

Transnationalism and the Decentralization of the Global Film Industry

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Abstract: As in other aspects of society (politics, economics), the film industry appears to be undergoing a process of decentralization (still in its infancy) by which Asia is, if not overtaking, at least matching its level of influence with that of European and American powers. Much of the impetus shifting this balance corresponds to China. The spectacular growth of China's domestic market is concentrating a substantial part of the global film business within this Asian giant, resulting in the still sector leader, the United States, conditioning its production in order to maximize profits in that territory. Resolute internationalization policies are also helping Chinese companies gain a foothold in Western countries conditioning film content there, although paradoxically their audiences remain unwilling to consume cinema that is culturally foreign. This essay will attempt to explain how all this has occurred.

Keywords: cinema, Asia, transnational

Economists tell us (and it can be seen in our everyday lives) that the “globalization of production processes is turning the world into a single global market where the capital, technologies, workers and products jump from one country to another, and apparently it is not possible to stop them”. [1] (Sala i Martín, 2009: 91) The film industry is no stranger to this economic context. Its worldwide reach, interwoven from the close relationships between many sector companies located around the globe (through alliances, purchases, acquisition of shares, etc.), has facilitated the exchange of films between countries. Moreover, co-productions between geographically and culturally distant countries are constant, often resulting in an exchange of not only money but also cultural references. The cultural spaces of cinematic production, distribution and consumption become “contact zones”, “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination”. (Mary Louise Pratt, in Chan, 2009: 11)

This occurs mainly through the movement of cinema professionals. During the last fifteen years several Asian filmmakers and actors have found success in America: John Woo, Lee Ang and Nakata Hideo have all directed films in Hollywood, Yuen Woo-ping

has choreographed action scenes and Zhang Ziyi, Watanabe Ken or Lee Byung-hun have starred in American films. But there are also those moving from the Western world to Asia: the best known case is that of the renowned Australian cinematographer Christopher Doyle, who has long been based in Hong Kong, or directors such as Gareth Evans and Michael Arias (the former Welsh, the latter American), who have worked in Indonesia and Japan, respectively, and also the Spanish cinematographer Carlos Catalán, who recently won an award in India for his work on a Bollywood film.

In such cases, the contents of the cultural goods are negotiated to suit the sensibilities of a variety of audiences, thereby facilitating the opening of markets around the world and increasing business opportunities. This transnational cinema “lives in a permanent tension between hybridization of cultures and the emergence of the hyperlocal” (Quintana, 2008: 6), meaning that local expressions are not lost in the maelstrom of globalization, but find a space within it and are conveyed. Lipovetsky and Serroy (2009: 24) talk about a “global screen”:

Because globalized cinema is made with “blockbuster”, transnational parameters, but are also hotchpotches and mishmashes, with increasingly scrambled, more multicultural elements. This cinema, arising from increasing trade liberalization, continues to highlight new themes or raise awareness of new problems. A deregulation of global markets is matched by a global cinema that increasingly assimilates new tracts of meaning, constantly expanding its old boundaries, deregulating the models of story and love, ages and genres, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. [...] cinema is [no] longer closed to any identity, any experience.

This is sometimes the product of a well-studied and well-designed strategy. Hollywood studios, for example, are interested in increasing their presence in relevant territories to capture a larger share of local entertainment consumption in various markets. As a result, they have started to engage in coproduction in foreign languages and with foreign entities. “The end products adapt on the one hand to local cultures while on the other they rely on the existing global structures of distribution of entertainment content.” (Sigismondi, 2012: 22)

Audiences multiply and what becomes interesting is the creation of fictions that can accommodate the largest possible number of (heterogeneous) spectators. The deterritorialization of people, which accompanies globalization and social inequalities, “creates new markets for film companies, [...] which thrive on the need of the relocated population for contact with its homeland”. (Appadurai, 1996: 49)

Interculturality in film is not a new phenomenon, but goes back to the origins of cinema. “[W]hat is new are the conditions of financing, production, distribution and reception of cinema today. The global circulation of money, commodities, information and human beings is giving rise to films whose aesthetic and narrative dynamics and even the modes of emotional identification they elicit, reflect the impact of advanced capitalism and new media technologies as components of an increasingly interconnected world-system.” (Ezra; Rowden, 2006: 1)

Thus, economic globalization fosters its cultural equivalent [2], which “entails the possibility that it may also be an international market for domestic cinemas”. (Lee,

2004: 73) Apparently, cinema's transnationality is no longer unidirectional (from North to South, from West to East) (if it has ever been so), because "the cultural traffic has if not reversed then at least become more a two-way street". (Roberts, 1998: 63)

It must be admitted, though, that the flow of trade is greater in some directions than others. The US entertainment industry, providing leisure time products and services for audiences around the globe, is the global leader in financing, producing, and distributing entertainment content. The six Hollywood studios consistently rank at the top of worldwide charts. (Sigismondi, 2012: 18-20) The dominant position of US production and distribution companies (whose branches operate in multiple countries) largely determines the type of product consumed in most of the world's cinemas. Not only in those that do not enjoy a sufficiently developed local industry, but even in those that do (in Spain, one of the world's main producers, 40% of films premiered in theatres come from the US, accounting for 70% of spectators, according to 2013 data). [3]

Moreover, not all foreign films reaching the large markets of Europe and North America are considered acceptable for exhibitors. Filters exist based on certain criteria of taste. "Western institutions (film critics, festivals, governments...) not only seem willing to determine what type of peripheral cinema is permissible, but they reveal themselves willing to define the criteria and conditions of authenticity" (Elena, 1999: 43) of those cinematographies. A good example is the limits imposed on those fictions coming from so-called Third World countries, which Antonio Weinrichter (1995: 31) precisely identified:

What is expected of a Third World filmmaker? What is admitted, what is required? His films can be militant or tackle themes of social justice [...], or can be an eyewitness to the crisis his country is surely undergoing, or be indigenist, or at least have something in common with realism. Alternatively, they can be aestheticizing (best if their imagery is also *exotic*) or inscrutable (Tarkovsky in the dunes), although a serene contemplative gaze is also accepted (if there is just one filmmaker per country, he had better be a poet). Third World fiction, therefore, should fall on the side of neorealism (and even the naturalism of misery) or "magical realism". We also tolerate well melodrama, which has fallen into disuse in the West: a historical setting and a *backward* society justify both the intensity and the "naiveté" of dramaturgy [...]. [4]

This point reveals the long shadow of prejudices, "mostly in the case of Eastern cinema, which is denied, sometimes unfairly, the possibility of offering a cinema of consumption, popular and well filmed, in favor of works of 'authorship' supposedly imbued with transcendence". (Navarro, 2005: 29).

This changed very little even after some Asian companies acquired several major US film studios. In 1990, the Japanese electronics company Matsushita (Panasonic) bought MCA/Universal, although five years later, due to disagreements with its American managers and the absence of tangible results, Matsushita decided to withdraw from Hollywood and sold eighty percent of MCA/Universal to the Seagram group. (Augros, 2000: 27) Meanwhile, another Japanese multinational, Sony, bought Columbia from Coca-Cola in 1989. Nowadays, besides owning Columbia, which has been integrated into its Sony Pictures Entertainment subsidiary, Sony exerts control over MGM, thereby

increasing its dominance and influence in the US and (consequently) international market. (It must be said that not only Asian companies have taken control of American studios: capital from Australia, Canada, Germany, UK or France also finances them.)

These companies sought profits and did not introduce any changes into a tried and tested business model. They hired American executives for their studios and used their experience to maintain the line of development that had brought success to these entertainment giants. Curiously enough, however, it was under the ownership of an Asian company that Columbia believed it could introduce Asian films into mainstream markets worldwide, and thus in 1998 it launched a division called Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, based in Hong Kong, with the aim of producing Asian films and distributing them internationally. This built a bridge to North America by creating a direct link between Asian producers and effective American systems of funding, distribution and exhibition. Its aim was to adapt the product to new target markets, but without losing its distinctive touch. It was, therefore, necessary to avoid localisms (which had kept this cinema regional) and adopt a transcultural sensibility that could satisfy everybody. One of the first products of this initiative was the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which we will discuss later.

But Asian film industries are also becoming important global players in their own right, due to the growth of the production and markets of specific countries, especially China. Just as China has become a dominant international player in many other industries, it has also captured a steadily increasing share of the global theatrical revenue pie, mainly through the rapid growth of its domestic box office. The Chinese market is challenging the US as the premier film market in terms of box office. [5] By 2012 China became the second largest consumer of feature films in the world in terms of box office (overtaking Japan). Pushed by the fast growth of its economy and the prosperity of its middle classes, cinema admissions rose sharply. Because of this (and a dramatic increase in ticket prices), box office in China between 2005 and 2013 grew on average by 40% per year. Meanwhile, the US market is facing stagnation (since 2009 it has grown on average by just 0.28% annually).

The power of Asian film industries can also be found in the dominance that local productions enjoy within their huge regional markets. In South Korea and Japan, local cinema has maintained a fifty percent audience share (and often exceeding this) over the last decade; while in China, the government has imposed limits on the entry of foreign productions in order to protect Chinese cinema from the “threat” of Hollywood movies. The case of India is also well known, as it is the country with the world’s most productive film industry, controlling some ninety-five percent of the national box office. All of these countries are also major exporters to other countries in the region.

The consumption of local cultural products in Asia, claims Shin (2005), is the result of cultural affinity, national awareness and an idea of patriotism that aims to promote a sense of Asian modernity, linked to the hybridization of culture:

“Like their own domestic audiences, young [cinema] directors have been deeply influenced by foreign, particularly Western, cultures and media, while they are also responsive to contemporary domestic affairs and politics. [...] These hybrid cultural forms provide an important means for their self-definition; a self-definition that not only distances itself from a xenophobic

and moralizing adherence to local cultural 'tradition' but also challenges Western cultural hegemony." (Shin, 2005: 57)

And of course, the stunning technical and technological development of these products cannot be ignored, having matched the level of production with that of the most advanced countries in this regard. Therefore, the cinema industries of Asia are a real challenge to Hollywood domination in many parts of the world and an alternative to its model. We cannot speak of *global cinemas* because (despite changes in the way we see movies) "A truly global cinema is one that claims significant space on theatre screens throughout developed and developing countries" (Bordwell, 2000: 82), and Hollywood remains the only industry capable of doing this. But it is clear that cinema audiences around the world now have access to a greater range of films than ever before, and this has been partly due to the growth of Asian cinema. Although its presence is limited in commercial theatres, it is more prominent at the household level, which is increasingly becoming the new hub of audiovisual consumption.

In fact, it could be said that "to some degree the advent of video has brought us World Film". (Bordwell, 2000: 96) Releasing a film in a domestic format (DVD or Blu-Ray) is much cheaper than importing cans of film for projection in film theatres (DCPs and satellite distribution have only recently reduced the cost of public screenings), and this has decisively facilitated the spread of cinema worldwide. Consequently, "new technologies and modes of domestic consumption, e.g. specially imported videos, alternatively sourced DVDs, and Internet (including broadband) downloads, are crucial in facilitating some overseas' audiences sense that they have a stake and emotional investment" (Stringer, 2005: 105) in Asian cinemas, as well as an unprecedented autonomy when forming their own tastes and canons. [6]

Film festivals too "are important to considerations of 'world cinema', as they facilitate cultural exchange between different 'national' cinemas and provide an alternative global distribution network" (Chaudhuri, 2005: 5), thanks to the "global cohort of spectators" (Bill Nichols *dixit*) they generate. Little by little, more *peripheral* filmmakers are being canonized in these temples of taste. Festivals, however, select films from each country based on a restrictive set of criteria, as we have seen, thus a complete overview (and in most cases, not even a meaningful one) of a film industry is never really obtained. Festivals are most interesting when accompanied by a market, as is the case in Cannes, delivering a larger and more varied range of films. The bulk of business and agreements that *move* the film industry are carried out in these markets, especially in terms of (re)distribution. This is how Asian cinema has ceased to be a regional product to become a global phenomenon.

Does this imply some kind of Asianization of the world? Yes and no. "In the information society, all those elements that can be considered in themselves as informational –and by definition, all culture is information– are designed for global consumption. In this sense, Oriental things *are and are not* Oriental at the same time. They are Oriental since they appear in the Orient, but at the same time they are born in an already globalized culture, a culture in need for expansion." (Aguirre, 2009: 10)

(Some) Asian influence in Western cinema

Despite the increasing focus on Asian films in the West for over a decade (their presence is now common in international film festivals and it is not unusual to find some of them acquiring commercial release), they are not yet (and probably never will be) a mass phenomenon. In fact, most of their audience has come to them in the form of remakes, filtered through Hollywood eyes. These movies have been adapted by Hollywood and have thus widened their reach. Asian cinema's influence on Western filmmaking has been particularly noticeable in the genre of action films, in which there has been a major exchange between East and West and an obvious stylistic shift. Asian action movies "have not only become the most popular and influential in the world, but have had a serious impact on the look, the sound, the feel, the aesthetics of Hollywood filmmaking. Several times over the last four decades [...] Asian action/adventure films have prompted Hollywood to virtually rewrite its rules on storytelling." (Donovan, 2008: 1) Think of films such as *Blade* (Stephen Norrington, 1998), *The Matrix* (Andy & Larry Wachowski, 1999) or *Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003 and 2004), all influential and popular films that use techniques and themes taken from their Asian counterparts –each with its own style– in the form of a resource, tribute or parody (and sometimes all three, as in the case of Quentin Tarantino). This can be traced back to Kurosawa Akira (and his influence on *spaghetti westerns*) and Bruce Lee (an idol for *blaxploitation* cinema), but it was mostly the migration of Asian filmmakers and stars in the 1990s, particularly from Hong Kong, that created "one of the biggest stylistic overhauls of American cinema". (Donovan, 2008: 5)

Nowadays, Hollywood and its acolytes in the rest of the world (e.g., specific European genre films with commercial aims, such as French filmmaker Luc Besson's international productions) have adopted the same stylized gunfights and martial arts battles that characterize Asian action, gangster and thriller films. (Donovan, 2008: 14) This is why Bordwell dares to speak of a "Hong Konification of American Cinema" (2000: 19). (Oddly enough, however, Asian filmmakers claim they find inspiration for their films in Western directors. "[They] sing the praises and reference the works of such Hollywood legends as John Ford, Howard Hawks and, specially, Sam Peckinpah." (Donovan, 2008: 14))

Transnational maneuvers

This model of cinematographic transnationality has a lot to do with the "integral link between high budgets and the need for maximal reach and appeal" (Hjort, 2010: 22), and it is oriented to the kind of global spectator that Charles Acland (2005: 11) associates with the idea that there are points of commonality across national boundaries. "The international and intermedia tendencies of entertainment corporations have altered conceptions of their markets and audiences. [...] there exists the idea about an international cinemagoer, one whose cinematic interests are not bound by local or national limits, and who looks instead to a globally circulating popular culture." (Acland, 2005: 11)

One consequence of globalization processes (in the film industry and at a broader social and cultural level) has been “the emergence of a global imaginary within Euro-American film” (Roberts, 1998: 66). “As the world has become the global village, so it seems, Euro-American mass culture has sought not just to capture but also to commoditize it. Advertisers have been quick to recognize that not just global markets but the concept of global itself can be a powerful marketing tool.” (Roberts, 1998: 66)

The clearest examples are perhaps those Hollywood blockbusters (usually action, adventure and/or fantasy genres) that feature characters and settings from East Asia, especially China, and also use some of the techniques present in films from these countries. In the fourth installment of the *Lethal Weapon* series (1987-1998), the protagonists are faced with the dangerous leader of a Chinese criminal group, played by Jet Li, whose martial arts skills have made him famous in his country. The stylized choreography of the fights between the characters, similar in style to the action movies of Hong Kong and China, introduces an aesthetic variation in the saga with cruder violence. *The Mummy* (1999-2008) series of films also decided to rejuvenate itself by incorporating Asian iconography, and so in its third installment, *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (Rob Cohen, 2008), it leaves Egypt (location of the first two films) and travels to China to see the return to life of the mummy of the first Qin emperor (Jet Li again). Alternatively, *Rush Hour* (another film series, with three films made between 1998 and 2007) was conceived from the beginning as a mix of US buddy movies (of the *Lethal Weapon* type) and Hong Kong thrillers. Chris Rock and Jackie Chan (both from ethnic minorities in the US) are an unlikely pair of cops fighting criminals in Los Angeles (*Rush Hour*), Hong Kong (*Rush Hour 2*) and... Paris (*Rush Hour 3*)!

The emergence of these and other similar films (Japan has also been featured recently in movies such as *The Last Samurai* by Edward Zwick, 2003; *The Wolverine* by James Mangold, 2013; *47 Ronin* by Carl Rinsch, 2013) responds partly to the will of the American film industry to gain a share in the largest market available outside its borders: East Asia. “Industry observers have long been talking of the day when [...] Hollywood blockbusters can no longer succeed by solely catering to American audience's tastes” (James Marsh, 2013), and that is happening right now (last year the monster-movie –inspired by the Japanese *kaiju eiga* genre– *Pacific Rim* by Guillermo del Toro, obtained more money at the Chinese box office than back on home soil).

Not only Hollywood has this expansionist ambition. Asian film industries, especially in China, are becoming aware of their power, and are also thinking globally, although their strategies are different. More than a decade ago, the release of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Lee Ang, 2000) attempted to popularize kung-fu movies around the world, and indeed the film introduced this classic genre of Asian entertainment to a massive international audience.

Crouching Tiger was the second production from the Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia (see above) initiative and it meant the introduction of an autochthonous genre such as “*wuxia pian*” (Chinese martial arts movies) to an international mainstream audience (mainly Western). Cheng Shao-chung (2004) claims the film is an example of “national transnational cinema”, “a particular national/local cinema in global mass culture”. The formula, he says, goes as follows: you choose a Chinese director with experience in Hollywood cinema and international films, such as Lee Ang, who is familiar with the modus operandi of both the American and Chinese films

industries (although Lee is from Taiwan) and also understands the different sensibilities of these diverse audiences; then, you choose the martial arts genre because of its appeal to both Western (who are familiar with it thanks to Bruce Lee, Japanese cartoons and video games) and Chinese (for whom it is the quintessential popular culture genre) audiences.

Moreover, as Cheng Shao-chung points out, *Chinese essence* can be found everywhere in the film. As a martial arts period drama, the film contains all that is exotic and *Chinese*. This has a lot to do with the desire on the part of the creators of producing a successful product in the international market, but also with domestic policy issues: this Chinese essence is used as a form of consensus and national cohesion, since this appeal to common culture is a way of softening the effects of a discriminatory society in transformation. The result is a product that despite its cultural peculiarities (or thanks to them) satisfies the expectations and tastes of (culturally) diverse audiences and, therefore, allows Chinese cinema to break through to the lucrative global market.

Profits and visibility are the arguments made by proponents of the commodification of Chinese culture for consumption by non-Chinese audiences (such as Van Ziegert, 2006), although many Chinese writers and spectators criticized films such as those directed by Zhang Yimou (i.e. the spectacular *Hero* or *House of Flying Daggers*) for exoticizing Chinese culture to suit Western tastes. [7] Kenneth Chan (2009) indicates that the uneven cultural, financial, and political power dynamics in the Chinese-Hollywood relation “engage an overlapping of Hollywood's projection (on behalf of mainstream America) of an ethnic Otherness of the Chinese, and of the latter's ‘autoethnography’ of Chineseness, a mode of self-representation to suit and engage Hollywood's ideological and cultural conditions”. (11)

First wave

This is not the first time that Chinese cinema has sought to break through to the West. Hong Kong's film industry had already become prominent in the early 1970s, when kung-fu movies could be seen at underground markets and alternative venues (following the success of, first, Bruce Lee and, later, Jackie Chan), influencing a certain type of American cult cinema and B-movies and establishing a new model for action scenes in Hollywood. Meaghan Morris (2004) explains how these films (such as Lo Wei's *Fist of Fury*) did not emerge in a vacuum. “Something new was happening in Hong Kong cinema and its energy carried across a number of the increasingly diversified audience formations taking shape in Western cities. The ‘Bruce Lee moment’ in the West coincides with a multiplication of sub-cultural modes of affirming ethnic or other group identity.” (244).

But their obvious commercial spirit closed the doors to critical recognition and attention from the most prestigious media. “[T]he coverage was almost always condescending [...] Then as now, most Western journalists treated Hong Kong productions as vulgar and stupid” (Bordwell, 2000: 87-8). Nonetheless, “by the early 1990s, despite having been almost completely ignored by the mainstream press, Hong Kong cinema attracted a cult following. [...] A popular cinema gave birth to a populist fan culture.

Subterranean taste helped push Hong Kong cinema into the mainstream". (Bordwell, 2000: 87) Production declined later, but its legacy remains alive. "A glance at almost any popular cinema shows that the Asian cinema exercising most influence on Western culture is Hong Kong's." (Bordwell, 2000: 86) As we have seen, this is particularly clear in the genre of martial arts. In addition, sword fighting movies, which Chinese cinema is producing in their most bombastic versions recently, "would not have had the same impact on the West had it not been for the contribution of Hong Kong's tradition, based on more popular roots". (Sala, 2003: 81) The key element here is that Hong Kong cinema created a receptive audience for East Asian cultural products, and in particular, for its genre cinema.

How the West is won

Returning to *Crouching Tiger*, the film made an impressive and unprecedented \$128 million in the US (more than \$200 million worldwide) and was nominated for 10 Oscars (winning four). Its experience and success encouraged Chinese producers and Lee's film was followed by *Hero* (*Ying xiong*, by Zhang Yimou, 2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (*Shi mian mai fu*, by Zhang Yimou, 2004), *The Promise* (*Wu ji*, by Chen Kaige, 2005), *The Curse of the Golden Flower* (*Man cheng jin dai huang jin jia*, by Zhang Yimou, 2006) or *Red Cliff* (*Chi bi*, by John Woo, 2008), all of which were sumptuous recreations of a mythical past, packed with action and stunning photography. The Chinese film industry is at its peak (as are Japan's and South Korea's) and it is not hesitating in investing in blockbusters.

But success has not been repeated: *Hero* still found some success, but the others have performed poorly in international markets [8], even though they were successful in China. Films with Chinese themes and allusions often fail with Western audiences, partly because of the strangeness that certain cultural archetypes produce (and also because the public in some countries, such as the US or Spain, are unwilling to watch films in their original version [9], as Asian movies are usually distributed).

Antonio Weinrichter (2002) proposed the "kimono-effect" concept to describe the following phenomenon: "The Western viewer reacts better to a Eastern historical film than to a film set in the present [...]. Contemporary characters make identification more difficult for a Western spectator, tending rather to activate rejection when trying to identify with those who are not white; however, this rejection is neutralized by the stylization of a period film, in which the cultural distance merges with the temporal one under the mantle of the exotic." (17)

Some are trying to reduce cultural distance through the system of coproductions, with China and Hollywood gearing up to make more films together. Hollywood wants access to a rapidly growing foreign market, while China wants local studios to pair up Hollywood companies and duplicate the success of big-budget movies in order to boost China's name and culture overseas. (Michelle Kung, 2012)

But the formula faces some difficulties. A good example is the film *The Flowers of War* (2011), directed by Zhang Yimou and starring the English actor Christian Bale, with

dialogue in both Chinese and English. The film tells the story of the Nanjing massacre during the Japanese occupation of China. The result: it was the highest-grossing local movie in China in 2011 (approximately \$95 million), but in the US the film grossed roughly \$300,000. The reasons given for this were the falloff to piracy, mixed reviews, the film's intense –often nationalistic– violence, its historical focus and the fact that much of it was in Chinese. Also the 2011 film *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan*, by Wayne Wang, a co-production between IDG China Media of Shanghai and Fox Searchlight, fell flat in both the US and China's box offices.

Another major problem is that any coproduction (or any film that hopes to play commercially in China) must be approved by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television. Committees from this body oversee all films shot in China at multiple steps of the production process, and then screen them for content –typically political– that they consider harmful to the Chinese people. This limits not only the freedom of creators, but also their ability to make attractive products for a Western audience, and often for a Chinese audience too.

This is probably why the producers of *Iron Man 3* (Shane Black, 2013), a film produced by Marvel Studios in association with the Chinese based DMG Entertainment, were not too keen on obtaining official co-production status from the Chinese government. They had to decide whether to comply with strict coproduction rules (basically, that any coproduction must share copyrights, investment and returns with a Chinese partner and have Chinese elements integrated into the story in order to qualify), or sacrifice some of the benefits of official coproduction status and instead optimize *Iron Man's* potential for the global market. Not surprisingly, they decided on the latter approach, creating a film broadly aimed at a global audience and only making a few concessions to the Chinese authorities (a few days of shooting in China, the use of some Chinese stars and some exclusive “Chinese oriented” extra scenes for the local version). (Michelle Kung, 2012) The Chinese government tolerates this (*Iron Man* was promoted in China for one year, while typically foreign studios are only allowed to advertise their films a few weeks prior to their release) because it will ultimately benefit from it through revenue and the growth of local companies.

Apparently, some Chinese companies have decided that it is now no longer necessary (nor it is fruitful) to try and conquer the world with culturally specific films. DMG Entertainment CEO Dan Mintz admits that they “want to do some more domestic Chinese films, but growing that global film base is what we're after. As far as an international Chinese language film, I think that's still a tough one. Not that it will never work, but for now it's going to be a rarity. It's still a ways off. What we really want to do are global, large-scale films that have some very interesting Chinese elements.”

It is this kind of realistic approach that is allowing the Chinese film industry to assume a leading role in the global film business, and to definitively decentralize it, at least in financial terms. Considering its current growth, China is expected to become the leading film market by 2020, and with this its influence will continue to grow.

This does not necessarily mean that cinemas in Europe and North America will be inundated by Chinese films, but it will nonetheless lead to changes in the consumer products that we are offered. An increase of Chinese elements in Hollywood films (as is

already happening), or a boost in the production of the kind of films that work well in China [10] will be the consequences. The Chinese market has just awoken and is still being tested. Let us simply wait and see.

Endnotes

[1] Translations of texts originally written in a language different from English are mine.

[2] This means that globalization processes (such as frequent and massive displacements from one side of the planet to the other, and the explosion of media, both based on technological development) have produced “a new kind of culture in which it is possible to identify yourself despite the diversity and distance of geographical spaces. Culture today is global. [...] Quotidian things have replaced the exotic.” (Aguirre, 2009: 10) Carlos Monsiváis (in Cabo; Rábade, 2006: 123) calls it “cultural migrations”, referring to permanent and fast mutations of tastes, sociological patterns, behaviours, family structures, and ways of structuring and validating social identity. Of course, economy *is* culture, but I use the term “culture” here not in an anthropological sense, but in the sense of “the behaviours and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic or age group”.

[3] We will not delve now into the causes of this situation. Let us just say that it is a mix of industrial position, economic power and audience tastes.

[4] It is also a plus for any film coming from the Third World if it has been censored or banned in its country of origin.

[5] Thanks largely to the success of films from the US (half of the top ten highest grossing films in 2014 are American), even though Chinese law allows Hollywood to take just 25% of the total box office generated.

[6] Every form of consumption corresponds to a particular type of audience, not just because of the products they consume, but also because of the way they ritualize their consumption.

[7] Zhang's work, evolving from rural and political films of a calm beauty (*Red Sorghum* or *Raise the Red Lantern*) to bombastic and melodramatic period films with martial arts, proves how “more diversified themes and aesthetic models [became more evident] as film-makers partially discarded the didactic model predominant in the 1960s in favour of postmodern ‘politics of pleasure’, incorporating music, humour and sexuality”. (Shohat; Stam, 2002: 49)

[8] *Hero* earned a solid \$54 million in the US and \$124 million worldwide. Figures then drop dramatically for *The House of Flying Daggers* (\$11 million in the US, \$81 million worldwide), *The Promise* (\$0,7 million in the US, \$31 million worldwide) and *The Curse of the Golden Flower* (\$6 million in the US, \$78 million worldwide).

[9] Dubbing in Spain is a legacy of General Franco's dictatorship, which for four

decades employed this technique to exercise control over those foreign films that were released in the country. The result has been a powerful dubbing industry and, above all, a social habit that is difficult to break. In the US, where the percentage of imported foreign language films is very low, audiences are not accustomed to reading subtitles, and these are therefore viewed as a handicap for a film.

[10] Despite the disappointing results of *Pacific Rim* (Guillermo del Toro, 2013) in the domestic market, a sequel is being prepared for 2017. The film was a resounding success in China.

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