

Cross-Cultural Communication in Sino-US Co-Production Films (2010—2024)

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Citation: Wang, K. & Srijinda, P. (2025). Cross-Cultural Communication in Sino-US Co-Production Films (2010—2024), *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 11(1), 118-128. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v11i1.3315>

Published: December 15, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the market performance and cross-cultural communication strategies of Sino-American co-produced films, with the objective of identifying cultural factors that influence audience reception and transnational cinematic success between China and the United States. The research adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing 24 Sino-American co-productions released between 2010 and 2024. Data were collected from authoritative movie databases including IMDb, Box Office Mojo, Rotten Tomatoes, and Douban. The analysis utilized the High- and Low-Context Theory as a theoretical framework, with textual analysis of film content, genres, ratings, and narrative structures. This was supplemented by comparative assessments of audience reviews and professional critiques. Findings reveal both convergence and divergence in the box office performance of Sino-American co-productions across regions. Significant cultural differences were observed in creative direction, theme selection, marketing tactics, and media engagement strategies. These factors collectively shaped the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication and audience engagement. Cultural differences play a pivotal role in shaping the success and reception of co-productions in global markets. Addressing these differences through creative and strategic collaboration is essential to achieving cultural resonance and market adaptability. The study offers practical recommendations to enhance the cultural and commercial effectiveness of Sino-American co-productions: (1) Foster collaboration between leading creators from both nations; (2) Promote cultural exchange programs to raise cultural awareness; (3) Enhance cultural integration benefits; (4) Refine cooperative production models; (5) Jointly develop intellectual properties (IP) to increase brand and market value; and (6) Establish a digital communication matrix to improve global promotional impact. These findings contribute to strengthening the international competitiveness of Chinese films and advancing effective cross-cultural cinematic exchange.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural Communication, Sino-US Co-Productions, Cultural Integration, Digital Communication Matrix¹

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

The prosperity of China's economy and the policy of opening up greatly promoted the industrialization of domestic films. In the cross-cultural context, how to better explore the road of development and narrow the cultural differences of the internationalized Chinese films, especially in the era of global economic integration, is particularly important. Based on the relevant history of Chinese film communication in the international market, including the development experience of Sino-US co-production films, this paper explores the existing

communication gap, and provides references for Chinese films to participate in the international market competition, as well as for the practice of Sino-US co-production films.

Since 2001, especially after China's accession to the WTO, the mainland film industry has been producing and distributing. The pace of reform in the field of film screening has been accelerated, the industrial system has been improved, and the scale of the industry has been rapidly upgraded. In the context of globalization, "Chinese film" has gradually expanded into a more inclusive and culturally significant concept. From the national level, Chinese films are also an important carrier for China to show its national image to the world, spread Chinese culture and show its cultural soft power. In recent years, the domestic film market has developed rapidly, both in terms of box office and market maturity, showing a rapidly rising trend. But on the other hand, the overseas market of Chinese films is not stable, and has the trend of shrinking year by year. As for the indicators of Chinese film transmission, the box office data is undoubtedly the most intuitive. The North American market is not only the benchmark of the global film market, but also the cultural market with the biggest difference for Chinese films.

Objective

1. To analyze the performance of Sino-U.S. co-produced films in cross-regional markets.
2. To compare the box office, genres, and ratings of Sino-U.S. co-produced films to understand audience favorability toward co-productions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From the perspective of cross-cultural communication, this paper examines the different cultural dilemmas faced by Chinese films in the international market and puts forward development countermeasures from macro to micro.

Fang (2012) believes that two important factors affect the international communication of Chinese films: ① "cultural discount"; ② the relatively backward operation mode of Chinese films going abroad. These issues can be effectively addressed through four measures: First, Chinese and foreign cooperative production to share market risks; second, participating in international film festivals and exhibitions; third, selling rights to overseas film distributors; and fourth, purchasing overseas theaters or cooperating with them to establish distribution channels. Based on Hall's encoding/decoding theory, Wang (2017) discusses the issue of Western audiences failing to resonate with Chinese films. This phenomenon is attributed to the "decoding failure" of cultural transmission caused by differences in historical and cultural backgrounds, ideologies, and value systems. At the same time, Liang (2017) explored the problems faced by Chinese films in the "going out" process, such as national policies and regulations, industrial monopolies, lack of vitality, and cultural discount. The author proposed strategies to identify commonalities between national and world cultures, modernize traditional Chinese culture, and emphasize two-way communication. Based on a multidisciplinary perspective, Feng (2021) divided methods of cross-cultural film research into external and internal studies, discussing perspectives such as social background research, subculture research, ideological research, psychology, postmodernism, communication studies, and narrative analysis. Feng also highlighted theoretical bases like text close reading, typology, and story prototype research. Digital media is an effective carrier of information dissemination, depending on the content of dissemination and present different morphological characteristics. As a result, Lan and Zhu (2022) found that the combined use of "Western trace-back framework" and "Chinese story framework" generates narrative tension in film reviews. High-scoring reviews in mass media tend to use thematic frameworks, while professional media prefer event-based frameworks, elucidating the characteristics of overseas online communication of Chinese films in cross-cultural contexts.

In summary, the factors influencing the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese films are diverse, including cultural barriers, policy support, multidisciplinary integration, and the narrative style of film reviews, all of which have a positive impact on the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese films. Moreover, understanding the characteristics of information dissemination through digital media and clarifying the status of cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese films can facilitate deeper integration and mutual borrowing between Eastern and Western cultures.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Related Concepts

Concepts

Sino-U.S. co-productions, also known as Sino-U.S. jointly produced films, refer to a cross-regional and cross-cultural form of film creation between Chinese and American film companies or related institutions. This typically

involves collaboration between China and the United States in areas such as scripts, funding, personnel, technology, and resources. During the production process, the two sides integrate their respective conditions, complement each other's strengths, and join forces to create high-quality films for global market distribution.

Related Theories

Cultural Discounting

Cultural discounting refers to the phenomenon that viewers in the import market usually do not adapt to the language, text, and dubbing of imported film and television programs, and have difficulty identifying with the lifestyles, values, histories, institutions, myths, and physical environments depicted therein. (Hoskins et al.,2004)

Cultural Theory of Context

Context refers to the built-in, shared, preprogrammed information that is related to the transmitted public part of the information. Context is generally divided into High Context (HC) and Low Context (LC). High context culture and the contrasting low context culture are terms presented by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his 1976 book *Beyond Culture*. It refers to a culture's tendency to use high context messages over low context messages in routine communication. This choice of communication styles translates into a culture that will cater towards in-groups, an in-group being a group that has similar experiences and expectations, from which inferences are drawn. In a high context culture, many things are left unsaid, letting the culture explain. Words and word choice become very important in higher context communication, since a few words can communicate a complex message very effectively to an in-group (but less effectively outside that group), while in a lower context culture, the communicator needs to be much more explicit and the value of a single word is less important.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This project adopts a qualitative research approach, combining "High-Context and Low-Context Theory" as the theoretical basis for studying the cross-cultural communication of Sino-US co-produced films. Due to China's accession to the WTO agreement, from 2010 to 2014, China achieved significant social results through external economic reform and opening-up, including the rapid and high-quality development of the film industry, marking a peak period with strong representativeness. Therefore, this research collects data on 24 representative Sino-US co-produced films from 2010 to 2024, sourced from authoritative film databases (such as IMDb, Box Office Mojo, Rotten Tomatoes) as well as diverse information from audience and professional reviews. This multi-dimensional data collection effectively reduces the bias of single data sources. Additionally, the use of literature retrieval methods to extract data from authoritative academic resources ensures the credibility of the data.

The collected Sino-US co-produced films encompass various types and styles, reflecting the overall development trends of Sino-US co-productions during this period. This ensures the validity of the research and minimizes the randomness and contingency of the sample. Meanwhile, selecting films from this time frame as samples provides high timeliness and representativeness, presenting a relatively comprehensive picture of the cross-cultural communication characteristics of Sino-US co-productions.

The study employs "High-Context and Low-Context Theory" as theoretical framework, which effectively explain the challenges and phenomena of Sino-US co-productions in cross-cultural communication. The theoretical framework aligns closely with the research content, enhancing the theoretical validity of the study. Furthermore, the research analyzes various aspects such as film genres, box office performance, professional reviews, audience comments, creative concepts, subject selection, marketing strategies, and media promotion. This comprehensive research design facilitates a thorough examination of the research issues, improving content validity.

The specific research approach includes collecting box office data, film genres, and film reviews of 24 Sino-US co-produced films from 2010 to 2024. By applying comparative analysis, the study examines the intrinsic correlations between film genres, box office performance, and reviews to understand the similarities and differences in Sino-US film production. This aims to identify key issues in the cross-cultural communication of Sino-US co-productions and significant factors influencing their cross-cultural dissemination.

Using observation methods, the study explores the international market response to Sino-US co-productions through film viewing, analysis of film genres, professional reviews, and audience comments. It identifies the differences between Sino-US collaborations and examines obstacles in creative concepts, subject selection, personnel composition, marketing strategies, media promotion, and cross-regional cultural communication in co-productions.

Through literature retrieval, the study collects academic works related to Sino-US co-productions and queries internationally renowned film databases (IMDb, Box Office Mojo, Rotten Tomatoes) and online academic

literature for analysis. This helps to understand the historical development, current status, and trends of Sino-US co-productions, as well as the research methods and perspectives of different scholars. The study aims to clarify the similarities and differences in the joint production process, serving as a foundation for constructing strategies conducive to the cross-cultural international communication of Sino-US co-produced films.

RESULTS

Analysis of the Performance of Sino-U.S. Co-Produced Films in Cross-Regional Markets

Data from the research results indicate the development of Sino-U.S. co-productions from initial unfamiliarity to gradual harmony, with diverse and colorful box office and rating performances in the Chinese and U.S. markets, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Types and Box Office Statistics of Sino-U.S. Co-Produced Films

| Date | Movie Title | Genres | China | US & Canada |
|------|---|---|---------------|---------------|
| 2010 | The Karate Kid | Kids & Family, Drama | \$170,211* | \$176,591,618 |
| 2011 | Snow Flower and the Secret Fan | Drama, History | \$30,058* | \$1,348,205 |
| 2013 | Man of Tai Chi | Action | \$4,280,000 | \$100,144 |
| 2013 | Kung Fu Man | Action | — | — |
| 2013 | Cloud Atlas | Mystery & Thriller, Sci-Fi, Drama | \$27,710,000 | \$27,108,272 |
| 2014 | Outcast | Action, Adventure, Thriller | \$3,860,000 | — |
| 2015 | Zhong Kui: Snow Girl and the Dark Crystal | Fantasy, Action | \$63,620,000 | \$165,428 |
| 2015 | Hollywood Adventures | Action, Adventure, Comedy | \$51,620,000 | — |
| 2016 | Warcraft | Fantasy, Adventure, Action | \$225,547,500 | \$47,365,290 |
| 2016 | The Great Wall | Adventure, Action, Fantasy | \$170,962,106 | \$45,540,830 |
| 2016 | Kung Fu Panda 3 | Kids & Family, Comedy, Adventure, Animation | \$154,304,371 | \$143,528,619 |
| 2016 | Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk | Comedy, Drama | \$24,095,465 | \$1,738,477 |
| 2016 | Skiptrace | Action, Adventure, Comedy, Crime Thriller | \$129,014,985 | — |
| 2017 | Transformers: The Last Knight | Action, Adventure, Sci-Fi, Fantasy | \$233,833,098 | \$130,168,683 |
| 2017 | The Foreigner | Action, Crime, Thriller | \$81,440,365 | \$34,393,507 |
| 2018 | Escape Plan 2: Hades | Action, Crime, Mystery, Sci-Fi, Thriller | \$13,721,831 | — |
| 2018 | Pacific Rim: Uprising | Sci-Fi, Action, Adventure, Fantasy | \$102,149,454 | \$59,874,525 |
| 2018 | The Meg | Action, Horror, Sci-Fi, Thriller | \$155,533,208 | \$145,522,784 |
| 2019 | White Snake | Action, Fantasy, Romance, Adventure, Animation | \$61,597,046 | \$34,730 |
| 2019 | The Farewell | Comedy, Drama | \$566,664 | \$17,695,781 |
| 2020 | Mulan | Action, Drama, Fantasy, Adventure | \$40,928,055 | — |
| 2022 | Moonfall | Sci-Fi, Action, Adventure | \$22,970,019 | \$19,060,660 |
| 2023 | Meg 2: The Trench | Action, Horror, Sci-Fi, Thriller, Adventure | \$119,819,939 | \$82,600,317 |
| 2024 | Kung Fu Panda 4 | Action, Adventure, Animation, Comedy, Family, Fantasy | \$53,851,318 | \$193,590,620 |

Source: Compiled from IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes, Box Office Mojo, and Douban professional movie review websites.

*It represents the box office of the Hong Kong market alone, excluding the box office of the Mainland China market.

"—": Indicates a missing value, meaning the film was not released theatrically and has no box office data.

Since August 10, 2004, the "Regulations on the Administration of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Production of Films," formulated by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television of China, have been implemented. These regulations clearly define three forms of Chinese-foreign cooperative film production:

1. Joint production, where both Chinese and foreign parties jointly invest (including funds, labor, or materials), produce, share benefits, and bear risks;
2. Collaborative production, where the foreign party invests, and the Chinese side provides equipment, facilities, and services for remuneration during filming in China;
3. Commissioned production, where the foreign party commissions the Chinese side to produce the film within China.

Subsequently, on February 18, 2012, China and the United States signed the "Memorandum of Understanding Between the U.S. and China Regarding Films to Resolve WTO-Related Issues." Concurrently, China increased its annual film import quota from 20 to 34, focusing primarily on IMAX and 3D films, while the U.S. share of box office revenue rose from 13% to 25%, bringing more opportunities and challenges to Sino-U.S. film cooperation.

Since then, Hollywood studios have sought better access to the Chinese market by creating Sino-U.S. co-produced films. These films entered the Chinese market as domestic productions, circumventing China's restrictions on foreign films and maximizing their appeal to Chinese audiences. After 2012, the number of Sino-U.S. co-productions gradually increased. In the early stages, many Sino-U.S. films featured symbolic appearances of Chinese actors without substantial roles or incorporated Chinese elements to appeal to Chinese consumers. Some films, like *Cloud Atlas*, *The Expendables 2*, and *Iron Man 3*, relied on Chinese locations for filming, essentially functioning as "collaborative productions."

From 2013, Sino-U.S. co-productions progressed to deeper levels of collaboration, with Chinese parties actively participating in content creation, main cast allocation, production, and distribution, establishing a model of integrated development. By 2016, five major Sino-U.S. co-productions were released, marking the peak year for

co-productions. Subsequently, Sino-U.S. co-productions matured, achieving comprehensive cooperation in content creation, storytelling, and filming methods, achieving notable box office success in both markets. Films like *Cloud Atlas*, *Warcraft*, *The Great Wall*, *Kung Fu Panda 3*, *Transformers: The Last Knight*, *The Foreigner*, *Pacific Rim: Uprising*, *The Meg*, *Moonfall*, *Meg 2: The Trench*, and *Kung Fu Panda 4* each surpassed \$100 million in box office revenue.

Some Sino-U.S. co-productions achieved high box office revenue in one market, such as *The Karate Kid*, *Zhong Kui: Snow Girl and the Dark Crystal*, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, *White Snake*, and *The Farewell*. Others, such as *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* and *Man of Tai Chi*, performed modestly in both markets in terms of box office and ratings. Some films, influenced by production, funding, and distribution factors, focused on the Chinese market, such as *Outcast*, *Hollywood Adventures*, *Skiptrace*, *Escape Plan 2: Hades*, and *Mulan*.

However, overall market performance data shows that Sino-U.S. co-productions perform better in the Chinese market than in the U.S., indicating that the content is more tailored to Chinese audiences. Box office revenue correlates with film ratings, narrative content, media promotion, and casting but is not strictly proportional. Action and science fiction are the primary genres of Sino-U.S. co-productions, such as *Transformers: The Last Knight* and *Pacific Rim: Uprising 2*, which appeal to a broad international audience. Animated co-productions like *Kung Fu Panda 3* performed well in both Chinese and North American markets, showcasing the universality of family-oriented films. Historical co-productions, such as *Mulan* and *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, performed modestly in the Chinese market and fared poorly in North America due to cultural differences limiting audience reach.

In contrast, successful films in North America often featured international or neutral themes, such as *Kung Fu Panda 3* and *The Meg*. Most co-productions achieved higher box office revenue in China than in North America, especially films like *The Great Wall*, which prominently featured Chinese characteristics.

The high- and low-context culture theory, proposed by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his 1976 book *Beyond Culture*, explains differences in information dependence during communication across cultures (Hall, 1976). According to this theory, high-context (HC) and low-context (LC) cultures differ significantly in communication styles. The success of *The Great Wall* in the Chinese market owes much to the effective integration of high- and low-context cultural characteristics.

From the perspective of high- and low-context culture theory, the film's box office success in both markets can be attributed to the following factors:

1. Compatibility with high-context culture and local cultural elements. China, as a typical high-context culture, emphasizes implicit cultural cues, shared values, and collectivism (Ting-Toomey, 1988). *The Great Wall* incorporated uniquely Chinese cultural symbols, such as the Great Wall and Taotie, evoking cultural identity among Chinese audiences. By setting the story during the Ming Dynasty and integrating traditional myths, the film leveraged high-context culture's preference for implicit information. Chinese audiences resonated with these elements without needing extensive explanation, enhancing the film's appeal (Zhang & Li, 2018).
2. Internationalization of narrative style in low-context culture. Compared to China's high-context culture, the U.S. represents a low-context culture, emphasizing explicit information transmission and logical narrative structures (Hall, 1976). *The Great Wall* employed Hollywood-style storytelling, featuring clear character roles, direct conflicts, and linear plot development. This low-context expression made the film accessible to global audiences while offering novelty to Chinese viewers. The blend of concise storytelling and implicit cultural references bridged cultural communication gaps (Chen, 2017).
3. Star cast balancing cultural markets. The casting reflected a balance between high- and low-context cultures. Chinese audiences connect emotionally through familiar faces, making local stars like Andy Lau and Eddie Peng crucial for domestic recognition. Conversely, international stars like Matt Damon appealed to global audiences, enhancing the film's international market presence. This "dual-star" strategy effectively bridged cultural differences in aesthetic and consumption preferences (Li et al., 2019).
4. Visual effects and efficient information transmission. High-context cultures value emotional expression and symbolism, while low-context cultures prioritize direct communication. The film's visual effects, created by Industrial Light & Magic, not only catered to Chinese audiences' emotional attachment to cultural symbols but also met low-context audiences' expectations for straightforward visual storytelling. Visual effects played a crucial role in bridging cultural differences, effectively conveying the film's themes across diverse cultural contexts (Wang, 2016).
5. Market strategy and policy support. China's high-context culture values relational networks and collective interests. The film capitalized on this by employing collaborative promotions and releasing during traditional Chinese festive periods (Zhao, 2017). Additionally, policy support for Sino-U.S. co-productions, such as treating them as domestic films, allowed higher box office revenue shares and more lenient approval processes, bolstering the film's market performance.

The success of *The Great Wall* in the Chinese market largely stemmed from its effective integration of high- and low-context cultural features. By combining implicit expressions of Chinese high-context culture with the

explicit storytelling of American low-context culture, the film achieved a balance in cross-cultural communication. This cultural strategy not only enhanced its appeal to local audiences but also provided valuable insights for Sino-U.S. film collaboration.

Comparing the Box Office, Genres, and Ratings of Sino-U.S. Co-Produced Films to Understand Audience Favorability

From Table 3, the Box Office and Ratings Statistics of Sino-U.S. Co-Produced Films, audience favorability and evaluations of co-productions in cross-regional communication can be understood.

Table 3: Box Office and Ratings Statistics of Sino-U.S. Co-Produced Films

| Date | Movie Title | China | US & Canada | IMDb Rating (10) | Douban Rating (10) |
|------|---|---------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 2010 | The Karate Kid | \$170,211* | \$176,591,618 | 6.2 | 6.4 |
| 2011 | Snow Flower and the Secret Fan | \$30,058* | \$1,348,205 | 6.1 | 5.8 |
| 2013 | Man of Tai Chi | \$4,280,000 | \$100,144 | 6.0 | 5.3 |
| 2013 | Kung Fu Man | — | — | 4.9 | 3.7 |
| 2013 | Cloud Atlas | \$27,710,000 | \$27,108,272 | 7.4 | 8.1 |
| 2014 | Outcast | \$3,860,000 | — | 4.6 | 4.8 |
| 2015 | Zhong Kui: Snow Girl and the Dark Crystal | \$63,620,000 | \$165,428 | 5.3 | 4.4 |
| 2015 | Hollywood Adventures | \$51,620,000 | — | 4.8 | 4.5 |
| 2016 | Warcraft | \$225,547,500 | \$47,365,290 | 6.7 | 7.6 |
| 2016 | The Great Wall | \$170,962,106 | \$45,540,830 | 5.9 | 4.9 |
| 2016 | Kung Fu Panda 3 | \$154,304,371 | \$143,528,619 | 7.1 | 7.8 |
| 2016 | Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk | \$24,095,465 | \$1,738,477 | 6.2 | 8.3 |
| 2016 | Skiptrace | \$129,014,985 | — | 5.6 | 5.7 |
| 2017 | Transformers: The Last Knight | \$233,833,098 | \$130,168,683 | 5.2 | 4.9 |
| 2017 | The Foreigner | \$81,440,365 | \$34,393,507 | 7.0 | 7.0 |
| 2018 | Escape Plan 2: Hades | \$13,721,831 | — | 3.9 | 3.2 |
| 2018 | Pacific Rim: Uprising | \$102,149,454 | \$59,874,525 | 5.6 | 5.4 |
| 2018 | The Meg | \$155,533,208 | \$145,522,784 | 5.7 | 5.7 |
| 2019 | White Snake | \$61,597,046 | \$34,730 | 7.0 | 7.8 |
| 2019 | The Farewell | \$566,664 | \$17,695,781 | 7.5 | 7.2 |
| 2020 | Mulan | \$40,928,055 | — | 5.8 | 4.9 |
| 2022 | Moonfall | \$22,970,019 | \$19,060,660 | 5.1 | 5.2 |
| 2023 | Meg 2: The Trench | \$119,819,939 | \$82,600,317 | 5.0 | 5.0 |
| 2024 | Kung Fu Panda 4 | \$53,851,318 | \$193,590,620 | 6.3 | 6.3 |

Source: Compiled from IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes, Box Office Mojo, and Douban professional movie review websites.

*It represents the box office of the Hong Kong market alone, excluding the box office of the Mainland China market.

"—": Indicates a missing value, meaning the film was not released theatrically and has no box office data.

A comparison between IMDb and Douban ratings reveals that cultural background directly influences audience reception of films. In recent years, Sino-American co-productions have gained significant attention in the international market. However, there is a marked difference in how these films are received by audiences in different regions, as reflected in their ratings on IMDb and Douban.

Films that receive higher ratings on IMDb than on Douban often feature complex narrative structures or philosophical themes, which align with the characteristics of low-context cultures—where information is conveyed through explicit, logical storytelling. As a result, North American audiences tend to rate these films more favorably, while Chinese audiences may give lower ratings due to the films' non-traditional narrative styles. Conversely, films with higher ratings on Douban than on IMDb tend to emphasize national pride and incorporate local cultural symbols. Chinese audiences are more likely to resonate with these films, as they are grounded in a familiar cultural context. For North American viewers, however, the lack of relevant cultural background may create a barrier to understanding, which can negatively impact their ratings.

These differences reflect how audience preferences for themes, content, and cultural elements are shaped by their cultural contexts, which in turn influence box office performance and marketing strategies. Based on statistical data from recent Sino-U.S. co-productions, IMDb ratings generally reflect global market aesthetic and evaluation standards, while Douban ratings emphasize local audiences' cultural identity. For example: *Kung Fu Panda 3*: IMDb rating of 7.1, Douban rating of 7.8, reflecting Chinese audiences' strong recognition of the film's cultural elements. *The Meg*: Both IMDb and Douban ratings are 5.7, indicating the universal appeal of the theme but falling short in plot and cultural depth.

The Great Wall: IMDb rating of 5.9, Douban rating of 4.9, demonstrating Chinese audiences' dissatisfaction with the film's superficial presentation of local cultural elements.

These rating differences reflect varying levels of audience acceptance of film content and cultural elements in different markets, directly influencing box office performance and future market strategies.

DISCUSSION

Based on the comprehensive research results, regarding the various performances of Sino-U.S. co-productions in cross-cultural markets, the factors influencing cross-cultural communication of co-productions, and the overall situation of audience responses to market box office, film genres, and film ratings, it can be concluded that:

Theme Selection and Audience Expectations

Universal Appeal of Global Themes

For example, *The Meg* received an IMDb rating of 5.7 and a Douban rating of 5.7. Despite low ratings, the film achieved high box office success, highlighting a contradiction. This indicates the universal appeal of its theme but reveals shortcomings in plot and cultural depth. The film's sci-fi and thriller genres rely less on cultural context, making them easily accepted by global audiences. The consistent ratings on IMDb and Douban suggest that these genres transcend cultural differences, leading to strong box office results of \$1.55 billion in China and \$1.45 billion in the U.S. (Hoskins et al., 2004).

Building on the success of the first Sino-U.S. co-production with a sci-fi and thriller theme, production companies, including Alibaba Pictures Group, Apelles Entertainment, China Media Capital, Warner Bros., and others, collaborated again in 2023 to produce *Meg 2: The Trench*. This sequel achieved impressive box office results of \$1.198 billion in China and \$826 million in the U.S., symbolizing the maturation of Sino-U.S. co-productions in genre films. This project effectively reduced cultural discount effects and received industry recognition, winning awards such as "Best Sino-U.S. Co-Produced Film" at the 2023 China-U.S. Film Festival, "Specially Recommended Film of the Year" at the 2023 Weibo Movie Night, and "Most Loved Film of the Year" by Weibo users in 2024.

Dual Challenges of Localization Themes

For example, *The Great Wall* implemented a balanced strategy in cross-cultural communication by incorporating symbols like the Great Wall and Taotie to attract Chinese audiences. However, its narrative style and plot logic adhered more to Hollywood conventions, failing to gain strong recognition from local audiences. This led to significantly lower Douban ratings than IMDb ratings, with a box office total of \$1.7 billion but mediocre evaluations.

Narrative Style and Cultural Differences

Universality of Hollywood Narratives

IMDb ratings tend to evaluate films based on narrative logic and production quality. For example, *Transformers: The Last Knight* focused on visual effects and straightforward storytelling, resulting in relatively stable IMDb ratings (5.2) but lower Douban ratings (4.9), reflecting Chinese audiences' dissatisfaction with the lack of cultural depth (Li et al., 2019).

The cultural depth of Sino-U.S. co-productions is sometimes lacking. *Transformers: The Last Knight* attempted to incorporate the Arthurian legend into the Transformers storyline but failed to integrate it organically, making the plot appear forced and superficial. For Chinese audiences unfamiliar with the Arthurian legend, the plot lacked appeal, while for those familiar with it, the treatment was too shallow and lacked historical and cultural depth. Douban users, emphasizing plot, cultural depth, and character development, rated the film poorly due to these deficiencies.

Cultural Proximity of Local Narratives

For example, *Kung Fu Panda 3* centered its narrative on Chinese culture while simplifying cultural differences through animation, making it more accessible to audiences in both China and the U.S. The mentor-student relationship (e.g., Po and Master Oogway) reflects Confucian values of respect for teachers while incorporating Western narrative elements of personal growth and self-discovery. By combining these elements, the film achieved broad appeal. Its high Douban rating (7.8) demonstrates the successful application of local cultural elements.

Relationship Between Ratings and Box Office

While there is no direct linear relationship between ratings and box office performance, they reflect market acceptance and audience motivations to some extent. For instance, *Transformers: The Last Knight*, a Sino-U.S. co-production, received low ratings on Douban (4.9) and IMDb (5.2), indicating criticism of its plot, character development, and cultural content in both regions. Despite this, the film achieved significant box office results: approximately \$2.34 billion in China and \$1.3 billion in North America.

This discrepancy can be attributed to the film's visual effects and IP appeal. Iconic scenes like the London Bridge battle and intricate CGI designs provided a visually stunning experience. Additionally, the *Transformers*

franchise, a globally recognized IP, has a strong fan base and brand awareness. Chinese audiences' familiarity and emotional connection with the franchise since the late 1980s played a key role in its box office success.

LIMITATION

The limitation of cultural perspectives. This study primarily analyzes the cross-cultural communication of co-produced films from the perspectives of China and the United States. However, in the international market, cultural perspectives and market responses from other countries and regions (such as Europe and Latin America) may also significantly influence cross-cultural communication, which are not included in the scope of analysis.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL USE AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Optimize cross-cultural marketing strategies. Develop differentiated promotional and marketing approaches for different markets. Utilize diverse media formats and social platforms to enhance the cultural adaptability and dissemination efficiency of co-produced films, particularly by increasing localized celebrity endorsements and word-of-mouth marketing.

Establish a continuous feedback mechanism. Adjust film promotion and distribution strategies based on real-time feedback from international audiences and professional reviews, while providing reference data for future co-production projects.

Incorporate quantitative analysis methods.

CONCLUSION

Through an analysis of the market performance, creative concepts, film ratings, and cross-cultural communication of Sino-U.S. co-productions, it is evident that these films have evolved from simple forms of cooperation to deeper creative engagement. The significant cultural differences between the two nations have manifested in diverse forms across narrative structures, plot presentation, box office performance, audience ratings, and cultural identity. To better develop Sino-U.S. co-productions, achieve the integration of Eastern and Western cultures, promote mutual learning among civilizations, and drive the internationalization of the cross-cultural film industry, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the co-creation of high-quality films by the Chinese and American film industries:

Increase the Cultural Integration of Professional Creative Teams

To organize cultural exchange activities to enhance cultural sensitivity in film creation. In the creation of Sino-U.S. co-productions, cultural integration is one of the key challenges. Cultural integration requires not only a balance between Chinese and American cultural elements in the film content but also greater cultural sensitivity during the creative process to reflect cultural commonalities and differences on a deeper level. The following explores the specific contributions and significance of introducing outstanding screenwriting and directing teams and organizing cultural exchange activities to the development of Sino-U.S. co-productions. The success of *Kung Fu Panda 3* is a quintessential example of cultural integration in Sino-U.S. co-productions. The film's screenwriting team included creative personnel from both Hollywood and China, involving DreamWorks Animation's classic team and China's Oriental DreamWorks.

The screenwriters integrated many Chinese cultural elements into the creation, such as kung fu philosophy, Yin-Yang balance, and family values, while adopting a Hollywood narrative framework to give the film global appeal. Directors Jennifer Yuh Nelson and Alessandro Carloni conducted in-depth research into Chinese culture during production. They not only visited China's Shaolin Temple but also consulted Chinese kung fu experts to ensure the authenticity of the film's action scenes. This cultural sensitivity and professionalism allowed the film to achieve strong box office results and critical acclaim in both China and the U.S.

By introducing outstanding screenwriting and directing teams from China and the U.S., the creative process can incorporate the cultural strengths of both sides, avoiding content fragmentation caused by a single cultural perspective. For instance, future Sino-U.S. co-productions could invite Chinese writers to participate deeply in screenwriting to strengthen the cultural foundation of the story, while Hollywood teams could optimize narrative structure and market-oriented promotion.

Optimizing Cooperation Models

Sino-U.S. co-productions, as an important format in the global film market, possess both cultural dissemination and commercialization potential. However, the current loose cooperation models and cultural differences often result in discrepancies in content depth, market acceptance, and box office performance. Optimizing cooperation models through joint scriptwriting, co-developing IPs, and establishing long-term cooperation mechanisms can not only improve creative efficiency but also promote the sustainable development of co-productions.

Joint Scriptwriting: Enhancing Cultural Integration and Content Depth

The script is the core of a film and directly determines its cultural depth and market acceptance. However, many Sino-U.S. co-productions suffer from superficial cultural elements and fragmented narrative logic due to a lack of collaboration during the scriptwriting phase.

Co-productions should feature scripts jointly created by Chinese and American teams, integrating Chinese cultural symbols (e.g., kung fu philosophy and family values) with Hollywood narrative techniques (e.g., character development and universal values). This collaboration balances cultural depth with global audience comprehension. For instance, *Kung Fu Panda* uses Po's growth story to showcase the spirit of family legacy in Chinese culture while framing the story as an adventure and self-discovery journey. This approach blends local cultural characteristics with global appeal, resulting in success in both the Chinese and North American markets. The film's box office performance and ratings demonstrate the effectiveness of cultural integration.

Enhancing the Practice of Script Collaboration

1. **Establish Cross-Cultural Writing Teams.** Both Chinese and American creators should participate in scriptwriting, deepening the cultural connotations of the storyline through cultural dialogue.
2. **Introduce Cultural Advisors.** Invite experts with cross-cultural experience to the creative process to prevent cultural misinterpretation.
3. **Strengthen Early Collaboration.** Initiate script collaboration from the project preparation stage to reduce content adjustments caused by cultural differences.

Establishing Long-Term Cooperation Mechanisms

1. **Optimize Resource Allocation.** Minimize repetitive investment in single projects through ongoing partnerships.
2. **Enhance Team Stability.** Build trust and rapport through stable relationships, reducing the impact of cultural conflicts on the creative process.

Joint IP Development: Enhancing Brand Effect and Market Competitiveness

IP (Intellectual Property) development is a core driving force in the film market. The success of Sino-U.S. co-productions in the global market often relies on strong IP foundations. However, at present, many co-productions merely utilize existing IPs and lack the development of original content. The *Transformers* series, particularly *Transformers: The Last Knight*, achieved box office success in both the Chinese and U.S. markets due to its strong IP influence. Despite its shortcomings in narrative depth and cultural integration (Douban rating: 4.9; IMDb rating: 5.2), the IP itself attracted a large base of loyal fans (Zhang & Lee, 2018). While leveraging existing IPs can quickly draw market attention, original IPs lacking cultural localization often fail to meet the cultural needs of different markets.

Through joint development of new IPs, Chinese and American creators can explore content with cross-cultural potential, creating brands with broader universal appeal. By integrating Sino-U.S. resources, combining Chinese historical and cultural elements with Hollywood storytelling techniques, both sides can co-create original IPs with global appeal. This effort can be advanced in phases, starting with smaller-scale projects like short films or animations to test the waters, then gradually expanding to films or TV series. By leveraging technological innovations, such as AI and VR, these IPs can be endowed with greater immersion and interactivity, further enhancing market attractiveness.

Building a Digital Communication Matrix to Enhance Promotion Effectiveness

Leverage social media and new media technologies to develop precise marketing strategies while strengthening bilateral promotional cooperation and broadening communication channels. With the acceleration of digitalization and globalization, international social media and new technologies play a crucial role in the cross-cultural promotion of Sino-U.S. co-productions. These platforms are also highly favored by global users in the current era of digital intelligence, serving as hubs for information dissemination and sharing.

Notable platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok—with their free-sharing, highly visual, and trendy content—have not only expanded the channels for film promotion but also achieved efficient cross-cultural market coverage through targeted and interactive content. YouTube: As the world’s largest video-sharing platform, YouTube covers over 100 countries and serves as the best platform for promoting movie trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, and short videos. Multilingual trailers can be released on the platform, creating customized multilingual versions for different markets to enhance cultural relevance. Short video marketing can also be conducted by producing 1–2 minute clips showcasing key scenes or highlights from the film to capture audience attention. Fully utilize the interactive features of social media by engaging with audiences in YouTube’s comment section. For example, invite viewers to submit questions about the film to be answered by directors or actors online. Encourage users to participate in co-creating information, discussions, likes, comments, and sharing. During the promotion of *The Meg*, the YouTube channel released a series of thrilling videos featuring ocean monsters, showcasing shark attack scenes and including interactive elements like “guess the shark’s size.” This approach effectively heightened the film’s popularity in the international market (Zhang & Lee, 2018). Simultaneously, focus on integrating resources across multiple platforms and coordinating promotional efforts to form a robust digital social media communication matrix. For instance, premiere trailers on YouTube, disseminate short videos on TikTok, and provide real-time updates on Twitter.

In conclusion, Sino-U.S. co-productions hold great potential in the context of a globalized film market, but their development still faces challenges related to cultural differences, market positioning, and cooperation mechanisms. By enhancing cultural integration, optimizing cooperation models, and refining market strategies, future Sino-U.S. co-productions are likely to occupy a more significant position in the international film market.

At the same time, by fostering cultural exchange, co-productions can tell globalized stories while disseminating local cultures, thereby promoting international audiences’ understanding and recognition of Chinese culture. The cultural communication within co-productions is not limited to the entertainment domain but can also provide richer cultural perspectives for the people of both China and the U.S., strengthening mutual understanding across cultures.

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