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## Post Covid-19 Comparison between Chinese and North American Film Industry: A Systematic Review of the Year 2020 Cinema

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Mudassar Hussain Shah \*

Muhammad Yaqoub †

Zhang Jingwu‡

### Abstract

*This article analyzes the Chinese post-Covid-19 cinema and compares it with the developments in North American Cinema. Coronavirus disease has significant detrimental effects on the worldwide film industry, and the annual box office of major film industries has seen a severe decline. This study presents the systematic review of the comparison of Chinese and North American Cinema during the year 2020. In this study, researchers have opted for the deductive approach on secondary source data with the keywords "Post Covid-19 Cinema", "Chinese Film Culture Industry", "Hollywood", "Box Office", and "Film Academy" on google search and consider all the significant sources in this systematic review. The Findings of the study reveal that China has already overtaken North America as the global most extensive box office crown for the first time, showing that in the post-COVID-19 era, the Chinese film industry is indeed among the first to get back on its feet.*

**Key Words:** Post-COVID Cinema, Chinese Film Culture Industry, Hollywood, Box Office, Film Academy

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the global film culture industry dramatically in 2020, mirroring its impact across other associated entertainment markets and slowing down the economy. Cinema halls were shuttered, events were cancelled or suspended, and movie productions and releases were pushed to future dates several times across the globe. The global box office has undergone a revenue loss and shrank 70%, dipping \$12.4 billion due to the ongoing cinema closures, the movie premieres delayed, and the movie cancelled screenings. Along with that, film supply to exhibitors has also fallen sharply last year ([Whitten, 2021](#)). If the pandemic economic consequences persist across 2021, the movie business may lose billions of dollars in the global box office. Moviegoers have

enthusiastically waited for more than a year to see Hollywood blockbuster movies on the big screen due to the novel coronavirus pandemic COVID-19 pandemic. Initially scheduled release of several blockbuster movies have been delayed or cancelled worldwide. The collection of foreign films from the Chinese domestic box office more than halved in 2020, creating a daunting obstacle for Hollywood, is one of the few big players to struggle to recover from the severe pandemic effects ([Dove, 2020](#); [Lewis, 2020 & Vulture Editors, 2021](#)).

The consequence was traumatic at least almost six months (late January to mid-July 2020) in which all Chinese cinemas were locked up. Since the COVID-19 has forced the withdrawal of all movies in the 2020 Chinese New Year Spring Festival, it has begun to

\* Department of Communication and Media Studies, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.  
Email: [mudassar.hussain@uos.edu.pk](mailto:mudassar.hussain@uos.edu.pk)

† Department of Film, Television, Art, School of Communication, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, China.

‡ Department of Film, Television, Art, School of Communication, Fujian Normal University, Fuzhou, China.

impact the global movie market. On 24<sup>th</sup> January, the Spring Festival's overseas films were withdrawn one after another, causing the overall Southeast Asian film market to be cold. The famous Chinese film markets, including Hong Kong-China (21st in the world), Taiwan-China (17th in the world), Singapore, and Malaysia (20th in the world), would have a wave of small climaxes depending on the Spring Festival films. It was accompanied by a fast rebound, albeit mostly dominated by local Chinese titles, as most Hollywood tent poles were being rescheduled by the second half of the year ([Frater, 2021](#)). With cinemas shutting on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2020, ahead of the lucrative Chinese New Year festive season, China was the first film market to see its box office wiped out by COVID-19 and started re-opening on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020. The first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic struck Chinese cinemas hard since lengthy closures pushed overall ticket revenue down 68 percent from \$9.2 billion in 2019. By March 2020, during the first outbreak of the pandemic, the Chinese film market lost \$2 billion, closing all movie theatres during the Chinese Lunar New Year's Festival. International scholars and researchers started saying that it seems doubtful that the Chinese box office could surpass the U.S. as projected to occur in 2020 ([Clark, 2020 & Screen Staff, 2020](#)). However, Beijing's proactive strategies, effective prevention and control measures to tackle the outbreak like the restriction of travelling, strict quarantine, extensive testing, contact tracing, isolating, mandatory QR-based health codes, temperature checks, masks at public places and transports, instigating social distancing protocols had significantly eliminated the COVID-19 testing, positive cases inside the country boundaries. The reaction to the coronavirus has been sluggish in America so far, and infections continue to increase to historical levels, with hospital visits and deaths still growing ([Dong, Du, & Gardner, 2020: JHU, 2021](#)). Chinese producers, directors, distributors, cinema chain owners, actors, technical staff, and other workers could return to work after safety protocol. Patriotic epics such as "The Eight Hundred" (\$450.6 million, the highest of any movie worldwide in the year 2020), "My People, My Homeland," "The Sacrifice," and "Leap" have touched the hearts of local filmgoers ([Brzeski, 2021](#)).

This tale of the Chinese Film Culture Industry growth is more of a story of achievements. In 2020, China eventually usurped North America as the largest box office, producing an unprecedented \$3 billion ticket revenue during the post-COVID-19. The Chinese film industry had recovered to a 92 percent monthly earnings average by December relatively the same time in 2019. However, Hollywood and other global cinemas were conspicuously missing from the party of recovering. According to the consultancy company Artisan Gateway, U.S. studio launches took a small record share of China's cinematic pie in 2020, making up just 10 percent (\$304 million), compared with 29 percent in 2019, which was also a historic low ([Brzeski, 2021](#)). There are two opposing views inside the Chinese industry on what would go on for the Chinese Film Culture Industry in 2021, both with different consequences for the coming year. Optimists claim China's Cinema adequacy was mostly a question of quality material, as China's most bankable tent poles will continue through 2021. China's film industry was off to a booming start in 2021 as the world's largest box office last year. During the New Year break, the best first Weekend since record-keeping started in 2011 the most of any film globally, the country's cinemas sold about \$200 million worth of tickets. As more global cinematic films are postponed or released on streaming, China returns to regular box office revenue with many local newbies ([Shackleton, 2021](#)). In 2020, the Chinese Film Culture Industry faced difficulties, conveyed the Chinese spirit with excellent works, demonstrated China's strength, and inspired and warmed people's hearts. In 2021, Industry development will grow steadily, and the optimization and adjustment of the cinema industry structure will be accelerated, and the Chinese film industry will become more mature.

## **Methodology**

As China holds the No. 1 box office in terms of the number of cinema and screens, concerns are increasing over whether the Chinese film industry has advanced technologies beyond imports (particularly Hollywood). China realized that the cinema industry is a wellspring of cultural power and a tool to

combat Western cultural hegemony and propaganda. This paper would analyze the Chinese film market's development before, during, and post-COVID-19 in 2020. In this study, researchers have opted for the deductive approach on secondary source data with the keywords "Post Covid-19 Cinema", "Chinese Film Culture Industry", "Hollywood", "Box Office", and "Film Academy" on google search and consider all the significant sources in this systematic review. This study also examines the Chinese Film Culture Industry's development

and performance of the Chinese domestic box office during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

### Chinese Box Office 2020

[Rui, 2021](#) and [Shackleton, 2021](#) assert that according to official evaluations, China's 2020 box office earned \$2.7 billion. A decline observed as compared to the previous year, but enough to beat North America as the largest box office in the world, and the top 10 films at the national box office were made in China (see Figure 1).

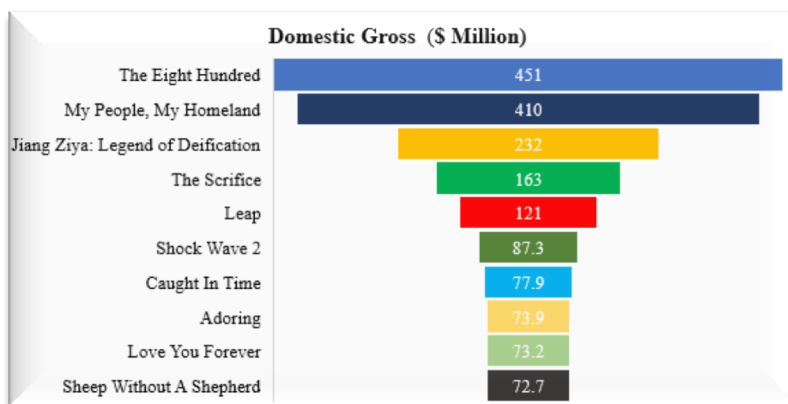


Figure 1: Chinese Domestic Box office January 1, 2020, to December 31, 2020

There were five films with a box office of over \$100 million in the whole year, all of which were domestic films. According to China Film Administration evaluations, between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, the overall Chinese box office was \$2.7 billion, compared to the U.S box office \$2.3 billion and overtaken the U.S. as a topper of the global box office ([Scott, 2021](#)). Two Chinese movies generated over \$400 million despite overall losing six months of revenue at the local box office: "The Eight Hundred," a 1930s thriller of conflict, and "My People, My Homeland," a satirical movie—these movies released during the post-COVID-19 rebound and were megahit. The worldwide cumulative gross of the war film "The Eight Hundred," ranking ninth (approximately 461 Million Dollars) in Chinese film history, became the world highest-earning, primarily non-

English language film the last year. Furthermore, this happened the first time in Chinese film history that a Chinese domestic film has won this accolade. Overall, historical war stories and feel-good humor and romance have become the most popular genres among the Chinese audience. The best performing imported is the sci-fi Warner Bros.'s film "Tenet," directed by Chris Nolan, which received \$66.1 million, ranking 11th in the Chinese box office revenue list of 2020 films. For reference, Sony's "Bad Boys for Life" was the highest-earning movie in North America last year, earning \$204 million. Even Hollywood blockbusters cannot dethrone Chinese cinema. The box office revenue would be even higher in the coming Spring (The Chinese New Year, February 11-17, 2021) Festival holiday season ([Shackleton, 2021](#)).

### Domestic and Imported Films

In 2020, imported movies accounted for about sixth (16.3%) of the overall Chinese domestic

box office, an annual decline of almost 50 percent. A recent decrease demonstrates the uncertainty created by COVID-19 on release

dates in Hollywood and other global cinema industries. While overseas movies rated for 38.0% of Chinese annually domestic box office during 2018, 35.9% in 2019, and only 16.3% of

over-all receipts in 2020, a drastic decrease (see Figure-2).

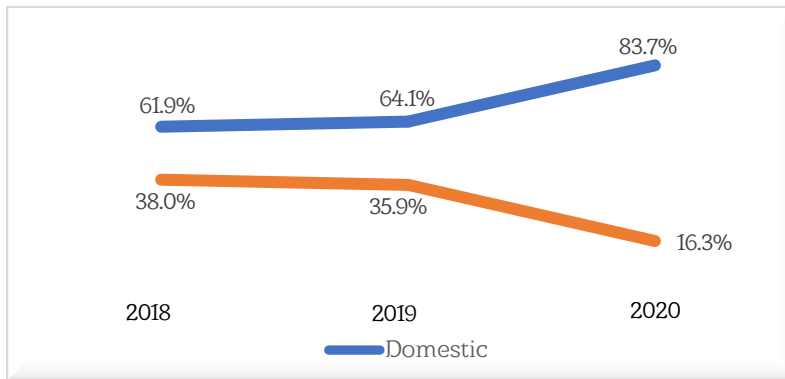


Figure 2: The proportion of domestic imports of films in the box office from 2018 to 2020.

In China, cinemagoers bought 548 million tickets in 2020, less than 35% (1727 million) of the previous year (Thomala, 2021). As North American theatres were closed for approximately nine months throughout the last year, the film industry encountered a severe survival crisis. International films had their best Chinese month in September in 2020, earning 132 million dollars, and the lowest month in October, when imported movies were blacked out global, and making room for patriotic domestic megahit on the National Days (October 1-8) (Davis, 2021; Maoyan Entertainment, 2021). Hollywood wants more and more access to the Chinese cinema industry, but China needs less access to Hollywood films (Su, 2021).

### Cinemas and Screens Creation from 2010 to 2020

In the last ten years, the number of cinemas in China has increased about ten times. The cinema industry in China is booming and has become the most profitable sector. China has the largest cinema screens (more than 75,500 screens and 11,987 cinema halls) and is building faster, mainly driven by its increasingly urban population, better people's living standards, and demand for entertainment. In 2020, about 954 new cinemas, 5,800 screens were added (an increase of 10.35%). In 2020, China had over 75 thousand cinema screens, the number of cinemas and screens increased more than ten times, nearly twice as many as the U.S. (see Figure 3).

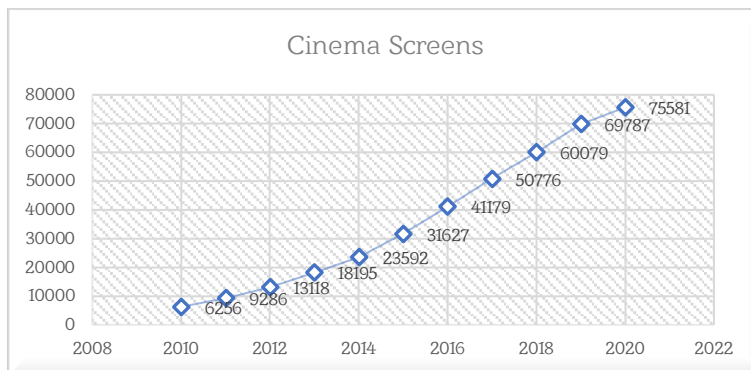


Figure 3: Number of Screens During 2010-2020.

At the end of 2020, when COVID-19 was brought under control, 10,700 cinema halls (nearly 94.8% of all) countrywide had reopened (after cinemas closed for 178 days). Because of stiff industry rivalry and a decline in capital spending, the growth rate slowed down compared to last year (Thomala, 2021). Multiplexes are still the trend of the Chinese Film Culture Industry's future.

### **New Film Academy and School**

China now has one of the biggest film markets where the entertainment industry is growing exponentially, and there is a tremendous demand for international and domestic filmmaking talent in the film culture industry. Many film academies and departments are already serving and playing a vital role in developing the film, drama, and television culture industry. In 2017, the total number of movie and TV program production and

operation institutions counted in statistical scope (the report will not include tv and radio stations and organizations of the audiovisual distribution network) totalled 17,223. In 2017, the total number of employees in the film and television program production and management institutions was 171,800, accounting for 17.59% of all radio and television (Planning and Finance Department, 2018). Film academies and Schools offer associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral-level degrees in many areas of film, drama, and television studies. Students can learn according to their interests in these programs, i.e., the script and screen writings, direction, production, distribution, acting for film, choreography, photography, promotion, and release of the film process. These Film Academies are creating around the philosophy that "learning by doing" is more important than years of theoretical study for producers and actors tied with best industry practices (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** The Rise of New Film Schools Across China in the Year 2020

<b>Dates of Inauguration in 2020</b>	<b>School/ Institute Name</b>	<b>University Name</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> April 2020	Nanhai Film Academy	Haikou University of Economics
28 <sup>th</sup> June 2020	Film School	Jimei University
15 <sup>th</sup> October 2020	Xian Film Academy (Chip),	Northwest University
4 <sup>th</sup> November 2020	Film Academy	Minjiang University
12 <sup>th</sup> November, 2020	Minxi Film Art Institute	Minxi Vocational & Technical College
1 <sup>st</sup> December, 2020	Film Academy	Shanghai Theatre Academy

*Material Source: (Jingwu, 2021)*

This instructional paradigm allows the learner to achieve something in less time with practice. These f academies play an essential role in the Chinese Film Culture Industry, which helped China become the world no.1 box office. It is of great significance for further enhancing film education in all small cities, and competent authorities are accelerating the construction of the new schools and departments of film academies in different cities and serving and enhancing China's soft power, and countering propaganda against China. These institutes also play an essential role in learning old, new, and advanced techniques to grasp concepts on-set learning experience. In 2020, some new film academies

were inaugurated, which are listed below (see Fig.1).

### **Advantages of Chinese Film Industry**

China has become the world's largest market in movie viewers, cinema screens, and box office revenue. Over the past decade, the Chinese Film Culture Industry experienced rapid development and growing sustainably and still potential for further development. In 2014, to promote the film industry's continued growth, beneficial economic and tax policies were released (Wei & Li, 2019). China has banned some international streaming services, notably Netflix, and movie tickets are generally cheaper than the U.S., so gradually, domestic production is welcomed by the audience and has become

the world's biggest movie market. It is natural for one of the most populated nations to grow a vibrant film industry representing its culture, history, and values. In recent years, Chinese cinema welcomed and encouraged innovation and creativity, replaced outdated equipment with advanced technology, and aligned film administration with practice. Chinese Film Culture Industry has ample cultural resources that help film producers make excellent movies to attract moviegoers. China's cinema has a significant commercial demand due to the escalation and development of cities. Chinese cinematography has modified Hollywood's conventional narratives in recent years ([Huiqun, 2010](#)). After constructing film academies and advancement in research and technology, the Chinese Film Culture Industry also progressed by leaps and bounds. In general, the Chinese film market has great potential. In recent years, domestic films' quality has continued to improve, and viewers have become more cautious in selecting and watching domestic films. In the future, only good works made with the heart can successfully capture the hearts of moviegoers, and the Chinese Film Culture Industry seems to fulfil these criteria.

### **Challenges and Prospects**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had potentially altered both the film culture industry style and substance. The outbreak is still challenging for directors, actors, producers, and cinematographers to shoot with a few characters (the crowd scenes are no-go) and technical staff, less close contact (on-screen romance), restrictions, limited travel opportunities (derailed the industry's travel plan) due to territory's second wave of COVID-19 (i.e., Hebei, Beijing, Jilin, and Heilongjiang). It seems that the film culture industry is rapidly going to digital to recover in the future. Many foreign blockbusters release on the digital online platform is not favorable for the film industry (especially cinemas and screens' owners). Coronavirus pandemic protocols provide the impression of a protected atmosphere, but their long-term applicability is challenging. The protocols have slowed production, which is contradictory too much of the way the business works. Around the same

period, a vast volume of online material has been produced and released, including films, web series, and shows, steadily transforming and reshaping the audience's film-watching habits and the entertainment industry. Chinese are usually less in the habit of watching the movie to the cinema. Still, it is challenging to attract a large number of audiences to the cinema. Chinese filmmakers can further sell their films on the foreign market via different universal themes and enhancing translation (subtitle). Some Chinese filmmakers do not have a foreign perspective and lack an adequate understanding of overseas markets, and cannot relate the film story of an international framework ([Qi, 2019](#)). A considerable part of the workers in film and television in China are professionals. From academic qualifications, personnel in the film and television industry are generally not well-educated, and less than 20% have a graduate degree or above ([China Report Network, 2020](#)). In recent years, the growth rate of screens nationwide has been higher than that of the box office revenue. The output of a single screen in the industry and the average revenue per film have been declining, and a certain number of small and medium theaters have closed stores. This year's pandemic has increased the cinema industry's overall operating pressure and objectively accelerated the clearance of low-box office and low-efficiency tail theaters. The film cultural industry requires more government help by property rights optimization, subsidies, and preferential policies to attract more foreign investments at this growth stage ([Liu, 2019](#)). The pandemic's impact and challenges have seriously considered transforming the crisis, adjusting the business structure, optimizing the industry pattern, and stimulating the market's vitality. In the future, film consumption may become a parallel mode of online and offline screening, and one day online platforms will become the most crucial window for film screening. How to deal with these industrial structure changes will determine a country's future film industry's height.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

After the severe impact of the COVID-19, the Chinese film market took the lead in recovering

and continuing to pick up in the world's major film markets, and the box office exceeded North America, becoming the world's most large ticket revenue for the first time. In 2020, China's box office income reached \$2.7 billion to become the most significant movie industry globally amid pandemic. A few years back, we saw that foreign films, including Hollywood, heavily supported the Chinese Film Culture Industry. In recent years, the strategic ground has radically changed, and China's increasingly adversarial relationship with the west and India, i.e., the U.S. China trade war, rising nationalism, and China's swift rebound from the pandemic compared to chaos internationally, has already begun to affect Chinese moviegoers' attitude towards international content. In addition to the excellent line-up of local movies, many factors played a role in the rebound, enabling audiences to feel optimistic about returning to cinemas. The film industry in China has recovered, but Hollywood seems to be in steep decline, which could refute the decade-long misconception of China's dependency on Hollywood. In China, where the dominance of the box office by domestic films has steadily increased in recent years, reaching more than 60 percent in 2019 and 83.7 percent in 2020. The top ten films in China's box office were made in China or HK-China. The proof of such nuances was the apparent popularity of the biggest hits of last year, including war films such as "The Eight Hundred" and "The Sacrifice," or China's Oscar 2021 submission "Leap," which celebrated the glories of the national women's volleyball team in China. For audiences right now, the most exciting thing is a movie that makes them feel fortunate to be Chinese. With open arms, Hollywood films are not immediately accepted. Average imported films would fail, and in China in 2021, even the

strongest brands are expected to receive a lot less than they did years ago. All countries needed to learn from China to figure out how to recover the business's revenue in the present scenario.

In 2021, cinema development will grow steadily, and the optimization and adjustment of the cinema industry structure will be accelerated, and the Chinese film industry will become more mature. The cold winter has passed, and the Chinese film industry after 2020 is bound to rejuvenate and produce more outstanding works. The Chinese cinema industry looks excellent. Undoubtedly, the rest of the world (especially the west and India) would take much time and plenty of stamina on the journey back to cinemas and screens. Nevertheless, the insights learned from the experience of countries that have recovered tremendously over the past couple of months (China, Japan, South Korea) demonstrate that a well-managed COVID-19 plan and attractive new films can jointly provide the spark to unlock box office success now and for the future. No doubt, during the COVID-19 lockdown and cinema closure, there were many disturbing moments for the Chinese Film Culture Industry, but the last half-year of 2020 took away all the sadness and brought smiles on the face of moviegoers, cinema owners, distributors, actors, directors, producers, and many concerns, and others related to the film industry. Despite the difficulties, the domestic film industry in 2020 also shows some bright spots and future situations. Now that the new crown vaccine is being vaccinated in an orderly manner, if all goes well, the Chinese film market in this year may mean a new beginning. In 2021, whether China can continue to be the world's largest holdings of seats will usher in a movement of hope for change in the future.

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