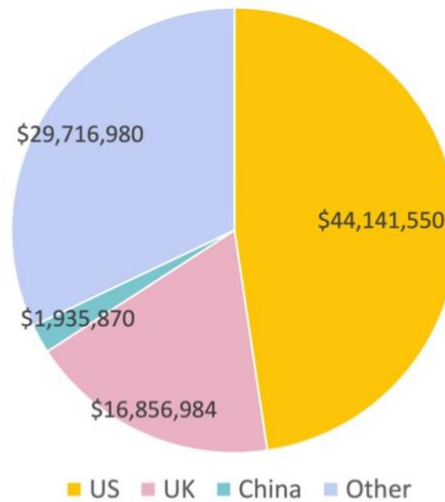
⁵⁸¹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Downton Abbey (2019)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyf.cn/movie/detail/07402272019?from=movie>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

⁵⁸² Litman & Kohl (1989); Sochay (1994); Chang & Ki (2005); Fetscherin (2010)

⁵⁸³ IMDb, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11703710/?ref=tt_sims_tt_i_2, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

scheme, which was identical to that of *Downton Abbey 1*.⁵⁸⁴ The film was released in China on May 20, 2022, approximately one month after its release in the UK and the majority of other countries on April 29.⁵⁸⁵ Eventually, this film generated nearly \$2 million in box office revenue and attracted approximately 373,000 cinema admissions in China, which renders it the most poorly performing film among all the cases examined in this research.⁵⁸⁶ Figure 5.2.1 illustrates that China's contribution to the film's global box office revenue was a mere 2%, placing it 7th internationally. This is the second-lowest proportion among all the cases analysed in this research, merely surpassing its predecessor.⁵⁸⁷

Figure 5.2.1 Gross Box Office Income of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022) in Different Countries



Source: Box Office Mojo

In comparison to *Downton Abbey 1*, this film generated roughly half the amount of box office revenue and cinema admissions in China. *Downton Abbey 2* was released during the COVID-19 pandemic, when China implemented a stringent 'Dynamic Zero COVID' policy.⁵⁸⁸ The opening and attendance rates of cinemas were greatly affected as a

⁵⁸⁴ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/1324996/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=594D36>, [accessed 16 Nov 2024]

⁵⁸⁵ Box Office Mojo, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'

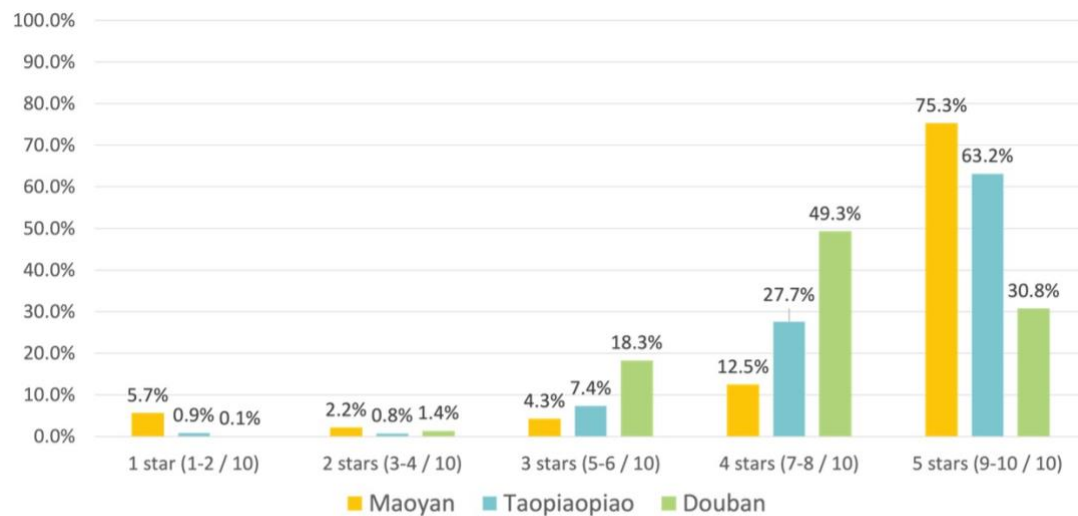
⁵⁸⁶ Box Office Mojo, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'; Maoyan Pro, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/1324996/box?barTheme=594D36>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Dengta Pro, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=1380854&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

⁵⁸⁷ Box Office Mojo, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'

⁵⁸⁸ Brzeski (2022b)

result.⁵⁸⁹ Moreover, the limited number of films released in China in 2022, owing to the epidemic, enabled its position of 93rd in China's yearly box office ranking for that year, slightly exceeding the ranks of its predecessor and *Darkest Hour* during their respective release years.⁵⁹⁰ It implies that *Downton Abbey 2* encountered a less competitive market environment than *Downton Abbey 1*. Yet, *Downton Abbey 2* still struggled to attract a large number of consumers due to its restricted appeal and the general sluggishness of the Chinese market in 2022.

Figure 5.2.2 Ratings of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

Like *Downton Abbey 1*, although *Downton Abbey 2* did not achieve significant box office revenue, it obtained positive ratings from most Chinese consumers. It has received ratings comparable to its predecessor, which are 8.7 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.8 on Taopiaopiao, and 8.2 on Douban, from about 5,000, 9,000, and 49,000 users, respectively. The various ratings that Chinese viewers have assigned to *Downton Abbey 2* are illustrated in Figure 5.2.2.⁵⁹¹ This suggests that, just like *Downton Abbey 1*,

⁵⁸⁹ Liu & Lu (2023)

⁵⁹⁰ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'

⁵⁹¹ Maoyan, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)',

https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1324996?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Taopiaopiao, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=1380854>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]; Douban, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/35008440/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

Downton Abbey 2 can be regarded as a work that failed to attract a large number of Chinese consumers but was praised by those who have viewed it.

Table 5.2 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Plot	35	3	0	38
Pre-sold IP	29	3	0	32
British culture	17	0	0	17
Characters in story	16	0	0	16
Country of origins	12	0	0	12
Audio-visual effects	11	0	0	11
Places in story	6	0	0	6
Language	0	0	0	0
Genre	0	0	0	0
Stars	0	0	0	0
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

Out of the 50 reviews that were sampled from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, 49 users assigned it a positive rating, and 1 user assigned it a neutral rating, which is consistent with its predecessor. As illustrated in Table 5.2, which summarises the frequency of factors that Chinese consumers mentioned, Chinese viewers had primarily provided positive feedback about *Downton Abbey 2*, with only a small number of neutral comments and no negative comments at all.⁵⁹² It indicates that, despite failing to succeed at the Chinese box office, most Chinese consumers held a predominantly positive assessment of the overall quality of *Downton Abbey 2*. In addition, the similar ratings and reviews of *Downton Abbey 1* and 2 suggest that, for most Chinese viewers, the quality of *Downton Abbey 2* seems to be on a comparable level with that of its predecessor.

It is worth noting that, because this film is a sequel to *Downton Abbey 1*, the characters, franchise and overall style remain consistent, while the plot varies. In general, Chinese viewers held a similar viewpoint when discussing these two films. Certain points made in the preceding section regarding the *Downton Abbey* TV series and *Downton Abbey 1* will not be redundantly reiterated in this one. Accordingly, in the analysis of each

⁵⁹² Maoyan, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'; Taopiaopiao, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'

factor in the subsequent section, similarities will be briefly noted, while the primary focus will be on the differences between *Downton Abbey 2* and *Downton Abbey 1*.

5.2.1 A Heartwarming but Not Exceptional Plot

The most frequently mentioned factor in *Downton Abbey 2* was the 'Plot', which was mentioned by 38 users. A positive attitude was exhibited by 35 of them, while 3 maintained a neutral attitude. Many Chinese viewers perceived the film's storyline to be captivating:

In short, I think the story of this film is grander and more diverse than the first one. Compared with the first film, which revolved around the visit of the royal family, this film uses the film crew's filming and the journey to Southern France as two lines of development, which also echo the title "A New Era". (Maoyan user)

The plot is very compact, and the two main lines are clear. The tropical atmosphere of the Southern French villa and the American casual romance of the film team are used to contrast the solemnity and rigor of *Downton Abbey*, and the birth of sound films is also paid tribute. It is really a very clever arrangement. (Maoyan user)

It appears that most Chinese viewers perceived the narrative as lucid, despite the presence of over 20 characters and numerous subplots. Additionally, although the expansion of the storylines outside Britain, the film generally maintained the narrative style of the original series. According to Rooney from *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Downton Abbey 2* is 'very much more of the same' as the original TV series without significant changes, which serves as a 'resolutely low-stakes comfort food' for viewers expecting further stories following six seasons of the series.⁵⁹³ This suggests that, although *Downton Abbey 2* incorporated certain novel elements into the plot, it remained fundamentally conservative, adhering closely to the narrative style of the original TV series. For Chinese fans, this approach continued to be appealing, as they mostly believed the plot to be satisfying.

⁵⁹³ David Rooney, "'Downton Abbey: A New Era': Film Review", *The Hollywood Reporter*, 25 April, 2022, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/downton-abbey-a-new-era-1235134390/>, [accessed 19 Nov 2024]



Figure 5.2.3 Film Team at Downton Scene in *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (UK, US: Simon Curtis, 2022). Copyright of Focus Features, US; and Carnival Film & Television, UK.



Figure 5.2.4 Southern France Scene in *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)

Additionally, certain Chinese viewers also reflected on the values and beliefs that were depicted in the film. The plot was described as ‘heartwarming’ and ‘touching’ by many users. Some of them stated that they were inspired by the film’s portrayal of the beauty of human nature and felt empowered as a result:

“Downton Abbey” brings me the daily life of a British aristocrat full of hustle and bustle around the 19th century, but in every detail, it is full of life philosophy that can be used today, persistence in the face of setbacks, and choices in the face of temptation. There are a thousand Hamlets in the eyes of a thousand people. In my eyes, “Downton Abbey” is an epic about life. I feel envious of their way of life, and it also gives me a lot of courage to face life. Nobles who have experienced the ravages of history still have the courage to face a different life. Why can we not fight for our own future, and why should we lie down and complain about the injustices in the world. Compared with never getting something, life will be tested more when you have it and then lose it. (Maoyan user)

A very comfortable and warm British film that shows the warm side of the British aristocracy, as well as the family's persistence and respect for women. The whole process is empowering without any surprises. In the end, the death of the old lady of the family should have been an extremely sad thing, but this wise lady calmly made the family feel relieved about her passing. She gave her family the enthusiasm for their future lives. It will be very powerful after watching it, and it is worthy of everyone's serious appreciation to complete self-salvation. (Maoyan user)

Like its predecessor, despite the film's narrative centring on British aristocracy and their servants in the 1920s, a historical context that was unfamiliar to Chinese consumers, the culturally specific background seems not impede their comprehension of the storyline in the film. Many Chinese viewers felt moved by the stories and qualities exhibited by the characters in the film, which prompted reflection on their own lives and instilled a sense of empowerment derived from the plot. In discussions on the themes of *Downton Abbey 1*, Chinese viewers were more concerned with the social and class issues depicted in the film. In *Downton Abbey 2*, their focus appears to shift to the virtues of humans portrayed in the story, such as fortitude, integrity and warmth. The differing viewpoints may pertain not just to the plots of the two films but also to the changes in Chinese society at the time of their release. Upon the release of *Downton Abbey 2*, Chinese viewers had endured over a year of epidemics and irregular lockdowns. They seem to be more inclined to seek reassurance in the heartwarming stories depicted in the film as a means of relieving their uneasiness. Thus, despite the film's unsatisfactory box office performance in China, most viewers appreciated its heartwarming story and uplifting values.

However, three Chinese viewers complained that the plot's coherence was compromised by the removal of the homosexual plot involving the male servant Thomas Barrow in the film's Chinese release version. According to IMDb, the original duration of *Downton Abbey 2* is 124 minutes.⁵⁹⁴ The film was only 119 minutes when it was released in China.⁵⁹⁵ The lack of a film classification system in China necessitates that all films be suitable for audiences of all ages when screened at cinemas. Any sensitive or inappropriate content will be required to be modified or removed during

⁵⁹⁴ IMDb, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)'

⁵⁹⁵ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'

the censorship process.⁵⁹⁶ Although a one-minute scene in which Thomas visited the gay bar in *Downton Abbey 1* was also removed in the Chinese release version, the coherence of the narrative seems to remain largely unaffected, as there were no audience reviews discussing this aspect.

Furthermore, three users maintained a neutral stance towards the 'Plot', which was slightly more than that of its predecessor. They claimed that while the narrative in *Downton Abbey 2* was not especially novel, it was still worth watching. For example:

Although the plot is a bit cliched, it is worth watching. Anyone who has followed this series of TV dramas will want to see it on the big screen. (Maoyan user)

It indicates that, even though the film's narrative may not impress certain Chinese viewers, it did not disappoint them. According to Halligan from *Screen Daily*, *Downton Abbey 2*, similar to its predecessor, resembles a TV Christmas special where all the familiar characters from the original series reunite but are left with no substantial narrative, as previous episodes 'have wrung them dramatically dry'.⁵⁹⁷ Nevertheless, although the plot of *Downton Abbey 2* may not be particularly satisfying for some consumers, it is evident that the *Downton Abbey* franchise effectively functioned as a selling point to attract existing fans in China.

5.2.2 Consistent but Reduced Franchise Quality

The second most frequently mentioned factor was 'Pre-sold IP', which was considered to be both the original TV series and *Downton Abbey 1*. This factor was referenced by 32 users, 29 of them maintained a positive attitude, while 3 expressed a neutral attitude. Similar to *Downton Abbey 1*, the reputation and quality of the original TV series continued to drive most Chinese consumers to watch this film. For instance:

The title "Downton Abbey" is a guarantee of quality. (Maoyan user)

⁵⁹⁶ O'Connor & Armstrong (2015), p.9; Geltzer (2017), p.158

⁵⁹⁷ Fionnuala Halligan, "'Downton Abbey: A New Era': Review", *Screen Daily*, 25 April, 2022, <https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/downton-abbey-a-new-era-review/5169761.article>, [accessed 19 Nov 2024]

Some viewers provided a detailed description of the essential attributes and characteristics that attracted them to *Downton Abbey*:

I will not say how well “Downton Abbey” is filmed. You just have to make your own judgment. But I will say that the slow life and slow pace of “Downton Abbey” are always a good medicine to adjust our tedious and fast-paced lives. As for whether the good medicine is bitter, it depends on one’s own opinion, so there is no need to say more. (Maoyan user)

As always, the core of Downton has all the beautiful parts of culture, such as etiquette, responsibility, love, diversity, respect, equality and pursuit. (Taopiaopiao user)

This finding aligns with the result of the BFI survey, which found that the top reasons why Chinese viewers were interested in British film/TV were ‘The quality of the storylines is generally good’ and ‘Production is often good’.⁵⁹⁸ It seems that, for many Chinese fans, the greatest appeal of the *Downton Abbey* series is the themes of etiquette, honour, responsibility and loyalty, which they can appreciate and embrace across cultural boundaries. This implies that the quality of the original TV series served as an effective selling point for *Downton Abbey 2* in attracting consumers in China.

In addition, it appears that a significant portion of the Chinese consumers for *Downton Abbey 2* was still comprised of fans of the original TV series. Although one Maoyan user stated, ‘For the plot, you have to watch the previous six TV seasons and one spin-off film first’, many fans claimed that the plot of this film did not pose significant obstacles to individuals who had not previously watched the original TV series and *Downton Abbey 1*:

This is a new story. It is also suitable for people who have not watched the TV series. However, there are many characters in the film, necessitating much effort to remember them. (Maoyan user)

Moreover, this film did draw in a few non-fans of the original TV series, who also found the film to be quite enjoyable. Even though they were not familiar with the previous stories, their overall comprehension of the plot of *Downton Abbey 2* was not affected:

⁵⁹⁸ BFI (2022b), p.9

Although I have not watched the TV series, this plot is completely comprehensible and integrally. (Maoyan user)

Nevertheless, similar to its predecessor, the small proportion of reviews from non-fan indicates that these two spin-offs still struggled to captivate the attention of Chinese consumers who had not viewed the original TV series.

Conversely, three users maintained a neutral stance and claimed that the quality of this film was slightly inferior to that of the original TV series and *Downton Abbey 1*, but it was still worth watching. For instance:

After all, the TV series is so wonderful that it is difficult for this film to compare with it. However, the original cast is starring, and the scene is still very Downton Abbey-style. All of this is destined to ensure that the basic style of this film will not be bad. (Maoyan user)

It seems that Chinese viewers still regarded *Downton Abbey 2* as a pleasing spin-off film that basically fulfilled their expectations about the franchise. The marginally weakened production quality of this sequel appears to be acceptable to these consumers, as they appreciated the continuous narratives about the fictional aristocratic family that this franchise had established. However, the increased number of neutral reviews on 'Plot' and 'Pre-sold IP' in *Downton Abbey 2* compared to those in *Downton Abbey 1* indicates that many Chinese viewers perceived the overall narrative and quality of this sequel to be slightly inferior to that of the first film. In addition to the negative effects of the pandemic, this may serve as an additional plausible explanation for the fact that *Downton Abbey 2*'s cinema admissions and box office revenues were only approximately half that of *Downton Abbey 1*.

5.2.3 Quintessential Britishness but Not Universally Appealing

In contrast to the previous *Downton Abbey* series, the narrative of *Downton Abbey 2* encompassed southern France, providing an apparent comparison with British culture. The factor of 'Country of origin' was noted by 12 users, which indicates that the British cultural identity of *Downton Abbey 2* was readily apparent to Chinese viewers. The film's 'British culture' was referenced by 17 users, all of whom expressed positive

attitudes. Similarly to *Downton Abbey 1*, 'elegance' was the most frequently used term by Chinese viewers when discussing British cultural elements in this film:

Gorgeous costumes that are dazzling, elegant aristocratic atmosphere, and warm family affection. (Maoyan user)

It suggests that the label of British elegance can be considered a selling point that has continually captivated Chinese consumers to watch the *Downton Abbey* series. Another cultural element that Chinese viewers mentioned was still 'British humour'. Contrary to the extensive discussion in *Downton Abbey 1*, this aspect was only addressed by two users in *Downton Abbey 2*. For instance:

An occasional bit of British humour that can make the whole room laugh. (Maoyan user)

This finding also appears to contradict Chen and Zhang's argument that the appreciation of British humour among Chinese-English bilinguals can be influenced by language, culture, emotions, and cognition.⁵⁹⁹ One potential explanation, as previously mentioned, is that the franchise's primary audience consisted of internationally educated elites in China who were relatively proficient in English.⁶⁰⁰ However, the findings of *Downton Abbey 1* and 2 indicate that, despite the cultural specificity of language-based British humour, it is not entirely inaccessible to certain Chinese viewers, particularly those who possess proficiency in English. In addition, these British cultural elements could also be observed in the discussion under the factor of 'Character'. A total of 16 users mentioned this factor, with all of them expressing a positive attitude. The grandmother character (Violet) in this film, like that in *Downton Abbey 1*, continued to be highly appealing to many Chinese viewers, as mentioned by 11 users. For example:

In fact, I think I like the old lady the most in this film. Almost all the funny things in this series are brought about by the old lady. Her sharp tongue hit the point every time, and her battle of wits with Matthew's mother was a joy to watch. And she has the pride of the aristocracy, as well as the consciousness and tolerance of the aristocracy. (Maoyan user)

⁵⁹⁹ Chen & Zhang (2023), p.15-17

⁶⁰⁰ Brzeski (2014)

Their discussion of Violet's character and qualities could serve as a reflection of the perspectives of Chinese consumers on British cultures, which were characterised by qualities such as modesty, restraint, kindness, calmness and sharp tongue. These characteristics were perceived as emblematic of British culture by most Chinese viewers, which differentiates them from other cultures. The findings corroborate Higson's assertion that banal symbols of British national identity can become the exotic signifiers of distinction in the global marketplace.⁶⁰¹



Figure 5.2.5 British Countryside Landscape Scene in *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)

Many Chinese consumers also enjoyed the portrayal of British aesthetics in this film. The film's depiction of the aristocratic lifestyle and the picturesque British countryside landscape was praised by 6 users who referenced the 'Places' and 11 users who mentioned the 'Audio-visual effects'. For instance:

The film is so beautiful! Everything is so perfect! The music is beautiful, the scenery is beautiful, the costumes of the characters are beautiful, the architecture is beautiful! Especially the beauty of the aristocratic spirit! (Maoyan user)

These British cultural elements provided visual pleasures, which allowed Chinese viewers to perceive these symbols as spectacles rather than as cultural specificity that could impede their comprehension of the film. Yet, like its predecessor, it may be challenging to pique the interest of ordinary Chinese consumers in viewing this film if they have a lack of interest in British culture. While stereotypical Britishness is a

⁶⁰¹ Higson (2011), p.71

distinctive brand for British films in the international market, this research is insufficient to substantiate its strong allure for most Chinese viewers.

The results of *Downton Abbey 1* and *2* suggest that most Chinese consumers appreciated some of the merits of British culture depicted in these two films. There was no evidence to suggest that Chinese viewers interpreted Britain and British culture with superiority through the lens of the Middle Kingdom Mentality. Middle Kingdom Mentality is a concept introduced by Jacques to describe the enduring inclination in Chinese to believe in the universality, applicability and superiority of their culture over others.⁶⁰² One possible explanation might be that the primary audience for these two films was fans of the original TV series. They opted to watch these two spin-offs because they already appreciate the British culture and values shown in the franchise. Nevertheless, Chinese viewers may interpret the films with a belief in the universality and applicability of Chinese culture, as they identified a comparable reference within Chinese cultural frameworks. Some Chinese scholars and fans regard the *Downton Abbey* TV series as the British version of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (《红楼梦》), also known as *The Story of the Stone* (《石头记》). It is one of the Four Great Classical Novels of Chinese literature and has been adapted into highly acclaimed TV series.⁶⁰³ This work was also referenced by one Chinese user in the reviews:

There are many commonalities. It would be great if “Dream of the Red Chamber” could be filmed as good as like this. (Maoyan user)

Dream of the Red Chamber uses the fictional Jia family, an aristocratic family in ancient China, as its central axis to illustrate the Jias’ decline from their former pinnacle of prestige. Although both are about nobles and servants in a privileged family in the past who are affected by the changing times, *Dream of the Red Chamber* displays an overall tragic and lamentable tone. Chinese fans may draw parallels between *Downton Abbey* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, and the analogous storyline may elicit their empathy

⁶⁰² Jacques (2009), p.283

⁶⁰³ Zhuo Yang, ‘What Makes “Downton Abbey” Still So Charming?’, *China Movie Channel*, 05 March, 2023, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/k7TXTikO-61CHcNFYyljzg>, [accessed 10 Apr 2024] [杨卓, “是什么让《唐顿庄园》依旧如此迷人?”, 电影频道, 2023-03-05, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/k7TXTikO-61CHcNFYyljzg>]; Shengqiang Cao, ‘On the Expression of the Symptoms of the Times in the Film “Downton Abbey”’, *Movie Literature*, 12(2020), 141-143(143) [曹胜强, “论电影《唐顿庄园》的时代症候表达”, 电影文学, 12(2020), 141-143]

for the themes of *Downton Abbey*. However, this could also potentially impact the interest of Chinese audiences in the *Downton Abbey* series, as familiar domestic works have already told similar stories. Some viewers may find these comparable narratives presented within the British context interesting, while some may not be interested in these clichéd tales set in a historical background with which they are unfamiliar.

5.2.4 Limited Marketing to Attract Non-Fans



Figure 5.2.6 Chinese Poster for *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)

The Chinese poster for *Downton Abbey 2* is also relatively simple, suggesting that the Chinese distributors might not make a sufficient effort to engage the general public, similar to the situation with the poster for *Downton Abbey 1*. Figure 5.2.6 illustrates the main characters positioned at the middle of the poster, dressed in attire that

signifies the British period drama genre and its franchise. However, their image was only likely to resonate with fans of the TV series and may be unfamiliar to non-fans. Beneath the poster, the film's release date and the slogan 'The good show is about to begin' (好戏待启) are written. The slogan is unlikely to be effective in attracting casual viewers, as it is rather bland and does not properly convey the content or theme of the film. At the top of the poster, the line is displayed as 'The feast returns to the silver screen' (盛宴回归大银幕). It seems that the target audience of the marketing continued to consist of the fans of the original *Downton Abbey* TV series, as it merely serves to remind them that their beloved story is once again being presented in cinemas. It can be hard to find any conspicuous components in this poster that are designed to captivate individuals who are not familiar with this franchise. It suggests that the film's disappointing performance at the Chinese box office can also be attributed to insufficient promotional efforts.

5.2.5 Limited Screening Arrangements

Although it is important to acknowledge the market's sluggishness during the pandemic, which had a detrimental effect on cinema attendance and box office revenue in China, it is also undeniable that *Downton Abbey 2* faced difficulties in capturing the attention of Chinese distributors, exhibitors and consumers. As shown in Figure 5.2.7 and Figure 5.2.8, during the initial week of its release, it received roughly 8% of the total screenings and generated approximately 5% of the total box office revenue in China. During the subsequent week, it was only shown on approximately 2% of the screenings and contributed less than 2% to the box office income.⁶⁰⁴ Although its screenings were slightly higher than those of *Downton Abbey 1*, they remained the third lowest among the eight cases examined in this research.⁶⁰⁵ It is necessary to reiterate that *Darkest Hour* had the least number of screenings among the eight cases, accounting for about 4% of the total screenings in China.⁶⁰⁶ The limited

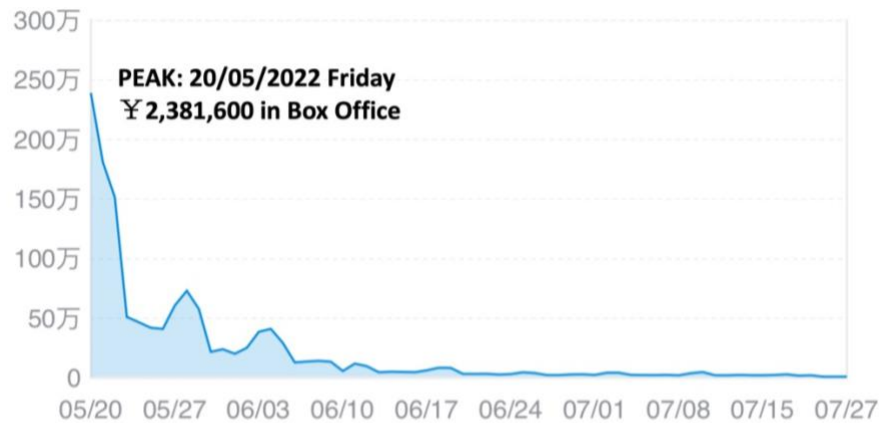
⁶⁰⁴ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/07400312022?from=movie>, [accessed 02 Apr 2024]

⁶⁰⁵ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Downton Abbey (2019)'

⁶⁰⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Darkest Hour (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/05101992017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 Jan 2024]

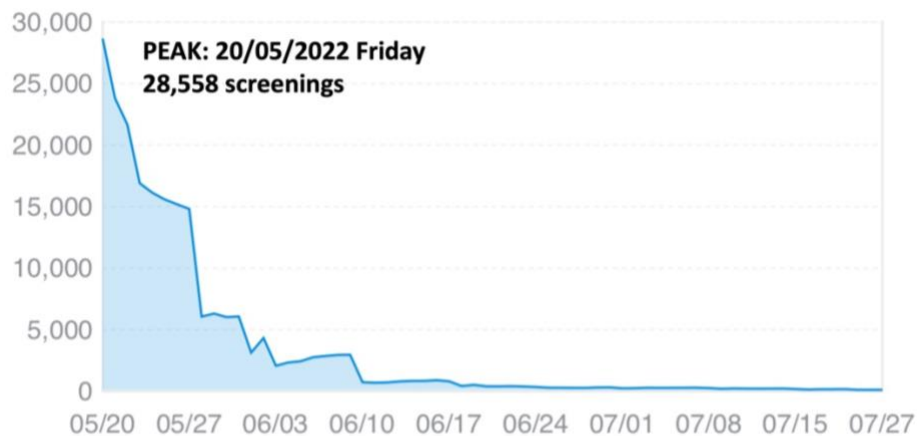
screenings of British historical films and period dramas may indicate that these culturally specific genres were hard to attract attention from Chinese distributors and exhibitors. This may be primarily attributable to their low expectations regarding the potential of these genres to generate substantial revenue in China.

Figure 5.2.7 Daily Box Office Revenue of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Figure 5.2.8 Daily Number of Screenings of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

In addition, the quantity of films that were released in China in 2022 was limited due to the pandemic. *Downton Abbey 2* had the opportunity to extend its theatrical run and continue to be screened until July 19, 2022.⁶⁰⁷ However, the extended release did not help the film obtain more screenings. It was allocated around 0.1% of the total screenings and earned less than 0.01% of the total box office revenue in China during

⁶⁰⁷ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'

the second month of release.⁶⁰⁸ Because of the restricted number of screenings, the film could encounter difficulty in attracting more Chinese viewers, which had a negative effect on its box office income.

Conclusion

To conclude, the high-quality narratives and representations of British cultural elements in these two films captivated many Chinese fans of the *Downton Abbey* series. However, the limited size of the fanbase in China made it difficult to increase their box office income. It was also challenging to pique the interest of non-fans in these films, as their plots were derived from the original TV series, which were unfamiliar to them. In addition, these two spin-offs lacked any additional beneficial elements that could attract the ordinary Chinese viewers beyond the influence of the original TV series. These two films relied heavily on dialogue and lacked special effects, which restricted their attractiveness to Chinese consumers and discouraged them from viewing these films in cinemas. Consequently, the box office performance of these two British period dramas in China was influenced by the limited appeal of the film style and the narrow audience of the original TV series.

The results of this chapter were in accordance with the cultural discount theory.⁶⁰⁹ It provided additional evidence that the films would have a diminished appeal in foreign markets, as viewers may not appreciate the style of the films. Furthermore, the findings were partially in agreement with Higson's claim.⁶¹⁰ The market for selling Britishness through culturally specific British films was exceedingly niche in China. The allure of the British cultural elements portrayed in these two films appeared confined to a restricted number of Chinese viewers who had a preexisting interest in Britain and its culture. The results also partly substantiate the Middle Kingdom Mentality theory.⁶¹¹ The findings did not suggest that Chinese viewers held a belief in the

⁶⁰⁸ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'

⁶⁰⁹ Hoskins & Mirus (1988), p.500

⁶¹⁰ Higson (2011), p.25

⁶¹¹ Jacques (2009), p.283

superiority of Chinese culture; yet, they did have a perception of the universality and applicability of Chinese culture. While comparable references within the Chinese cultural context may help Chinese viewers to better empathise with the stories of *Downton Abbey*, many Chinese consumers may be disinterested in these similar tales that were set in the unfamiliar British context.

The findings of this chapter contributed to the study of cross-cultural box office performance. The quantitative research conducted by Kwak and Zhang found that the drama genre has a negative impact on the box office revenue of foreign films in China.⁶¹² This chapter provided additional qualitative evidence to explain the challenges that foreign drama films may face in their pursuit of success at the Chinese box office. The results indicated that the genre's appeal to Chinese consumers can be diminished by the substantial number of English dialogues, the unfamiliar cultural background, and the lack of spectacular special effects. Despite being spin-offs of popular TV series, these two *Downton Abbey* films still encountered challenges in achieving success at the Chinese box office.

⁶¹² Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135

Chapter 6 The Performance of British Family Film

Introduction

Between 2017 and 2022, one British family film was released in mainland China: *Paddington 2* (2017). According to *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, family films usually feature characters of all ages, 'contain little or no violent or sexual content, are rated inclusively, have uncomplicated happy endings, and elicit feelings of uplift, comfort, and reassurance.'⁶¹³ As indicated in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the appeal of films in overseas markets may be diminished by the cultural discount and varied audience reception. The themes of family films typically make them accessible to a broader spectrum of international audiences, which could help them to experience less cultural discount and achieve a better box office outcome in the global market. However, the 2021 BFI survey, which examined the viewing preferences of Chinese consumers about British film/TV, reveals that 24% of Chinese respondents preferred the family film genre. This percentage was even lower than the period/historical genre, selected by 32% of respondents.⁶¹⁴ This indicates that family films are not a genre that is particularly popular among Chinese viewers, which presents challenges for British family films to achieve box office success in China.

The *Paddington* film series is based on renowned British children's books by Michael Bond, with the first book titled 'A Bear Called Paddington' published in 1958. Bond wrote over 20 Paddington books, and Paddington has become one of the UK's most beloved fictional characters.⁶¹⁵ In the first film of this series, *Paddington* (2014) (hereinafter referred to as *Paddington 1*), a little bear travelling from Peru arrived in London and got adopted by the Browns, who gave him the name Paddington. Paddington found, as an outsider, that London was not as he had previously envisaged, but he continued to treat others kindly and ultimately attained a joyful life in London with the Browns. *Paddington 1* captivated over 3 million cinema admissions, grossed

⁶¹³ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

⁶¹⁴ BFI (2022b), p.18

⁶¹⁵ Stuart Heritage, 'Hard Stares, Tea With the Queen and So Many Marmalade Sandwiches—65 Years of Paddington Bear', *The Guardian*, 13 October, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/oct/13/65-years-of-paddington-bear> [accessed 27 Dec 2024]

about \$17 million at the Chinese box office, and ranked 76th in China's annual box office ranking for 2015.⁶¹⁶ In *Paddington 2*, Paddington wished to buy an antique pop-up book that portrayed London landmarks as a birthday present for his Aunt Lucy. The villain recognised that the book contained clues to locate hidden treasure, so he stole it and framed Paddington. Finally, Paddington and the Browns succeeded in apprehending the villain, and they extended an invitation to Aunt Lucy to visit London on her birthday. *Paddington 2*'s box office revenue in China ranked fourth highest among the eight cases examined in this research, with around \$33 million.⁶¹⁷ The figure was roughly double that of its predecessor's box office revenue in China.

This chapter argues that the box office performance of this British family film in China was influenced by the restricted attraction of the family film genre and the fierce competition within the Chinese market. Due to the fact that most Chinese domestic family films are primarily targeted at children, this genre often struggles to pique the interest of Chinese adult consumers. It could pose an obstacle for *Paddington 2* to convince viewers beyond the family audience in China to watch the film. In addition, although *Paddington 2*'s quintessential Britishness, production value and narrative quality attracted a considerable audience in China, it faced stiff competition from the powerful Disney film, *Coco* (2017), at the time of its release. Direct competition from *Coco* undoubtedly posed a challenge for *Paddington 2* in its efforts to attract the attention of more consumers in China. Therefore, the contextual factors within the Chinese market had a significant impact on the box office performance of *Paddington 2* in China.

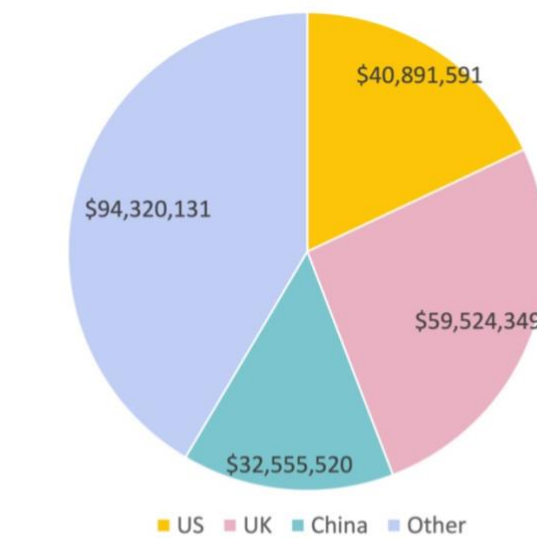
⁶¹⁶ Box Office Mojo, 'Chinese Box Office For 2015', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2015/?area=CN&grossesOption=totalGrosses>, [accessed 11 Jul 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Paddington* (2014)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr206787077/>, [accessed 10 May 2024]; Maoyan Pro, '*Paddington* (2014)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/78827/box?barTheme=401D40>, [accessed 10 May 2024]; Dengta Pro, '*Paddington* (2014)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=16751&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 10 May 2024]

⁶¹⁷ Box Office Mojo, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr99635717/>, [accessed 01 May 2024]

6.1 *Paddington 2* (2017)

Paddington 2 is classified by IMDb as an adventure, comedy and family film. With an estimated production budget of \$40 million, it was produced by France and the UK. The production companies involved were StudioCanal (France, an affiliate of Canal+), Anton (UK), Canal+ (France), Ciné+ (a French pay television channels broadcasting films, owned by Canal+), Heyday Films (UK), and Pin3hot (UK).⁶¹⁸

Figure 6.1.1 Gross Box Office Income of *Paddington 2* (2017) in Different Countries



Source: Box Office Mojo

The official distribution notification for *Paddington 2* in China reveals that it was jointly distributed by China Film Group Corporation (CFG) and Huaxia Film Distribution, and imported into China via the revenue-sharing scheme.⁶¹⁹ It was released in mainland China on December 8, 2017, about one month after its release in the UK on October 18, but nearly simultaneously with its release in most other regions, which occurred from late November to early December.⁶²⁰ Eventually, *Paddington 2* garnered nearly 7 million cinema admissions, generated about \$33 million at the Chinese box office, and

⁶¹⁸ IMDb, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4468740/?ref=ttawd_awd_tt, [accessed 15 Dec 2024]

⁶¹⁹ Maoyan Pro, 'Distribution Notification of *Paddington 2* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/343905/extrainfo/issuedNotice?barTheme=401D1D>, [accessed 01 May 2024]

⁶²⁰ Box Office Mojo, '*Paddington 2* (2017)'

ranked 65th in China's annual box office ranking for 2017.⁶²¹ China accounted for about 14.3% of the film's total global box office income, which placed it in 3rd place globally, as illustrated in Figure 6.1.1.⁶²²

To gain a better grasp of *Paddington 2*'s performance in China in 2017, it would be helpful to compare it to other imported family films. In 2017, many American family films were imported into China, creating a competitive market environment for this genre. The highest box office performance among family films in China in 2017 was achieved by American films *Coco* (2017) and *Despicable Me 3* (2017). According to IMDb, *Coco* was produced by Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studios, while *Despicable Me 3* was produced by Illumination Entertainment and Universal Pictures.⁶²³ These two films were positioned 11th and 15th in China's annual box office ranking for 2017, respectively.⁶²⁴ *Coco* earned over \$189 million, while *Despicable Me 3* grossed approximately \$158 million at the Chinese box office.⁶²⁵ These two films generated more than five times the revenue of *Paddington 2* at the Chinese box office. *Sing* (2016) and *Smurfs: The Lost Village* (2017) were the imported family films that achieved a comparative performance to *Paddington 2*. These two American films were ranked 60th and 69th, respectively.⁶²⁶ *Sing* was also produced by Universal Pictures and Illumination Entertainment, whereas *Smurfs: The Lost Village* was produced by Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Animation.⁶²⁷ *Sing* generated over \$31 million, while *Smurfs: The Lost Village* earned around \$25 million at the Chinese box office.⁶²⁸

⁶²¹ Box Office Mojo, '*Paddington 2* (2017)'; Maoyan Pro, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/j/imovie/343905/box?barTheme=401D1D&curTab=1>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Dengta Pro, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=221226&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking', <https://zgdyf.zgdyf.cn/movie?tab=1&secondTab=1>, [accessed 08 Feb 2024]

⁶²² Box Office Mojo, '*Paddington 2* (2017)'

⁶²³ IMDb, '*Coco* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2380307/?ref=ttco_ov_i, [accessed 10 May 2024]; IMDb, '*Despicable Me 3* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3469046/?ref=ttco_ov_i, [accessed 16 May 2024]

⁶²⁴ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'

⁶²⁵ Box Office Mojo, '*Coco* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2402243077/>, [accessed 10 May 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Despicable Me 3* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1982484997/>, [accessed 16 May 2024]

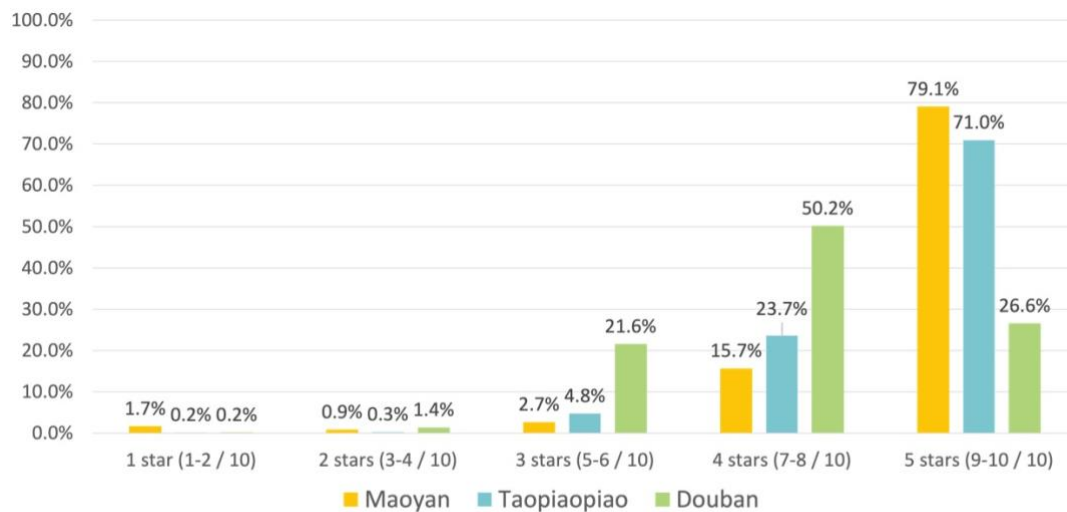
⁶²⁶ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'

⁶²⁷ IMDb, '*Sing* (2016)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3470600/?ref=ttco_ov_i, [accessed 16 May 2024]; IMDb, '*Smurfs: The Lost Village* (2017)', https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2398241/?ref=fn_all_ttl_1, [accessed 16 May 2024]

⁶²⁸ Box Office Mojo, '*Sing* (2016)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3642970629/>, [accessed 16 May 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Smurfs: The Lost Village* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr1982484997/>, [accessed 16 May 2024]

In contrast, *Paddington 2*'s performance surpassed that of *Cars 3* (2017), an American family film, and *Thomas & Friends: The Great Race* (2016), a British family film. They generated approximately \$21 million and \$3 million at the Chinese box office, respectively.⁶²⁹ The box office figures suggest that, although *Paddington 2*, a British family film, encountered challenges in achieving a comparable performance to certain American family films produced by major studios, it still achieved a comparable or even better performance to many other imported family films in China in 2017.

Figure 6.1.2 Ratings of *Paddington 2* (2017) on Maoyan, Taopiaopiao and Douban



Sources: Maoyan, Taopiaopiao, and Douban

In addition, compared to other imported family films, *Paddington 2* received a relatively high rating from Chinese viewers. *Paddington 2* has been rated 9.1 out of 10 on Maoyan, 9.0 on Taopiaopiao, and 8.0 on Douban, from about 193,000, 315,000, and 273,000 users, respectively. Figure 6.1.2 exhibits the various ratings given by Chinese consumers for the film.⁶³⁰ Although its ratings were inferior to those of *Coco* and comparable to *Sing*, it significantly surpassed the ratings of the other four

⁶²⁹ Box Office Mojo, '*Cars 3* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr659837445/>, [accessed 26 Nov 2024]; Box Office Mojo, '*Thomas & Friends: The Great Race* (2016)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt5563932/>, [accessed 26 Nov 2024]

⁶³⁰ Maoyan, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/343905/audienceRating?share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/movie/pages/user-score/index.html?sqr=dianying.dy.home.tabbar&showId=221226&spm=dianying.share.a1z2r.8728475&originsqr=m=>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Douban, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/26340419/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 May 2024]

imported family films.⁶³¹ The reception of *Paddington 2* was also more favourable than that of *Paddington 1* in China. *Paddington 1* has been rated 9.0 out of 10 on Maoyan, 8.5 on Taopiaopiao, and 7.9 on Douban, by about 140,000, 5,000, and 473,000 users, respectively.⁶³² Moreover, the ratings of *Paddington 2* on the two ticketing platforms, Maoyan and Taopiaopiao, were the highest of the eight cases that were investigated in this research. As noted by Mumford from *The Guardian*, following its worldwide release, *Paddington 2* had overtaken both *Citizen Kane* (1941) and *The Godfather* (1972) in terms of critical acclaim on Rotten Tomatoes, an American website that aggregates reviews for films and television. This website had officially proclaimed *Paddington 2* as the highest-rated film in the history of the site.⁶³³ Despite *Paddington*

⁶³¹ Maoyan, 'Coco (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/342068?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Coco (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=214258>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Douban, 'Coco (2017)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/20495023?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Maoyan, 'Sing (2016)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/344258?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Sing (2016)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=206438>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Douban, 'Sing (2016)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/26354572?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Maoyan, 'Despicable Me 3 (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/249900?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Despicable Me 3 (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=178416>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Douban, 'Despicable Me 3 (2017)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/25812712?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Maoyan, 'Smurfs: The Lost Village (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/78610?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Smurfs: The Lost Village (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=150740>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Douban, 'Smurfs: The Lost Village (2017)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/19899718?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Maoyan, 'Cars 3 (2017)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/342067?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Cars 3 (2017)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=208910>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Douban, 'Cars 3 (2017)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/25849480?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Maoyan, 'Thomas & Friends: The Great Race (2016)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1132555?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Thomas & Friends: The Great Race (2016)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=226985>, [accessed 01 May 2024]; Douban, 'Thomas & Friends: The Great Race (2016)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/26830596?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 May 2024]

⁶³² Maoyan, 'Paddington (2014)', https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/movie/78827/audienceRating?share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare, [accessed 10 May 2024]; Taopiaopiao, 'Paddington (2014)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/movie/pages/user-score/index.html?sqm=dianying.dy.home.tabbar&showId=16751&spm=dianying.share.a1z2r.8728475&originsqm>, [accessed 10 May 2024]; Douban, 'Paddington (2014)', https://movie.douban.com/subject/2998373/?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 10 May 2024]

⁶³³ Gwilym Mumford, 'Paddington 2 Becomes Best Reviewed Film Ever', *The Guardian*, 19 January, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/jan/19/paddington-2-becomes-best-reviewed-film-ever>, [accessed 02 May 2024]

2 has currently lost its status as the best film of all time on Rotten Tomatoes, the film is undeniably of exceptional quality.⁶³⁴

Table 6.1 Mentioned Factors in Chinese Audience Reviews of *Paddington 2* (2017)

Category	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Plot	45	1	0	46
Pre-sold IP	15	2	0	17
Characters in story	17	0	0	17
Country of origins	10	0	0	10
Genre	8	0	0	8
British culture	7	0	0	7
Stars	5	0	0	5
Audio-visual effects	4	0	0	4
Places in story	4	0	0	4
Marketing	0	0	0	0
Language	0	0	0	0
Awards	0	0	0	0

Sources: Maoyan and Taopiaopiao

All 50 reviews that were sampled from Maoyan and Taopiaopiao gave *Paddington 2* a positive rating. According to Table 6.1, which presents the frequency of factors mentioned by Chinese viewers, the overall sentiment was mostly positive in relation to these factors.⁶³⁵ While there was a tiny quantity of neutral comments, none of them were negative. The favourable responses about *Paddington 2* on these two ticketing platforms may also contribute to the film's box office performance. Like one user said:

Since I have not seen “Paddington 1”, I had no intention of watching this one. The overwhelmingly positive online reviews compelled me to do so. I am glad that I went to see this film, because “Paddington 2” may be one of the top three films for viewing experience this year. (Maoyan user)

It is evident that the positive ratings and reviews that were posted online served as word-of-mouth to attract more potential consumers in China. This finding is consistent with the claim of Li et al., who argue that positive reviews may enhance the attraction of a film.⁶³⁶ Regarding the other factors that influenced *Paddington 2*'s box office performance in China, a thorough analysis will be provided in the subsequent sections.

⁶³⁴ James Hibberd, “‘Paddington 2’ Loses Top Movie of All Time Honor Due to New Bad Review”, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 28 May, 2021, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/paddington-2-rotten-tomatoes-review-1234960772/>, [accessed 02 May 2024]

⁶³⁵ Maoyan, ‘*Paddington 2* (2017)’; Taopiaopiao, ‘*Paddington 2* (2017)’

⁶³⁶ Li, et al. (2022), p.3

6.1.1 Positive Storyline Empowers Viewers

The most frequently discussed factor in *Paddington 2* was the 'Plot', with 45 of 46 users expressing positive attitudes. It corresponds with the findings of the BFI survey, which discovered that the primary factor contributing to Chinese viewers' interest in British film/TV was 'The quality of the storylines is generally good'.⁶³⁷ Firstly, most Chinese viewers perceived the storyline as easy to follow. For example:

The plot is nicely constructed, both in terms of completeness and pleasure. The characters' relationships and story processing are constant, and the slightly absurd and exaggerated plot does not lack dissonance. (Maoyan user)

The plot is very compact, without any unnecessary dragging parts. The first section is humorous and very funny throughout. The middle section highlights the positive thoughts through the changes in the little bear's inner struggle. The final section kicks off the climax, which is exciting and cheerful. It ends with a comedy result. (Taopiaopiao user)

It seems that the storytelling ability of this film was satisfactory to most Chinese consumers, and they did not encounter any apparent obstacles for comprehending. The readability of *Paddington 2* in China may reflect the 'narrative transparency' strategy, as proposed by Olson. For example, *Paddington 2* employed circular storytelling, wherein storylines return to their initial state of balance; in addition, it featured archetypal characters such as heroes and villains, thereby keeping the narrative within the audience's familiar and comfortably anticipated framework.⁶³⁸ The transparent texts enabled Chinese viewers to relate to the content regardless of its origin, thus effectively enhancing the comprehensibility of *Paddington 2*. Secondly, although *Paddington 2* was set in London, the film's themes also resonated with Chinese viewers. The plot of *Paddington 2* was an uplifting tale that promoted values that compatible with Chinese culture, such as integrity, sincerity and kindness. Many Chinese consumers stated that the film's storyline was healing and heartwarming. According to Brown, the recurring formal characteristics of the family film genre encompass 'the reaffirmation of nation, kinship and community; the exclusion and/or

⁶³⁷ BFI (2022b), p.9

⁶³⁸ Olson (1999), p.18; Olson (2000), p.12

defeat of disruptive social elements'.⁶³⁹ Felperin from *The Hollywood Reporter* highlights that *Paddington 2* conveys a virtuous moral message that is especially fitting for the current unstable era. It encourages viewers to be civil, kind, and look for the good in others in a world where arrogance, insults, and prejudice based on appearances are on the rise.⁶⁴⁰ Many Chinese consumers were also impressed by this uplifting tale, which somewhat influenced their behaviour and perception. They remarked that the story motivated them to embody kindness and optimism, akin to Paddington:

Everything you encounter in life is not always smooth sailing, but no matter what difficulties and obstacles you encounter, you must use your positive energy, optimism, and positive attitude to influence the people around you and the world. (Maoyan user)

This film reminds us of every minute and every second how much kindness and innocence we have lost along the way. More often than not, we are not Paddington, but the neighbour who is unwilling to accept Paddington. (Taopiaopiao user)

The well-meaning, polite and forgiving characteristics of Paddington in this film motivated not only the characters (except for the antagonist), but also the viewers to behave with kindness, collaboration and integrity. Two lines in the film were notably emphasised by Chinese viewers in their reviews. The initial one was Paddington's reiteration of the line 'Aunt Lucy said: If we're kind and polite, the world will be right'. The second quote was given by Mr. Brown. While the Browns were rushing to Paddington Station to assist Paddington and defeat the villain, they were halted by a neighbour who disliked Paddington. Mr. Brown defended Paddington indignantly and pointed out his outstanding qualities, stating, 'He looks for the good in all of us and somehow, he finds it. It's why he makes friends wherever he goes.' These principles that were represented in *Paddington 2* were also synonymous with the concept of 'truth, goodness, and beauty' (真善美) in the Chinese culture. This term denotes the genuine and selfless nature of excellent behaviour, characterised by virtuous actions and language, commonly used to illustrate someone's moral character and

⁶³⁹ Noel Brown, 'The "Family" Film, and the Tensions between Popular and Academic Interpretations of Genre', *Trespassing Journal*, 2(2013), 22-35(29)

⁶⁴⁰ Leslie Felperin, "'Paddington 2': Film Review', *The Hollywood Reporter*, 26 October, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/paddington-2-review-1052097/>, [accessed 02 May 2024]

commendable qualities. The concept was also referenced by two Chinese users in their comments. It indicates that despite the fact that the Chinese viewers recognised the British norms and values depicted in the film, they were able to establish connections with similar principles within their own cultural context. It suggests that most Chinese consumers were able to embrace the values and beliefs depicted in this British family film without experiencing significant cultural discount.



Figure 6.1.3 Paddington's Famous Quote Scene in *Paddington 2* (France, UK: Paul King, 2017). Copyright of StudioCanal, France; Anton, UK; Canal+, France; Ciné+, France; Heyday Films, UK; and Pin3hot, UK.



Figure 6.1.4 Mr. Brown Defends for Paddington Scene in *Paddington 2* (2017)

The storytelling in *Paddington 2* also resonated with family audiences in China. Many users mentioned that they brought their children to see *Paddington 2*, and they claimed that the story of the film allowed not only children but also adults to be profoundly engaged. For instance:

It is a very thoughtful film. The plot is very suitable for young children, and the story is not dragged out. Adults can also be moved by it. It has a very pure and natural atmosphere. In this fiercely competitive real world, watching such a healing film can bring positive feelings to children. I really enjoy this kind of family happiness! (Taopiaopiao user)

In contrast, only one user held a neutral stance regarding the 'Plot' of the film, stating:

If there are any shortcomings, it is that the plot is a bit childish, the setting of the villain is a bit far-fetched, and it lacks the unique surprise of the previous work, which allowed you to perceive the large picture from the minute elements. (Maoyan user)

It seems that the user's dissatisfaction with the film's plot stemmed not from the perception that it was unenjoyable, but from the opinion that the narrative was somewhat 'childish' for adults to watch. A comparable discussion can be found under the factor of 'Genre', which will be addressed in Section 6.1.4. In addition, this user also perceived that this film lacked the element of surprise seen in *Paddington 1*. Similar discussions can also be observed under the factor of 'Pre-sold IP', which will be introduced in the next section.

6.1.2 Enhanced Quality Surpassed Its Predecessor

'Pre-sold IP' was the second most often cited factor in *Paddington 2*. Although the character of Paddington Bear was derived from a British children's book that was initially published by Michael Bond in the late 1950s, most Chinese consumers were unaware of the existence of these books. The 'Pre-sold IP' of this film was referred to as *Paddington 1*. *Paddington 1* was mentioned by 17 users, and 15 of them expressed positive attitudes. As previously mentioned, *Paddington 1*'s performance in China in 2015 was not particularly remarkable. Its tepid performance may also be partially attributed to the fact that most Chinese viewers were unfamiliar with the original British children's books, which lessened its appeal as a selling point for *Paddington* films in the Chinese market. However, *Paddington 1* received a favourable rating from most Chinese viewers. Many Chinese viewers articulated that their interest in *Paddington 2* stemmed from their fondness for *Paddington 1*:

I really like the image of Paddington Bear. I have been looking forward to this film for a long time. I watched “Paddington 1” again before watching “Paddington 2”. The two films fit together perfectly. (Maoyan user)

It is a series of films that I like very much. When I watched “Paddington 1”, I fell in love with this cute and principled bear. This sequel is still very good to watch. It makes people feel warm inside, and all the bad mood disappears! (Maoyan user)

This could indicate that the reputation and quality of *Paddington 1* were effectively turned into a market signal to encourage fans to watch *Paddington 2*. This result is in accordance with Cucco’s claim, which asserts that employing subjects that characters and narratives are already familiar with and favoured by the public could be regarded as a guarantee of the film’s success.⁶⁴¹ In addition, three users believed that *Paddington 2* was better than *Paddington 1*. For example, one user noted:

This sequel is really better than the first film, both in terms of rhythm and drama. The first film was bland and a bit boring, but this sequel is just right. It is a very cute fairy tale, focusing on the “truth, goodness and beauty” that are beautiful like fairy tales. Coupled with some well-designed jokes, beautiful art, and exquisite production... the whole film is very comfortable to watch. (Taopiaopiao user)

Two users maintained a neutral stance and voiced that, despite its high quality, *Paddington 2* did not surpass its *Paddington 1*. For instance, one user said:

Personally, I do not think it is as exciting as the first film. When I watched the first one, it was already fascinating at the beginning. I thought it was super funny, wonderful, and touching. It made me cry more than this one. This sequel does not make me have any strong feelings at first, but then I feel it was okay, and the laughter comes later. (Maoyan user)

Yet, as stated in the preceding section, *Paddington 2*’s cinema admissions and box office income in China were double those of *Paddington 1*, and *Paddington 2* garnered better ratings from Chinese viewers compared to *Paddington 1*.⁶⁴² This indicates that the majority of Chinese viewers regarded the quality of *Paddington 2* as superior to that of its predecessor. This is an uncommon occurrence for sequels, as ‘sequels rarely top their predecessors’.⁶⁴³ This finding is in contradiction to the conclusions of Basuroy

⁶⁴¹ Cucco (2009), p.220

⁶⁴² Box Office Mojo, ‘*Paddington* (2014)’; Box Office Mojo, ‘*Paddington 2* (2017)’; Maoyan, ‘*Paddington* (2014)’; Maoyan, ‘*Paddington 2* (2017)’; Taopiaopiao, ‘*Paddington* (2014)’; Taopiaopiao, ‘*Paddington 2* (2017)’; Douban, ‘*Paddington* (2014)’; Douban, ‘*Paddington 2* (2017)’

⁶⁴³ Josh Spiegel, ‘How “*Paddington 2*” Succeeds Where Others Have Failed’, *The Hollywood Reporter*, 13 January, 2018, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/paddington-2-succeeds-others-have-failed-1073419/>, [accessed 02 May 2024]

and Chatterjee, which suggests that sequels generally do not generate comparable box office revenues to their predecessors.⁶⁴⁴ Although there were varying assessments of *Paddington 2*'s quality among Chinese users, it is undeniable that the reputation of *Paddington 1* had a positive impact on the box office performance of *Paddington 2* in China. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily suggest that this franchise can be consistently appealing in the Chinese market, as the production quality and storytelling ability of *Paddington 2* also contributed to its performance at the Chinese box office. The box office performance of *Paddington in Peru* (2024) (referred to as *Paddington 3*) in China was substantially inferior to that of its two predecessors. *Paddington 3* was released in China on January 1, 2025, attracting over 1 million cinema admissions and generating almost ¥6 million, approximately \$1 million, at the Chinese box office. The Chinese box office data of *Paddington 3* was not available on Box Office Mojo at the time the thesis was written.⁶⁴⁵ It has been rated 8.6 out of 10 on Maoyan and 6.8 out of 10 on Douban by approximately 7,000 and 18,000 users, respectively. Its rating on Taopiaopiao was also unavailable at the time the thesis was written.⁶⁴⁶ The significant decline in box office income, cinema admissions, and ratings for *Paddington 3* in China implies that the acclaim for *Paddington 1* and *2* was insufficient to enhance *Paddington 3*'s box office performance, since the film's quality did not meet the heightened expectations of Chinese viewers. *Paddington 2* achieved the highest box office performance in the series in China. It indicates that while *Paddington 1* functioned as a marketing asset to attract existing fans, the superior quality and favourable word-of-mouth of *Paddington 2* allowed it to appeal to a broader demographic of Chinese family audiences beyond the fanbase.

⁶⁴⁴ Basuroy & Chatterjee (2008), p.803

⁶⁴⁵ Box Office Mojo, '*Paddington in Peru* (2024)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt5822536/>, [accessed 01 Mar 2025]; Chinese Film Box Office, '*Paddington in Peru* (2024)', <https://zgdyf.zgdyf.cn/movie/detail/07402092024?from=movie>, [accessed 01 Mar 2025]; Maoyan Pro, '*Paddington in Peru* (2024)', <https://piaofang.maoyan.com/i/imovie/1215138/box?barTheme=1D4040>, [accessed 01 Mar 2025]; Dengta Pro, '*Paddington in Peru* (2024)', <https://dtpro.taopiaopiao.com/app/ykfc-beacon-h5/app-main/box-office/detail/date.html?dataId=520780&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&hideTitlebar=true&transparentStatusBar=true&spm=a2o45.b3032016.1.1>, [accessed 01 Mar 2025]

⁶⁴⁶ Maoyan, '*Paddington in Peru* (2024)', https://m.maoyan.com/asgard/movie/1215138?userCode=2JWDmoKxE71yGqYZ38dqV6Ypl3Zk&share=iOS&utm_source=maoyan_appShare&utm_content=c_g42lbw3k, [accessed 01 Mar 2025]; Taopiaopiao, '*Paddington in Peru* (2024)', <https://m.taopiaopiao.com/tickets/moviemain/pages/show-detail/index.html?showid=520780>, [accessed 01 Mar 2025]; Douban, '*Paddington in Peru* (2024)', https://www.douban.com/doubanapp/dispatch/movie/27115004?dt_dapp=1, [accessed 01 Mar 2025]

The poster for *Paddington 2* in China could be perceived as an efficient approach for appealing to both family audiences and fans of the predecessor. As shown in Figure 6.1.5, the pop-up book centred on the iconic London Tower Bridge, which serves as a constant clue in the storyline, and the main character of the film, Paddington, are the primary focal points of this poster. The adorable image of Paddington is likely to engage not just existing fans from *Paddington 1* but also additional family audiences who, despite not having viewed the first film, perceive this film as appropriate for children.



Figure 6.1.5 Chinese Poster for *Paddington 2* (2017)

The images of the Brown family can be seen behind Paddington. Not only does their recognisable imagery play a critical role in captivating consumers of *Paddington 1*, but the representations of mother, father, daughter, son, and grandmother (who is actually Browns' live-in housekeeper) can be interpreted as standard family members, serving

as an explicit signifier of the family film genre to appeal to family audiences. The slogan ‘Hugs from bears in winter, provide warmth to people’s hearts (熊抱冬日，暖化人心)’ is located at the top of the poster, suggesting that the film’s plot is heartwarming and appropriate for both children and adults. Therefore, the exceptional quality of *Paddington 2* could attract not only fans of *Paddington 1*, but also family audiences who had not previously viewed its predecessor. This, in turn, had a positive impact on its box office performance in China.

6.1.3 British Culture Beyond Stereotypes

The film’s ‘Characters’ also received much attention and acclaim from Chinese consumers, as noted by 17 users, all of whom expressed positive attitudes. Paddington, being the central character of the film, was cited most frequently in their comments. For example:

I like Paddington very much. His kindness and cuteness make people fascinated. Because he can always see the shining points of other people, everyone is willing to be friends with him. He is silly, innocent, and loves everyone. My dream is to have a Paddington too. (Maoyan user)

I like this kind of happy ending. And I also like the innocence and kindness of the little bear, that is what we are missing now. It is not just children who have innocence, cuteness, and kindness. All adults have forgotten that we were also children once. It is rare to be able to retain that kind of kindness and innocence. (Taopiaopiao user)

Paddington’s charming bear look, along with his commendable virtues, substantially elevated his attractiveness as a character. Chinese viewers were inspired to reflect on their own lives because of Paddington’s virtuous characteristics. Moreover, the appeal of Paddington in the film was inextricably linked to the assistance of advanced digital technology. The *Paddington* films are live-action animations that combine real actors and locations with computer-generated characters. According to Chen, the film blurs the boundaries between live-action films and CG animation, allowing Chinese viewers to know the virtuality of Paddington, but are very willing to believe that the image of this bear is real.⁶⁴⁷ A similar argument is made by Liu, who claims that the advanced

⁶⁴⁷ Xuhui Chen, ‘Analysis of the Aesthetic Dimensions of “Paddington” From Multiple Perspectives’, *Movie Literature*, 6 (2018), 61-63(63) [陈旭辉, “多重视角下《帕丁顿熊》审美维度解析”, 电影文学, 6 (2018), 61-63]

digital technology in the film brings Chinese viewers a visual spectacle. A bear coming out of a storybook appears on the screen, blending perfectly with the surrounding environment and interacting smoothly and naturally with other real actors.⁶⁴⁸ The special effects in the film also received commendation from some Chinese viewers. All four users who mentioned 'Audio-visual effects' expressed positive attitudes regarding the factor. For instance:

The scene transformations are wonderful and dazzling, and the special effects are excellent from start to finish. (Maoyan user)

Paddington was not the initial contemporary adaptation of children's literature to combine CGI and live-action characters. Spiegel from the *Hollywood Reporter* states that other franchises, such as *The Smurfs* (2011) and *Peter Rabbit* (2018), also employed this technique. However, these films were met with predominantly negative reviews, despite having fans of the original materials. Spiegel claims that the *Paddington* films stand out in the family film market of recent years, which is dominated by Disney and Pixar, due to their distinctly British style.⁶⁴⁹ This implies that the distinctive Britishness of *Paddington 2* could also be regarded as a key selling point in the international market.

The British cultural identity of *Paddington 2* was comparatively apparent to Chinese viewers, as 10 users identified Britain as the film's 'Country of Origin'. The image of Paddington itself can be considered an explicit representation of Britishness. According to Dong's interpretation of Paddington in *Paddington 1*, the little bear is depicted as wearing a red wide-brimmed hat, a blue hooded duffle coat, and holding an old-fashioned suitcase in his hand. This attire is indicative of the typical British clothing and matching style that Chinese viewers are accustomed to.⁶⁵⁰ In addition to the British aesthetic represented in the image of Paddington, *Paddington 2* also represented various British cultural elements. The factor 'British culture' was referenced by 7 users, all of whom expressed positive attitudes. Some Chinese users

⁶⁴⁸ Junjie Liu, 'The Aesthetic Characteristics of "Paddington 2" From a Digital Perspective', *Movie Literature*, 18(2018), 144-146(145) [刘军杰, "数字化视角下《帕丁顿熊2》的美学特征", 电影文学, 18(2018), 144-146]

⁶⁴⁹ Spiegel (2018)

⁶⁵⁰ Jinping Dong, 'British Animated Films' Symbolic Presentation of Local Elements', *Movie Literature*, 18(2015), 100-102(101,102) [董金平, "英国动画电影对本土元素的符号化呈现", 电影文学, 18(2015), 100-102]

recognised the renowned symbols of British culture in the film, such as British gentlemen and British humour. For instance:

The whole film is full of British style. Although the protagonist, Paddington, is a bear from Peru, he looks more gentlemanly than any British people in the film. (Maoyan user)

In fact, in a country like the UK that maintains a typical calm surface, as long as a casual dry humour contrasts with the elegant appearance of British gentlemen, the comedy effect can be doubled with half the effort. (Taopiaopiao user)

These findings further indicate that Chinese viewers were more inclined to identify the most iconic characteristics of British culture in British films. This substantiates Higson's assertion that the most banal representations of Britishness are emphasised, exaggerated and foregrounded in British films intended for international circulation.⁶⁵¹ As Zou points out, in the global context, the *Paddington* films have successfully exported British culture, which particularly serves as a statement of the self-positioning of the British gentleman. The *Paddington* films represented that the British people hold important moral values, such as using proper vocabulary and behaving in a disciplined manner, showing respect towards others, and displaying bravery in pursuing progress.⁶⁵² Paddington's polite and proper attitudes and behaviours in the film effectively reinforced the stereotypes about the British gentleman among Chinese viewers. In addition, the user referenced above stated that the humour in *Paddington 2* was characterised by dry wit, which juxtaposed the classical attitude of British gentlemen, exemplifying a quintessential form of British humour rooted in satire of daily events. It supports the results of the 2022 BFI survey on international perceptions of UK screen content, which shows that international viewers described British humour as dry, dark, and quirky.⁶⁵³ Liu highlights another film featuring a bear as the main character, *Ted* (2012), which is an American comedy characterised by exaggerated, impulsive, decadent and erotic undertones. He claims that *Paddington 2* exemplifies quintessential British humour, which is hilarious and thought-provoking.⁶⁵⁴ The humour in *Paddington* and *Ted* may not be comparable, as one is intended for

⁶⁵¹ Higson (2011), p.71

⁶⁵² Bin Zou, "'Paddington' Series and British Culture", *Movie Literature*, 6(2019), 127-129(127) [邹斌, "《帕丁顿熊》系列与英式文化", 电影文学, 6(2019), 127-129]

⁶⁵³ BFI (2022d), p.23

⁶⁵⁴ Liu (2018), p.146

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family audiences and the other is not. While *Ted* is a comedy film that features a bear as the primary character, its humour contains numerous ‘adult’ elements that are not appropriate for children. Nevertheless, Chinese scholars and viewers enjoy comparing Paddington and Ted, possibly because of the lack of analogous iconic bear images in Chinese films and television dramas. These two furry bears, which were depicted in American and British films that were relatively well-known in the Chinese market, enabled Chinese viewers to experience and discern the differences between the American and British cultures they represent: Paddington embodies gentleness and tradition, while Ted exemplifies openness and individualism.



Figure 6.1.6 London Pop-up Book Scene in *Paddington 2* (2017)



Figure 6.1.7 London Tower Bridge Scene in *Paddington 2* (2017)

Moreover, as Liu highlights, following the perspective of the gentleman-like Paddington Bear, worldwide viewers can enter his world that is full of British style, tour

the entire London, and experience the unique British customs and practices.⁶⁵⁵ The representations of London landmarks in *Paddington 2* could also be indicative of the film's distinctive British style. It was also found under the 'Places' factor, where four users commented on the London depicted in the film, each of which exhibited a positive attitude. They maintained that the portrayal of well-known London landmarks in this film was an attractive London travel guide for them. For instance:

It is not so much a comedy as it is a perfect promotional film about London (look at how foreign city promotional films are shot). Thousands of words in the film are combined into one sentence: "I love London". (Maoyan user)

The inclusion of these renowned London landmarks might not only assist Chinese consumers in recognising the British identity of this film, but also appeal to Chinese viewers who were interested in Britain and British culture.

Furthermore, whereas *Paddington 1* illustrated Paddington's gradual assimilation into the bustling metropolis of London as an outsider, *Paddington 2* further highlighted the inclusive nature of London via Paddington's story. In the discussion about the 'British culture' in the film, some Chinese users also commended the film's depiction of London's friendly atmosphere to immigrants. For example:

They both examine the humanistic features and spiritual character of London from the perspective of an outsider (Paddington). The first film can be seen as an immigration film, talking about the openness, integration and friendliness of the London city. This film talks about the unity, warmth and justice of London, and the cultural export is deeper. Paddington's cuteness, gluttony and kindness almost capture all the laughter. He is like the spiritual beacon of this city, and his "truth, goodness, and beauty" warm people's hearts. (Maoyan user)

As Zou points out, in *Paddington 2*, Paddington's neighbourhoods exemplify the inclusive and multicultural aspect of London. Mr. Gruber, owner of an antique store in Notting Hill, speaks with a German accent. Dr. Jafri, who frequently forgets his keys when leaving home, is of Indian descent. Mr. Giuseppe, the owner of the barber shop, possesses an Italian surname. The person in charge of driving the waste disposal vehicle is of African descent. Additionally, Madame Kozlova, who manages the Steam

⁶⁵⁵ Liu (2018), p.145

Fair, comes from Eastern Europe.⁶⁵⁶ By incorporating characters from a variety of global regions, Chinese viewers were able to experience the city's cultural diversity and inclusivity. This perception of an inclusive London can be considered an element of a fresher British culture, distinct from the stereotypical Britishness. This partly supports the claim of Higson, which states that using iconic Britishness in British films could preserve the British national identity while serve as exotic signifiers of distinction in the international market.⁶⁵⁷ Although *Paddington 2* primarily portrayed stereotypical British cultural elements, it also provided Chinese viewers with the opportunity to gain insights into a more multifaceted aspect of Britain. Following the development of Paddington's story, Chinese consumers had been exposed to a wider range of British cultures, surpassing mere stereotypes. In addition, these results did not support that Chinese users use the Middle Kingdom Mentality to interpret British culture, which is a concept proposed by Jacques to delineate the inclination of Chinese culture hold a belief in its universality, applicability and superiority in comparison to others.⁶⁵⁸ One potential explanation is that *Paddington 2* exhibited the similar virtues of British and Chinese culture, as the film's values were consistent with the concept of 'truth, goodness, and beauty' in the Chinese cultural framework.

6.1.4 Vague and Less Popular Genre

Although *Paddington 2* received favourable reviews from most Chinese viewers in terms of plot, characters, quality as a sequel, and British cultural elements, its genre influenced its success at the Chinese box office. On the one hand, the family film genre is not particularly popular in China. On the other hand, British family films usually lack brand recognition and competitiveness in China. 'Genre' was mentioned by 8 users, and all of them had positive attitudes. To be specific, 4 users classified *Paddington 2* as a comedy, 2 users classified it as a family film, 1 user classified it as an animation, and 1 user classified it as a children's film. The two users who perceived *Paddington 2* as a family film merely stated that it conveyed the concept of a happy family, without

⁶⁵⁶ Zou (2019), p.129

⁶⁵⁷ Higson (2011), p.71

⁶⁵⁸ Jacques (2009), p.283

providing any additional information regarding their understanding of and expectations of the family film genre. In contrast, the user who classified the film as a children's film maintained:

Cuteness is its tone, innocence is its style, and warmth is its core. I really enjoy such a children's film. Although it seems childish, it is also simple and beautiful. If you watch it as an adult, you will also be inspired by the adorable image of Paddington and be infected by this group of kind and beautiful British people. The beauty and innocence in fairy tales should actually be like this. (Maoyan user)

This user also stated that the film was 'childish', but it could also be enjoyed by adults. This sentiment was consistent with the comments made by the user who maintained a neutral stance towards the 'Plot'. However, rather than being a children's film, *Paddington 2* is a family film that could engage both adult and child viewers. It is important to highlight that family films and children's films are two closely related yet distinct genres. According to *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, children's films are films that are either specifically produced for young people, are exhibited to audiences constituted of young people, or are pertinent to or have an impact on the lives of children and young people.⁶⁵⁹ To comprehend the distinction between family and children's films, it is beneficial to reference the three different modes of appeal that Brown and Babington introduce, which are designed to appeal to a variety of audience segments. 'Single address' targets a specific demographic group. 'Double or dual address' seeks to engage both child and adult audiences as separate entities, which necessitate tailored forms of engagement. 'Undifferentiated address' regards child and adult audiences as a singular entity.⁶⁶⁰ Although children viewers are indispensable to both genres, they are the primary audience in children's films, while they are a component of broader 'family audiences' in family films.⁶⁶¹ In other words, children's films are typically single address and intended only for children, whereas family films are usually dual address or undifferentiated address and intended for both adults and children.

⁶⁵⁹ Kuhn & Westwell (2020)

⁶⁶⁰ Brown & Babington (2015), p.8, 9

⁶⁶¹ Noel Brown, and Bruce Babington, 'Introduction: Children's Films and Family Films', *Family Films in Global Cinema: The World Beyond Disney*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2015), pp.1-16(p.1)

The concepts of family films and children's films can often become mixed in China. The family film genre in China is commonly referred to as '合家欢电影' in the general public and academia, which directly translates to 'whole family happy films'. According to Qin, the aesthetic expectation of 'whole family happy' as a film genre was established in Hong Kong films during the 1980s and 1990s. In these films, the narratives are centred around the family, the plots are relatable to daily life, the themes typically revolve around ethics, love, and marriage, and, most importantly, they must be comedies with happy endings, in order to cater to the preferences of all demographics.⁶⁶² Nonetheless, as Zhao indicates, although the concept of 'whole family happy films' has been suggested for many years, only American productions can truly achieve 'whole family happy' status in the Chinese market. Many Chinese domestic films are marketed as 'whole family happy', yet those of exceptional quality deserving of this title are scarce.⁶⁶³ Wang also makes criticisms regarding the scarcity of family films that are of high quality in China. He contends that recent family films in China have merely simplified the narrative, which would only enable children to appreciate the film while causing adults to feel drowsy.⁶⁶⁴ In mainland China, the absence of a film classification system necessitates that all released films be appropriate for all age groups.⁶⁶⁵ Nevertheless, not all released films are devoid of blood, violence, or latent sexual content that is considered unsuitable for children. Without direct guidance from the film classification system, many parents rely on their own judgement to determine if a film is appropriate for their children before taking them to the cinema. Yet, films that are tailored to the preferences of children frequently fail to satisfy the expectations of adult viewers. It might foster a perception among many viewers in China that films tailored to family audiences can only engage children, not adults. Therefore, this special industrial environment may lead many Chinese consumers to conflate children's films with family films. The discussion among

⁶⁶² Zongpeng Qin, 'Chinese Family Films: Tracing the Origins from the History of Discourse Production', *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 7(2024), 93-101(96, 99, 100) [秦宗鹏, "中国合家欢电影:从话语生产的历史中溯源", 北京电影学院学报, 7(2024), 93-101]

⁶⁶³ Li Zhao, 'There Is Huge Market Potential For Domestic Family Films', *China Film News*, 18 May, 2016 [赵丽, "国产合家欢电影市场空间巨大", 中国电影报, 2016.05.18]

⁶⁶⁴ Yan Wang, 'Chinese Films, "The Urgent Need For Whole Family Happy" Is Still Not Satisfied', *Wenhui Daily*, 27 February, 2018 [王彦, "中国电影, '合家欢刚需'仍未满足", 文汇报, 2018.02.27]

⁶⁶⁵ O'Connor & Armstrong (2015), p.9; Geltzer (2017), p.158

Chinese viewers on the suitability of the plot for both children and adults, as referenced in the previous section, could also reveal that most of them had an ambiguous understanding of the distinction between children's films and family films. It could also be supported by discussions among some Chinese viewers, who expressed their joy with the unexpected universal appeal of *Paddington 2* and encouraged parents to bring their children to see the film, as there were very few films that were suitable for both adults and children:

I highly recommend this film. The pictures are realistic and the story flows smoothly. I especially recommend it for parents to watch with their children who can understand it. (Maoyan user)

There are not many films like this that are suitable for both adults and children. (Maoyan user)

It further supports that family films with dual or undifferentiated address are not common in China. Accordingly, the capacity of *Paddington 2* to engage children could discourage certain Chinese viewers who perceive this genre as single address, since they might believe that the film's narrative lacked appeal for adults. It suggests that the cultural discount that *Paddington 2* encountered in the Chinese market may be due to cultural disparities in genre recognition. While the family film genre is less culturally specific, the blurred boundaries of the genre in China may diminish its attractiveness among some Chinese consumers. The BFI survey indicates that 24% of respondents preferred family film genres, which was less than the 42% who selected action/adventure genres and the 32% who selected period/historical genres.⁶⁶⁶ Therefore, the performance of *Paddington 2* may be influenced by the ambiguous perception of the family film genre in China, as well as its limited appeal to Chinese adult viewers.

However, it is essential to point out that many Chinese consumers do not regard most Disney family films as single address. As evidenced by the substantial box office revenue of numerous Disney family films in recent years and previous decades, Chinese viewers regard them as capable of engaging adult viewers. This may be

⁶⁶⁶ BFI (2022b), p.18

attributed to the competitive advantage of the Disney brand's influence in the global marketplace and the frequent circulation of Disney films in China. In contrast, British family films remain unfamiliar to Chinese consumers and have not established a brand impact. According to the BFI survey, the family film genre was associated with the UK by 25% of Chinese respondents.⁶⁶⁷ This indicates that Chinese viewers lacked familiarity with British family films and were not likely to select British productions when they intended to watch films in this genre. The influence of the Disney brand in the Chinese market can be observed in the most formidable competitor to *Paddington 2* during its theatrical run, *Coco* (2017).

6.1.5 Inappropriate Release Timing

The box office performance of *Paddington 2* in China was adversely affected by the direct competition from *Coco*. As one user mentioned:

The poor box office performance of this film in the Chinese market is not because of the poor quality of the film itself, but because it encountered another film with an explosive reputation that was released at the same time, "Coco". The screening schedule that should have been available in the first week for "Paddington 2" was occupied by "Coco". At this time, I have to sigh: "Since Yu is born, how can Liang be born (既生瑜，何生亮)". (Maoyan user)

This comment suggests that *Coco*'s appeal and dominance at the box office during the first week of *Paddington 2*'s release in China resulted in a reduction in the market share that *Paddington 2* could have claimed. Both films belong to the family genre with adventurous and animated elements, which might prompt some Chinese viewers to opt for only one of them to watch. To characterise the relationship between *Coco* and *Paddington 2*, the Maoyan user referenced above employed a famous Chinese saying, 'Since Yu is born, how can Liang be born (既生瑜，何生亮)'. This proverb is usually used to express sorrow over the presence of someone surpassing one another in every aspect. It indicates that, despite the exceptional quality of both films, the competition from *Coco* captured the interest of a substantial number of consumers in China, which potentially impeded the development of their interest in *Paddington 2*. Their screening

⁶⁶⁷ BFI (2022b), p.18

slots and box office revenue in China could be used as evidence. *Coco* was released in China on November 24, 2017, two weeks prior to the release of *Paddington 2*. As previously mentioned, Chinese box office revenue of *Coco* were five times higher than those of *Paddington 2*.⁶⁶⁸ According to the data from the Chinese Film Box Office, during its first week of release, *Coco* occupied approximately 20% of the total available screenings, and generated nearly 45% of the total box office revenue in China.⁶⁶⁹ Conversely, *Paddington 2* was allotted approximately 20% of screenings and accounted for 20% of the total box office revenue in China during its first release week.⁶⁷⁰ During the first release week of *Paddington 2*, *Coco* continued to hold about 25% of screenings and accounted for about 40% of the overall box office revenue in China.⁶⁷¹ Accordingly, *Paddington 2* faced substantial challenges in the Chinese market in terms of box office revenue and cinema admissions as a result of the intensive competition from *Coco*. This result aligns with the argument of Simonton, which suggests that the release timing of a film can significantly impact its success in the industry.⁶⁷²

In addition, as illustrated in Figure 6.1.8 and Figure 6.1.9, the daily box office revenue and screenings of *Paddington 2* experienced an obvious decrease from the second weekend of release. About 7% of screenings were allocated to it during that week, and it accounted for less than 5% of the total box office revenue in China.⁶⁷³ *Youth* (2017), a Chinese drama and romance film, was released one week after *Paddington 2*. It was allocated approximately 35% of screenings and generated over 50% of the total box office revenue in China.⁶⁷⁴ It suggests that *Paddington 2*'s box office performance in China may be hindered not only by formidable competition from *Coco* during its initial release week but also by the limited allocation of screenings and diminished consumer interest owing to the subsequent release of new films. Consequently, despite the

⁶⁶⁸ Box Office Mojo, '*Coco* (2017)'; Maoyan Pro, '*Coco* (2017)'; Dengta Pro, '*Coco* (2017)'; Box Office Mojo, '*Paddington 2* (2017)'; Maoyan Pro, '*Paddington 2* (2017)'; Dengta Pro, '*Paddington 2* (2017)'

⁶⁶⁹ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Coco* (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/05101942017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 May 2024]

⁶⁷⁰ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Paddington 2* (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/07502022017?from=movie>, [accessed 01 May 2024]

⁶⁷¹ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Coco* (2017)'

⁶⁷² Simonton (2009), p.414

⁶⁷³ Chinese Film Box Office, '*Paddington 2* (2017)'

⁶⁷⁴ Box Office Mojo, '*Youth* (2017)', <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr3006157317/>, [accessed 10 May 2024]; Chinese Film Box Office, '*Youth* (2017)', <https://zgdypf.zgdypw.cn/movie/detail/index/00105572017?from=movie>, [accessed 10 May 2024]

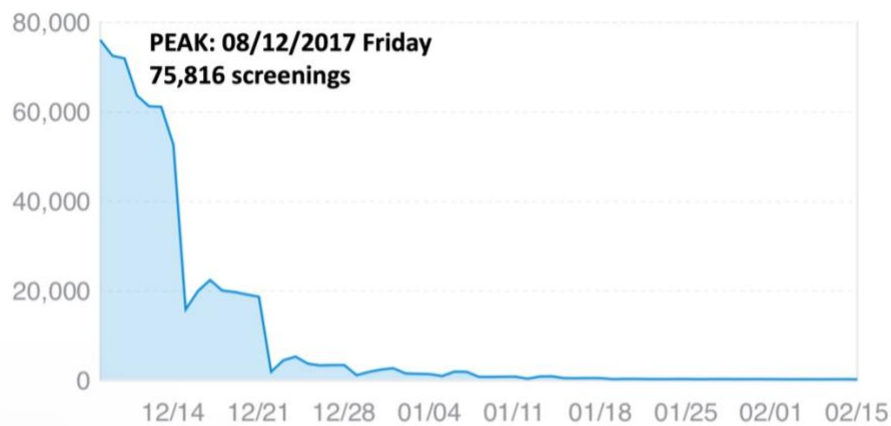
excellent quality and appealing plot of *Paddington 2*, it faced formidable competition upon its release in China, adversely affecting its box office performance.

Figure 6.1.8 Daily Box Office Revenue of *Paddington 2* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Figure 6.1.9 Daily Number of Screenings of *Paddington 2* (2017) in China



Source: Chinese Film Box Office

Conclusion

To conclude, *Paddington 2* received overwhelmingly positive comments from the majority of Chinese viewers due to its superior quality, heartwarming narrative, and iconic Britishness. However, its box office performance was negatively affected by contextual factors within the Chinese market. The appeal of the family film genre to many Chinese viewers has been diminished by the scarcity of Chinese domestic family

films that can appeal to both children and adult audiences. In addition, British family films had not yet established brand recognition in China. The direct competition from *Coco* had a detrimental impact on the attention that *Paddington 2* could garner from Chinese consumers. Thus, the box office performance of this British family film was influenced by the severe competition within the Chinese market and the restricted appeal of the family film genre in China

The findings of this chapter corroborated the cultural discount theory.⁶⁷⁵ It offered additional evidence that films embodying less culturally specific values and themes would encounter lower cultural discount in the global market. Nevertheless, the results did not support the Middle Kingdom Mentality theory.⁶⁷⁶ A possible explanation could be that the values showed in the film aligned with an ethical principle of the Chinese cultural framework. The results partially supported Higson's assertions.⁶⁷⁷ Alongside the stereotypical representations of Britishness emphasised in *Paddington 2*, it also introduced fresh British cultures to Chinese viewers: the inclusivity of London as a multicultural immigrant metropolis. Although this was distinct from the stereotypical British cultural elements, numerous Chinese consumers still recognised and enjoyed this representation when they followed the Paddington story as immigrants in this country.

There were two noteworthy contributions that this chapter made to the study of cross-cultural box office performance. First, the results elucidated how a formidable rival within the similar genre influenced the film's box office performance, while previous studies did not thoroughly investigate a film's distinctive competitive market environment at the time of its release. Secondly, it also considered the perception and attraction of a particular genre within the target market, which was also a critical contextual factor that influenced the film's box office performance and was not closely studied in previous research.

⁶⁷⁵ Hoskins & Mirus (1988), p.500

⁶⁷⁶ Jacques (2009), p.283

⁶⁷⁷ Higson (2011), p.71

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Introduction

This Conclusion will be divided into three sections. First, it will conclude the research by providing a summary of the primary research findings in relation to the research aims and three research questions. Subsequently, it will assess this research's limitations and suggest recommendations for future studies. Finally, it will present how this research has contributed to the study of cross-cultural box office performance from the theoretical, methodological, and industrial perspectives.

7.1 Overall Findings in Relation to the Research Aim and Questions

The aim of my thesis was to analyse the factors that influence the box office performance of British films in China between 2017 and 2022. My thesis has argued that the competitive landscape of the Chinese film market, the viewing tastes of the Chinese audience, and the phenomenon of cultural discount have influenced the performance of the studied British films at the Chinese box office. In addition to reducing the allure of culturally specific content and themes in these British films, the cultural discount also diminished the appeal of their franchises and stars to Chinese viewers. The distinct stories, styles, and genres of certain British films were not particularly well-suited with the film viewing tastes and preferences of many Chinese consumers. The number of screenings assigned to these British films and the audience attention they could attract were also reduced by the policy initiatives and the competitions they faced in the Chinese film market.

7.1.1 The Box Office Performance of British Films in China

Research Question 1 examined the British films released in mainland China from 2017 to 2022 and their box office performance. The findings revealed that quintessentially British films were not frequently released in China and did not achieve remarkable commercial success at the Chinese box office during the researched timeframe.

7.1.1.1 Overall Box Office Performance of Cases

Between 2017 and 2022, only eight culturally British films featuring quintessentially Britishness were released in China. On the one hand, it was evident that the number of quintessentially British films that were imported into China was limited and diminished over the researched period. Most of these films were released in 2017, with none being released in 2020, and one film was released in each of the remaining years. Compared to the annual import quantity of foreign films in China, which usually around 70 titles, the quantity of quintessentially British films that were imported was markedly limited.⁶⁷⁸ This suggested that, between 2017 and 2022, culturally British films that featured quintessentially British cultural elements were relatively under-represented and experienced a decline in market share in China.

On the other hand, the box office performance of these films in China was not particularly successful. The highest box office revenues among the eight cases examined in my research were achieved by three high-budget blockbusters: *Kingsman 2*, *No Time To Die* and *Dunkirk*, generating around \$72 million, \$65 million and \$51 million, respectively.⁶⁷⁹ They were listed at 35th, 26th and 43rd in China's annual box office ranking in the respective years of their release.⁶⁸⁰ Conversely, the films with the lowest box office revenues in the analysed cases in my research were three drama films: *Darkest Hour* and two *Downton Abbey* films, which generated about \$6 million, \$3 million and \$2 million, respectively, ranking 140th, 157th and 93rd in China's annual box office ranking for their respective release years.⁶⁸¹ These results suggested that, despite China having one of the largest markets for film consumption in the world, these British films were neither particularly favoured by Chinese viewers nor did they attain notable commercial success in China.

⁶⁷⁸ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.69; Zhu (2022), p.192

⁶⁷⁹ Box Office Mojo, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)'; Box Office Mojo, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'; Box Office Mojo, '*No Time To Die* (2021)'

⁶⁸⁰ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'

⁶⁸¹ Chinese Film Box Office, 'Yearly Box Office Ranking'; Box Office Mojo, '*Darkest Hour* (2017)'; Box Office Mojo, '*Downton Abbey* (2019)'; Box Office Mojo, '*Downton Abbey: A New Era* (2022)'

However, the revenue generated in China was still a critical and substantial source of worldwide box office revenue for these eight British films. Although these British films did not achieve a particularly high ranking in China's annual box office rankings, their number of admissions in China was high due to the vast population base of the Chinese market. Despite the fact that the BFI's 2021 survey suggested that China was one of the least engaged markets with British films in the world, the BFI Statistical Yearbooks revealed that China consistently rated as the largest export market for British films by admissions from 2018 to 2021, and second-largest in 2017 and 2022.⁶⁸² Additionally, the cultural influence of these British films on China was undeniable. As evidenced by the findings, a significant number of Chinese viewers found these British films to be enjoyable and provided them with favourable evaluations. Thus, the Chinese market remained to be a significant and lucrative market for British films.

7.1.1.2 Influence of Contextual Factors in the Chinese Market

China's market conditions during the researched period affected British films' number of releases and box office performance. First, the consumption of British films appeared to be a niche interest in China, as Chinese viewers did not exhibit regular viewing habits for British films. The 2021 BFI survey on Chinese consumers' attitudes towards British film/TV revealed that 32% of respondents showed interest in British films, while 26% claimed familiarity with them.⁶⁸³ Second, since 2017, the Chinese government has implemented several policies to strengthen the protection of domestic films, such as the 'Film Industry Promotion Law' and the establishment of the China Film Bureau. These initiatives may have hindered the capacity of imported films to generate greater revenue in the Chinese market.⁶⁸⁴ The results of my thesis indicated that none of these cases were released in China during the peak seasons identified by Zhou, which included the summer holiday, National Day and Chinese New Year.⁶⁸⁵ Although their theatrical release period may not be particularly competitive, the diminished number of potential cinema attendance may also have a negative

⁶⁸² BFI (2022b), p.8; BFI (2018), p.9; BFI (2019), p.10; BFI (2020), p.11; BFI (2021), p.9; BFI (2022a), p.11; BFI (2023a), p.9

⁶⁸³ BFI (2022b), p.6

⁶⁸⁴ Xinhua News Agency (2016)

⁶⁸⁵ Zhou (2015), p.245

impact on their revenue at the Chinese box office. Moreover, the number of releases and the box office income between 2020 and 2022 were significantly influenced by the pandemic. The implementation of the 'Dynamic Zero COVID' policy in mainland China during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the attendance and opening rates of cinemas.⁶⁸⁶ Therefore, these contextual factors within the Chinese market might adversely affect the import quantity and box office performance of British films during the researched period.

7.1.1.3 The Performance of Different Genres

My thesis provided further evidence to support the cultural discount theory, suggesting that British films with a higher degree of cultural specificity can be correlated with a reduced probability of box office success in China. The British action-adventure film genre was the most frequently imported into the Chinese market between 2017 and 2022, with three films of this genre being released: *Kingsman 2*, *Johnny English 3*, and *No Time To Die*. Action-adventure films are usually less culturally specific and more likely to achieve a stronger box office performance in international markets than other genres. While *Johnny English 3*'s box office income was lower than that of the other two films, which was partially due to it not being a high-budget blockbuster with elaborate visual effects, the other two films generated the highest revenues at the Chinese box office among the eight cases examined in my research, as shown in Table 2.1. It supported the assertions made by Lee, who argued that action films generally experience a reduced cultural discount compared to other genres.⁶⁸⁷ Additionally, while historical films are generally regarded as culturally specific, two British films in this genre, *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour*, were imported into China during the researched period. Their culturally specific themes and narratives presented obstacles to captivate a substantial number of Chinese viewers. Although both films depicted the same British historical era, their performances at the Chinese box office varied considerably, as *Dunkirk* was a high-budget blockbuster made by a renowned director. Table 2.1 indicated that the two films' box office revenue placed third and

⁶⁸⁶ Liu & Lu (2023)

⁶⁸⁷ Lee (2006a), p.273, 274

sixth, respectively, among the eight cases studied in my research. The box office performance of these two British historical films was adversely affected by the cultural discount they encountered in China. Moreover, although period dramas are also regarded as culturally specific, two British films in this genre, *Downton Abbey 1* and *2*, were imported into China during the researched period. In addition to the cultural specificity that is inherent in this genre, the plots of these two spin-off films further enhanced their cultural specificity by serving as continuations of the original TV series. This collectively diminished their appeal to a broader audience in China. These two films generated the lowest box office revenue among the cases examined in my research, as illustrated in Table 2.1. It corroborated the findings of Kwak and Zhang, which indicated that the drama genre negatively impacts the box office performance of foreign films in China.⁶⁸⁸ Furthermore, while family films are generally perceived as a genre with less cultural specificity, only one British family film, *Paddington 2*, was released in China between 2017 and 2022. The theme and narrative in this film were relatively ‘transparent’, which can lessen the effects of cultural discount and improve the understandability and exportability in the Chinese market. The film’s plot and British cultural elements received overwhelmingly positive reviews in China. However, Table 2.1 showed that *Paddington 2*’s box office income in China placed fourth among the eight cases studied in my research. The family film genre’s limited appeal to most Chinese adult consumers could present a challenge to *Paddington 2*’s potential for greater success. Overall, these results partly supported the argument of Barthel-Bouchier, which pointed out that the concept of genre carries with it expectations about exportability.⁶⁸⁹ The analysis of the number of genres imported into China and their box office performance revealed that the expectations regarding the exportability of a particular British film genre were more closely associated with the box office revenues generated by that genre than with the quantity imported into the Chinese market.

⁶⁸⁸ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135

⁶⁸⁹ Barthel-Bouchier (2012), p.80

7.1.2 Factors Influencing the Performance of British Films in China

Research Question 2 was formulated to investigate the influence of the factors mentioned by Chinese viewers in their reviews on the Chinese box office performance of British films. Before discussing the factors, the findings indicated that the box office performance of a British film in China was significantly influenced by the number of opening screens it garnered upon its release. This supported the results of Litman and Kohl, Chang and Ki as well as Fetscherin, which suggested a positive correlation between the number of screens and the box office revenue.⁶⁹⁰ The allocation of screens to a film seemed contingent upon the strength of its market signals, which influenced the confidence of Chinese distributors and exhibitors in its commercial viability. It corroborated the argument of Kim and Jensen, which posited that the positive market signals could be beneficial to both distributors in determining which films to import and consumers in selecting which films to view.⁶⁹¹ In contrast, the comments and ratings of these eight cases in China showed that the British films that generated substantial box office revenue were not necessarily regarded as of high quality by Chinese viewers. British films that were regarded as having exceptional quality did not always achieve commercial success in China. This suggested that the positive influence of favourable word-of-mouth on the Chinese box office performance of British films was relatively restricted. This partly aligned with the research results of Duan et al., Hu et al. and Fan et al., who found that films' box office revenue was highly correlated with the quantity of audience reviews, rather than the attitudes conveyed in those reviews.⁶⁹² This implied that the box office performance of a British film in China was more directly influenced by the attention it garnered from its market signals than by the evaluations of Chinese consumers.

However, analysing the reviews of Chinese consumers for each British film remained useful, as it offered valuable insights into the impact of different factors on the film's box office performance in China, both positively and negatively. The subsequent sections will elaborate on the perspectives of Chinese viewers on the market signals

⁶⁹⁰ Litman & Kohl (1989), p.48; Chang & Ki (2005), p.264; Fetscherin (2010), p.472

⁶⁹¹ Kim & Jensen (2014), p.1362

⁶⁹² Duan, et al. (2008), p.1015; Hu, et al. (2018), p.1024; Fan, et al. (2021), p.8

and narrative components that were discussed in their comments, as well as the factors that were not addressed in their reviews.

7.1.2.1 Market Signals

The market signals that motivated the Chinese audience to develop their interest in British films, including 'Pre-sold IP', 'Stars', 'Audio-visual effects', and 'Genre', were frequently mentioned as critical factors in their reviews. These factors either increased the cultural familiarity of the film or decreased its cultural specificity, thereby improving the interest of Chinese viewers in British films.

Pre-sold IP

The production of sequels and adaptations was one of the most effective market signals for British films to attract consumers in China. Among the eight cases examined in my research, four were sequels to popular films, while two were spin-offs of well-known TV series. The *Kingsman* films, *Paddington* films, and *Bond* films can also be considered as film adaptations of comic books, children's literature and novels. It suggested that China preferred importing British franchise films, expecting that their ability to appeal to the existing fanbase would ensure a certain level of success at the Chinese box office. Chinese consumers also exhibited a preference for British franchise films, as their comments indicated that their enthusiasm for previous works was the main incentive for their decision to watch the sequel/spin-off. Their interest in these sequels/spin-offs was not solely a result of the perception of these previous works as a guarantee of quality; it also stemmed from a desire to follow the further development of their favoured characters and investigate the additional facets of the narratives. Yet, the lacklustre box office performance of these British films implied that the fanbase of these franchises in China was relatively limited, which posed challenges for them to achieve significant box office success.

My findings did not entirely confirm Cucco's claim that employing subjects that characters and narratives are already favoured by the public can be regarded as a

guarantee of a certain success for the film.⁶⁹³ First, the quality of sequels needed to meet fans' elevated expectations. The performances of *Kingsman 2* and *Paddington 2* were the two prominent examples. Many Chinese viewers were disappointed by the inferior quality of *Kingsman 2* in comparison to its predecessor. The film's word-of-mouth was negatively impacted, which led to a weaker box office performance in China than *Kingsman 1*. In contrast, most Chinese viewers regarded the quality of *Paddington 2* as superior to that of its predecessor. It promoted the word-of-mouth of *Paddington 2* and contributed to a nearly twofold increase in cinema admissions and box office revenue in comparison to *Paddington 1*. This partly contradicted Basuroy and Chatterjee, who asserted that sequels generally fail to generate box office revenues that are comparable to those of their predecessors.⁶⁹⁴ The findings of my research indicated that, while a franchise can be beneficial during the early stages of a British film's release by attracting existing fans, the production quality of the sequel significantly impacted its potential to generate positive word-of-mouth and attract consumers, which in turn impacted its subsequent box office revenue.

Second, the efficacy of franchises in enticing Chinese consumers was inconsistent across various film genres. My findings showed that the most successful franchise films were British action-adventure films, while the least successful were British period dramas in China. This variation was influenced by the size of the existing fanbase associated with the franchises, as well as the inherent appeal of the British film genre in drawing Chinese viewers. It suggested that, although British franchise films can draw the attention of many Chinese consumers, this approach cannot always guarantee commercial success, as a British film's box office performance in China was influenced by a variety of other factors.

Stars

The findings indicated that only two British stars, Christopher Nolan, the director of *Dunkirk*, and Rowan Atkinson, the main actor in *Johnny English 3*, had the potential to

⁶⁹³ Cucco (2009), p.220

⁶⁹⁴ Basuroy & Chatterjee (2008), p.803

serve as effective market signals to attract Chinese consumers. Rowan Atkinson is well-known and liked by many Chinese viewers for his portrayal of Mr. Bean. According to the BFI survey, he was the most familiar British actor among Chinese respondents.⁶⁹⁵ This was corroborated by my findings, as the most frequently cited factor in *Johnny English 3* was 'Star'. Most Chinese viewers stated that their primary motivation for viewing the film was the presence of Atkinson. This aligned with the findings of Wallace et al., Levin et al. and Albert, which suggested that the presence of stars frequently functions as an advantageous selling point for films.⁶⁹⁶ Although a few Chinese viewers also mentioned other actors in other films, the majority of their discussions simply indicated that they recognised these actors because of their previous work, rather than suggesting that these actors were the primary reason they decided to watch a British film. This offered further evidence for the research conclusions of Kwak and Zhang, as well as Elliott et al., which argued that Chinese consumers generally possess limited familiarity with foreign actors, and their image only serves as a weak determinant of the performance of foreign films at the Chinese box office.⁶⁹⁷

In the reviews of *Dunkirk*, many Chinese viewers engaged in discussions regarding the director, Christopher Nolan. Nolan's acclaim in China arises from the significant box office achievements and positive film ratings of his previous works, which made his reputation as one of the most compelling assets for promoting this culturally specific historical film in China. This finding contradicted the results of Hennig-Thurau et al., Chang and Ki, as well as Fetscherin, who did not observe a significant correlation between directors and box office revenue.⁶⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the reviews of other British films did not include the names of other directors, which could imply that the Chinese consumers were not particularly familiar with these foreign directors. These results partially corroborated Kwak and Zhang's research, which suggested that the names of foreign directors may not captivate the interest of the Chinese audience.⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁵ BFI (2022b), p.20

⁶⁹⁶ Wallace, et al. (1993), p.23; Levin, et al. (1997), p.179; Albert (1998), p.264

⁶⁹⁷ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.135; Elliott, et al. (2018), p.84

⁶⁹⁸ Hennig-Thurau, et al. (2007), p.83; Chang & Ki (2005), p.265; Fetscherin (2010), p.474

⁶⁹⁹ Kwak & Zhang (2011), p.132

The BFI survey also revealed that the appeal of British stars was varied among different Chinese viewers. It showed that 27% of respondents selected 'They have actors I recognise and enjoy seeing' as a reason for their interest in British film/TV, whereas 28% selected 'I don't recognise the actors' as a reason for their disinterest in these productions.⁷⁰⁰ My research provided additional evidence to suggest that British actors and directors possess the potential to serve as effective market signals for attracting Chinese consumers. To bolster films' box office performance, they must be among the most renowned figures in the industry and have a substantial fanbase in China. Otherwise, British actors and directors may get recognition among Chinese viewers but would not serve as a compelling motivation for them to watch British films.

Audio-Visual Effects

The discussions surrounding audio-visual effects indicated that this factor functioned as a market signal that was only effective in high-budget British films to attract Chinese consumers. *Kingsman 2*, *Dunkirk* and *No Time To Die* were the three films with the highest budgets among the eight cases, each having an estimated production cost of over \$100 million.⁷⁰¹ These three films are classified as action genre, which often features captivating spectacles that entice viewers to watch them in cinemas in order to enhance the overall viewing experience. The exceptional audio-visual effects may be regarded as one of the main factors influencing consumers' purchasing decisions about these films. Moreover, the only two 3D films in these cases, *Kingsman 2* and *No Time To Die*, were also the highest-grossing films in my research. This corroborated Elliott et al., who argued that the enhanced formats, namely 3D and IMAX, have a positive and significant effect on films' box office revenues in China.⁷⁰² Thus, audio-visual effects in these action blockbusters could be deemed an effective market signal that captivated Chinese viewers and positively influenced box office outcomes.

⁷⁰⁰ BFI (2022b), p.9

⁷⁰¹ IMDb, '*Kingsman: The Golden Circle* (2017)'; IMDb, '*Dunkirk* (2017)'; IMDb, '*No Time To Die* (2021)'

⁷⁰² Elliott, et al. (2018), p.88

In contrast, the production costs in the other five cases were all below \$40 million.⁷⁰³ The audio-visual effects in these films were mainly perceived by Chinese viewers as an aspect of production quality, rather than as a market signal that could pique their interest in watching the films. The primary subject of discussions regarding the audio-visual effects in these films centred on the praise for their production values, such as costumes, make-up, props, setting and music. It was in accordance with the findings of the BFI survey, which showed that 43% of Chinese respondents selected 'Production is often good' as a critical factor in their interest in British film/TV.⁷⁰⁴ This implied that, while the audio-visual effects of these lower-budget British films may not necessarily attract a greater number of viewers, they did have the potential to positively impact the film ratings and generate favourable word-of-mouth.

Genre

As Section 7.1.1.3 introduced the performance of the various British film genres in China, this section will not reiterate the perceptions of Chinese consumers regarding these genres. According to the reviews, most Chinese viewers were content with these films, as they met their expectations regarding the diverse genres. It was consistent with Gunter's claim, which posited that consumers possess specific expectations concerning the distinctive characteristics of a genre when they attend a film.⁷⁰⁵ This suggested that genre was a critical factor in the decision-making process of Chinese viewers when selecting British films and that it was an effective marketing signal for British films to attract Chinese audiences.

7.1.2.2 Narrative Components

Regardless of genre, the narrative components, including the 'Plot', 'Characters in story' and 'Places in story', were the most frequently discussed factors in Chinese audience reviews. Although 'Places' were only occasionally referenced, plots and characters of these British films garnered considerable attention from Chinese

⁷⁰³ IMDb, 'Darkest Hour (2017)'; IMDb, 'Paddington 2 (2017)'; IMDb, 'Johnny English Strikes Again (2018)'; IMDb, 'Downton Abbey (2019)'; IMDb, 'Downton Abbey: A New Era (2022)'

⁷⁰⁴ BFI (2022b), p.9

⁷⁰⁵ Gunter (2018), p.89

consumers. The logicity of the film's plot and the reasonability of the characters' actions within the narrative's framework appeared to significantly impact Chinese viewers' viewing experience and their evaluation of the films' quality. This confirmed Bordwell's claim that the primary purpose of film viewing activities is to construct an integrated story from the plot.⁷⁰⁶ Most viewers provided favourable feedback regarding the plots and characters in these British films. It indicated that they were generally satisfied with the narrative quality of the film. This corresponded with the findings of the BFI's survey, which showed that the primary factor contributing to Chinese viewers' interest in British film/TV was 'The quality of the storylines is generally good'.⁷⁰⁷ These favourable reviews about the narrative had a positive impact on the film's word-of-mouth, which could captivate consumers who were not initially interested in the film. A typical example is *Paddington 2*. The film's plots and characters received overwhelmingly positive reviews from most Chinese viewers. *Paddington 2*'s box office revenue in China increased as a result of the positive word-of-mouth, which attracted many Chinese viewers who were not previously interested in the film nor had viewed *Paddington 1*.

It is undeniable that there were still some negative comments regarding the narrative components in these eight cases. Chinese viewers' discussions of action-adventure films exhibited the most divergent perspectives on narrative components, particularly *Kingsman 2* and *Johnny English 3*. Although the genres, franchises, and stars of these films captivated Chinese viewers during the early release phase, their interest rapidly decreased in the latter phases, partly because the narrative quality did not meet their expectations. The significance of narrative components was also noticeable in Chinese viewers' discussions of *Dunkirk*. Although the director's reputation attracted consumers' attention during the early release stage, the film subsequently received a negative public response in China. Due to the unfamiliar British historical context, certain Chinese viewers perceived the narrative as embodying values that were incompatible with traditional Chinese cultural beliefs. This resulted in a decline in the interest of potential viewers and a detrimental impact on the film's box office

⁷⁰⁶ Bordwell, et al. (2017), p.72

⁷⁰⁷ BFI (2022b), p.9

performance in China. These results suggested that the narrative components of British film significantly impacted its word-of-mouth in China, and potential Chinese consumers may be discouraged by negative comments about the plot. In other words, the ability of a British film to maintain its allure to the Chinese audience may be compromised if it lacked a compelling narrative, even though it possessed strong market signals, such as popular franchises or renowned stars.

However, the commercial success of British films in China could not be guaranteed by a high-quality narrative. Although the narrative components of *Darkest Hour* and two *Downton Abbey* films received positive comments from the majority of viewers, their box office income in China was the lowest among the cases examined in my research. These three British films were culturally specific and encountered obvious cultural discount in China. This might suggest that the Chinese viewers who chose to watch and enjoyed these films were usually those who were already interested in the genres and subjects. Although these viewers provided favourable feedback on the narratives of these three British films, it remained difficult to captivate the attention of Chinese viewers who were not interested in these culturally specific stories, styles, and genres.

7.1.2.3 Less Discussed Factors

The remaining three factors, 'Marketing', 'Awards' and 'Language', were either rarely or never mentioned in the reviews.

Language

Compared to the other two factors, language was cited by Chinese viewers more frequently, particularly in the reviews of *Downton Abbey 1*, which mainly expressed their appreciation for the British accents. It was consistent with the results of the BFI survey, which revealed that 21% of Chinese respondents cited 'I like listening to the different British accents' as the reason for their interest in British film/TV.⁷⁰⁸ However, my research findings were insufficient to suggest that the British accents could

⁷⁰⁸ BFI (2022b), p.9

function as a selling point to draw Chinese consumers and favourably impact the British film's box office incomes in China.

There was no additional comment regarding language were made in the reviews of other British films. The BFI survey showed that the primary obstacle to Chinese viewers' interest with British film/TV was 'I cannot understand English', as cited by 56% of respondents. Additionally, 22% of respondents attributed their disinterest to 'The storylines are too difficult to follow/require too much concentration to enjoy'.⁷⁰⁹ This indicated that the interest of Chinese viewers in British films might be diminished by the excessive amount of English dialogue. This could be supported by the fact that the dialogue-driven dramas, *Darkest Hour* and two *Downton Abbey* films, had the lowest number of screenings and box office receipts in China among the eight cases examined in my research. It revealed that, while language may not hinder Chinese consumers' understanding of British films' narrative, it could diminish their interest in genres that heavily rely on English dialogue.

Marketing

Among the eight cases that I examined in this research, *Dunkirk* was the sole British film in which one Chinese viewer mentioned marketing in the review. According to the user, the film did not meet the high expectations that had been established by its promotion. The discussion of other British films did not include any additional references to marketing. The lack of discussion regarding marketing in reviews can be attributed to a variety of potential reasons. First, the quality of these British films may largely meet the expectations of Chinese viewers that have been established by the films' marketing. Chinese consumers might be more inclined to focus on the content of the films in their reviews, rather than the discrepancies between the films and their promotion materials. Second, the distribution rights for foreign films in mainland China are exclusively held by two state-owned companies: China Film Group Corporation and Huaxia Film Distribution.⁷¹⁰ These British films may not have extensive marketing

⁷⁰⁹ BFI (2022b), p.9

⁷¹⁰ Yeh & Davis (2008), p.42; Su (2016), p.81; Cheung (2016), p.179

campaigns in the Chinese market, which could potentially result in a lack of a strong impression on Chinese consumers.

However, the lack of references to marketing in reviews did not imply that it was not a significant factor in influencing British films' box office performance in China. Marketing remains a critical process for informing Chinese viewers about the upcoming British films and the unique selling points that are likely to captivate them. Thus, additional research is required to assess the impact of marketing activities on British films' box office revenue and the types of marketing strategies that may be advantageous in China. This issue will be further addressed in Section 7.2.

Awards

Chinese viewers did not mention awards in their comments on the eight British films. A plausible explanation is that these British films received awards or nominations after their distribution in China. Another explanation may be that films' nominations and awards may not hold significant importance for Chinese consumers. It might align with the conclusion of Elliott et al., which indicated that films' box office revenues in China are not significantly influenced by major Asian or Western awards.⁷¹¹ However, the BFI survey revealed that 18% of Chinese respondents were interested in British film/TV because 'They often win awards'.⁷¹² Further investigation is necessary regarding the influence of awards on British films' box office performance, which will also be further addressed in Section 7.2.

7.1.3 Cultural Representations and Their Influence on Cultural Discount

Research Question 3 investigated the impact of cultural representations in British films on the cultural discount they encountered in China. According to Higson, selling Britishness in films can be a viable business strategy in the international market, albeit specialised.⁷¹³ My research further examined the applicability of this argument in the

⁷¹¹ Elliott, et al. (2018), p.84, 89

⁷¹² BFI (2022b), p.9

⁷¹³ Higson (2011), p.25

Chinese market. Chinese consumers' discussions regarding 'Country of origin' and 'British culture' suggested that it was feasible to sell quintessentially Britishness in films that were less culturally specific, whereas selling quintessentially Britishness in films that were culturally specific would be a highly niche market in China.

7.1.3.1 Britishness in Highly Culturally Specific Genres

The Britishness of *Dunkirk*, *Darkest Hour*, *Downton Abbey 1* and *2* was primarily conveyed through the British historical context, events and characters. *Dunkirk* and *Darkest Hour* were culturally specific since they were deeply rooted in British history, which was unfamiliar to most Chinese viewers. The British historical period depicted in these films was mentioned by a small number of Chinese users in their reviews; yet, these references were merely commented on or debated about the historical backgrounds, which did not appear to be a significant attraction for these consumers. Nevertheless, the divergent cultural values and unfamiliar historical events of *Dunkirk* elicited a negative response from the Chinese audience, which exacerbated the cultural discount it experienced in China. Although the values and narratives of *Darkest Hour* did not conflict with Chinese culture, its themes and characters were culturally specific and difficult to captivate the interest of most Chinese viewers. In contrast, the Britishness of the two *Downton Abbey* films was represented not only through the historical context but also via the attire and ambience. In these two films, the portrayal of the aristocratic spirit and the ladylike and gentlemanly characters were the primary subjects of Chinese consumers' discussions about British culture. Yet, these representations were more effective in attracting *Downton Abbey* fans and difficult to pique the interest of ordinary consumers in China. This implied that the Britishness portrayed in culturally specific genres may also be culturally specific, which could exacerbate the cultural discount these films would encounter in China and make it difficult for them to function as a selling point to attract Chinese views.

7.1.3.2 Britishness in Less Culturally Specific Genres

The Britishness of *Kingsman 2*, *Johnny English 3*, *No Time To Die* and *Paddington 2* was primarily portrayed through the use of explicit and iconic British cultural symbols, such

as locations and personalities. These British films were relatively less culturally specific. The British cultural elements that were incorporated into these films were readily recognisable as quintessentially British by Chinese consumers. It may not exacerbate, but rather mitigate, the cultural discount these British films would experience in China. The portrayal of British humour, gentlemen and landmarks in *Kingsman 2*, *Johnny English 3* and *Paddington 2* were the primary topics of discussion among Chinese consumers. The majority of Chinese viewers perceived these Britishness as iconic and stereotypical, which could have reinforced their British national identity in China. In contrast, *No Time To Die* was the only film among the eight cases in my research that did not receive any comments regarding the British culture it portrayed. It was even identified as an American blockbuster by a small number of viewers. This implied that *No Time To Die's* portrayal of British cultural elements was not sufficiently explicit for Chinese consumers to identify it as British. It indicated that the representation of stereotypical Britishness in genres that are less culturally specific could increase the exotic allure of the films and reduce the cultural discount they may face in China. However, these cultural elements need to be distinguishable enough for Chinese viewers to identify them as British.

7.1.3.3 The Efficacy of Britishness in China

It is evident that most Chinese viewers had a constrained imagination of Britain, as the discussions about British culture in their reviews were primarily centred on the stereotypes that these films presented. Although these films may depict other aspects of British culture, Chinese consumers seemed only capable of discerning and appreciating a certain version of Britain: a version that aligned with their preconceived notions and stereotypical imagination. It appeared to be hard for them to identify the characteristics of Britishness beyond the prevailing stereotypes and to categorise these elements as representative of British culture. Hence, this implied that the cultural discount British films encountered in China might only be alleviated by the cultural elements that were perceived as stereotypes by Chinese viewers.

Additionally, the appeal of Britishness in films may vary among different Chinese viewers. On the one hand, most British films that were culturally specific struggled to captivate a significant number of Chinese consumers. On the other hand, the films' representation of the stereotypical British cultural elements was usually not the primary factor that compelled Chinese viewers to watch British films that were less culturally specific. The allure of the British cultural elements was primarily confined to those consumers who held a pre-existing interest in Britain and its cultures. This was consistent with the BFI survey, which revealed that 34% of Chinese respondents selected 'I am generally interested in the UK', and 30% selected 'I appreciate the cultural references used' as their reasons for interest in British film/TV. On the contrary, 44% of Chinese respondents selected 'I don't have any interest in the UK', and 26% selected 'It is often difficult to understand the cultural references used' as the reason for their disinterest in British film/TV.⁷¹⁴ Therefore, the effectiveness of stereotypical Britishness in attracting consumers in China may be limited, as it was difficult to captivate Chinese viewers who lacked interest in Britain and British culture.

7.2 Limitations of the Research and Recommendations for Future Studies

It was necessary to acknowledge that my research had some limitations. Considering the constraints of time and resources within the research's viable timetable, I focused only on eight quintessentially British films that were chosen from 35 British films released in China between 2017 and 2022. The quantity of Chinese audience reviews that were collected for analysis was also relatively limited because of the constraints of human and financial resources. To enhance the validity of the research results, future research could analyse a more diverse array of British films and a broader range of film reviews to achieve a more thorough comprehension of the cultural discount encountered by British films in China. Despite the fact that my thesis was restricted to eight cases and a small number of film reviews, it still offered valuable insights into the diverse range of factors that influenced the box office performance of British films

⁷¹⁴ BFI (2022b), p.9

across various genres in China. Furthermore, it was necessary to acknowledge that the research employed convenience sampling due to the limited availability of time and human resources. This non-probability sampling method may increase the susceptibility to sampling bias and potentially diminish the generalisability of the findings. In order to improve the database's representativeness, further studies could implement probability sampling methods. In spite of this, my research still offered novel perspectives on the attitudes and preferences of Chinese viewers toward the various factors of the chosen British films. The findings of my research, as outlined in Section 7.1, suggested that each factor shared some commonalities in its influence on the box office performance of British films in China. These parallels may be applicable to other British films released in China during the same period.

Future research could investigate British films that have recently been released in China. Given that I focused on British films that had already been released in China, reviews from Chinese consumers on ticketing platforms were a significant resource for my thesis. These reviews showed relatively actual responses from Chinese viewers after watching a particular British film, which were crucial for analysing the factors influencing the performance of British films at the Chinese box office. However, the generalisability of my research may be compromised by the lack of fundamental demographic information about users on the ticketing platforms, such as their gender and age groups. In addition, my thesis only explored the perspectives that viewers expressed in their reviews. It was challenging to develop a more thorough understanding of the other factors that were not addressed in their comments. For instance, the influence of marketing and awards on British films' box office revenue in China was hard to assess, as Chinese consumers did not mention these two factors in their reviews. To deepen the comprehension of the various influencing factors, future research could focus on newly released films and may start the survey immediately following Chinese consumers' viewing of a particular British film in cinemas. Questionnaires and focus groups can be employed to gather different perspectives from viewers about the cinematic experience, explore each factor in greater depth, and collect necessary demographic information about the participants. Nevertheless, my research still offered a relatively profound and authentic understanding of the

factors that affect the box office performance of British films in China. The opinions and sensations conveyed in the film reviews written by Chinese consumers were comparatively unbiased, as they were not influenced by the researchers.

7.3 Theoretical, Methodological and Industrial Contribution

Notwithstanding the limitations of my research, it still provided fresh insights into the investigation of cross-cultural box office performance. The contribution of my research to the subject will be presented from theoretical, methodological, and industrial perspectives.

7.3.1 Theoretical Perspective

My research examined the box office performance of British films in mainland China, a subject that has not been sufficiently investigated in previous international media flows studies. The results revealed that most Chinese viewers were not particularly familiar with and not particularly interested in British films. The import quantity of British films in China was limited, and their box office performance in China was lacklustre between 2017 and 2022. In addition, my research provided additional evidence for the cultural discount theory.⁷¹⁵ The findings showed that the appeal of British films to Chinese viewers would be diminished as a result of the increased cultural specificity. Reviews from Chinese consumers showed that cultural differences did not significantly hinder their understanding of these British films. The box office performance of these British films in China was adversely affected by the diminished attractiveness of certain British qualities, such as subject matters, styles, franchises, stars, and genres, which were less familiar to most Chinese viewers and hard to pique their interest.

The results also suggested that Higson's argument regarding the stereotypical Britishness in British films intended for transnational circulation was not always

⁷¹⁵ Hoskins & Mirus (1988), p.500

effective in preserving the British national identity and serving as exotic signifiers of distinction in the Chinese market.⁷¹⁶ Numerous stereotypical British cultural elements in these films can be recognised as distinctly British by Chinese viewers, particularly the representations of British gentleman and British humour. Yet, the portrayal of British cultural elements in films needed to match with the established stereotypes of Britain held by Chinese consumers and be sufficiently discernible for them to identify it as British. Moreover, the results of my research indicated that Jacques's Middle Kingdom Mentality theory, which claimed that Chinese culture perceives itself as universal, pertinent and superior to others, was not frequently employed by the Chinese audience to interpret British culture in British films.⁷¹⁷ Chinese viewers occasionally showed a conviction in the universality and applicability of Chinese culture, as they were interested in finding values or cultural materials that were comparable within the Chinese cultural framework in order to comprehend certain elements of British films. The belief in Chinese culture's superiority appeared only once in my research: when some Chinese consumers advocated a boycott of *Dunkirk*. This superiority may be attributed to the fact that the values represented in *Dunkirk* were incompatible with traditional Chinese values or conflicted with the interests of China and Chinese domestic films. *Dunkirk's* box office performance in China was undoubtedly adversely affected by the Middle Kingdom Mentality. However, the findings indicated that Chinese viewers generally showed a favourable and appreciative attitude towards the British culture and values depicted in the majority of these British films. It suggested that most Chinese viewers did not often perceive Britain through the lens of the Middle Kingdom Mentality when watching British films, and this mentality may not exacerbate the effects of cultural discount if the values depicted in the film are compatible with Chinese culture.

7.3.2 Methodological Perspective

My research introduced an innovative approach for analysing films' box office performance in overseas markets: the mixed-methods case study design that yielded

⁷¹⁶ Higson (2011), p.71

⁷¹⁷ Jacques (2009), p.283

both qualitative and quantitative evidence on a singular case basis. Previous studies about cross-cultural box office performance have primarily relied on statistical analysis and a large sample size of films. Nevertheless, these studies did not treat each film as a unique production, and the research methodologies were insufficient to thoroughly examine the complexity of films, cultures and audience reception. My thesis achieved a more thorough comprehension by examining the distinctive characteristics of each film and assessing the influence of the target market on its reception. Hence, my research not only examined the impact of the different factors identified in previous studies, but it also showed the significance of contextual and textual factors in influencing British films' box office performance in China.

In terms of contextual factors, my research revealed that the distinctive cultural, social and political environment of the Chinese market influenced the import quantity and box office performance of British films. The results showed that policy incentives, institutional variables, audience preferences and competitive dynamics in the Chinese market all had an impact on British films' box office revenue. However, these contextual factors were not thoroughly considered in previous statistical analysis, as they may be difficult to classify as specific variables and assess their impact on films' box office success. This indicated that a qualitative analysis of contextual factors in the target market is essential for thoroughly understanding the influence of a film's local reception on its box office performance.

In terms of textual factors, the findings indicated that Chinese viewers placed significant emphasis on the narrative components of British films. Irrespective of the genre of British films, Chinese consumers anticipated a coherent and logical narrative, which significantly influenced films' word-of-mouth and appeal to potential viewers. Nonetheless, the narrative of a specific film has not been extensively examined in previous research. Due to the substantial sample size of previous quantitative studies, they only employ genre as a classification of stories to infer the cultural discount that a particular genre may encounter in international markets. My research found that, even within the same genre, varying storytelling abilities, budgets, and values could result in different cultural discount and box office performance. This suggested that

using case study design to investigate the textual factors of films is important for acquiring a more profound comprehension of the cultural discount that films might encounter in overseas markets.

7.3.3 Industrial Perspective

The BFI implemented the International Strategy from 2013 to 2017 and classified China as a Tier One territory to promote the economic growth and cultural influence of UK film.⁷¹⁸ However, my research showed that the Chinese audience did not develop a consumption habit for British films, resulting in British films remaining a niche market in China from 2017 to 2022. Although my thesis was not a policy report, the findings of my research had two implications for British film studios that are interested in entering and succeeding in the Chinese market. First, three of the eight cases examined in my research received investment from Chinese companies, indicating that such participation may enhance the probability of these British films securing the restricted annual import quota and facilitate their navigation through China's censorship procedures. Thus, collaboration with Chinese companies could be regarded as a vital strategy for British films to get into the Chinese market. Second, the findings revealed that, irrespective of the film's cultural specificity, an increased number of screens and intensive marketing activities in China were essential for enhancing the likelihood of British films appealing to Chinese consumers. Therefore, it is also critical for British films that are seeking to improve their box office performance in China to enhance negotiations with Chinese distribution companies (CFGC and Huaxia) to obtain additional screenings and increase marketing efforts.

Conclusion

The box office performance of eight British films in mainland China was analysed using the mixed-methods case study design in my research. My findings showed that most factors that have been identified in previous quantitative research had an impact on

⁷¹⁸ BFI (2013), p.4

Chapter 7

British films' box office revenue in China, including cultural specificity, genres, stars, budgets (audio-visual effects), franchise, release timing and the number of screens. In addition, my research introduced new factors that have not been thoroughly investigated in previous studies, including narrative components (plots, characters, and places) and market conditions (competitions, genre preferences, and policy initiatives), and revealed their influence on the performance of British films at the Chinese box office. The results revealed that the studied British films faced challenges in achieving significant success at the Chinese box office due to the cultural discount, the Chinese market environment, and audience viewing preferences.

Appendix A Original Text of Chinese Audience Reviews in Chapter 3

A.1 Section 3.1.1

The story is not complicated at all. As I said, the most difficult thing is to tell the story well, completely and logically. I think this film has basically achieved this and is able to integrate various elements. (Maoyan user)

一点也不复杂的故事，还是那句话，把故事讲好讲完整，讲得合乎逻辑才是最难，我觉得这部电影基本做到了，并能够融合各种元素。

It is as exciting as a party, the whole process is smooth without any boring parts, and the ending is very satisfactory. (Taopiaopiao user)

精彩得像 party，全程流畅无尿点，结局很圆满。

The entire plot is connected by stiff clues, which are sudden and strange, without any logic at all, which is outrageous. (Maoyan user)

整个剧情都用生搬硬套的线索连接，突然而又奇怪，没有任何逻辑可言，令人发指。

The beginning is reasonable, but the plot goes completely wrong later?!? I am so angry that I can only type so many words to slightly relieve the two hours wasted by this film. Cherish your life and stay away from this bad film!! (Maoyan user)

开头还像回事，后面的套路完全走偏了?!? 气愤的我只有打出这么多字才能稍微缓解被这电影浪费的两个小时，珍爱生命远离烂片!!

The values it depicted may be incompatible with some people in China. Domestic drug control is so strict, and the number of drug users is far lower than in Europe

and the United States, so some plots are difficult to arouse empathy. (Maoyan user)

另外可能在中国还是有些水土不服吧，国内毒品管制这么严，吸毒人数远远低于欧美，部分剧情很难引起共情。

The film wants to say too much, which results in the characters not being fully fleshed out, and the 2-hour running time fails to establish these characters. As a result, the sequences in which Kingsman was bombed and Tequila was shot left people feeling bland, and I felt neither pity nor sadness at all. (Maoyan user)

想说的太多导致人物不够丰满，2小时的时长也没能塑造起人物形象。这就导致Kingsman被炸、龙舌兰中枪平淡无奇，我丝毫不感觉不到可惜或者难过等情绪。

In terms of character creation, the new characters that are hyped up in the early stages either sleep throughout the entire film or turn against the protagonists for no apparent reason. It would not affect the plot if they were completely removed. As for the characters in the first film... well, it would not be surprising if the audience who liked the first film wanted to send knives to the screenwriter and director. (Maoyan user)

人物塑造方面，前期大肆宣传的新角色不是睡了整场电影，就是莫名其妙的反水，或是完全删掉也不影响。至于老角色...这么说，如果喜欢第一部的观众想给编剧导演寄刀片真是一点也不奇怪。

A.2 Section 3.1.2

Moreover, some settings are more comic and imaginative. The Alpha Gel and the electric lasso are super cool, and the long shot of the three-person fight at the end is unforgettable. (Maoyan user)

而且某些设置更具漫画感与想象力，阿尔法凝胶和电光套索超级酷炫，结尾的三人打斗长镜头让人过目难忘。

The action is upgraded, and the various carefully choreographed action scenes and photography editing are very exciting. The opening car racing scene and the long shot of the final battle, as well as various other scenes in the film, have pushed the action performance to the extreme and are definitely worth a full mark.

(Maoyan user)

动作升级，各种精心编排的动作场面和摄影剪辑不要太爽，开场的飙车戏和决战的长镜头，以及片中的各种，算是将动作表现推到了极致，绝对是值满分的。

To put it simply, this is an action comedy, with action scenes and comedy jokes from beginning to end, and of course, thrilling passages. There is no doubt that “Kingsman 2” is a spy film tailor-made for young people. After getting used to Bond’s serious gentlemanly style, “Kingsman” is so intense and has a humorous style of making fun of each other, which is obviously more appealing to today’s young people! (Maoyan user)

通俗一点说，这就是一部动作喜剧，从头到尾都有动作场景和喜剧笑料，当然也少不了惊险的段落。 毋庸置疑的是，《王牌特工 2》是一部为年轻人量身定做的间谍片，在看惯了 007 一本正经的绅士风之后，《王牌特工》这样紧张中不乏互黑互烈的搞笑风格，显然更对如今年轻人们的胃口！

Compared to Bond and Bourne, I prefer this candy-style spy film with purely staged fights and wide-open imagination... (Taopiaopiao user)

王牌特工，和 007，谍影重重相比，我还更喜欢这部糖果系，纯摆拍式打斗，脑洞大开的谍战片...

The graphics and art style are also super good. The switching between British style, cowboy style, and American retro style is seamless. The shooting technique of the fighting scenes is also quite interesting. The 360-degree camera makes the

solemn fighting scenes full of humour. The music is also very good, switching between various styles. (Maoyan user)

画面和美术风格也超级赞，英伦风，牛仔风，美国复古风切换毫无违和，打斗场景的拍摄手法也相当有趣，360 度环绕的镜头，肃杀的打斗镜头变得充满幽默感，音乐也相当棒配合各种风格切换音乐。

The slow and funny handling of the fighting scenes and the dynamic soundtrack are very different from most action films and are more novel. Although the plot development is old-fashioned, it is not boring. It is worth going to the cinema to watch! (Taopiaopiao user)

打戏部分慢速滑稽的处理方式和动感的配乐与大部分动作电影有极大不同，更加新颖～情节发展虽然老套但也不乏味～值得去影院观赏！

A.3 Section 3.1.3

It is not that bad. It is just far below my expectations... The screenwriter of this film is really mean to the fans of the first film. (Maoyan user)

不是说不好看，只是远远不及当初的期望...这一部的编剧对第一部的老粉简直太恶意了。

If the first film is a masterpiece, this one is just a passerby. Despite this, this film is still better than all the recent domestic blockbusters. (Maoyan user)

如果说第一部是神作，这一部就泯然路人矣，尽管这样，这片还是足以秒杀近期一众国产大片。

A.4 Section 3.1.4

Who says the British are serious? They are really good at humour. (Taopiaopiao user)

谁说英国人严肃，幽默起来无敌了。

The success of “Kingsman” is that it combines the romantic British gentleman with the intelligent agent who can fight and kill! They wear expensive custom-made suits, and everything they do is charming. When fighting and killing people are no longer wild but become full of romance, this look is so fresh! (Maoyan user)

王牌特工的成功，就是将英伦风的浪漫绅士与能打能杀智慧超群的特工结合到了一起！他们穿着昂贵的定制西装，举手投足之间都是风情，当打架杀人那些事不再狂野，而变得风情十足，这种观感简直不要太新鲜！

A film worth watching, full of British secret agent style. The British style is completely opposite to the American style. There is a sense of accent and ritual. British spy films are different from American films where agents show off their muscles. Instead, they wear tailor-made suits from Savile Row in the UK and the etiquette of British gentlemen to fight the enemy in various dangerous and exciting places. Worth watching! (Taopiaopiao user)

值得去看的一部电影，里面充满了，英式的特工风格。英式的格调和美式的截然相反。很有一种腔调和仪式感，英式电影特工不同于美式的大块头秀肌肉的电影，而是穿着在英国萨维尔街定制的西装，英式绅士的礼仪游走在各个危险又充满刺激的地方展开对敌人的殊死搏斗。值得一看！

The contrast between Kingsman and Statesman is obvious. One is polite and gentlemanly, while the other is passionate, open and straightforward. The conflict in the film is very clear. (Taopiaopiao user)

Kingsman 和 Statesman 的对比很明显，一个彬彬有礼绅士风度一个热情奔放开朗直接，电影冲突很明确。

The combination of American cowboy and British gentleman lacks the contrast between elegance and violence and fails to create the expected sparks. (Maoyan user)

美国牛仔+英国绅士的组合缺少了文雅与暴力的反差又没有碰撞出期望的火花。

The refreshing British style that the first film gave the audience has been weakened into an almost negligible background in this film, and it has lost its own characteristics, which is a pity. (Maoyan user)

第一部给观众的耳目一新的英伦腔调弱化成了几乎可以忽略不计的背景，失去了自己的特色，有点可惜。

This sequel is a mix of British and American elements, and the addition of new American elements makes this film more diverse. (Maoyan user)

第二部算是英美混血，新加入美国元素让影片更多元化。

I want to see gentleman in double-breasted suit, why do you show me American country style? (Taopiaopiao user)

我想看 gentleman 双排扣 suit，却给我看美式乡士气息。

A.5 Section 3.2.1

Watching the respected Mr. Rowan Atkinson getting older day by day, I feel really sad. Just like Master Chaplin, he represents the pinnacle of comedy in the new era! (Taopiaopiao user)

看着尊敬的罗温•艾金森先生一天天老去，心里有些心酸，就如同卓别林大师一样，他代表着新时代的搞笑巅峰！

Mr. Bean is an eye-catching title in the laughter world of the new century. If Chaplin is the greatest master of humour and comedy in the 20th century, then Mr. Bean is his successor. (Taopiaopiao user)

憨豆是新世纪笑声届里的一个醒目标题，如果说卓别林是 20 世纪最伟大的幽默喜剧大师，那么憨豆就是他的接班人。

Mr. Bean can be said to be a childhood memory, so this is destined to be a film watched for sentimental reasons. Those who like Mr. Bean must support it. (Maoyan user)

憨豆可以说是童年回忆了，所以注定这是一部情怀向的电影，喜欢憨豆的必须支持。

To be honest, I am honoured to see Mr. Bean appear on the screen again. This is also the first time I have seen his work in the cinema. In the past two days, I had seen some of the upcoming films, but when I read the title “Agent Bean”, I was determined to watch it, and I was very excited. He has influenced two generations with his performance for nearly 30 years, which is great! Hats off to him! (Maoyan user)

说句实在话，能看到憨豆先生再次出现在荧幕当中我是很荣幸的，这也是我第一次在电影院看到的他的作品，当前两天我看到即将上映的电影中有憨豆特工这几个字时，我决心已定，必看无疑，内心非常激动。他用他的表演在将近 30 年的时光中感染了两代人，很伟大！向他致敬！

A.6 Section 3.2.2

The film continues the style of the “Mr. Bean” TV series, with an average of one laugh every three or four minutes. Laughter continued. (Maoyan user)

影片延续了憨豆先生电视剧的风格，笑点平均三四分钟就有一个，笑声不断～

I am a loyal Mr. Bean fan! From “Bean” to “Agent Bean 3”, I have watched each of them twice or more. The reason why the “Agent Bean” series is attractive to me is not only because of Mr. Bean’s humour, but more importantly, the spirit he conveys in the film: “Even if everyone doesn’t trust me, I will never give up easily!” (Taopiaopiao user)

我是一个忠实的 Mr.. Bean 迷！从《憨豆先生的大灾难》一直到《憨豆特工 3》没有一部不是看两遍及以上，《憨豆特工》系列对于我之所以有吸引力不仅仅

是源于憨豆先生的搞笑幽默，更重要的是他在电影中传递的那种“纵使大家都不信任我，但我绝不会轻易放弃”的精神！

A.7 Section 3.2.3

There is constant laughter throughout the whole process. It is a film that can be understood without much thought. (Taopiaopiao user)

整个过程，笑声不断，一部不费脑筋就能看懂的电影。

The film turns out to be unexpectedly wonderful, very funny, and shows justice and persistence. The plot is great. I like it. (Taopiaopiao user)

结果影片出人意料的精彩，很搞笑，正义，坚持，剧情很棒，喜欢喜欢。

It is so funny, with rich and exaggerated facial expressions and cute movements. I almost died of laughter in the cinema. (Taopiaopiao user)

太搞笑了，丰富夸张的面部表情，憨态可掬的动作，我快笑死在电影院里了。

The “Mr. Bean” series of films is considered a classic among comedy films. It still has Mr. Bean’s unique body language and humour. (Taopiaopiao user)

憨豆系列电影算是喜剧电影中的经典了。还是一如既往的憨豆先生特有的肢体语言，还是一样的诙谐幽默。

I am very disappointed with Mr. Bean. There is almost no funny point. I did not laugh even though I am easily amused. (Maoyan user)

让我很失望的憨豆先生，搞笑的点几乎没有。我笑点这么低都没笑。

I really do not want to give it even one point. It is too bad. Or I can say I do not understand it. American comedy is different from Chinese comedy. It is boring to

watch. Except for American blockbusters, which are okay, the rest are really bad.
(Maoyan user)

真的 1 分都不想给，太烂了，也可以说我看不懂，美国的搞笑剧跟中国的搞笑剧不一样，看着也就无聊了，除了美国大片看的还可以以外其他的真的是烂。

A.8 Section 3.2.4

Compared to the noble temperament of Kingsman and the extraordinary charm of Tom Cruise in IMF, Mr. Bean does not have the special advantages of other agents. However, he has maintained superb acting skills and extremely challenging body language for decades. Through the screen, we can still feel his sincerity in acting. He is worthy of being the ace of comedy! Such a conscientious masterpiece is really worth watching and cherishing! (Maoyan user)

相比 Kingsman 的尊贵气质，IMF 阿汤哥的非凡魅力，B 先生虽没有其他特工的特别优势，尽管如此，几十年如一日保持精湛演技和极富挑战性的肢体语言，透过屏幕还是感受到他对演艺的真诚，不愧为搞笑王牌！如此良心佳作真的且看且珍惜了！

Old-school jokes, typical British humour. If Kingsman is the British showing off their charm, then Mr. Bean is the British making fun of themselves. (Taopiaopiao user)

老派的笑点，典型的英式幽默，如果说王牌特工是英国人展示自己的魅力，那憨豆特工就是英国人的自黑。

The British are very good at making fun of themselves. (Maoyan user)
英国人的自黑能力杠杠的。

The funny point of Mr. Bean lies in his self-deprecating skills in the UK, the twists and turns in life, and, of course, his helplessness and struggle in facing life. It can make me laugh happily for two hours in a tense rhythm. (Taopiaopiao user)

憨豆的笑点，在于腐国的资深自黑，在于生活的阴差阳错，当然也在于憨豆自

己面对生活时随遇而安的小无奈又努力挣扎的小动志，能让我在紧张的节奏中开心地笑两个小时。

A.9 Section 3.3.1

I have been watching “007” films since I was a child, and they have accompanied the growth of my generation. (Maoyan user)

从小到大一直在看 007 的电影，伴随着我们这代人的成长。

Is 007 really dead? This is the first time I wonder if “007” will continue to make new films. If it really does not make any more sequels, I will really be sad. (Taopiaopiao user)

007 死了吗？我头一次产生 007 还会不会继续拍新的电影？如果真的不拍了，真的有点舍不得。

After following the series for many years, I have experienced many actors playing the role of 007, but I still think that Daniel’s 007 is the most impressive. (Maoyan user)

追剧多年，经历多个演员饰演 007 角色，还是觉得丹尼尔饰演的 007 印象最深。

It can be said that Daniel’s Bond has accompanied me throughout my youth. There will be different 007 in the future, but no matter what, in my heart, Daniel will always be the best Bond, no doubt about it. (Maoyan user)

丹叔的邦德可以说陪伴了我整个青春，以后还会有不同的 007，可是不论怎样，在我心里丹叔永远是最好的邦德，没有之一。

007 is the most handsome man in my mind, full of charm. (Maoyan user)

007 我心目中最帅的男人，魅力十足。

After watching the film, I can really feel a lot from Bond, his elegance, his responsibility, his wisdom, and his skills. Films do not need to rely on high

technology and scenes to attract attention. A real 007 is the best element to attract the audience! (Maoyan user)

看完真的能从邦德身上感受到很多，他的优雅从容，他的责任担当，他的智慧与身手。电影不是依靠高科技与画面去博眼球的，一个有血有肉的 007 才是吸引观众的最佳元素！

A.10 Section 3.3.2

The plot seems to be very compact, and the main line is clear. (Maoyan user)

看起来情节也很紧凑，主线清晰。

It is unexpectedly good. The plot is exciting and full of surprises. It is better than the previous ones. It has very delicate emotional expressions. Some minor flaws can be ignored. (Maoyan user)

确实出乎意料的好看，剧情紧张刺激而不乏惊喜比之前几部要出彩，很细腻的情感体现。一些小瑕疵可以忽略不计。

I read film reviews before watching the film, and someone said that the last part of the film made people cry. I did not expect that I would cry too. Love and separation, oh, the tears that I deliberately did not wipe away are salty. (Taopiaopiao user)

之前看影评，有人说电影最后部分让人看落泪了，没想到自己也同样看哭了，爱别离，唉，故意没擦的眼泪是咸的。

The only time it is not a happy ending, the hero is always an ordinary person, which is very sad. But this ending is more realistic. After all, 007 is just a code name, not a specific individual. They are not supermen with steel bones and invulnerable to

weapons. There will always be a day when the hero will retire from the game.
(Taopiaopiao user)

唯一一次不是大团圆的结局，英雄始终是平凡的人，看完很心酸。但是这样的结局更加真实一点，毕竟 007 只是一个代号，不是特指的个体，他们都不是钢筋铁骨刀枪不入的超人，总归有英雄迟暮退出游戏的一天。

The reason I did not give it a full mark is because of the ending. It is not because he died, but because his death was not splendid enough. We all thought that “his death must be earth-shattering”. Maybe the director has his own ideas, but I think his death could be more splendid because he is James Bond! (Maoyan user)

没有给满分的原因，就是结局，不是因为把他写死了，而是他死的不太 splendid，我们想的应该都是“他的死必须惊天动地”那种感觉，或许导演有他的想法，但我觉得他可以死的精彩一些，因为他是詹姆斯邦德！

In the second half, Bond's ex and daughter were confusing, and Bond's death was also confusing. Yes, according to the plot, it is reasonable, but this is Bond! It is 007! Is this even a little bit legendary? Yes, Bond is a hero in his twilight years, but the 007 legend has not ended yet! Rubbish film ruined 007. I gave it a one point just for Daniel! If you want to watch it, you can wait for the film to be released on streaming platforms. Do not waste your money! (Maoyan user)

后半段邦德前任和那个女儿搞得莫名其妙，邦德的死亡也很莫名其妙啊！对，按剧情说没问题，但是这是邦德啊！是 007 啊！这还有一点点传奇的样子吗？对，邦德是英雄迟暮，但是 007 传奇没落幕啊！垃圾电影毁了 007。

The plot is weak, the dialogue is awkward. I fell asleep and woke up in the middle, woke up and fell asleep several times, and finally watched the ending, but it turned out to be even more rubbish! American blockbusters are really getting worse and worse. (Maoyan user)

情节单一，对白很尬。..... 中途睡了醒，醒了睡，几次都想离场，好不容易看到结局，结果更垃圾！美国大片真的是越来越没落了。

A.11 Section 3.3.4

The action sense of the film never seems sloppy! Great! (Maoyan user)

电影的动作感也是从来不会拖泥带水的！点赞！

Bond's action scenes, in which he risks his life, are smooth and graceful, keeping the audience's attention focused. (Taopiaopiao user)

邦德全程置之死地而后生的动作戏流畅潇洒，让观众注意力高度集中。

The whole film is more than two hours long, the action scenes add up to less than half an hour, and the rest is fake and empty. (Maoyan user)

全片两个多小时，动作场景加起来不超过半小时，剩下的都是假大空。

The plot is exciting, as always, and the sound effects are absolutely the best! I like the opening song, and the soundtrack that can interpret the plot really adds scores to the film. I was scared by the mask in the opening! The explosions and motorcycle scenes still provide enough gimmicks. (Maoyan user)

剧情刺激，一如既往的精彩，音效绝对是最棒的！种草片头曲，能够诠释剧情的配乐真的会给电影加分。被片头的面具吓到ㄟㄎㄎ！爆炸和机车戏依然给足噱头。

Great, so enjoyable. This is the visual effect of American blockbusters, especially the car racing scenes, which are amazing. In two words, beautiful, perfect! (Maoyan user)

太棒了，过瘾。这就是美国大片的视觉效果，特别是飙车的那些场景，绝了。两个字漂亮，完美！

There are many scenes that I enjoy visually. The film started with Matera in Italy. It feels like a city on a cliff. It is perfect for a vacation. The beach where Bond retired is also very beautiful. I have not found this filming location yet. It feels like a villa is standard for a retired agent's beach! After that, we saw the magnificent scenery of the parks and plains in the UK, the glacial lakes in Norway, the cliffs and islands in

Denmark, and the most beautiful one was the Atlantic Coast Highway in Norway, which is so amazing. The views are all beautiful. (Maoyan user)

让我视觉很享受的是好多场景，影片一上来就是意大利的马泰拉，感觉是长在悬崖峭壁的城市，太适合去旅游度假了。邦德养老的海滩也相当美，还没有找到取景地。感觉特工退休海滩，别墅是标配呀！之后又先后领略了英国国家公园和平原的壮丽美景，又到了挪威的冰湖，丹麦的悬崖峭壁小岛，最绝美的还是挪威的大西洋海滨公路，那个警官太让人拍案叫绝。景色都很美。

Appendix B Original Text of Chinese Audience

Reviews in Chapter 4

B.1 Section 4.1.1

Nolan skilfully uses three timelines to tell a story. I personally had a wonderful feeling. It was a bit depressing and difficult to understand when I was watching it. But after watching it, it is like an enlightenment. Nolan not only wants to give a realistic description of the battlefield and say how cruel the war is, but also to say that everyone on the battlefield is crucial. There is no American individual heroism. Every character exudes brilliance. (Maoyan user)

诺兰巧妙地运用了三条时间线讲述一件事情，我个人有个奇妙的感觉，看的时候有点压抑，难以理解，但是看完之后，犹如醍醐灌顶，诺兰不仅是想给战场一个写实，说战争是多么的残酷，而是说战场上的每个人都是至关重要的，没有美国个人英雄主义，每一个人物都散发着光辉。

The whole process is tense and full of suspense. The three storylines of sea, land and air are like the hands of a clock, proceeding at different speeds but eventually intersecting. (Taopiaopiao user)

全程紧张而充满悬念，海陆空三条故事线如时钟的指针，不同速度进行却最终交汇。

This film is also full of love for the country. When I heard the word “home”, I could not help but burst into tears..... (Taopiaopiao user)

同样充满着一种对家国的热爱。听到 home 这个词时，不禁热泪盈眶.....

I was really touched when I saw the ordinary people driving their own boats to pick up the troops. This is the cohesion of a country. (Taopiaopiao user)

看到老百姓们开着自己的小船来接军队，我真的好感动，这是一个国家的凝聚力啊。

In the end, the soldiers were worried about being criticised, but they were greeted with smiles and beer. This is worthy of deep thought by the Chinese people. (Taopiaopiao user)

最后士兵担心被口水淹没，迎来的却是笑容与啤酒，这值得中国人深思。

The strength of a country can be seen from the quality of its ordinary citizens. When the army failed and retreated, the people bravely rushed to the front line to pick up the soldiers in small boats. After the soldiers arrived at the station safely, the people cheered and celebrated. This is very admirable! (Taopiaopiao user)

一个国家的强大从他的普通国民素质看出，面对军队失败撤退，百姓可以勇敢冲向前线迎接战士，在战士们平安到达车站后，百姓们欢呼庆祝。这是非常敬佩的！

And then the theme of the film: Yes, anti-war. People should cherish life. But if they are afraid of death, they should not be soldiers. Such soldiers will only kill their comrades, kill their allies, and expose the people behind them to enemy fire. This is where the fundamental values of this film are incorrect. It must be pointed out. This is also the main reason why I gave it a low score. (Maoyan user)

然后是主旨：没错，反战。人是应该珍惜生命，但，怕死，就不要当军人，这样的军人只会害死战友害死盟友，只会将身后的人民暴露在敌人的炮火之下。这是这电影三观不正的地方，必须提出，这也是我打低分的主要原因。

It was clearly a huge rout at Dunkirk, but it was shamelessly filmed as a victorious retreat! (Maoyan user)

明明是敦克尔大溃败、竟无耻拍成了胜利大撤退！

B.2 Section 4.1.2

I like Nolan's down-to-earth narrative without showing off his skills. This film can be seen as a video experiment that breaks through his previous creative thinking and narrative style. This film is destined not to be as widely recognized as Nolan's

previous mainstream commercial films that mainly show off ideas, but I like it. Top ten of the year, full marks. (Maoyan user)

喜欢这个踏实叙事不炫技的诺兰，本片更能看作是他突破过往创作思维和叙事风格的影像实验。这部电影注定不能如诺兰之前以卖弄点子为主的主流商业片一般受到普遍的认可，但我喜欢。年度十佳，满分。

If Nolan lived in a world with superpowers, his title would definitely be ‘Time Weaver’. It is probably difficult to find another director in this world who can complete the narrative of multiple time and space as flawlessly as he does. (Maoyan user)

诺导若是在有超能力的世界的话，他的称号一定是“Time Weaver”。在这世上大概已经很难再找到一个像他这样把多重时空叙事完成得这么滴水不漏的导演了。

This film is really bad. Nolan showed the audience what it means to be defeated. In fact, this story could be made more tragic and depicted with more details, but the director insisted on portraying this story from his personal perspective. I would like to ask, is it really necessary to deliberately not film the German and French troops? Is it really necessary not to show any bloody battle scenes? I am afraid these are all trying to avoid things that audiences will find offensive. Although they are effective and the angles are fresh, the actual effect is probably far less profound and enjoyable than other characterisation methods. (Maoyan user)

真的非常的不好看，诺兰很好的向观众展示了什么叫溃不成军，但是是一部很用心拍摄的电影。其实这个故事可以拍得更悲壮，可以有更多细节刻画，但导演却非要从他个人的角度来刻画这个故事，我想问真的有必要刻意避开德军和法军吗？真的有必要不展示任何血腥的战斗场面吗？这些恐怕都是在忌观众之大不韪，虽然有所成效，角度新鲜，但实际效果恐怕远不及其它刻画方式那么深刻和有观赏性。

Many people say that this is a special narrative technique. Nolan’s filming is amazing, with a different perspective and so on. You do not make films for yourself. You do not make films to show that you are different You make films for

the public to watch. However, when your film comes out, it is completely different from the perspective that the public wants to watch. It is so bad, so bad that I do not want to say anything more. (Maoyan user)

很多人说这是一种叙事的特殊手法，诺兰拍的太牛了，什么不一样的视角什么的。 你拍电影不是给自己拍的，不是要显示自己与众不同的，你是拍给大众看的。然而你这部电影一出来完全不是大众想看的角度。 太烂了，烂到无以复加。烂到我不想再多说什么了。

B.3 Section 4.1.3

Whether it is the picture size or the sound effects, this film will be at least half as good if you do not experience it in a cinema. (Maoyan user)

无论是画面画幅还是音效，这部片不在电影院体验的话起码感觉会逊色一半吧。

I admire the sound effects very much. The repetitive percussion sounds and the small amount of dialogue did not make the film boring. I think only Nolan can make such a stylish, artistic and sophisticated film. (Taopiaopiao user)

我对音效十分佩服，重复的打击声音和少量的台词并没有让电影乏味枯燥。我想能拍出这样有风格有艺术有高度的电影也就是诺兰了。

Has anyone seen such a Hollywood blockbuster? There are 5 planes in total, 0 tanks, 2 battleships, 0 Germans, some steel helmets, some rifles, 0 cars, 0 machine guns, 20 civilian ships, 1 Frenchman, and 1,000 British walk-ons. (Maoyan user)

有人看过这样的好莱坞大片吗？飞机总共 5 架，坦克 0，战舰 2 艘，德国人 0，钢盔若干，步枪若干，汽车 0，机关枪 0，民船 20 艘，法国人 1 人，英国人 1000 龙套。

Appendix

“Dunkirk” is a bad film, not good at all. There are few fierce fighting scenes, and there are no grand scenes of two armies confronting each other. (Maoyan user)
敦刻尔克烂片，一点都不好看。没得几个激烈打斗的场景，更没有两军对垒的恢宏巨制。

It is not as shocking as I had imagined, maybe because the expectations were too high during the promotion, which led to some disappointment when watching the film. Maybe it is just a failed battle and a successful retreat. I feel like there is nothing much to say. (Taopiaopiao user)
没有想象中的震撼，可能因为宣传时的预期太高，导致观影时有些落差失望，可能就是一场失败的战役，成功的撤退，感觉没什么好说的。

The views and ideologies expressed in this film have nothing to do with traditional war films. The enemy troops are fully marginalized and contextualized, and are replaced by the ultimate presentation of the will and actions of trapped beast-like humans to survive that is suppressed and tense throughout. (Maoyan user)
和传统战争片所表达的观点与意识形态尽皆无关，敌军被充分边缘化背景化，取而代之的是全程压抑紧张的困兽般人类求生意志与行动的极致呈现。

Unlike previous World War II-themed films, there are no enemies in sight, and there are no fancy special effects in the air combat, but the fear and the feeling of wanting to go home are deeply rooted in people’s hearts. A great film, many of the scenes are very Nolan-esque, great! (Taopiaopiao user)
不同以往的二战题材电影，看不到任何敌人，空战也毫无花式特效，但是那份恐惧，那份想回家的感受却是深入人心，很棒的一部电影，很多画面也很诺兰，很棒！

If you like watching aeroplanes and cannons, this film is not for you. You can hardly see the enemy. The film uses this depressing feeling to reflect the cruelty of war and human nature. If you think this film is rubbish, it is because you have never experienced war and have been brainwashed by the various domestic anti-

Japanese dramas nowadays. You think war films are good only if they have various explosion scenes. The actual scene of the real Dunkirk Evacuation was like this in the film. If you think it is rubbish, please study history first. Do not think that watching a few domestic films means you are patriotic. (Maoyan user)

喜欢看飞机大炮的这电影不适合你，几乎看不到敌人，电影用这种压抑的感觉了反应战争残酷，反应人性。如果你觉得这电影垃圾，那是你没经历过战争，大多被现在的各种抗日神剧洗脑了，觉得各种炸各种爆就是好的。敦刻尔克当时的实际场景就是这样的，觉得垃圾的拜托你去先把历史学好，觉得看了几部国产电影就是爱国了。

There is no excessive rendering of bloody scenes. But it still made people feel the urgency, and no one from the enemy camp was seen from the beginning to the end. Do not ask us why we watch foreign war films, because they are real and well-filmed. (Taopiaopiao user)

没有过多渲染血肉模糊的场景。但是依然让人感受到那种紧迫，从头到尾没看到敌方阵营的人。不要问我们为什么看国外战争片，因为人家拍的实在，拍的好。

B.4 Section 4.1.4

The greatness of Dunkirk is only for the British because it saved a large number of British troops. Only the British could praise this “Great Escape” as a “Victorious Retreat”. The British escaped, and tens of thousands of French troops who stayed behind were captured. Not long after, on the Asian battlefield, the British army commanded by this General Alexander retreated from Burma to India. This time, tens of thousands of Chinese expeditionary forces and General Anlan Dai were left behind as cannon fodder. The British official said that the British army fled from Burma to India and called it “Asia’s Dunkirk Miracle”. As a Chinese, I have absolutely no reason to praise Dunkirk, let alone applaud this kind of escape regardless of friendly forces. The tens of thousands of heroic souls of the

expeditionary force who stayed in Myanmar are the heroes we need to praise and applaud. (Maoyan user)

敦刻尔克伟大仅仅是对于英国人来说，因为保存了大量英军。也只有英国可以把大逃跑歌颂为胜利大撤退，英国人跑了留下来殿后的几万法军都被俘虏。不久后的亚洲战场，同样是这位亚历山大指挥的英军从缅甸撤退到印度，这次留下来当炮灰的是几万中国远征军还有一位戴安澜将军，英国官方将英军从缅甸逃到印度称为“亚洲的敦刻尔克奇迹”。作为一个中国人我完全没有理由去歌颂敦刻尔克，更没有理由去为这种不顾友军的逃跑鼓掌，那几万留在缅甸的远征军英魂才是我们要去歌颂要去鼓掌的英雄。

There were only ten or eight people in the cinema, thanks to the moral kidnapping of Internet trolls and keyboard warriors. Watching “Wolf Warrior” means being patriotic, but watching this film means being unpatriotic, because in history the commander who commanded this evacuation once abandoned our Chinese Expeditionary Force in Burma, so we must boycott this film resolutely. But what does this have to do with people making this film? In the future, when choosing an actor for a film, do you have to check his background to see if he has done anything that would be unworthy of the country? Nonsense! Good things are always good. Only by learning from other people’s good ideas can we make countless “Wolf Warrior” in the future! (Maoyan user)

影院稀稀拉拉坐了十个八个人，这得“感谢”网喷和键盘党的道德绑架，看战狼就爱国，看本片就是不爱国，历史中指挥这次大逃生的指挥官曾经在缅甸抛弃过中国远征军，要坚决抵制。这跟人拍电影的有毛关系？以后是不是拍个电影选演员得查*****看有没有做过有愧国家的事！扯淡！好的永远是好的，只有学了人家优秀的，我们今后才能拍出无数个战狼！

B.5 Section 4.2.1

A masterpiece of Gary Oldman that ought to earn him the Best Actor award! It is as if he is possessed by Churchill's soul, and he alone illuminates "Darkest Hour"!

(Maoyan user)

加里·奥德曼的封帝代表作！简直就是丘吉尔灵魂附体，一个人点亮了《至暗时刻》！

The actor who played Churchill delivered an outstanding performance.

(Taopiaopiao user)

丘吉尔的演员演技炸裂。

It broke the label of an iron Prime Minister that history books had given me.

(Maoyan user)

打破了历史书给我造成的铁腕宰相的标签。

It gave me a glimpse into a more real Churchill. (Taopiaopiao user)

让我见识到了更为真实的丘吉尔。

In fact, I have no interest in history, and my impression of Churchill was only that of a "warmonger". But after watching this film, I realised how one-sided and narrow this term is when applied to Churchill! This film completely changed my view of Churchill. Please forgive my ignorance. The courage and belief of an old man who took over at a critical moment for the country are truly worthy of our admiration! (Maoyan user)

其实我本身对历史是没什么兴趣的，而对邱吉尔的印象也只是停留在“好战”，而看了这个片子之后，我才知道，这个词用在邱吉尔身上是有多么的片面与狭隘！ 这个片子让我对邱吉尔彻底改观，请原谅我的无知。一位在国家危急时刻接任的老人，其勇气与信念真的是值得我们钦佩！

Through this film, I saw a paranoid practitioner with extraordinary courage, a greedy and aspiring dreamer, a passionate speaker, a humorous and charming

leader, a wise man with clear thinking, a British Prime Minister in history that I was not familiar with before. (Maoyan user)

所以我看到一位偏执且勇气非凡的践行者，贪婪的有抱负的逐梦人，激情澎湃的演说家，幽默有魅力的领袖，思路清奇的智者，一位我不曾了解的历史上的英国首相。

B.6 Section 4.2.2

The first part of the film is light-hearted and moderately intense, but the middle part is so oppressive and emotionally distressing that it made my heartbeat race wildly, and I was sweating profusely. The ending part is melodious and uplifting, just like the darkest moment has finally ushered in the light, and you have survived the pain and are ready to enjoy the feeling of relief, and the protagonist has already left the scene coolly..... Not enough to watch. A very wonderful film. (Maoyan user)

前段轻松愉快力度适中，中段压迫感十足扎心的紧张看得我心脏狂跳，满头大汗，结尾悠扬振奋就像至暗时刻终于终于迎来了光明，而你熬过痛苦准备享受释然的感觉，主角已经炫酷离场了...不过瘾啊，相当精彩的电影。

We should really look at how the other countries' main melody films grasp the rhythm and polish the script. Even the clichéd plot of "go to the masses" can be used in such a moving way without feeling pretentious. (Maoyan user)

真应该多看看别人国家的主旋律是如何把握节奏打磨剧本，连“到群众中去”这种老梗也能运用得令人动容而不觉矫情。

The Underground section is said to be fictional. Although it helps advance the storyline in an emotional aspect, it still feels a bit strange overall. The history still needs to be true. (Taopiaopiao user)

地铁那段据说是虚构的，虽说在情绪上有助推进，但整体上还是感觉奇怪了点，历史还要是真的好啊。

B.7 Section 4.2.3

In terms of cinematography, the tone of the whole film is very consistent with the title. The techniques of light and shadow arrangement, light and dark interlacing, and facial lighting are skilfully used, and they are good at creating a classical charm. The long-shot scheduling of large sections is very ornamental. After the excellent acting, the script, soundtrack and photography of *Darkest Hour* are also extraordinary, and the whole is still an exquisite film. (Maoyan user)

在摄影上，全片基调与片名十分契合，光影布置、明暗交错、面部打光的技巧运用娴熟，擅长营造古典韵味，大篇幅的长镜头调度极具观赏性。在卓越的演技打头阵之后，《至暗时刻》的剧本、配乐和摄影也都同样不凡，整体不失为一部精致的电影。

The light and colour are like a classical oil painting, and the soundtrack, editing, and performance are all very natural. It is really beautiful. (Taopiaopiao user)

古典主义油画般的用光与色调，配乐、剪辑、表演浑然天成，真是美极了。

The style of the film is the British style of elegance, luxury and sophistication. (Maoyan user)

影片的风格就是英国的风格优雅华丽精致。

As a biopic, this is not boring or stereotyped, it can even be called interesting. The laughter in the cinema almost never stopped. (Maoyan user)

作为人物传记，这部不仅不无聊刻板甚至可以称得上有趣了。影院的笑声基本没断过。

It is a standard history film, except for the part on the Underground, I do not know if it really happened. What is rare is that it is not boring and has a lot of humour. (Taopiaopiao user)

很工整的历史正片，除了地铁上那段不知道是不是真实发生过。难得的是竟然不枯燥，有很多小幽默。

This film has no special effects and is purely about characters' inner changes and a country's political struggles. It will not be easy to understand if you do not understand some of the history at that time. (Maoyan user)

本片无特效，纯粹是围绕心里变化和政治斗争的，如果不了解一些那时的历史的话不容易看懂。

B.8 Section 4.2.4

The plot can be a perfect complement to Nolan's "Dunkirk". One is the perspective of frontline soldiers, and the other is the perspective of national policymakers. (Maoyan user)

剧情上可以作为诺兰《敦刻尔克》的完美补充，一个是前线士兵的视角，一个是国家决策者的视角。

The plot of this film is actually very simple, and it is a clean line. Perfectly connected with "Dunkirk", I suddenly understood the ins and outs of the Dunkirk Evacuation in World War 2! Two films, one about war and one about biography. Two talented directors used different presentation techniques and chose different angles of events. They are actually telling the same battle and bringing about the same film-watching experience. Both of these two films exude a strong brilliance of humanity! (Maoyan user)

剧情其实很简单，一条线干净的走完，跟《敦刻尔克》完美对接，一下子看懂了二战敦刻尔克大撤退的来龙去脉！两部电影，一部战争、一部传记，两位才华横溢的导演，用了不同的表现手法，选择不同的事件角度，其实是在讲述同一场战役，也带来了相同的观影体验，两部电影同样散发着浓浓的人性光辉！

B.9 Section 4.2.5

I am so glad I went to see this film. It is great! It is a pity that there are very few screenings scheduled for the film, but this is understandable when science fiction films are more popular today! (Maoyan user)

我很庆幸我去看了这部片子，很棒！只可惜排片很少，不过在科幻片更受欢迎的今天，这也可以理解！

There were 6 people in the screening. Three of them left after a while. My sister and I stayed. My sister thought it was not good and fell asleep. Only another girl and I were watching attentively. I think only people who do not understand it will leave halfway and give bad reviews. (Maoyan user)

电影院一共 6 个人，没到一会儿走了三个，剩下我和姐姐。姐姐觉得不好看在睡觉，只有我和另一个女孩专心再看。我觉得只有看不懂的人半中腰才会走，才会给差评。

Appendix C Original Text of Chinese Audience Reviews in Chapter 5

C.1 Section 5.1.1

As a die-hard “Downton Abbey” fan, after watching the film, I feel like I am back to the days when I was watching “Downton Abbey” four or five years ago. The film maintains the same high quality as the TV series, and the plot is more interesting.

(Maoyan user)

唐顿庄园铁粉路过，看完电影，感觉又回到了四五年前追唐家屯的日子。电影保持了和电视剧一样的高质量，剧情更为有趣。

The film maintains the level and excitement of the original TV drama, incorporating tolerance and innovation, tradition and innovation, and the past and new life. If you have watched the original TV drama, I strongly recommend you watch it and get back the feeling of watching the first episode of the first season. (Maoyan user)

电影保持了原剧应有的水准和精彩，包容与创新，传统与革新，逝去与新生都融入其中。看过原剧的墙裂推荐一定要去看，找回看第一季第一集的感觉。

If you have not watched the “Downton Abbey” TV series, you may not understand this film version because there are many characters, and their personalities are directly related to the plot. (Taopiaopiao user)

如果你没看过《唐顿庄园》，看电影版或许看不懂，因为人物很多，人物性格也直接关联剧情。

Although the film follows the plot of the TV series, it does not affect the viewing of the new audience at all. The film inherits the TV drama version’s description of the details of British life in the last century, but it does not stick to the complex character relationships. It tells a brand-new story through the king’s visit. In short, original fans can look back on the surprises in TV series, and new viewers

can also enjoy an excellent visual feast in the film, which is worth watching multiple times. (Taopiaopiao user)

虽说电影是承接电视剧剧情，但丝毫不影响新观众观看。电影继承了剧版故事对上世纪英伦生活细节的描写，但却不拘泥于复杂的人物关系，而是通过国王来访，讲述了一个全新的故事。 总之，老粉可以回顾惊喜，新观众也能过得极佳视觉盛宴，值得多次观看。

The film is more soothing than imagined. Even if you have not watched the original British drama, there will be no problem at all. Highly recommended! I am going to watch the original TV series. (Taopiaopiao user)

比想象中更轻松的一部电影，哪怕没有看过英剧原作也完全没有问题，强力推荐！补原著去也～～

C.2 Section 5.1.2

A fantastic film version that may be considered the closing chapter for most of the characters from the TV series. The primary and supplementary strings of the plot are distinct yet linked. The narrative is perfectly crafted. If there is too much narrative, it will be too long, and if there is too little narrative, it will be a bit boring. (Maoyan user)

非常好看的一部电影版。影片算是对电视剧里大部分人物的盖棺定论，故事的主副线各有不同但又交相渲染，多则长，少又乏味。

This film is very good at telling stories. In such a short time, there are stories about nobles and servants, and the several lines are scattered but not chaotic. (Taopiaopiao user)

会讲故事，这么短的时间，有贵族人物的故事，也有底层仆人们的故事，而且几条线穿插的很零散，却不乱。

The magnificent manor and castle, the exquisite and luxurious banquet are just the background of this scene, behind which lies the hesitation, confusion, loss,

hope, bravery, responsibility..... These spiritual impulses are the only things that are free of class constraints! (Maoyan user)

壮观恢弘的庄园古堡，精致奢华的宴会都只是这场戏的背景，背后隐藏着彷徨，迷茫，困惑，失落，希望，勇敢，担当...这些精神层面的感受是唯一不受阶层桎梏的东西！

A wonderful experience: seemingly a series of trivial things, but they vividly reflect a series of contradictions, trends of thought, questions, and thoughts in the entire society. (Taopiaopiao user)

一种奇妙的体验：貌似都是一系列无关紧要的小事，却生动的反映了整个社会的一系列矛盾与思潮，疑问与思考。

From a film standpoint, the ensemble cast is very formulaic. There are too many characters, and each character is underdeveloped, showcasing only two positive and negative qualities. (Maoyan user)

从电影的角度来看，群戏的脸谱化过于严重，人物过于多，逐个人物刻画的都不是很丰满，只有善与不善两面。

C.3 Section 5.1.3

The core of the story is the glory of Downton. Even if they are serving the royal family, they must have Downton's own character. From the atmosphere of the manor, the core of the community, the care of the hostess, the pride of the male servants, maids, and chefs, as well as the confrontation with the arrogance of the royal family and the reflection on self-survival, they can all reveal the culture and elegance that the British aristocracy should have. (Maoyan user)

故事的核心内核是唐顿荣耀，即便是服务皇室，也要有唐顿自己的风骨。从庄园的气象，社区的核心，女主人的操心，男仆，女佣，厨房的骄傲感，以及对皇室傲慢的对抗与自我生存的反思，都能流露出英国贵族应有的气象与高雅。

Appendix

What impresses me the most is how gentlemanly and ladylike all these servants are, as well as how intelligent and dignified they are. (Taopiaopiao user)

给我感触最深的就是这些仆人个个都是绅士淑女，有头脑有尊严。

A film full of British humour. The servants' counterattack is so interesting. The anger is also suppressed and restrained. Various problems are solved calmly. Cool! (Taopiaopiao user)

充满英式幽默的电影，仆人们的反击实在太有趣了，愤怒也是压抑而克制的，不动声色解决了各种问题，帅！

The costumes are really well-designed, the storyline is not bland, and the British humour makes people feel happy. (Taopiaopiao user)

服装造型真是用心良苦，故事情节也不枯燥乏味，英式幽默让人心情愉悦。

I like everyone in the film, especially the old lady, who always has a sharp tongue. (Maoyan user)

喜欢剧中每一位，特别是老太太，一如即往的毒舌啊哈哈哈。

My favourite is the old countess, who is stubborn but protects the family and is always arrogant. When I go home, I want to excerpt all the old lady's golden quotes. It is like "Grandma teaches you how to be a good person". (Taopiaopiao user)

最喜欢固执却护家，日常傲娇的老伯爵夫人，回家想把老夫人的金句都摘抄一遍，简直是“奶奶教你学做人”。

In addition, many of the pictures are so beautiful and can be used as wallpapers, and the soundtracks are also nice. (Taopiaopiao user)

另外，很多画面真的美的可以做壁纸啊，配乐也好听。

The pastoral scenery of old-style imperialism is truly beautiful with connotation! (Maoyan user)

老牌帝国主义的田园风光，是真的有内涵的美！

C.4 Section 5.1.4

Even a person with poor English can watch it very interestingly. It has accompanied me in my English learning for many years, and I love this singing-like British accent. (Maoyan user)

英语渣也能看得很带感。 陪伴我多年英语的学习，爱死这唱诗一般的英音了。

Elegant British accent. I will always love “Downton Abbey”. (Taopiaopiao user)
优雅的英国的口音。我永远爱唐顿庄园。

Give it 9 points. This film is classic but may not suit the tastes of some people. For example, my boyfriend fell asleep while watching it. He likes popcorn commercial films, but I like all genres of films. There are many characters in the story, and it is really necessary to gradually clarify the relationship between the characters. It is like an eloquently narrated song, and it takes a little patience to figure out the connotation of the story. The style is comparable to that of “Gone with the Wind”, portraying inner power and character nuances. (Maoyan user)

给 9 分，这部经典可能不符合一部分人的喜好，比如我男票看了打瞌睡哈哈哈，他喜欢爆米花商业片，我则是各种类型都爱的。剧本人物很多，确实需要慢慢缕清人物关系，像一首娓娓道来的述事情歌，需要花点耐心才能琢磨出剧本内涵的信念，跟《飘》的风格较为类似，刻画的是内心的力量与人物细节。

In essence, it is not a film but more like a special episode of the TV series. (Maoyan user)

本质上它不是一个电影，更像是电视剧的一个特辑。

The film itself is not really interesting. It is very much like the Christmas special episode of “Downton Abbey”, but it brings together all the actors, and the ensemble cast distributes everyone’s roles fairly. (Maoyan user)

电影本身没有太多的意思，非常像《唐顿庄园》的圣诞特别版，但是集齐了所有的演员，而且群戏把大家的戏份都安排均匀了。

C.5 Section 5.1.5

I am surprised by the limited number of screenings that the film is scheduled for. Ultimately, it only remains a carnival for fans of the TV series. (Maoyan user)

没想到排片这么少，终究还是剧迷的狂欢吧。

On a special day, I took a day off to watch this film, thinking that the cinema might be only me, but the ticket collector told me that there were three people. One person left in the middle of the film’s screening, and I watched it with another girl. I suppose she also came to see this film because she had watched the TV series. (Maoyan user)

特殊的日子，休了一天假来看电影，以为可能会影院包场，被检票员告知有三个人。中途有一个人退出，我和一个姑娘认真看完了，想必她也是因为看过电视剧才来看电影的吧。

C.6 Section 5.2.1

In short, I think the story of this film is grander and more diverse than the first one. Compared with the first film, which revolved around the visit of the royal family, this film uses the film crew’s filming and the journey to Southern France as two lines of development, which also echo the title “A New Era”. (Maoyan user)

总之我觉得这部比第一部的故事更加宏大和多元。相较于第一部全程围绕皇室到访展开故事，这一部里用到了电影剧组拍摄和南法旅程双线发展，穿插着讲述也照应了标题“全新时代”。

Appendix

The plot is very compact, and the two main lines are clear. The tropical atmosphere of the Southern French villa and the American casual romance of the film team are used to contrast the solemnity and rigor of Downton Abbey, and the birth of sound films is also paid tribute. It is really a very clever arrangement.

(Maoyan user)

剧情编得很紧凑，两条主线也非常清晰，分别用南法庄园的热带情调和电影拍团队的美式随性浪漫对比了唐顿庄园的庄重严谨，不忘致敬了有声电影的诞生。真的是很巧妙的铺排。

“Downton Abbey” brings me the daily life of a British aristocrat full of hustle and bustle around the 19th century, but in every detail, it is full of life philosophy that can be used today, persistence in the face of setbacks, and choices in the face of temptation. There are a thousand Hamlets in the eyes of a thousand people. In my eyes, “Downton Abbey” is an epic about life. I feel envious of their way of life, and it also gives me a lot of courage to face life. Nobles who have experienced the ravages of history still have the courage to face a different life. Why can we not fight for our own future, and why should we lie down and complain about the injustices in the world. Compared with never getting something, life will be tested more when you have it and then lose it. (Maoyan user)

唐顿庄园带给我一个 19 世纪前后充满烟火气息的英式贵族的日常生活，但又在点点滴滴之中，充满了可以沿用至今的生活哲理，面对挫折的执着，面对诱惑的选择。一千个人眼中有一千个哈姆雷特，唐顿庄园在我眼里是一个生活的史诗，感叹羡慕于他们的生活方式的同时给予我很大面对生活的勇气，经历过历史冲刷的贵族尚且有面对不一样生活的勇气，我们又有何不可去为自己的未来所拼搏，又有什么理由躺平去抱怨世间的种种不公，相比从未得到，得到过又失去才更会考验人生。

A very comfortable and warm British film that shows the warm side of the British aristocracy, as well as the family's persistence and respect for women. The whole process is empowering without any surprises. In the end, the death of the old lady of the family should have been an extremely sad thing, but this wise lady calmly

made the family feel relieved about her passing. She gave her family the enthusiasm for their future lives. It will be very powerful after watching it, and it is worthy of everyone's serious appreciation to complete self-salvation. (Maoyan user)

很舒适温暖的一部英国片，展现了英国贵族温暖一面，以及家族坚持，对于女性的尊重。全程没有意外的给人力量，最后家族的大女主去世本应该是件令人无比伤感的事，却在这位睿智的女士以坦然之姿另家人对于她的离去以释怀。给予家人们未来生活的热情，看完会很有力量，值得大家认真欣赏，完成自我救赎。

Although the plot is a bit cliched, it is worth watching. Anyone who has followed this series of TV dramas will want to see it on the big screen. (Maoyan user)

剧情虽然有点老套了，但是值得一看，只要是追过这一系列电视剧的就会想看一下大银幕。

C.7 Section 5.2.2

The title “Downton Abbey” is a guarantee of quality. (Maoyan user)

《唐顿庄园》这个名字就是品质的保证啊。

I will not say how well “Downton Abbey” is filmed. You just have to make your own judgment. But I will say that the slow life and slow pace of “Downton Abbey” are always a good medicine to adjust our tedious and fast-paced lives. As for whether the good medicine is bitter, it depends on one's own opinion, so there is no need to say more. (Maoyan user)

我不会说唐顿庄园拍摄的有多好，诸君自赏。但我要说，唐顿庄园的慢生活，慢节奏，总是一剂可以调节我们这个繁琐且快节奏的生活的良药。至于良药是否苦口，那就仁者见仁，智者见智，自不必多言。

Appendix

As always, the core of Downton has all the beautiful parts of culture, such as etiquette, responsibility, love, diversity, respect, equality and pursuit.
(Taopiaopiao user)

一如既往唐顿的内核，它有文化中所有美的部分，礼仪、责任和爱、多样性，尊重、平等和追求。

For the plot, you have to watch the previous six TV seasons and one spin-off film first.

剧情你得先看完六部电视剧一部大电影。

This is a new story. It is also suitable for people who have not watched the TV series. However, there are many characters in the film, necessitating much effort to remember them. (Maoyan user)

这是一个新的故事。也适合没看过电视剧版本的人看。只不过，剧中的人物很多，记住要花费些功夫就是啦。

Although I have not watched the TV series, this plot is completely comprehensible and integrally. (Maoyan user)

雖然沒看電視劇，但是這個情節完全不跳脫。

After all, the TV series is so wonderful that it is difficult for this film to compare with it. However, the original cast is starring, and the scene is still very Downton Abbey-style. All of this is destined to ensure that the basic style of this film will not be bad.
(Maoyan user)

毕竟电视剧太精彩了，电影很难与之媲美。不过，原班人马出演，画面依然很唐顿庄园风格，这一切皆以注定这部电影的基本风貌不会差。

C.8 Section 5.2.3

Gorgeous costumes that are dazzling, elegant aristocratic atmosphere, and warm family affection. (Maoyan user)

华丽得让人目不暇接的服饰，优雅的贵族气息和温情脉脉的亲情。

An occasional bit of British humour that can make the whole room laugh. (Maoyan user)

偶尔一点英式幽默也能逗得满堂大笑。

In fact, I think I like the old lady the most in this film. Almost all the funny things in this series are brought about by the old lady. Her sharp tongue hit the point every time, and her battle of wits with Matthew's mother is a joy to watch. And she has the pride of the aristocracy, as well as the consciousness and tolerance of the aristocracy. (Maoyan user)

其实我觉得这部电影我最喜欢那个老太太了，几乎所有的这部剧里搞笑的地方都是老太太带来的。她的毒舌，每次一针见血地说到关键处，和马修妈妈的斗智斗勇，都看得很欢乐。并且她有贵族的骄傲，也有贵族的自觉和宽容。

The film is so beautiful! Everything is so perfect! The music is beautiful, the scenery is beautiful, the costumes of the characters are beautiful, the architecture is beautiful! Especially the beauty of the aristocratic spirit! (Maoyan user)

电影太美了！一切都那么完美！音乐美，风景画面美，人物服饰美，建筑美！特别是贵族精神透出的风神气韵之美！

There are many commonalities. It would be great if "Dream of the Red Chamber" could be filmed as good as like this. (Maoyan user)

有很多共同点，如果红楼梦能拍出这么好的效果就好了。

Appendix D Original Text of Chinese Audience

Reviews in Chapter 6

Since I have not seen “Paddington 1”, I had no intention of watching this one. The overwhelmingly positive online reviews compelled me to do so. I am glad that I went to see this film, because “Paddington 2” may be one of the top three films for viewing experience this year. (Maoyan user)

因为没看过熊 1，所以本来没打算去看这部，但没挡住网上关于这部口碑的一致好评。也幸好最终去看了这部片，因为帕丁顿熊 2 可能是今年年度观影体验前三的电影。

D.1 Section 6.1.1

The plot is nicely constructed, both in terms of completeness and pleasure. The characters’ relationships and story processing are constant, and the slightly absurd and exaggerated plot does not lack dissonance. (Maoyan user)

剧情的完整性、趣味性都拿捏得很到位，人物关系、剧情处理前后呼应，略显荒诞与夸张的剧情并不违和。

The plot is very compact, without any unnecessary dragging parts. The first section is humorous and very funny throughout. The middle section highlights the positive thoughts through the changes in the little bear’s inner struggle. The final section kicks off the climax, which is exciting and cheerful. It ends with a comedy result. (Taopiaopiao user)

故事情节很紧凑，没什么多余的拖拉部分，前半段诙谐幽默，一直很逗乐，中间段通过小熊的心里挣扎后的变化更多的突显出正面积极的想法，末尾段拉开高潮部分，有惊无险，刺激而又欢快，最后全部以喜剧结果收尾。

Everything you encounter in life is not always smooth sailing, but no matter what difficulties and obstacles you encounter, you must use your positive energy,

optimism, and positive attitude to influence the people around you and the world.

(Maoyan user)

生活中的遭遇并非一帆风顺，但无论遇到何种艰难险阻，也要用自己正能量乐观而积极的态度去影响身边人与这个世界。

This film reminds us of every minute and every second how much kindness and innocence we have lost along the way. More often than not, we are not Paddington, but the neighbour who is unwilling to accept Paddington. (Taopiaopiao user)

这部电影每分每秒都在提醒着我们，现在的自己一路走来丢掉了多少善意和天真，更多的时候我们不是帕丁顿，而是那个不愿意接受帕丁顿的邻居。

It is a very thoughtful film. The plot is very suitable for young children, and the story is not dragged out. Adults can also be moved by it. It has a very pure and natural atmosphere. In this fiercely competitive real world, watching such a healing film can bring positive feelings to children. I really enjoy this kind of family happiness!

(Taopiaopiao user)

很用心的电影，剧情非常适合幼龄儿童观看，而且故事也不拖沓，成人看一样能被感动到，很纯真很自然的氛围，在这个激烈竞争的现实社会，看看这样的治愈电影，给孩子带去积极的感受，我非常享受这样的天伦之乐！

The dramatic transformation of the story is very good, and the cuteness of the bear is an extra point. This film is not limited to any age group and is not pretentious. There is no content inappropriate for children, suitable for all ages! (Taopiaopiao user)

故事戏剧性的转化非常好，小熊可爱度加分，这部电影不分年龄毫不做作，更没有少儿不宜内容，老少通吃！

If there are any shortcomings, it is that the plot is a bit childish, the setting of the villain is a bit far-fetched, and it lacks the unique surprise of the previous work,

which allowed you to perceive the large picture from the minute elements.
(Maoyan user)

要说缺点就是剧情低幼了些，反派设定扯飞了些，不及前作见微知著的原创惊喜。

D.2 Section 6.1.2

I really like the image of Paddington Bear. I have been looking forward to this film for a long time. I watched “Paddington 1” again before watching “Paddington 2”. The two films fit together perfectly. (Maoyan user)

很喜欢帕丁顿熊的形象。期待很久，看 2 之前特地把 1 又看了一遍，两部契合地非常完美。

It is a series of films that I like very much. When I watched “Paddington 1”, I fell in love with this cute and principled bear. This sequel is still very good to watch. It makes people feel warm inside, and all the bad mood disappears! (Maoyan user)
很喜欢的一个系列的电影，看 1 的时候就喜欢这只可爱有原则的熊。这一部依然很好看，看完让人心里暖暖的，不好的心情都消失了！

This sequel is really better than the first film, both in terms of rhythm and drama. The first film was bland and a bit boring, but this sequel is just right. It is a very cute fairy tale, focusing on the “truth, goodness and beauty” that are beautiful like fairy tales. Coupled with some well-designed jokes, beautiful art, and exquisite production... the whole film is very comfortable to watch. (Taopiaopiao user)

第二部是真的比第一部好看的，无论是节奏还是戏剧性，第一部平淡得有点无聊了，第二部就刚刚好，一个很可爱的童话，着眼于童话般美好的真善美，再加上一些精心设计的笑料、漂亮的美术、精致的制作..整部电影看下来是十分舒服的。

Personally, I do not think it is as exciting as the first film. When I watched the first one, it was already fascinating at the beginning. I thought it was super funny,

wonderful, and touching. It made me cry more than this one. This sequel does not make me have any strong feelings at first, but then I feel it was okay, and the laughter comes later. (Maoyan user)

个人觉得没得第一部精彩，第一部才看就引人入胜了，觉得超级好笑、精彩，而且还感人，比第一部有泪点些。这部最先看起没撒大的感觉，就慢慢才觉得可以，笑点也是在后面才出来的。

D.3 Section 6.1.3

I like Paddington very much. His kindness and cuteness make people fascinated. Because he can always see the shining points of other people, everyone is willing to be friends with him. He is silly, innocent, and loves everyone. My dream is to have a Paddington too. (Maoyan user)

很喜欢帕丁顿，他的善良可爱让人为之着迷。因为他总能看到人性的闪光点，所以大家都愿意与他为友。他傻傻憨憨的，爱着所有人。我的梦想是也能有一只帕丁顿。

I like this kind of happy ending. And I also like the innocence and kindness of the little bear, that is what we are missing now. It is not just children who have innocence, cuteness, and kindness. All adults have forgotten that we were also children once. It is rare to be able to retain that kind of kindness and innocence. (Taopiaopiao user)

我喜欢这种美好的结局，也喜欢小熊的天真善良，那是现在的我们所缺失的，不要只是小孩子才有天真可爱善良的一面，所有的大人都忘记了，我们曾经也是个孩子，还能保有那种善良天真是难能可贵的。

The scene transformations are wonderful and dazzling, and the special effects are excellent from start to finish. (Maoyan user)

场景转化很用心也很炫目，特效从头到尾地好到扎心。

Appendix

The whole film is full of British style. Although the protagonist, Paddington, is a bear from Peru, he looks more gentlemanly than any British people in the film. (Maoyan user)

整部电影充斥着满满的英伦风，主角帕丁顿熊虽然是一只来自秘鲁的熊，但是却比电影里任何一个英国人都显得更加绅士。

In fact, in a country like the UK that maintains a typical calm surface, as long as a casual dry humour contrasts with the elegant appearance of British gentlemen, the comedy effect can be doubled with half the effort. (Taopiaopiao user)

其实在英国这种典型的维持表面平静的国家，只要一个不经意的冷幽默，和英国人绅士讲究的外表形成对比，就能让喜剧效果事半功倍~

It is not so much a comedy as it is a perfect promotional film about London (look at how foreign city promotional films are shot). Thousands of words in the film are combined into one sentence: "I love London". (Maoyan user)

与其说是喜剧，倒不如说是关于伦敦的一部完美宣传片（瞧瞧人家国外的城市宣传片是怎么拍的），影片千言万语汇成了一句话“I love London”。

They both examine the humanistic features and spiritual character of London from the perspective of an outsider (Paddington). The first film can be seen as an immigration film, talking about the openness, integration and friendliness of the London city. This film talks about the unity, warmth and justice of London, and the cultural export is deeper. Paddington's cuteness, gluttony, and kindness almost capture all the laughter. He is like the spiritual beacon of this city, and his "truth, goodness, and beauty" warm people's hearts. (Maoyan user)

都是以外来客（帕丁顿熊）的视角来审视伦敦城市的人文风貌与精神品格。第一集可以看作是移民电影，讲伦敦城市的开放，融合和友善，这一集讲伦敦的团结，温暖和正义，文化输出更深一层。帕丁顿熊憨萌，贪吃，善良几乎承包了所有笑点，它像是这个城市的精神航标，真善美温润人心。

D.4 Section 6.1.4

Cuteness is its tone, innocence is its style, and warmth is its core. I really enjoy such a children's film. Although it seems childish, it is also simple and beautiful. If you watch it as an adult, you will also be inspired by the adorable image of Paddington and be infected by this group of kind and beautiful British people. The beauty and innocence in fairy tales should actually be like this. (Maoyan user)

萌趣是它的基调，纯真是它的风格，暖心是它的内核。很享受这样一部儿童向的电影，虽显幼稚却也单纯美好，作为成年人去看，也会被帕丁顿的形象萌化，被这一群善良美好的英国人所感染，童话里的美好与天真其实就该如此。

I highly recommend this film. The pictures are realistic and the story flows smoothly. I especially recommend it for parents to watch with their children who can understand it. (Maoyan user)

极力推荐这部电影，画面逼真，故事流畅，特别推荐家长带看得懂的小朋友看。

There are not many films like this that are suitable for both adults and children. (Maoyan user)

这样同时适合大人和孩子看的影片实在不多。

D.5 Section 6.1.5

The poor box office performance of this film in the Chinese market is not because of the poor quality of the film itself, but because it encountered another film with an explosive reputation that was released at the same time, "Coco". The screening schedule that should have been available in the first week for "Paddington 2" was occupied by "Coco". At this time, I have to sigh: "Since Yu is born, how can Liang be born (既生瑜，何生亮)". (Maoyan user)

这部电影在国内市场票房表现不佳不是因为影片本身质量不好，而是因为它同期遇到了另外一部口碑爆炸的电影寻梦环游记。首周应该有的排片量都寻梦环游记给被挤占了。这时候就不得不感叹一句：“既生瑜，何生亮”了。

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