

HOW IS HOLLYWOOD PURSUING THE CHINESE

YUAN?

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# HOW IS HOLLYWOOD PURSUING THE CHINESE YUAN?

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## Abstract

As the Chinese market has become a more important part of the global film economy, the need to satisfy the target audience has become greater. The reach to the Chinese audience has increased at an exponential rate over the last few years, with the Chinese market set to become the biggest market in the world by 2017.

This study focuses on the methods that Hollywood has used to gain access to and then make the most money from the Chinese market. The question posed is “How is Hollywood Pursuing the Chinese Yuan?” To answer this, the thesis specifically looks at three case studies to show the various ways in which Hollywood has approached the issues in entering the Chinese market and how the industry has adapted to maximize profits and audience figures.

### 1. Introduction

This thesis analyses the way in which the content of Hollywood cinema has developed as the industry has pursued the huge potential of the Chinese market. It argues that Hollywood is changing in a variety of ways; including ideology, the role of the state, aesthetics, production values, stars, locations; whilst reacting to the distribution regulations and the desires of the domestic audience. These factors and the way the rules are interpreted are analysed using case studies from recent Hollywood films and show the differing tactics that Hollywood has used to make the most of the Chinese market. However, these changes that are occurring are not always well received either at home (in the West) or in their target market and as such this thesis seeks to analyse consumer reaction using social media as the barometer for public feeling.

As described by Yin Yiyi in *Pop Culture in Asia and Oceania*, “by deliberately incorporating Chinese elements that include Chinese characters, Chinese locales, Chinese performers, and references to traditional Chinese culture into its films, Hollywood tries hard to appeal to Chinese

*sentiments and aesthetic tastes.*"<sup>1</sup> This statement helps to sum up the motivation behind this thesis and the drive is to discover how these elements are affecting the Hollywood film industry. On August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004, "The Stipulation of Administration on Chinese-Foreign Film Co-Production" came into force and its impact and the changes that are occurring in cinema around the world are prominent. Article 1 states that the stipulation was made "*in order to boom film creation and production, to protect the legal rights and interests of the Chinese and foreign film producers and relevant personnel in Chinese-foreign film co-production, and to promote the exchange between Chinese and foreign film industries.*"<sup>2</sup> This is the moment when the Chinese market had a distinctive point where it was opened up more freely to foreign films, so long as they were willing to incorporate certain elements and cooperation, as there now was a concrete way to circumnavigate the quota system that continues to restrict foreign films being released in China.

Hollywood has seized upon this opportunity to gain access to the fastest growing film market in the world, where there is a real thirst for big budget movies, not just in the megacities of the East, but across China. The economic success has spread beyond Beijing, Shanghai and Chongqing and an increase in the per capita disposable income from US\$760 per person in 2000 to US\$3,438 per person<sup>3</sup>. This has led to the fuller realization of what earning potential there is for the film industry with 1.35 billion consumers. To gain access without the constraints of the quotas, foreign films must collaborate with Chinese partners and appeal to Chinese censors so that there is nothing considered being anti-the State. This has led to a fundamental shift in how China is portrayed in Hollywood cinema. The market for Hollywood cinema in China has always been great and as the audiences have grown and their appetite was whetted by the initial influx of films that were part of the quota system.

Despite the huge numbers involved, of both people and dollars, there is little research into the shift in content in Hollywood films. How China's culture is portrayed, the number of locations

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, J. & Nadeau, K. (ed.) (2016) *Pop Culture in Asia and Oceania*. Santa Barbara, USA: ABC-CLIO

<sup>2</sup> Xu, G. (2004, July 6th) *The Stipulation of Administration on Chinese-Foreign Film Co-Production*. The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television.

<sup>3</sup> Ernst & Young (2012) *Spotlight on China: Building a Roadmap for Success in Media and Entertainment*. London, UK: Ernst & Young

that are changed to feature China, and how Chinese characters are shown. The focus has largely been purely on the numbers, with reports, such as the Ernst & Young report in 2012, that showcase the potential of the Chinese media market for financial gain and stressing that it must be entered. Revenue have always played a vital part in cinema so it is understandable that the focus has been on maximising profits, this dissertation aims to fill the void in content analysis and expand the research into the aesthetics.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to analyse three mainstream Hollywood films and see how they have changed or been adapted, in any stage of production, to harness the vast wealth of the cumulative Chinese audience.

The three films that will be analysed are:

1. *Transformers: Age of Extinction*
2. *Iron Man 3*
3. *Looper*

To satisfactorily see how these films have been made with the Chinese censors and audience in mind, there are multiple areas of analysis. Each film will be scrutinised on the elements that make up the film, including pre-production promotions and product placements, the locations and stars and the reactions and social media. This will enable the dissertation to cover the screenwriting process and see how the plot, aesthetics and characters are adapted or changed for the Chinese market, following the analysis through to the finished film and analysing the additional elements of product placement, production values and social media to gauge contrasting successes in China based on audience reaction to financial success.

## 2.1 Historical Context

In helping to understand the historical context of Hollywood's manoeuvres in China, this thesis considered the early days of Chinese cinema with Fu's *"Movie Matchmakers: The Intermediaries between Hollywood and China in the Early Twentieth Century"*<sup>4</sup> proving extremely useful in understanding the earliest origins of the trans-continental relationship. With its focus on the early twentieth century the article concentrates on the perception and practices of intermediaries with an analysis on their contributions to the Chinese film industry. The context helps to build the foundations of the research for why Hollywood cinema is so in demand in China, for the audience, for the producers, and for those in power, which gives the Western industry the first foot in the door to enter the market. The government's policy of importing Hollywood films, as represented by the case studies, and the framework that Hollywood must adhere to is discussed by Su in *"Resisting Cultural Imperialism, or Welcoming Cultural Globalisation? China's Extensive Debate on Hollywood Cinema from 1994 to 2007"*<sup>5</sup> and *"To Be or Not To Be? - China's Cultural Policy and Counterhegemony Strategy Toward Global Hollywood from 1994 to 2000."*<sup>6</sup> Su discusses the internal conversations that helped to drive the governmental decisions that gave rise to The Stipulation of Administration on Chinese-Foreign Co-Production.

The pre-2004 China was a more difficult arena for Hollywood films. There had been a long period of low audience figures since the reforms of Deng Xiaoping started in 1978 with the government reluctant to allow such an important propaganda tool to be completely out of state control. The years 1978 to 1984 saw an initial boost to Chinese cinema as Ying Zhu in the New York Times wrote, "The end of the Maoist era brought a remarkable revival of Chinese cinema from the late 1970s to the mid 1980s, marking [yet] a third golden age."<sup>7</sup> This third golden age

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<sup>4</sup> Fu, Y. (2014, September 10th) *Movie Matchmakers: The Intermediaries between Hollywood and China in the Early Twentieth Century*. Journal of Chinese Cinemas.

<sup>5</sup> Su, W. (2011, April 26th) *Resisting Cultural Imperialism, or Welcoming Cultural Globalisation? China's Extensive Debate on Hollywood Cinema from 1994 to 2007*. Asian Journal of Communication.

<sup>6</sup> Su, W. (2010, January 7th) *To Be or Not To Be? - China's Cultural Policy and Counterhegemony Strategy Toward Global Hollywood from 1994 to 2000*. Journal of International and Intercultural Communication.

<sup>7</sup> Zhu, Y. *The Past and Present of Shanghai and Chinese Cinema*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/college/coll-china-media-001.html>

was aided by the distinct change in the stance of the government, causing the interest from domestic audiences to increase. In 1984 the government introduced the “self-responsibility system”, changing the production landscape domestically, stating that “cinema was an integral part of the cultural industries instead of just an instrument to reinforce the government’s ideology.”<sup>8</sup> The changes did not have the desired effect on audience numbers as “in the first quarter of 1985, the moviegoing audience was 30 percent smaller than the previous year.”<sup>9</sup> Despite further government reforms, audience figures and revenues for the studios were still low, leading to the 1993 policy to allow foreign films for the first time, with *The Fugitive* being the first big picture to get a release in 1994. The government then instituted “the ‘9550 project”, which stipulated that China would just let 10 foreign films enter the market each year between 1996 and 2000.”<sup>10</sup> December 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 saw China join the World Trade Organisation and with it came a variety of stipulations across the economy, including cinema. This meant that China had to agree to loosen the quota system, which has been steadily increasing to this day. The landscape of the Chinese market pre-2004 was of restrictions and enhanced difficulty in getting a China release, therefore the announcement of co-production requirements saw Hollywood embrace China as never before.

The “soft-power” dynamic that exists with China and cinema is well analysed by De Zoysa and Newman, with *“Globalisation, Soft Power and the Challenge of Hollywood”*<sup>11</sup> providing an analysis of the soft power of the USA and the issues that the industry is facing with globalisation. This encroachment of China into Hollywood, through the market’s appeal to the Chinese audience is also seen in *“The Asian Invasion (of Multiculturalism) in Hollywood”*<sup>12</sup> by Pham, which brings a useful discussion on how multiculturalism operates in Hollywood using the representation of Asian bodies in *Rush Hour* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. The analysis is

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<sup>8</sup> Aranburu, A. M. (2016, December 7<sup>th</sup>) *The Film Industry in China: Past and Present*. Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business.

<sup>9</sup> Zhu, Y & Rosen, S. (2010) *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*. Hong Kong, China: Hong Kong University Press

<sup>10</sup> Aranburu, A. M. (2016, December 7<sup>th</sup>) *The Film Industry in China: Past and Present*. Journal of Evolutionary Studies in Business.

<sup>11</sup> De Zoysa, R. & Newman, O. (2010, July 1st) *Globalisation, Soft Power and the Challenge of Hollywood*. Contemporary Politics.

<sup>12</sup> Pham, M. (2013, May 3rd) *The Asian Invasion (Of Multiculturalism) in Hollywood*. Journal of Popular Film and Television.

interesting as it shows a breakthrough of sorts in Hollywood cinema where Chinese culture and cinema are not just borrowed and repurposed, but made into their own success with Chinese elements.

The historical context of the relationship between Hollywood and China identifies how the Chinese government and public perceived Hollywood and how they developed their working relationship.

## 2.2 The Growth of the Chinese Market

The growth of the Chinese market is discussed by modern news organisations from around the globe. News outlets such as The Hollywood Reporter, The Guardian and Variety, provide 24-hour coverage of events in Hollywood and anything that may occur around the world that has influence, and one of their biggest areas of interest is the growth of the Chinese market and the effects on Hollywood's bottom line. As an analysis of finances, Forbes magazine provides both articles, such as Pomerantz's "*Why Americans Should Care that the Chinese Box Office Will Hit Almost \$5 Billion This Year*,"<sup>13</sup> and listings for successful films and actors, which can highlight the growth in the Chinese market.

Analysis of the growth and entering the market has been done by financial institutions, such as Ernst & Young and Charltons, the latter producing "*China's Film Industry*"<sup>14</sup> in 2015 which was a data driven report using a variety of sources to come to conclusions on the methods needed to maximise profits from the expanding market.

As the Chinese market has grown, in terms of numbers at the box office and ticket receipts, Hollywood has paid more and more attention. The multitude of news sources that are available help to decipher the demands and drives that cause the desire to gain as much access as possible to the lucrative market that ultimately causes a shift in content, style and substance.

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<sup>13</sup> Pomerantz, D. (2014, March 11th) *Why Americans Should Care that the Chinese Box Office Will Hit Almost \$5 Billion This Year*. Forbes.

<sup>14</sup> Charltons. (2015) *China's Film Industry*. Hong Kong, China: Charltons

## 2.3 Hollywood Entering China

“The Chinese-foreign film co-production should abide by the following principles:

1. To accord with the Chinese constitution, Chinese laws and regulations and other relevant stipulations;
2. To respect the customs, religions, beliefs and living habits of all the nationalities in China;
3. To help develop the excellent cultural tradition of the Chinese nation;
4. To help promote the economic, cultural and moral construction and social stability in China;
5. To help promote the exchange between the Chinese and foreign film industries; and
6. To avoid damaging the interests of any third country.”<sup>15</sup>

Article VI of the Stipulation of Administration on Chinese-Foreign Film Co-production lays out in very simple language the desires and demands of the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (hereafter known as SARFT) of the People’s Republic of China.

The first three points of the Article clearly define the importance of the Chinese censors to continue their control of content that enters the country. Chris Homewood shows this as “before granting joint-production status, the CFCC (China Film Co-Production Corporation) requires positive Chinese elements and a significant Chinese cast presence. In this regard, China is using its “hard” power-base to compel Hollywood’s co-operation, effectively securing the Dream Factory as an adjunct Chinese soft power asset that can help spread Chinese dreams and culture around the world”<sup>16</sup> (Homewood, C. 2014). This has created an atmosphere where “censorship forces filmmakers to edit their content and a desire to please the government is

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<sup>15</sup> Article VI of the Stipulation of Administration on Chinese-Foreign Film Co-production. (2004, August 10th) Retrieved from <http://www.sarft.gov.cn/>

<sup>16</sup> Homewood, C. (2014, July 5th) *China’s New Soft Power: Transformers 4, X-Men & Hollywood*. Informed Comment.

making Hollywood voluntarily change their films, even those not distributed in China.”<sup>17</sup> The most important Chinese sources are the official channel of SARFT and the China Film Co-Production Corporation. SARFT is the official Chinese government agency providing

## 2.4 China’s Social Media Scene

China’s social media scene is dominated by 新浪微博 (Sina Weibo), a social media presence that has over 200 million active searches every day, over 500 million registered users and over 60% of those are in the primary demographic for the movie going public of 18-30<sup>18</sup>. Weibo, as it is more commonly known, provides a unique perspective into the minds of the Chinese public who are the ones watching and providing the demand from Hollywood. The top 5 users of Weibo as of September 2015 were all Chinese actors, none of which would be considered known in the West, but each has over 70 million followers<sup>19</sup>, showing the wide reach that the medium has within the target demographic for Hollywood. Youku, the Chinese video sharing platform has over 500 million unique visitors every month<sup>20</sup> and provides users with full length TV shows and films, mostly with Chinese subtitles. This portal, similar to YouTube, allows user comments and gives another vantage point into the mindset of the audience. The use of Chinese social media can help provide a vital direct link between the people and the content they are watching. A culturally important user based platform in China is 豆瓣 (Dòubàn) which, according to Digitalintheround.com “was launched on March, 2005, (and) probably is the most unique and innovative SNS in Chinese Internet. It allows registered users to record information and create content related to film, book, music, culture, lifestyle, recent events and on-going

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<sup>17</sup> Follows, S. (2015, January 26th) *The Rise and Rise of China’s Film Business*. Stephenfollows.com

<sup>18</sup> (2015, December 22nd) *Weibo Search User Insights 2015*. Retrieved from <https://www.chinainternetwatch.com/16366/weibo-search-users-insights-2015/>

<sup>19</sup> Koetse, M. (2015, September 16th) *Weibo Super Stars: Chinese Celebrities with Most Weibo Followers*. Retrieved from <http://www.whatsonweibo.com/weibo-super-stars-chinese-celebrities-with-most-weibo-followers/>

<sup>20</sup> Hong, K. (2014, August 20th) *China’s Youku Tudou Now Serves 500 million Users Per Month, Half of Youtube’s Reach*. Retrieved from <http://thenextweb.com/asia/2014/08/20/chinas-youku-tudou-now-serves-500-million-users-per-month-half-of-youtubes-reach/#gref>

activities in Chinese cities”<sup>21</sup> There are “reviews on 16.70 million books, 320 million movies, 1.06 million songs, 27,000 indie musicians, and 38,000 interest groups. It has registered over 75 million users, mainly from first- and second-tier cities, with a daily average PV of 210 million.”<sup>22</sup> The online world in China is not as restricted as is often reported in Western media and bloggers, as well as the actors themselves, can have a powerful voice in shaping opinions.

There is access in China to sites such as IMDB (The Internet Movie Database), but, as with the Western audience, there is a preference for “home-grown” versions of social media and information networking. By using the highly used Chinese social media sites, there can be an analysis of if there is a common feeling amongst the target demographic and how that feeling is developed by what they have seen in each of the case studies. This can then be used to provide a distinctive contrast with Western social media to see if there is a commonality across national divides or if there are definitive differences. There has been, to this point very little comparative direct analysis of user viewpoints from cross cultural perspectives using social media to give a guide to sentiment between the prime movie going demographics in each nation. This paper intends to begin to bridge the gap using the case studies contained herein.

## 2.5 Statistical Data

The numbers and statistical analysis come from a wide array of sources. The Motion Picture Association of America provides a variety of data points from an official American source. This is reinforced with US data from online repositories, [boxofficemojo.com](http://www.boxofficemojo.com), The Internet Movie Database ([IMDB.com](http://www.imdb.com)) and [the-numbers.com](http://www.the-numbers.com). These online archives provide a wealth of data that is pooled from the industry and direct from the production companies as they vie for status and prestige. From China, the China Box Office ([cbooo.cn](http://www.cbooo.cn)) provides some data and statistics in regards to attendance and economic successes and failures, but due to the nature of statistical reporting in China, can only give a broad view rather than an accurate analytical source.

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<sup>21</sup> Li, N. (2013, June 6th) *Digital Marketing in China: Douban and the Brand identity*. Retrieved from <http://www.digitalintheround.com/digital-marketing-china-douban/>

<sup>22</sup> Lee, E. (2013, November 13th) *Douban's Unique Monthly Visitors Doubled YOY to 200 Million*. Retrieved from <http://technode.com/2013/11/13/doubans-monthly-unique-visitors-doubled-yoy-to-200-million/>

By using the various statistical data available, this dissertation aims to show how the supporting data reinforces the ideas expressed in *How Hollywood Pursuing the Chinese Yuan*.

### 3.1 Case Study 1 - *Transformers: Age of Extinction*

*Transformers: Age of Extinction* is a landmark film as it achieved a hugely positive reaction from the Chinese audience in terms of gate receipts, audience satisfaction (based on social media responses, such as on 豆瓣 (Dòubàn)) and pre-production integration to lay the groundwork for success on release. This combination enabled *Transformers: Age of Extinction* to become the first Hollywood movie to gross more in mainland China than its home territory, grossing \$320 million in China opposed to \$245 million in the US<sup>23</sup>. This was no accident as there are so many areas where the film is geared towards the Chinese market, with a reality TV show amongst the preproduction measures designed to drive interest in the movie. The producers had China in mind very early on in production and worked with Chinese partners, specifically the state-owned China Movie Channel (中国电影频道), Huaxia Film Distribution Company (华夏电影发行有限责任公司) and the China Film Group (中国电影集团公司), to help navigate the censor and audience requirements for success. The China Movie Channel, an agency of The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, gave the production the green light to develop a reality show to engage the audience and to give a direct hand to the State government to be involved from the start. Huaxia Film Distribution Company and the China Film Group gave further state backing and access to over 55% of the distribution network in China<sup>24</sup>.

#### 3.1.1 Locational Analysis

Locations are an important part of *Transformers* as they are a setting for battles, represent something to fight for and they are something that can be blown up in extravagant ways. Our first introduction is into America, the world of *Cade Yeager* (Mark Wahlberg). This

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<sup>23</sup> Box Office Mojo. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=transformers4.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Entgroup. (2015) Retrieved from <http://english.entgroup.cn/uploads/reports/China%20Film%20Industry%20Report%202014-2015%EF%BC%88in%20brief%EF%BC%89.pdf>

world is of an ageing superpower. A big, old American truck drives down a dusty road with an antiquated train chugging alongside.

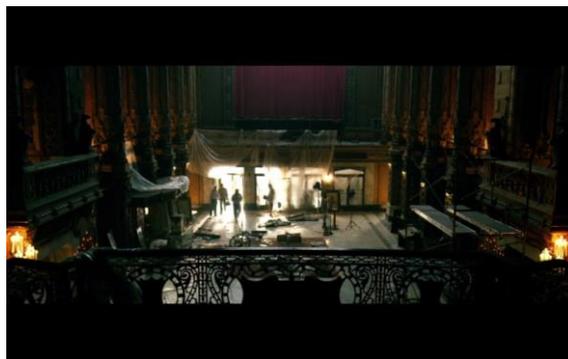


(Fig. 1) A nondescript road in Texas with a pick-up driving alongside an old diesel train



(Fig. 2) A sign shows we are in the Transformers' universe alongside the truck and train

It is quintessentially American scene with accompanying song of *"Heartbreaker"* by Salva that leaves you in no doubt that we are in America as an acoustic guitar and a slow Southern drawl serenade the audience. The idea of entropic change is highlighted as *Cade* arrives in the small Texan town, given no name. The cinema is literally falling apart, the definitive symbol of American cultural dominance, crumbling, beyond repair and salvaged for parts.



(Fig. 3) The crumbling remains of a US cinema

This America is still idealistic though. A vast, green land full of promise is shown as *Tessa* (Nicola Peltz) comes home. The contrast here is of the potential of America versus the "reality" of the dilapidated state that we were initially introduced to.



(Fig. 4) *The vast, open promise of America*

Even within this setting we have the threat of foreclosure of the property, the American cannot fund his dream, even with all his ingenuity.

The iconic America is reinforced as Optimus Prime meets up with the *Autobots* in Monument Valley. The setting here gives the sense of the definitive America, the America of the Western as created by John Ford, as recognised by Smithsonian, “*Thanks to Ford, Monument Valley is one of the most familiar landscapes in the United States.*”<sup>25</sup> Here we have the “Magnificent Seven”, the remaining *Autobot* Transformers and their human comrades (minus *Tessa*), in an all-American setting, all be it re-packaged from an Asian original.



(Fig. 5) *Monument Valley, the iconic gathering of Western heroes*

This setting is to set the scene for this motley group of heroes coming together to save the day, fulfilling a necessary part of the plot for the Hollywood blockbuster that is geared to

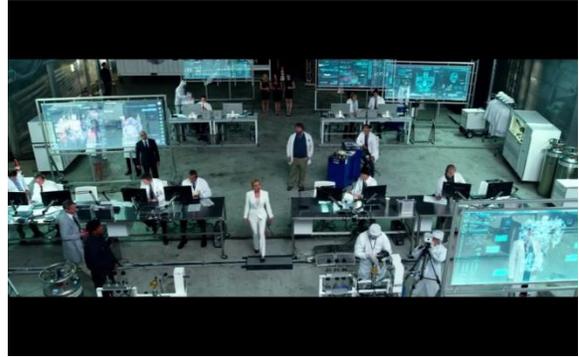
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<sup>25</sup> Perrottet, T. (2010, February) *Behind the Scenes in Monument Valley*. Smithsonian Magazine. Retrieved from <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/behind-the-scenes-in-monument-valley-4791660/?no-ist>

mass audiences globally. For the rest of the movie's time in the US, there are the CIA offices, the modern looking factory of Kinetic Solutions Incorporated in Chicago and further use of Chicago itself as a backdrop to the midpoint action sequence. There are iconic shots of Cloud Gate and the Willis Tower skyscraper just to confirm that this is Chicago. The chase scene upon leaving KSI could be anywhere as it resembles a test track for racing.



(Fig. 6) A CIA office, bland and lacking modernity



(Fig. 7) KSI facility Chicago, with futuristic holoboards



(Fig. 8) Cloud Gate, Chicago, to identify location



(Fig. 9) Willis Tower, Chicago



(Fig. 10) A nondescript road in America provides the open road for a Transformers chase and fight

This is the last we see of the USA as the story moves across to China, where the failings of the US operation are to be rectified and improved upon.

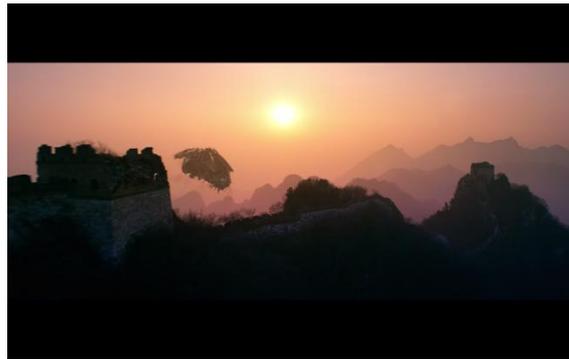
China, by comparison, is seen very differently. The first sights we see are of Beijing, rising above the Bird's Nest stadium to a modern city skyline.



(Fig. 11) The Bird's Nest Stadium and the Beijing skyline in a fleeting stop off by Joyce and Yueming



(Fig. 12) KSI Guangzhou has an impressive view with Chinese characters dominating



(Fig. 13) The Great Wall of China on the Autobots' route to Hong Kong

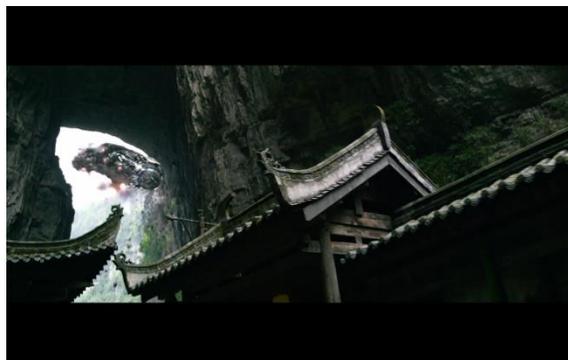
Further highlights of Beijing are shown as *Joyce* and *Yueming* drive down a highway. This is an introduction to China that is modern, futuristic with structures that are as recognisable and striking as those previously seen in Chicago. From *Joyce's* office in Guangzhou, the bright, clear city skyline is crisp and radiant with Chinese characters illuminated brightly in the background, almost distracting from the dialogue. The story shifts to Hong Kong, with a significant detour to the Great Wall of China. The route the *Autobots* must have taken is not direct and can only have been used to help mirror the introduction of the US. Here is a China that is steeped in history and culture but the modern world of China is advanced and bright compared with the decline in the US.

Hong Kong is world renowned and is recognisable through its famous skyline, boasting a multitude of skyscrapers in a seemingly tiny space.



(Fig. 14) The Hong Kong skyline before destruction comes

The action moves through Hong Kong, through large apartment buildings, nondescript hallways and packed city streets. In a far removal by location, *Optimus Prime's* ship is damaged and crashes 1000 km away in the UNESCO World Natural Heritage site in Wulong.



(Fig. 15) The Three Natural Bridges tower over the Chinese rooftops

The Three Natural Bridges are an incredible creation of nature and the buildings that sit within are quintessentially Chinese. This location could not be found anywhere else and gives a message to the world that China is much more than smog-ridden cities. The time spent in the lush, green surroundings of Wulong is brief as the action demands that the film moves back to Hong Kong but the imagery is there to show the variety in China, as well as the “green” credentials of the government.



*(Fig. 16) A lush natural environment in China, a different view from the smog laden cities usually seen in Western media*

As with other major cities in disaster blockbusters, Hong Kong can be destroyed as well, with *Lockdown* destroying at will in his desire to reclaim his prizes. The cities of China are more than comparable with those in the West and the film is a statement that there is more to China than many people think. The scenes shot in China could equally be used for a tourism commercial or for a production commercial for advanced technologies, all of which enhance China in the eyes of the world, embracing their audiences and pleasing the government officials.

### 3.1.2 Stars

The Hollywood stars in *Transformers* are, as you would expect in a big budget summer blockbuster, plentiful. The biggest name draws are Mark Wahlberg (*Cade Yeager*), Kelsey Grammar (*Harold Attinger*) and Stanley Tucci (*Joshua Joyce*). In a slight deviation from the Michael Bay/*Transformers* convention, these actors are predominantly known for acting ability rather than box office draw, muscle and looks. With 3 Oscar nominations and 5 Golden Globe wins between them<sup>26</sup>, this trio was cast to bring more gravitas to the franchise, as Stanley Tucci himself acknowledged in an interview with FilmJuice.com, “*Mark brings certain gravitas to the set that makes you feel very much wanted. And he is a true professional. If I ever knew a guy who comes prepared, it would be Mark Wahlberg. And on top of that he’s an incredible actor. He took*

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<sup>26</sup> IMDB. Retrieved from <http://www.imdb.com/>

*this movie to a whole new level,*"<sup>27</sup> with each recognisable on both sides of the Pacific in their own right. None of them are names that would instinctively make an audience want to go see the film just for their presence, but they can bring a level of performance that might appeal to a wider group, beyond the demographics Bay is known for as he said himself, "*I make movies for teenage boys. Oh, dear, what a crime.*"<sup>28</sup>

The young, attractive demographic for Western audiences is more than ably taken care of in the form of Nicola Peltz (*Tessa Yeager*), clearly the object of the 'male gaze', and Jack Reynor (*Shane Dyson*). Nicola Peltz is very much considered an up-and-coming actress in the States, with Marie Claire recently describing her as "*the next big thing*"<sup>29</sup> and making her their cover girl, in a feature designed to expand on her growing profile as an actress.



(Fig. 17) Nicola Peltz in her standard outfit throughout the movie



(Fig. 18) Jack Reynor providing the young, attractive, white male Hollywood requirement

She fulfilled the attributes that were required of being young, blonde, attractive and able to seem mostly helpless throughout the movie, requiring the strong male leads to rescue her. The young, attractive male is given to Jack Reynor, cast for his Midwest good looks rather than a proven proficiency in acting. Both actors give the film the formulaic Hollywood requirement for their target demographic in both the US and in China, where a common factor is the desire to see young attractive people on screen.

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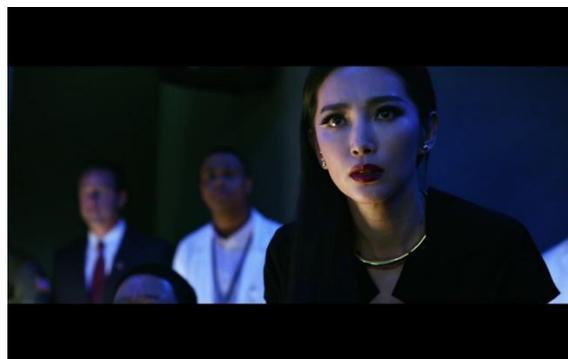
<sup>27</sup> Tucci, S. (2014, November 17th) Retrieved from <http://www.filmjuice.com/stanley-tucci-talks-transformers-features/>

<sup>28</sup> Curtis, B. (2005, June 15th) *The Bad Boy of Summer vs. His Critics*. Slate.com. Retrieved from [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/summer\\_movies/2005/06/the\\_bad\\_boy\\_of\\_summer.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/summer_movies/2005/06/the_bad_boy_of_summer.html)

<sup>29</sup> Bonner, M. (2016, April 12th) *The Next Big Thing: Nicola Peltz*. Marie Claire retrieved from <http://www.marieclaire.com/celebrity/a19763/nicola-peltz/>

The voice over artists for the robots sees a return for Peter Cullen as *Optimus Prime* and much used voice actor Frank Welker as *Galvatron*, giving a degree of continuity from previous incarnations of the franchise. These iconic voices resonate with audiences the world over and have become instantly recognisable as their characters. To add to these are, among others, the new robots, *Hound* (voiced by John Goodman) and *Drift* (voice by Ken Watanabe). The choice of these actors to voice the robots is to add more Hollywood star power without them needing to be on screen. Both Goodman and Watanabe have voices that, even if you did not know their names, are recognisable to people in both the West and the East. Their characters mirror their over acted origins, with *Hound* the representative from America, loud, guns blazing and with unmatched courage, even *Crosshairs* (voiced by John DiMaggio) refers to *Hound* as having “textbook machismo”. *Drift* is the stereotypical Asian, thoughtful, wise and a great sense of honour. He is fast and deadly, utilising his preferred swords as his weapons.

However, it is when we analyse the Chinese contingent within the film that it becomes more interesting. Most prominent is Li Bingbing (*Su Yueming*), fulfilling many target demographics as Chinese, young, attractive and the most powerful woman in the film. A household name in China, Li Bingbing is on the cusp of success in the Western film world according to renowned news show *60 Minutes* referring to her as “China’s Angelina Jolie”<sup>30</sup>, for her humanitarian and animal rights work as well as her flourishing acting career. As the CEO of Kinetic Solutions Incorporated’s China operations, she is an accomplished businesswoman, clearly able to hold her own in the male dominated world in the West. She is the only character to instantly recognise the danger of *Galvatron*, as her reaction shows in this shot:



(Fig. 19) *Su Yueming (Li Bingbing) instantly recognising there is something wrong*

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<sup>30</sup> Williams, H. (2016, April 8th) *Rising in the East*. 60 Minutes. CBS News.

Smarter than her male, Western counterparts, she adds to this with other skills, as she physically dominates two, highly trained CIA agents in Hong Kong, having shown off incredible driving skills in both a car and on a motorbike. She is the complete woman, a female superhero in every respect. So much so that after devastating the CIA agents the following scene occurs:

[Su takes out a couple of goons]

Joshua Joyce  
How'd you do that?

Su Yueming  
Police academy, before my MBA.

Joshua Joyce  
I love you.<sup>31</sup>

Smart, beautiful, powerful, Li Bingbing is the most complete character in the film in terms of positive attributes and there are no negatives. This is China represented in the film through one individual character.

As a throw away feature for the Chinese audience, Han Geng was included as *Convertible Passenger*. This inclusion and actual credit being given is purely for the Chinese audience as there are very few in the West who would know who Han Geng is. His screen time may be extremely limited, but the producers of the film were able to use him in press junkets and interviews. To gain even more traction with the Asian audience, Han Geng performed on the film's soundtrack with "Daybreak". Han Geng was announced very early in the production to help generate publicity in China, with users on Sina Weibo claiming, "Wah! I did not know Han Geng is to be in transformers 4!!!"<sup>32</sup> and "too excited it! #Hangeng join Transformers # 4"<sup>33</sup>, and

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<sup>31</sup> Bryce, I. (Producer) Bay, M. (Director) (2014) *Transformers: Age of Extinction* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Paramount/Di Bonaventura Pictures

<sup>32</sup> User: elli123 (2013, December 2nd) Sina Weibo.

<sup>33</sup> User: QIAN RongKai abc (2013, July 31st) Sina Weibo.

his appearance on screen had mixed reactions according to the LA Times with one Weibo user stating, "I went to watch Han Geng but his screen time was even less than the Chinese milk."<sup>34</sup> For the producers, however, his casting worked as it enamoured them with both the Chinese audience and censors.

There can be no doubting the effect of hiring these major name Chinese actors for supporting roles at best had a huge influence on the Chinese audience and allowed the producers to utilise their star power to drive interest even before the film's release.

### 3.1.3 Ideology of the State

The ideology of the State in Transformers is the manner in which the film depicts the behaviour and attributes of American characters versus the behaviour and attributes of the Chinese characters. In Transformers, the American state is portrayed as clueless as represented by the President's *Chief of Staff* (Thomas Lennon). He is the representative of the elected government, who are completely unaware of the activities of the CIA and *Attinger*.

CIA Director

I've had my desk 2 years. Mr. Attinger has been here for 25.

He runs the projects where I don't ask for specifics.  
That's why they're called Black Ops and why we all sleep safer  
at night.

Chief of Staff

Check. That is great. So, um...  
Any dirt on that? How, that's going?

Attinger

Outstanding.

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<sup>34</sup> Makinen, J. (2014, June 30th) 'Transformers' breaks box office records in China. La Times. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/cotown/la-et-ct-transformers-in-china-20140630-story.html>

Chief of Staff

Great. Great.

I was hoping to hear that.

The President will be pleased.<sup>35</sup>

This is the prototypical, untrustworthy state that much of the Western world, and America in particular, is worried about. The level of misinformation was highlighted when Edward Snowden leaked classified information from the NSA (National Security Agency) after having worked for the CIA. He showed the world how there were numerous surveillance programs that were run with the knowledge of the telecommunications industry and various governments. This combines with the fear that people in America have over a government that will take their land, liberty and possibly their lives, shown with the reaction to the military exercises that took place in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, under code name Jade Helm, where locals were genuinely fearful that their government was about to initiate martial law and a dictatorship. As the Daily Mail reported, “*while such views represent the fringes of American political opinion, they reflect a broader suspicion of the federal government that has run deep in Texas for years.*”<sup>36</sup> It is this deep suspicion of the government and their activities that is highlighted by the actions of the CIA, together with the lack of oversight and lack of knowledge of the elected bodies in power.

The American state is one who deceives their citizens for their own personal agenda, *Attinger*, as we learn late in the film, has done a deal to get on the board of Kinetic Solutions Incorporated and a multi-million pay day once his time in the CIA is done. He uses the guise of “defending the State” for evil means, hunting down the *Autobots* who previously worked with the US. *James Savoy* (Titus Welliver) has his own personal agenda for hunting down *Autobots* and *Decepticons* as he seeks to avenge the death of his sister. There is nothing that will stop him and he does not

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<sup>35</sup> Bryce, I. (Producer) Bay, M. (Director) (2014) *Transformers: Age of Extinction* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Paramount/Di Bonaventura Pictures

<sup>36</sup> (2015, July 13th) *Special Forces are Digging Tunnels under Walmart and will Install Obama as dictator: The wild conspiracy theories surrounding plans for a SOCOM military exercise in Texas*. Daily Mail. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3158407/Wild-conspiracy-theories-surrounding-coming-military-exercise-Texas.html>

draw a distinction between friend or foe in his quest for retribution, you could go so far as to say that he doesn't appear to have any friends at all, only his devotion to the mission and his anger. When hunting Optimus Prime, the CIA agents, as directed by *Attinger*, do not even pause for thought with the idea and execution of threatening, and even possibly killing, *Cade Yeager* and his family, particularly using his unarmed, defenceless daughter as leverage to get what they want. These are not the actions of a government and state that are democratic, rational and in defence of their citizens.

The Chinese state largely takes a back seat until the latter stages of the film. The ideology comes from the dominant presence of Chinese companies and expertise. The Chinese characters, representing their state, literally and metaphorically as government officials, company executives and citizens, are rational, thoughtful and never threaten their own or any other citizens.

When the facility is breached in Chicago, *Su Yueming* shows her concern but there is only one place where they could go to advance the company and the technology according to the Western executive:

Su Yueming

Mr. Joshua, I would not describe your product testing as perfected.

Joshua Joyce

We have plenty of time for improvements in China.<sup>37</sup>

China here is shown to be the place where improvements can happen, where the technology can be "perfected". There is no state intervention, the company is free to move ahead with its plans, unlike in the US where the government intervention has caused considerable physical damage to the company's facility. *Joshua Joyce* and Kinetic Solutions Incorporated would not be able to be this world leader in the field without the assistance from China. Even throughout the

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<sup>37</sup> Bryce, I. (Producer) Bay, M. (Director) (2014) *Transformers: Age of Extinction* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Paramount/Di Bonaventura Pictures

research and development facility in Chicago the lab floor is dominated with Chinese cargo containers.



(Fig. 20) Chinese characters in the background,  
Asian scientist in the foreground

China is at once supporting “foreign” industry whilst providing its own advanced abilities. The factory in Guangzhou is where the advanced robots are being constructed and it is thought the deception of the Americans that there is a threat.

When fleeing the CIA in China, *Yueming* declares:

Su Yueming

I know how to lose them in Hong Kong. I know a military  
garrison there.<sup>38</sup>

This has a double meaning; the Chinese state here can provide support and defence against the evil aliens and the evil US government whilst also expressing that Hong Kong is very much a part of China. It is not some other place, not controlled or ruled by anywhere else. It is China. When *Lockdown* descends on Hong Kong harbour it isn't the Americans or British that the Chinese call, it is the “Central Government”. The response is swift and decisive:

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<sup>38</sup> Bryce, I. (Producer) Bay, M. (Director) (2014) *Transformers: Age of Extinction* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Paramount/Di Bonaventura Pictures

### Minister of Defence

The Central Government will protect Hong Kong at all costs. We have fighter jets on the way.<sup>39</sup>

The Chinese state is there to protect its people, all of them, and that includes Hong Kong.

This is the message that the Chinese state would like everyone to know, China is now not only able to defend itself, but is a world superpower and the world's heroes and America is reliant on it, not the other way around as has been the suggestion from Hollywood cinema for close to 100 years. The power of China is not only present but the future as described by President Xi Jinping in November 2012 as "*realising the nation's great rejuvenation is the greatest dream of the nation.*"<sup>40</sup> This "Chinese dream" is represented throughout by the words and actions of all the Chinese characters.

#### 3.1.4 Aesthetics

The aesthetics of *Transformers: AOE* was always going to be a difficult area to try and appeal to a mass Chinese audience if Michael Bay wanted to grasp onto traditional visuals in classical Chinese art. However, the films of Michael Bay all, by and large, have one thing in common, big action sequences. It was his use of these *tent pole* action sequences that he used to draw in the crowds the world over and China was no exception. The audience came to see the spectacle and anything else that was included was a bonus.

The Transformers themselves exhibit traditional Chinese philosophy, with the *Autobots* representing the Yang (阳) and the *Decepticons* representing the Yin (阴) and is storytelling 101 to have clear distinctions between the good and the bad, even if as Lin Li discussed, "*even lots of Chinese do not understand their own traditional aesthetics, let alone Westerners.*"<sup>41</sup> However,

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<sup>39</sup> Bryce, I. (Producer) Bay, M. (Director) (2014) *Transformers: Age of Extinction* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Paramount/Di Bonaventura Pictures

<sup>40</sup> (2013, December 8th) *Making 'Chinese Dream' A Reality*. China Daily. Retrieved from [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-12/08/content\\_17160305.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2013-12/08/content_17160305.htm)

<sup>41</sup> Li, L. (2013) *Traditional Chinese Aesthetics in Life of Pi: An Analysis of Traditional Chinese Aesthetics in Ang Lee's Films under Contemporary Context*. The Asian Conference on Film and Documentary 2013, 166, 3.

the Taoist philosophy of 鏡游 (Jingyou) is prevalent in the character of the *Autobots*. The 游 (you) means travel and the *Autobots* are the ultimate travellers, traversing the universe for a home somewhere to belong. Beyond this it is the ultimate aura for all arts and lives, and it is lives that the *Autobots* care for above all else. The sanctity of life is shared between the heroes as *Cade* values the lives of the *Autobots* as much as they value human life:

Darcy Tirrel

Metal. Just Metal. That's what I always thought of them.

Cade Yeager

Well, they're not. They're living things, with souls like ours.  
Once, I spoke to one.

Darcy Tirrel

And you're working with Transformium?

Cade Yeager

Yeah, that's what I do. I am.

Darcy Tirrel

I'm out there digging for it. There's just not much left to  
find.

So that's how badly you boys need more? Reduced to melting  
evil old Decepticons down.

Cade Yeager

No. That's an Autobot there. The one's who fought for us.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Bryce, I. (Producer) Bay, M. (Director) (2014) *Transformers: Age of Extinction* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Paramount/Di Bonaventura Pictures

The *Autobots* for all their firepower never kill anyone, in stark contrast to the revitalised *Decepticons* who almost gleefully destroy with wanton abandon as they pursue the *Autobots* and fight to seize the seed.



(Fig. 21) The Deceptions recklessly fight in the streets of Hong Kong

They are the Yin (阴), the dark side that has only the desire for destruction. The seed itself that all the villains are after and wish to use is an object that causes the destruction of humanity and nature. Humanity and nature are at the centre of Taoist philosophy and the relationship between them is extremely important, hence the heightened evil of the *Decepticons* and the CIA as they seek to break the bond.

The human evil characters, led by *Attinger* and *Savoy*, share the lack of concern for human life with the *Decepticons*, threatening *Tessa* on their first meeting with her being only moments away from death at *Attinger's* command. *Attinger* then directly threatens *Cade* in their face to face meeting at Kinetic Solutions Incorporated, offering him the choice of giving up on his friends, family and comrades or giving up his and his family's lives.

The Taoist aesthetics are based on emotion and it can be seen throughout each of the characters who carries the positive and negative emotions. The positivity of saving life, defending each other and honour is personified through the *Autobots* and the *Yeagers*. They all use their emotions for good against the rage and anger that drives the *Decepticons* and the CIA.

Visual aesthetics in China are driven by centuries of traditional painting. The paintings, although static, have a rhythm and flow that creates the audience's response. The closest to the traditional painting style is the scene shot around the Three Natural Bridges, showing the great

beauty in nature in China. The scene brings together the prehistoric *Transformers* with those in the modern day in a visually stunning setting. This scene, more than any other, is there to show the raw beauty of China, especially as the location is around 1000 kilometres from Hong Kong, where the action starts and ends.

It is in the action sequences that the international appeal is seen. Audiences the world over want to see a spectacle, as can be seen from the highest grossing films of all time, with 8 of the top 10 being big budget action movies, (*Avatar*, *Star Wars Ep. VII: The Force Awakens*, *Jurassic World*, *The Avengers*, *Furious 7*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part II*, *Iron Man 3*), 1 was a spectacle in its own right (*Titanic*) and the final film was a marketing spectacle (*Frozen*)<sup>43</sup>. *Transformers: AOE* certainly delivers on a scale for explosions and action sequences. There are fighting robots all over America and China with the action thick and fast and one on one human combat between CIA agents and a variety of the heroes. In the age of the MTV generation that demands speed, there are still elements of traditional Hong Kong cinema techniques in the action sequences as John Woo-style slow motion shots punctuate the scenes. The fighting is still fast and frenetic but it is also rare that there are these pauses in the big budget blockbuster. This can only be for stylistic purposes, making the moments within more like paintings and poetic.



(Fig. 22) A moment of calm, with a visually beautiful shot

Michael Bay's films all have these attributes to some degree, but it is the prevalence of these visuals in *Transformers: Age of Extinction* that makes it stand out and means that this was specifically thought out so that it would appeal to the Chinese aesthetic.

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<sup>43</sup> The Numbers. Retrieved from <http://www.the-numbers.com/movie/records/All-Time-Worldwide-Box-Office>

The visual, emotional and action aesthetics are all a combination of what is expected from a Hollywood blockbuster and what is designed for a mass Chinese market.

### 3.1.5 Product Placement

Product placement has been part and parcel of the *Transformers* universe ever since its inception as the original cartoon concept was made in order to sell the toys of the same name. As the movie industry has sought to gain more and more revenue streams, we have seen an increase in the number of product placements throughout the films that get produced, the blockbusters as they aim for the highest numbers of market penetration and target the highest spending demographic of 18 to 34 year olds. As shown by De Zoysa and Newman, “*the cultural reach of Hollywood opens the doors to cross merchandising endorsing the values of consumerism and commodification globally.*”<sup>44</sup> This is by no means a value judgement on the action blockbuster, more a statement of the necessity of modern economics to gain the most revenue from each picture. The *Transformers* films are squarely aimed at those demographics as can be seen by the kind of products that feature most heavily. To form a full list of the products from both sides of the Pacific that feature would be far too exhaustive, so included are some of the best examples found in the film.

There are several major Western brands that have a global presence, wishing to gain customers in all markets, but with a definite eye on China. One of the most prominent is Chevrolet, who provided the basis for many of the vehicles, including the concept car for *Bumblebee* when he is made new and cool.

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<sup>44</sup> De Zoysa, R. & Newman, O. (2002) *Globalisation, Soft Power and the Challenge of Hollywood*. Contemporary Politics, 8:3, 185-202.



(Fig. 23) New and improved Chevrolet Bumblebee

The inclusion of Budweiser is blatantly obvious, with bottles flying and an almost despondent shot that the beer has been cast to the ground.



(Fig. 24) Bud Light, damaged but the branding is still strong



(Fig. 25) Bud Light, refreshing in a fight

This is a beer that you want to drink though, as even our hero, *Cade*, during the action, stops to take a drink. It is the Chinese brands though that are most interesting as they are not even available in other markets, yet their presence is hard to miss. Early in the film, whilst the setting is still America, we see someone using a China Construction Bank card in the middle of Texas.



(Fig. 26) 中国建设银行 in Texas

中国建设银行 (China Construction Bank) was incorporated in 1954 and has a presence in many countries worldwide, particularly in Europe, but, at present, does not have a presence in Texas. The bank is barely heard of by the layman in the West, yet it was ranked as the second biggest, most powerful and most valuable companies in the world by Forbes in their 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Global 2000<sup>45</sup>. The inclusion for financial gain is purely for the Chinese market, making this brand seem worldly and powerful, but it is also there to show a wider world that Chinese companies are worldly and powerful and coming to an ATM near you soon. The fact that it's accepted by a Western audience without question would lead us to think that either we are so used to product placement that this inclusion is ignored or that we accept the ever-burgeoning dominance of Chinese brands and that this is a realistic possibility that a Chinese bank would be used regularly in Texas.

In one of the more blatant pieces of product placement, 伊利 (Yili) milk brand features heavily. A long shot of Stanley Tucci drinking the milk, with the branding perfectly in focus, was the most obvious product placement in the film.



(Fig. 27) Joyce enjoying his milk

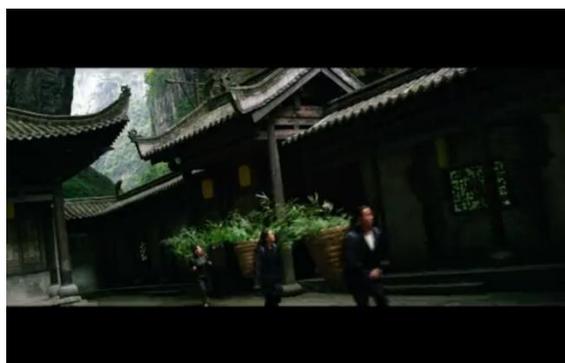
Here again we see a brand that does not have a Western presence, so it's purpose here is for the domestic Chinese marketplace. Globally, and particularly within China, 伊利 is most known for the 2008 China milk scandal where contaminated baby milk formula was found to contain melamine, used to give the appearance of higher protein content in the milk. The ensuing

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<sup>45</sup> Forbes. (2015, May 6th) Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbespr/2015/05/06/forbes-13th-annual-global-2000-the-worlds-biggest-public-companies/#6b554e2d14fd>

protein deficiency led to 6 infant deaths and 54,000 babies becoming hospitalised with milk products coming from a variety of Chinese companies, including 伊利. The scandal made real a lot of international concerns about food safety and political corruption in China, as the tainted milk could not have happened without widespread knowledge of the fact. The inclusion here of a main Hollywood actor and one of the main characters in the film drinking the milk that had previously had a dangerous reputation is a clear indication that this company is safe and favoured by Westerners.

The value of product placement in *Transformers* is so high that when conditions are not met, especially as money had been received in good faith, there are potentially severe repercussions. A case that begun in 2014 once the film had been released finally made it to court in China in April 2016, as Wulong Karst Tourism stated that they had paid in excess of \$750,000 USD in addition to closing access to the UNESCO World Natural Heritage site for 5 days for filming, losing them millions of yuan in lost revenue. The deal was seemingly simple; the producers would be allowed to film exclusively for 5 days and receive a cash sum and in exchange there would be hefty product placement and prominent positioning of the words “China Wulong” (“中国武隆”) in the film. Even though the extremely scenic 天生三桥 (Three Natural Bridges) does feature in the finished cut of the film.



(Fig. 28) Three Natural Bridges, with no sign stating 中国武隆

There is nowhere that contains the words that the Tourism company paid for. In addition, Huang Daosheng (Wulong Karst Tourism company’s general manager) told CCTV (China Central

Television) News he was worried about audiences not realising where the scene was shot, thereby wasting the paid-for opportunity of product placement,” The story was set near Hong Kong. People that don’t know us will think Wulong is adjacent to Hong Kong. It’s misleading to tourists and audiences. The effect can be long-lasting.”<sup>46</sup> In this case the product placement did not work for either party and ended up in court with potentially millions of dollars at stake.

In *Transformers: Age of Extinction*, the product placement allowed the producers to recoup a healthy sum of money that was outplayed for production, but, more importantly, it allowed for easier access to the huge Chinese market, through pleasing the authorities.

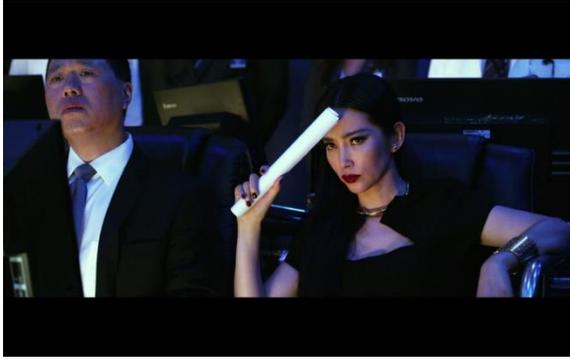
### 3.1.6 Production Values

The production values of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* are a mix of the standard Hollywood blockbuster and moments designed to draw in the Chinese audience.

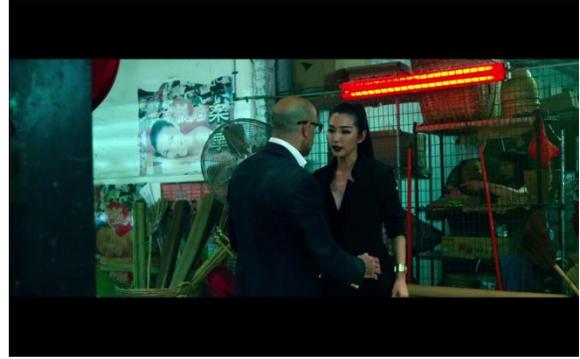
The current standard in Hollywood is to have rapid cuts that drive the story forward at pace and make action sequences appear to be faster and fuller and *Transformers* films have followed this throughout the quadrilogy. However, *Transformers: Age of Extinction* is slightly different. Interspersed within the fast and furious action cuts are more lingering shots of our stars and heroes. Li Bingbing is lingered on in a variety of shots and poses. She is seen thoughtful in a close-up; shown powerful once she has physically overcome an adversary; and full of emotion and concern.

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<sup>46</sup> Wu, G. (2014, August 15th) *Wulong Scenic Area Sues 'Transformers 4' Producers for Credit*. CCTV.com. Retrieved from <http://english.cntv.cn/2014/08/15/VIDE1408033319865260.shtml>



(Fig. 29) Li Bingbing being thoughtful



(Fig. 30) Strong and powerful



(Fig. 31) Emotional

In each example, it can be seen how she is being portrayed. She is a beautiful and vibrant star and everything from the lighting to the stances are designed to highlight these attributes. She is the poster woman for China in the film and when she is present, the production values are built around maximising her presence.

In a blatant appeal to the Chinese fans, Michael Bay hired Geng Han early on in production and his scene is a little bizarre. As a “*Convertible Passenger*” he is sitting with his guitar and singing. It cannot be underestimated the effect of the focus put on Geng Han. Just a few seconds of hearing him sing and seeing him on screen is enough to drive a large portion of Chinese audiences to the cinema. Even with the world being torn apart around the car, the audience can still hear him singing above all the other external noise. Realism is thrown out the window so that his presence can be utilised fully.



(Fig. 32) Han Geng with guitar

In an interesting twist, some of the Hong Kong shots were filmed in Detroit but are magically transformed into pokey Hong Kong apartments.



(Fig. 33) Hong Kong apartment in Detroit

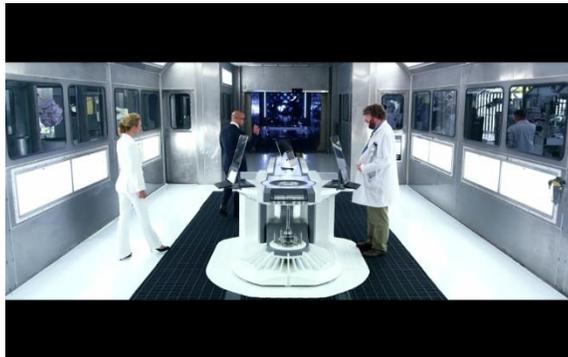
This is an excellent example of the production design and the design team had clearly gone to great lengths to ensure as much accuracy as they could to a realistic Hong Kong apartment.

America is shown to be a country in a state of disrepair, the small town in Texas and *Cade's* farm set the scene. Around *Cade's* farm we see the spirit of America alive and well, he is inventive and passionate, but nothing works like it is supposed to.



(Fig. 34) Robots that don't work as they should

This feeling is echoed in the lab at Kinetic Solutions Incorporated, a clean, state-of-the-art facility



(Fig. 35) KSI Chicago

however, as *Joshua Joyce* points out:

Joshua Joyce

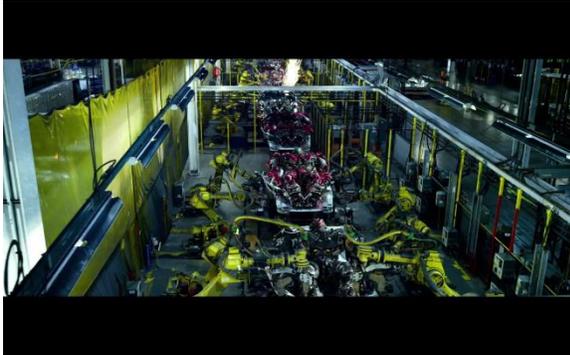
Why can't we make what we want to make the way we want to make it?<sup>47</sup>

This is in contrast with the facility in China where there is not only construction, but development. The factory itself is ultra-modern, with robots building robots and personnel in safety gear monitoring the progress of the production line. This China is one where the real work

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<sup>47</sup> Bryce, I. (Producer) Bay, M. (Director) (2014) *Transformers: Age of Extinction* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Paramount/Di Bonaventura Pictures

happens, the office in Chicago is the one for show and for investors, it is in China where we see the practical development of the future. Everything about the facility oozes the cutting edge of production, with well-designed automation to the orderly staff.



(Fig. 36) KSI Guangzhou



(Fig. 37) Cutting edge production

This promotion of China is that even though America is still a land of opportunity and potential, China is the land of progress and production.

The score for *Transformers: Age of Extinction* is written by Steve Joblonsky, with a little help from fellow composer Hans Zimmer. The score is designed to evoke an emotional response, from “*Tessa*” whose slow, melodic violin-based tune gives a sense of optimism and togetherness, to the immediate following of “*Cemetery Wind*”, which uses an electronic rock sound to compliment the combat scene, whilst building the sense of impending evil that the CIA agents bring. It is this constant flicking between that different sounds, and sights, that is a trademark of Michael Bay and part of his appeal to audiences, they do not know what they are going to get from one second to the next.

One thing that Michael Bay does do well is create a rousing sense of grandeur. This is done to great effect when the *Autobots* come together in Monument Valley, with the music of “*Autobots Reunite*” combining with the visuals to give the audience this growing feeling of the heroes gathering. There is nothing robotic about the music at this point, it’s very human and further draws the audience to the side of good, the side of the *Autobots*. In contrast, whenever the film encounters *Lockdown* or *Galvatron*, the score is deliberately metallic, with heavier rock tones and emphasises the negativity of those characters. There is no less grandeur, it is just directed differently. This helps to clearly define the two sides, the Yin and the Yang.

The production values of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* are designed for audiences worldwide that respond to the soundtrack and the visuals, but it is in the specifics utilising the clarity of good and evil and in the use of the Chinese elements that help to make it more appealing to the Chinese market.

### 3.1.7 Distribution Regulations

The distribution for most territories was handled by Paramount Pictures itself through its global system of offices, each geared to its individual territory. However, China required a different approach. With the state backing of the China Movie Channel, who co-produced the film, the film was able to pass through the censors with little problem. Once all the elements of Chinese product placement, agreements regarding the perception of China and Chinese characters and the prominence of China in the film were settled, the film could organise the distribution.

With the help of its Chinese partners, the producers were able to navigate the potentially constantly changing regulations and desires that the government and particularly the film censors set. One example of this is to avoid an international incident and a ban throughout China, a scene was cut where *Attinger* kills a Chinese citizen to steal his vehicle. This was deemed inappropriate and not China-friendly and so was cut, avoiding any problem. As Kelsey Grammer himself said in an interview with Yahoo, the scene “*was very violent, and it looked very violent... Apparently the Chinese government had some input on these things, and they just didn’t want to see a Chinese national get thrown out of the car [laughs] — and then subsequently run over.*”<sup>48</sup>

This was not without its issues though as at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, Beijing Pangu Investment Company decided a day before the premiere that their product placement agreement was not fulfilled by the producers, essentially thinking that they did not receive the appropriate level of exposure, and that they were cancelling their deal. The cancellation would have meant that all images of the Beijing Pangu Plaza hotel would have to be removed throughout the entire

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<sup>48</sup> Doty, M. (2014, August 16th) *Kelsey Grammer, Covert Hollywood Overlord*. Yahoo Movies. Retrieved from <https://www.yahoo.com/movies/kelsey-grammer-covert-hollywood-overlord-94848618482.html>

distribution of film worldwide. With the discussions rectifying the alleged problem, a joint press conference with Michael Bay led Bay to reportedly state, “*Working with Pangu was fantastic and I want to put all this misunderstanding aside.*”<sup>49</sup> The issues appeared to be addressed, the hotel featured and the movie made its distribution deadlines.



(Fig. 38) Pangu Plaza

By working with the state backed organisation of the China Film Group, the producers could avoid many of the pitfalls that could have come their way and when something did happen they could rectify it quickly to avoid any lasting damage. The combination of the two biggest distributors in China, China Film Group and Huaxia Film Distribution Company, meant that maximum exposure was achieved in the minimum amount of time.

With the aim to maximise profits and to make sure there were no unforeseen difficulties with release, which was timed simultaneously with the US to limit the demand for piracy, the producers of Transformers partnered with the government-owned China Movie Channel for production and the massive distribution network managed by China Film Group and Huaxia Film Distribution Company. This was described by Quartz as “*crucially, that cut down on the time for pirated copies to circulate the country.*”<sup>50</sup> The effects can be seen with the record box office numbers that were achieved, audiences preferred to go to the cinema and see the film and were willing to pay to experience the spectacle on the big screen.

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<sup>49</sup> Lang, B. (2014, June 23rd) ‘*Transformers: Age of Extinction*’ Partner Back on Board After Threatening China Release. Variety. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2014/film/news/transformers-age-of-extinction-partner-back-on-board-after-threatening-china-release-1201242100/>

<sup>50</sup> Kuo, L. (2014, July 7th) *Why the abysmal ‘Transformers’ sequel is about to become China’s top grossing film of all time.* Quartz. Retrieved from <http://qz.com/230781/why-the-abysmal-transformers-sequel-is-about-to-become-chinas-top-grossing-film-of-all-time/>

As the Chinese market expands and grows at a rate far surpassing any other territory, the way *Transformers* was distributed within China has made it a market leader in the best way to gain the highest profits from a potentially difficult market.

### 3.1.8 Social Media and Promotions

As with all big budget blockbusters coming out of Hollywood, the marketing and promotions budget was almost equal to the production budget for *Transformers: Age of Extinction*.

The producers wanted to make an impact and they certainly achieved that. The franchise has been popular in China in each of its previous outings, gathering, \$37 million for *Transformers*<sup>51</sup>, \$65.8 million for *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*<sup>52</sup> and \$165 million for *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*<sup>53</sup>, so there was a pre-existing knowledge and awareness about the film that did not need to be overcome. However, the producers utilised an array of promotional tie ins that helped to feed back into the movie.

One of the first moves was to confirm the presence of Chinese stars. Li Bingbing and Han Geng were signed up as quickly as possible, with both having a huge following in Mainland China. Once the contracts were finalised, it was possible to get them both out, in front of the cameras to promote the film. Within China, Han Geng was interviewed and made out to be one of the stars of the film. Michael Bay described him as, “one of Asia's top stars in the worlds of music, television and movies and has become one of the most influential entertainers in China...Welcome Han Geng to the cast of *Transformers 4*.”<sup>54</sup> This is key as Bay himself described Han as a top star and particularly influential in China, not being hired for his acting prowess. Han Geng announced to his near 48 million followers on Weibo<sup>55</sup> that it was “a childhood dream coming true.”<sup>56</sup> With

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<sup>51</sup> Box Office Mojo. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=transformers06.htm>

<sup>52</sup> Box Office Mojo. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=transformers2.htm>

<sup>53</sup> Box Office Mojo. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=transformers3.htm>

<sup>54</sup> Tsui, C. (2013, July 14th) *Chinese Star Joins 'Transformers 4'*. The Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/chinese-star-joins-transformers-4-585242>

<sup>55</sup> Official figure from Sina Weibo. Retrieved from [http://www.weibo.com/hangeng?is\\_hot=1](http://www.weibo.com/hangeng?is_hot=1)

<sup>56</sup> The Diplomat. (2013, July 16th). *Han Geng Joins Li Bingbing on 'Transformers 4' Cast*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2013/07/han-geng-joins-fan-bingbing-on-transformers-4-cast/>

such a forceful promotion from the “star” it was expected that he would feature quite prominently, however his screen time was under 30 seconds. Li Bingbing was much better utilised, providing the strongest female character the franchise has ever seen and has a significant portion of screen time. The combination of these stars certainly gave increased exposure in Mainland China.

To reinforce the sense of the film being at least partly Chinese owned, the producers and China Movie Channel ran a reality TV show to find four “regular” people who would feature as speaking extra roles, advertised to play opposite the lead star Mark Wahlberg. This cooperation was described by producer Sid Ganis as *“the first time it’s been done this way in China...It’s kind of a western way to do it.”*<sup>57</sup> The result led to four winners, Byron Li, Austin Lin, Candice Zhao and Teresa Daley, but the roles became smaller than originally advertised, as producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura explained, *“For us it’s an opportunity to get new talent; for new talent, it’s an opportunity to experience [making] a big Hollywood movie, I think it’s important for both sides and not about how big or how small something is.”*<sup>58</sup>

For direct promotion, a 21-foot-tall model of *Optimus Prime* was placed next to Hong Kong harbour, a watching sentinel. This was reinforced in the mainland with the film closing the biggest film festival, the Shanghai International Film festival, showing the film as bigger and better than any of its release date competitors. All this promotion was done at a fraction of the cost with US print and advertising spend reaching \$100 million versus \$3 to \$5 million in China<sup>59</sup>. This huge difference can help explain why China is such an attractive market to Hollywood executives and filmmakers.

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<sup>57</sup> Block, A. B. (2013, May 2nd) *‘Transformers 4’ Reality Show Begins Casting Chinese Actors*. The Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/transformers-4-reality-show-chinese-449206>

<sup>58</sup> Rigney, T. (2013, September 3rd) *‘Transformers 4’ Producers Announce Chinese Reality Show Winners*. Inquisitr. Retrieved from <http://www.inquisitr.com/934006/transformers-reality-show-winners/>

<sup>59</sup> McClintock, P. (2014, July 31st) *\$200 million and Rising: Hollywood Struggles with Soaring Marketing Costs*. The Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/200-million-rising-hollywood-struggles-721818>

### 3.1.9 Reaction in China

Despite unprecedented box office success, *Transformers* was not widely viewed as a “good” movie, more a spectacle that drew in audiences. 豆瓣 (*Dòubàn*) users have scored *Transformers: Age of Extinction* as 6.6/10 on their rating system that is public driven with 173,537 users<sup>60</sup> providing their scores. Compared to a Western facing site, IMDB (Internet Movie Database) which rates the film as 5.7/10 with 237,751 user scores<sup>61</sup>. This difference shows how the general public, as opposed to critics, saw the film. The Chinese audience has a noticeably better experience of the film, believing, on average, that it was 10% better than the Western audience. With the commonality of spectacle drawing audiences the difference may be in catering for the Chinese audience, not just the Chinese censors. Viewers such as 你好奇啊 declared, “五星好评不解释! (5 stars. No need to explain!)”<sup>62</sup> and this was a sentiment shared by 张躲躲 who said in their 5-star review, “变形金刚 4 真的是变硬金刚呢!!! (Transformers 4 is a brilliant diamond!!!)”<sup>63</sup>. However, the Chinese audience is not stupid and could see the blatant inclusion of Chinese products with 梁臻頤 airing their frustration, “中国元素敢再多些吗中国产品广告敢再多点吗? 舒化奶你够了! (Are the Chinese elements are more and more like direct Chinese product advertising? Enough with lactose milk!)”<sup>64</sup>, and user OI had a similar feeling with “一个美国农民, 在美国大农村随手掏出一张中国建设银行的卡去取钱, 你在开玩笑么? (An American farmer in the United States in a rural area uses a China Construction Bank card to withdraw money, are you kidding me?)”<sup>65</sup>. The combination of the relatively high score from viewers and the comments show that the Chinese audience was more willing to accept the changes to cater to their market than the Western audience.

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<sup>60</sup> Retrieved from <https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/>

<sup>61</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2109248/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_3](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2109248/?ref_=nv_sr_3)

<sup>62</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=52&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=52&limit=20&sort=new_score)

<sup>63</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=199&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=199&limit=20&sort=new_score)

<sup>64</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=176&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=176&limit=20&sort=new_score)

<sup>65</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=101&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/7054604/comments?start=101&limit=20&sort=new_score)

With this case study, the end desire of success in China had a tangible effect on the content, visuals, aesthetics and perceptions of the film, the aims changed the means and could indicate a future for the Hollywood summer blockbuster. If money is the principal indicator of success, then, in China *Transformers: Age of Extinction* is one of the most successful films ever.

## Case Study 3.2 - Looper

*Looper* is an interesting case study as a film that was a solid performer at the US box office, taking \$66.5 million<sup>66</sup> from a production budget of \$30 million<sup>67</sup>, but was very successful in China with little promotion as it took \$20 million<sup>68</sup>. The success can be attributed in large part to the adaptations that the film underwent to make the product more desirable to the Chinese market and censors, changing location from Paris to Shanghai and China, and including some additional shots featuring China and catering to their audience. The main concept, as envisioned by writer/director Rian Johnson, remained the same from treatment to scripting with producer James Stern claiming in an interview with *Variety* that, “In Rian’s mind, it worked better for the script. In fact, he originally thought, when talk about it came up, (that) we couldn’t afford to go to China — otherwise he could’ve written it in initially.”<sup>69</sup> Hit men would be sent their targets from the future and dispose of the bodies in the past, the main change here was that the country and place of the future became China. This is of particular interest as the entire concept of time travel was condemned in China, due to the ability of time travellers to distort or change historical events, as *Time* reported the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television stated that “the producers and writers are treating the serious history in a frivolous way, which should by no means be encouraged anymore.”<sup>70</sup> With this hostile reception to the content that *Looper* was showing from government agencies, the success of the movie in China is all the more surprising.

### 3.2.1 Locational Analysis

From initial treatment to final production, the biggest individual change that occurred was in location, with France supplanted by China. Anne Greenspan explains, “*Looper* director

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<sup>66</sup> Box Office Mojo. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=loopers.htm>

<sup>67</sup> The Numbers. Retrieved from <http://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Looper#tab=summary>

<sup>68</sup> Box Office Mojo. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=loopers.htm>

<sup>69</sup> Goldstein, G. (2012, October 6th) China Partner Helps ‘Looper’ Win Big. *Variety*. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2012/film/box-office/china-partner-helps-looper-win-big-1118060324/>

<sup>70</sup> Ho, E. (2011, April 13th) China Decides to Ban Time Travel. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://techland.time.com/2011/04/13/china-deCides-to-ban-time-travel/>

Rian Johnson had originally intended to set the film in Paris, but when Chinese distributors offered to pay to switch the location to China, Johnson agreed to rewrite the script and transplant production from Paris to Shanghai. The resulting scenes contain spectacular images of Shanghai futurism.”<sup>71</sup> This view was reinforced in the media with The Guardian reporting that the move was made to “gain lucrative Chinese funding”<sup>72</sup> and came from theatrical distributor DMG Entertainment. This initially appears to be concerning money to get the film off the ground, however it is a larger change than that and, combined with the assistance of DMG Entertainment, the change helped to enamour the movie with the Chinese audience.

The film begins in the near future, 2044,



(Fig. 39) Wide open fields in rural America remain the same in 2044

and shows the audience a view of rural America that is recognisable as wide open fields of the Midwest. A large field of crops stands waiting to be harvested, merely a backdrop to murder as the plastic sheet awaits its victim. This duality mimics the duality of America itself, at once peaceful and welcoming and equally brash and violent.

The rural diner could be from 2012 but is at home in Kansas in 2044. The small-town America is still alive and well and hasn't changed or adapted to the new, modern world. The diner is a safe-haven, a place to go to that represents an America that is secure and homely. This

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<sup>71</sup> Greenspan, A. (2014) *Shanghai Future: Modernity Remade*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press

<sup>72</sup> Pidd, H. (2012, October 1<sup>st</sup>) *Sci-fi Blockbuster Looper Achieves Chinese Box Office First*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/oct/01/looper-sci-fi-blockbuster-china>

is the place that *Joe* goes to after he disposes of a body, as his familiarity with the waitress *Beatrix* (Tracie Thoms):

Beatrix  
How's the French?

Joe  
Slow.

Beatrix  
How's the coffee?

Joe  
Burnt.<sup>73</sup>

The diner is the place where *Joe* meets *Old Joe* for the conversational confrontation. The audience is teased with the prospect that *Joe* has been caught with the markings on *Old Joe's* arm, but it is the security of old world, rural America at the diner that the meeting takes place.



*(Fig. 40) The audience teased with the possibility that Joe has been captured, but it is merely instructions for Old Joe*

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<sup>73</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

The diner and the rural scenes are a world away from the expanded Kansas City with giant skyscrapers on the horizon.



*(Fig. 41) Kansas City of the future in the background dominating the skyline*

The city and the countryside are a contrast of America, two different entities at once. As much as the countryside is homely and welcoming, the city is harsh and selfish. The homeless on the streets are beyond counting and live a completely different lifestyle to the 'Loopers'.



*(Fig. 42) The homeless of the city are numerous and clog the streets*



*(Fig. 43) Joe's apartment is comfortable and functional without having homely touches, better than the streets*

The city is home to violence, drugs, prostitutes and gangs and there are no redeeming features seen in the city.

Sara's farm is completely different from the city and is another place of relative safety, again the countryside provides a respite from the corrupted city. The countryside represents an America of old, where little has changed.



*(Fig. 44) Sara's farm, a comforting version of rural America*

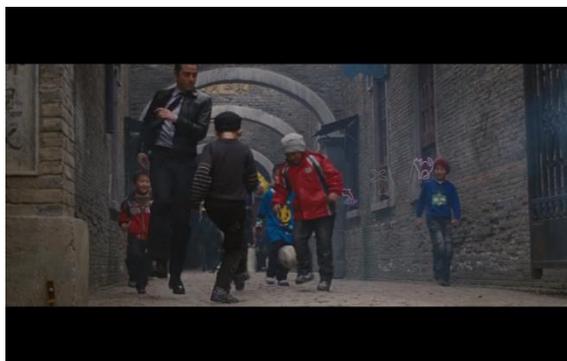
This America is homely, comforting and, like the diner, shows the best side of the nation. As the farms are reminiscent of the old-world America, it is stating that America's best days are behind, the future represented by the city is dark and dangerous.

The first scene of China is from the Bund in Shanghai. The city has ultra-modern and futuristic skyscrapers across the Huangpu River.



*(Fig. 45) Shanghai of the future with existing skyscrapers surrounded by further development into the year 2044*

In this modern city *Joe* is still able to walk down a narrow alley with children playing football carefree, a scene that makes him smile as this could never have happened in Kansas City.



(Fig. 46) Joe with children playing football carefreely in the street

Joe's apartment is sparse and ultra-modern with sweeping views of the city.



(Fig. 47) Joe's Shanghai apartment overlooking a smog-ridden future Shanghai cityscape

This shot is the only negative seen of China as the city is surrounded in smog, a long-standing problem in the mega cities of the East, but does allow for the apartment shots to be filmed anywhere and a murky Shanghai skyline to be placed behind.

The location for *Old Joe* and *Old Joe's Wife* to consummate their relationship is very different from his hyper modern, cold apartment. *Old Joe's Wife's* place, representing a more traditional China that is not tainted by Western culture, is full of homely touches, flowers, furniture and colour. *Old Joe* and his *wife* then relocate to the idyllic Chinese countryside, with accompanying slow, romantic music to help reinforce this change to *Joe's* life. *Joe* is finally happy and has made a home, finding a lifestyle that is no longer selfish and embraces a more traditional Chinese way of life.



(Fig. 48) A homely bedroom filled with Chinese decorations



(Fig. 49) The idyllic Chinese countryside where Joe settles down with his Chinese wife

China is seen throughout as a land of the future, modern and exciting, whilst still maintaining its traditional values in the city, until they are corrupted by the Western intervention. The Chinese countryside, where traditional life and values are most represented is the best place in the world for *Joe*, a world without Western influence and only gets destroyed when the West, the gangsters, catch up with him. America is represented as a traditionally good place but is ultimately corrupted.

### 3.2.2 Stars

As a small budget Hollywood film, the stars in *Looper* are a mix of big name draw, Bruce Willis, and known, but yet to break into superstardom, Joseph Gordon Levitt and Emily Blunt. This mix enabled the producers to get a good balance of reasonable box office guarantee with young acting talent that would potentially engage an audience to see what would make a star like Bruce Willis act in this relatively low budget fare.

Of all the “stars”, only Bruce Willis would be considered a household name in China. As an internationally renowned action star, Bruce Willis has got what the Guardian has described as “bankable brawn”<sup>74</sup> and was the biggest name attached to the production. His addition certainly garnered attention in the West and further enamoured him with the Chinese audience, leading

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<sup>74</sup> Kay, J. (2013, 19<sup>th</sup> February) *Bruce Willis wins the battle of the box office beefcakes*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/feb/19/bruce-willis-arnie-sly-box-office>

to his role in the \$90 million Chinese film “The Bombing”<sup>75</sup>, due for release in China on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016<sup>76</sup>. His casting was not only for acting and action prowess but also for the inevitable star power that he brings worldwide. As *Joe* of the future, he is representative of what will happen if *Joe* continues on the road he has chosen, with his drug taking lifestyle leading him to more and more violence until he meets Qing Xu. With this relationship, he endeavours to change the future as he seeks to destroy the enemy to come, which, in turn, drives him to assassinate innocent children. Here *Joe* is as America, literally, killing its youth to secure what it believes is a better future. *Old Joe* is unable to see that there is any alternative than the path he walks, and constantly reminds himself of his desire to get to the better potential future with the picture of Qing Xu in his pocket watch.

Old Joe

We don't have to give her up.

I'm not going to give her up.

I'm going to save her.<sup>77</sup>

As Bruce Willis is the big-name star playing *Old Joe*, Joseph Gordon Levitt was the up and coming star playing *Joe*. *Looper* was a film in which Joseph Gordon Levitt could take a leading role, something he had not managed to secure in a major Hollywood film, with supporting roles in *Inception* (2010) and *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012)<sup>78</sup> the biggest international hits for him. The producers had identified that Bruce Willis was the star, with Rian Johnson himself stating, “Bruce is such a good actor and so right for the part in so many ways,”<sup>79</sup> the trick was to turn Joseph Gordon Levitt into a younger version of him, rather than finding an *Old Joe* to resemble the young version. He took on many of Bruce Willis’ mannerisms, cadence and glances successfully and built a believable young *Joe*. His *Joe* is the one who lives for himself, seeking his own

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<sup>75</sup> Rainey, J. (2015, 10<sup>th</sup> June) *Chinese Film Biz Lures American Talent with Bruce Willis, ‘The Bombing’*. Variety. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2015/film/news/bruce-willis-china-hollywood-heroes-1201515685/>

<sup>76</sup> Retrieved from IMDB.com

<sup>77</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

<sup>78</sup> Retrieved from IMDB.com

<sup>79</sup> Johnson, R. (2013, 13<sup>th</sup> September) *Looper Behind the Scenes Look at Joseph Gordon-Levitt’s Amazing Transformation*. Toy Box Entertainment. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45xUJVsAlaI>

pleasures, with a background of a rough childhood. He is essentially all that is wrong with America for the first half of the movie. He is full of the potential of youth but is too wrapped up in his own pleasure seeking to care of the future or of consequences. However, he evolves in the movie when he encounters *Sara* (Emily Blunt) and *Cid* (Pierce Gagnon). After initially wishing to stop *Old Joe* and continue his own path, he sees the future potential of good or evil in *Cid* and takes on the role of protector.

Joe

Right now, two things have happened.

My loop knows *Cid's* the kid he's looking for.

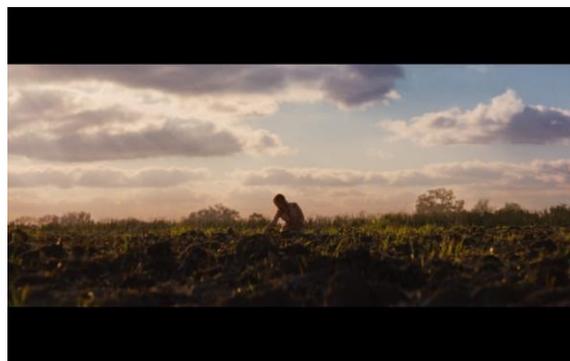
And my gang knows I'm here.

That means in 15 minutes, one or both of them is coming down  
that highway.

Pack up the truck. Take everything you can and go.

Drive north away from the city.<sup>80</sup>

He realises the inevitability of continuing down the same path and that something must change for there to be a better and brighter future. This acknowledgement that the path that America is on could lead to devastating consequences is the theme at the end where only *Joe's* (and America's) sacrifice can lead to the dawn of a brighter future.



(Fig. 50) After the self-sacrifice, there is the potential for a new dawn

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<sup>80</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

The idea that America needs to change to avoid its path of destruction is a direct appeal to the Chinese market that the all-powerful America is on the wrong path.

Piper Perabo plays *Suzie* the stripper and a prostitute frequented by *Joe* in the early part of the movie. She is most well-known for *Coyote Ugly*, and so would not be considered a draw to Chinese audiences in herself but her character aids and reinforces the hedonistic lifestyle of young *Joe*, she is helping to feed the addictions that *Joe* embraces and as such is representative of all the negative aspects of American culture that want the country to continue its course. She doesn't think of the future but merely enables the pleasures of the present. This is in stark contrast to *Old Joe's Wife*, Qing Xu. This love interest completely changes him when he is possibly at his lowest point.

#### Old Joe

I'm gonna tell you what happens to this beautiful woman who save your worthless fucking life.<sup>81</sup>

Xu changes *Joe's* life for the better, helping him to leave his carefree selfish lifestyle behind him and moving, physically and metaphorically, to a better place in the Chinese country, where he can live happily and peacefully. She shows him a potential future that is a world away from what he has lived. Despite being found in the middle of his darkest days, he can come out of it a better man, so much so that he does not want his future to unfold as he lived it, even if that means sacrificing some more of his humanity. Xu is the incentive for change. Xu represents China, one that "at present" has a similar hedonistic façade to America but is still capable of looking to the future, with the capability of change. If *Joe* embraces the Chinese model, then he has the potential for a brighter future.

Emily Blunt as *Sara* who has seen her star rise since 2012 with roles in *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014), *Into the Woods* (2014) and *Sicario* (2015)<sup>82</sup>. *Sara* is the protective 'mother' of *Cid* and will

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<sup>81</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

do anything to help and nurture him. She knows of *Cid's* destructive capabilities, even keeping a safe where she can securely hide away for when he loses control, but still endeavours to protect him. *Sara* represents an America that is still present but the future lies open and could lead to death and destruction or to a potentially better world. This America needs to be protected and allowed to develop the potential of youth, rather than the current path that leads to "The Rainmaker". *Sara's* ideals of family, growth, education and potential are shared with the ideals that the Chinese government would like to promote, therefore making the character of *Sara* particularly appealing to the Chinese audience.

In the case of *Looper*, it is less the names of the actors, but rather the roles and characters that they play that make the film more appealing to the Chinese government and market. The addition of up and coming stars with a big-name grabs attention, the development of the characters keeps it.

### 3.2.3 Ideology of the State

The ideology of the two nations that are predominantly represented, America and China, are presented in stark contrast. With American ideology, as identified by Seymour Martin Lipset as being "*born out of revolution, the United States is a country organized around an ideology which includes a set of dogmas about the nature of a good society*"<sup>83</sup>, the world of *Joe* is one that embraces self rather than what American's would like to believe with the nature of a good society. America is shown to be a world dominated by gangsters, drugs and guns. The only players that are seen to not be involved in this world are farmers or the homeless of the city, even then there are guns present everywhere. The fields and farmers are the old promise of America, with *Sara* being strong and resilient and prepared to lay her life down to protect her child. The America that wants to be. But the reality for most in the modern world is very different. The ideology of modern America is one of selfishness and excess. The nightclub is a

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<sup>82</sup> Retrieved from IMDB.com

<sup>83</sup> Lipset, S. M. (1997) *American Exceptionalism: A Double-edged Sword*. New York, USA: W. W. Norton & Company

hive of hedonistic pleasures with sex and drugs overtaking any other desires or sense of a good society.

The strongest moment in the film to openly declare that China is the future is when *Abe* (Jeff Daniels) states:

Abe  
Studying up your Mandarin?

Joe  
French.

Abe  
French?

...

Abe  
Why the fuck French?

Joe  
I'm going to France.

Abe  
You should go to China.

Joe  
I'm going to France.

Abe

I'm from the future. You should go to China.<sup>84</sup>

This is the ideology of the Chinese state summed up by someone who comes from the future. China is the country of the future and everyone would be wise to learn Mandarin. The image that the Chinese government wants to project is that of a forward thinking, modern nation that will one day lead the world. *Joe* is fixated on the past, France representing an old-world dominance, America the current world dominance but it is China where the future lies.

This domination of the future even extends to the currency as the modern world of 2044 in America uses currency that shows Mao Zedong. It may only be for a fleeting second but he is there, making his image ubiquitous in a future America. This represents economic domination of the US by China in the very near future, not just the future that Abe talks about. This is the ideology of the Chinese state as the dominant economic force of the future.

The attitude towards those less fortunate in society in America is that the homeless are everywhere in the city and are purely in the way. They are an obstacle that *Joe* almost runs over.



(Fig. 51) *Joe* drives recklessly down a street with no care for the homeless, who must jump out of the way

Their lives are spent on the streets and look out for themselves, as one man shoots another for stealing something non-descript from his school bus. The difference between the

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<sup>84</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

rich and poor, the haves and have-nots has increased to a point where there are two distinctly different societies in the cities of America. The society of the rich lives for itself and follows the modern trend as stated by Robert Putnam, “*This growing gap between rich and poor is reflected in many other measures of well-being, including wealth, happiness and life expectancy.*”<sup>85</sup> The rich in America have wealth and happiness and the ‘Looper’s’ life expectancy is only limited by their own life choices.

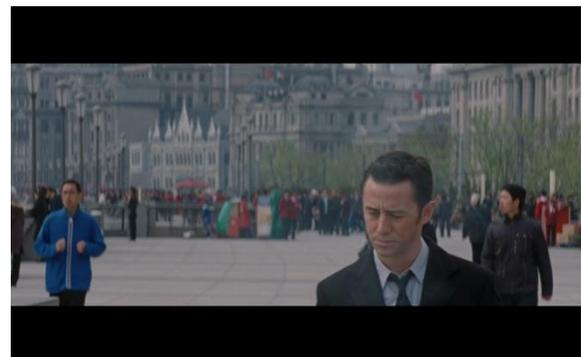
Joe (V.O.)

The job doesn’t tend to attract the most forward-thinking people.<sup>86</sup>

China, by comparison, shows the audience the lifestyle of the rich in bars and clubs that is tainted by the Western influence. The hedonism that *Joe* lived in America, he brings with him to China and the audience does not see the drug taking or violence without *Joe* as central to the problem. America has brought this to the shores of China in this context, it is not a Chinese ideology to be so selfish. The city scene on the Bund in Shanghai does not contain any homeless people at all.



(Fig. 52) *Joe brings the violence and death to China in his pursuit of money and drugs*



(Fig. 53) *No sign of any homeless along the Bund in Shanghai*

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<sup>85</sup> Putnam, R. D. (2015) *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. New York, USA: Simon and Schuster

<sup>86</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

A world away from the rampant homelessness on show in Kansas City. Chinese society takes care of its own, leading to a nation that does not have a homelessness problem from what the audience is shown.

The image of China that is projected is one that shows a nation of strength, economically and socially. America has descended into rampant violence and selfishness and the American dream is nowhere to be seen.

### 3.2.4 Aesthetics

The aesthetics of *Looper* draw on a mix of Western and Chinese values with a Rian Johnson playing with the Jungian idea of archetypes as *“forms that have received a specific stamp and been handed down over a long period of time.”*<sup>87</sup> This common theme that runs throughout both Western and Eastern stories as *Joe* is both Yin (阴) and Yang (阳). The Yin as the dark, evil side and the Yang as the light and good side.

*Joe* is the central hero but he is also the villain. The most common archetypes as identified by Christopher Vogler are, *“hero, mentor, threshold guardian, herald, shapeshifter, shadow, ally, trickster.”*<sup>88</sup> Characters can take on one or more of the roles, but it is rare that they take on multiple ones at the same time, as in *Looper* where Johnson creates a hero that is at once hero, mentor, herald, shadow, ally and trickster. As Vogler identifies, *“the dramatic purpose of the Hero is to give the audience a window into the story,”*<sup>89</sup> and the complexity of *Joe’s* character in both the present and the future gives the audience the chance to see the hero as flawed and capable of this multitude of different roles.

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<sup>87</sup> Jung, C. (1991) *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Collected Works of C. G. Jung)*. Oxford, UK: Routledge

<sup>88</sup> Vogler, C. (2007) *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Studio City, USA: Michael Wiese Productions

<sup>89</sup> Vogler, C. (2007) *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Studio City, USA: Michael Wiese Productions

*Joe* is introduced to the audience as narrator and central character, with the world viewed through his interactions.

Joe (V.O.)

Time travel has not yet been invented.

But 30 years from now, it will have been.

It will be instantly outlawed, used only in secret by the  
largest criminal organisations.

It's nearly impossible to dispose of a body in the future.

I'm told.<sup>90</sup>

*Joe* is initially established as the hero but immediately goes against his Yang status, as he reveals his profession as an assassin, a killer for money, and therefore difficult to fulfil the traditional aesthetic of hero per Eastern philosophy. However, the audience soon learns that the hero is flawed due to his Yang qualities being “*deluded by alcohol, sex, wealth and anger.*”<sup>91</sup> The negative influences here coincide with the Eastern aesthetic of how a potential hero and good man could be shifted into the Yin.

*Joe's* life takes him progressively down a deeper and darker hole as he embraces the Yin, causing death and destruction and it is with the intervention of the pure Chinese character that he is brought back and lives a life of peace. That life is shattered by the ever-present shadow, the gangsters who kill the pure Yang in his life and drive him once more into the darkness.

It is at this point that *Old Joe* becomes a herald, ally and trickster to himself, announcing the future, helping him survive and tricking him into his own escape. Once these roles are fulfilled, *Old Joe* becomes the shadow, the killer of innocents, in his quest to return to a state of good. Here there is a return to the more traditional dynamic, where *Joe* becomes the hero and *Old Joe* becomes the shadow. The traditional return is complete when *Joe* sacrifices himself for a better future for the world, the ultimate act of a hero.

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<sup>90</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

<sup>91</sup> Komjathy, L. (2014) *The Way of Complete Perfection: A Quanzhen Daoist Anthology*. New York, USA: State University of New York Press

### 3.2.5 Product Placement

The product placement within *Looper* is not aimed at selling specific items to a mass audience, but at selling ideas and ideals. With the lower box office expectations, as identified in *The Independent Filmmaker's Law and Business Guide*, “*Even modest success can often result in large percentage returns. At the other extreme, high-budget films must be block-busters to justify the expense, resulting in ever-more lavish productions and increasing expectations*”<sup>92</sup>, the appeal to local or multinational corporations was not as great as a comparative summer blockbuster. This led to a placement of visuals that promoted the ideas and values that the Chinese partners and censors wanted to see promoted.

Early in the film, *Joe* trades in some of his earned silver for spendable currency. In the fleeting shot as the money is handed through the whole in the wall, the face of Chairman Mao is orientated poignantly towards the camera. The placement of the face of Mao on the currency is one that is found throughout China, every day the Chinese people are used to seeing and using similar currency. The same currency seen in America is also used in China when *Joe* moves there, with his stash of gold and silver exchanged for the new Yuan.



(Fig. 54) Chairman Mao is an everyday sight on currency in China



(Fig. 55) Chairman Mao on the currency of the future, the Yuan

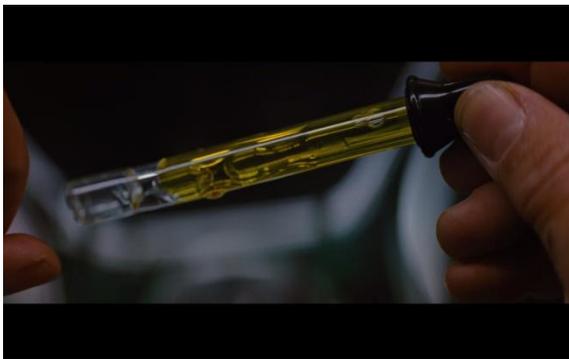
The use of this currency gives the Chinese audience a sense that this is a world that they can relate to, this is a world they are used to and is identifiable. The subtler sentiment beneath is to please the censors and government that by 2044, China is the dominant power and it is

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<sup>92</sup> Garon, J. M. (2002) *The independent Filmmaker's Law and Business Guide: Financing, Shooting, and Distributing Independent and Digital Films*. Chicago, USA: Chicago Review Press

Chinese currency that is to be found and accepted the world over, from Kansas City to Shanghai. The product on show here is the dominant Chinese economy, not with “Made in China” labels, but with a much more powerful symbol of actual currency.

The items that *Joe* spends his money on help to reinforce the ideals that the Chinese state would like to promote. In the West, *Joe* uses his money solely to purchase sex and drugs, as evidenced by his “relationship” with *Suzie* and his constant use of a nondescript drug that he drips into his eyes. The drug use escalates as his money and his care for others dwindles, leading to an injecting drug, again with no name, but clear from the little money he has left, this is directly related to his drug habit.



(Fig. 56) The nondescript drug that *Joe* drips into his eyes



(Fig. 57) *Joe*'s drug habit increases as his money stash decreases

The placement here is of supposed American ideals of self, acting purely for one's own self-gratification. This is the attitude and behaviour of modern and future America that the Chinese state wants to show is detrimental to society and all its citizens and that the use of drugs can lead to only one outcome. *Joe* descends into greater and greater violence as he is forced into more aggressive acts to fuel his habit. Assassination and bombing is only halted when the Chinese influence of his future wife opens him to Chinese ideals.



(Fig. 58) Joe's violence escalates as he conducts bombings

The simple life that he lives in the Chinese countryside is representative of the contrasting Chinese ideals of family and unity that are placed to influence both a domestic Chinese audience and the viewing public around the world.

In each case, the placement of physical and mental attributes in the futuristic world setting are not designed to promote items and raise sales, they are there to reinforce the dominance of Chinese economic and cultural force.

### 3.2.6 Production Values

The production values seen in *Looper* are predominantly driven by the film's low budget, but feature elements that are unusual and a signature of writer/director Rian Johnson. The target audience for *Looper*, was predominantly the 15-30 year olds with a preference for something a little unusual, and the film delivered.

All films are restricted by time and money and it is even more acute when working on a low budget feature. In the case of *Looper* decisions had to be made to maximise what could be achieved whilst including all elements that were necessary for the Chinese market. It is here the Johnson is strongest as David Lynch put it, *"to me, the power of film goes beyond the simple task of telling a story. It has to do with the way you tell that story and how you manage to create a*

*world of your own.*<sup>93</sup> The world that Johnson creates is visually compelling and has a realism that grounds the future in the present. Against the grain of “rapid-cut Hollywood” that is epitomised by Michael Bay and *Transformers*, Johnson uses a slower pace that allows the audience to become engrossed in the story, rather than focus on the action. With the complex storyline and crossing of timelines,



(Fig. 59) Bruce Willis is sent back from the future in the first timeline



(Fig. 60) Bruce Willis covered in timeline two as he is assassinated by his younger self

the slower pace allows the audience to follow the plot with relative ease. This may not have been the case with everyone who viewed the movie, but does appear to be part of the reason for regulating the pace of the film.

The colour grading in the film heightens the sense of dystopian future in the West and contrasts that with the brighter future in the East. As Noam Kroll describes it, “*color grading will allow you to control the sensory experience of the audience by making scenes feel warm and inviting, cool and bleak, or any other variation in between*”<sup>94</sup> and Johnson uses this to his advantage to appeal to the millennials in the West and the wider audience in China. Kansas City itself is not a pleasant place, with a greying palette sitting over everything.

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<sup>93</sup> Tirard, L. (2002) *Moviemakers’ Master Class*. New York, USA: Faber and Faber

<sup>94</sup> Kroll, N. (2014, September 2nd) *5 Ways to Give Your Low Budget Film More Production Value*. Retrieved from <http://www.premiumbeat.com/blog/5-ways-to-give-your-low-budget-film-more-production-value/>



*(Fig. 61) A dark and foreboding Kansas City*

China is different, the children playing in the street are brighter and untainted by the West, purely enjoying being children. The exact same skyline shot of Shanghai is brighter and the lights are more inviting than Kansas City.



*(Fig 62) Shanghai is bright and does not look as dangerous as Kansas City*

Even as *Joe* brings the violence and escalation; the colours are not greyed as they were in Kansas City.



*(Fig. 63) Despite the violence, Shanghai still has colour and life*

Once *Old Joe* meets his wife to be, the colours are vibrant and full of life, marking his own transition from drabness to brightness.



*(Fig. 64) With his wife, there is colour and light, blues, reds and a soft, warm glow*

The sets are sparse, serving the dual purpose of costing little and allowing Johnson to again show great contrast between the world that *Joe* comes from and the one that he grows into. *Joe's* apartment in Kansas City has little to no furniture giving no sense of home or attachment.



*(Fig. 65) Joe's apartment in Kansas City, in the background there can be seen very few personal items*

This is a place where he rests, it is a house rather than a home. He plans on leaving it once his work as a looper is done and moving on, giving his life a sense of short-term functionalism. Upon moving to China, *Joe's* living choice becomes even more minimalist, he has brought his Western functionalism to China.



(Fig. 66) *Joe's apartment in Shanghai is sparsely decorated*

Here *Joe's* apartment is solely designed as a stop off in between indulging his vices. When he encounters *Old Joe's Wife*, his life is changed and he builds a home, something with roots and something to live for. The East in the future provides a depth of life that the West could not.



(Fig. 67) *Joe's family home in rural China*

The only place in the West where there is a sense of home is in the farm with *Sara* and *Cid*. In the heart of the representation of old world America, there is still a place for home and belonging.



(Fig. 68) Sara's farm is full of personal belongings and items, making it a home

This is under threat from the invasion of modern American values and attitudes, represented by *Joe*, *Old Joe* and the gat men.

The production values on display in *Looper* reinforce the pro-China message that seeps through the movie and can be explained using the limited budget, rather than a desire to please Chinese censors, partners or audiences.

### 3.2.7 Distribution Regulations

With the primary production company being Endgame Entertainment, the producers did not have their own distribution network to call upon and so required distributors outside of their sphere to get the film screened worldwide. As DMG Entertainment had already stepped in to provide access to the Chinese market for filming purposes and for funding, the producers had an in road into the Chinese theatre market with DMG as distributor. In the US, Sony Pictures Releasing handled distribution and over 20 other distribution partners ensured the film's global presence.

However, there were issues that had to be dealt with in the build up to the release in China. A week before the scheduled release the State Administration on Radio, Film and

Television gave the film “*assisted co-production*” status<sup>95</sup>, which put their ambitions of making the 45% revenue share in jeopardy. As Zhang Peiming, deputy chief of SARFT said, “*Some so-called co-production movies just (make) superficial changes, with little investment from China, use very few Chinese elements, and call it a co-production. These co-productions get around the quota system and take domestic investment away, and threaten Chinese movies.*”<sup>96</sup> This was a direct threat to the movie’s potential success at the box office. The officials had agreed to let the film be screened, but had not given the much-coveted full co-production status. As the producers’ saw it, there was no problem, “*Whether we have a (co-production) stamp or not is semantics to me,*” said Endgame business development VP Christopher Chen, who came to the company at its 2002 launch to develop film opportunities with China. “*We’re being told that we’re a getting a favourable box office (around 45%). DMG is telling that to us, and they haven’t let us down yet,*” Chen added.<sup>97</sup> In this case the US based producers were confident that the official status would not damage the bottom line and it did not appear to, with *Looper* making just over \$20 million<sup>98</sup> at the Chinese box office.

This was an occasion when even working with a Chinese partner, a deal that was announced two years before *Looper* hit the screens, did not guarantee a successful passage through the Chinese system. This marked a distinct moment in Hollywood’s attempts to penetrate the Chinese market as they attempted to use their own rules whilst paying lip service to the rules that had been laid out. The requirements that DMG Entertainment laid down, with location changes, scenes and positive perceptions of China, meant that even though there was scepticism from the official channels, it did not interfere with the pursuit of profit. The wording coming out of the SARFT, however, was more of a warning to future transgressors that *Looper* only just managed to fulfil its obligations to China.

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<sup>95</sup> Goldstein, G. (2012, October 6th) *China Partner Helps Looper Win Big*. Variety. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2012/film/box-office/china-partner-helps-looper-win-big-1118060324/>

<sup>96</sup> Goldstein, G. (2012, October 6th) *China Partner Helps Looper Win Big*. Variety. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2012/film/box-office/china-partner-helps-looper-win-big-1118060324/>

<sup>97</sup> Goldstein, G. (2012, October 6th) *China Partner Helps Looper Win Big*. Variety. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2012/film/box-office/china-partner-helps-looper-win-big-1118060324/>

<sup>98</sup> Box Office Mojo. Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=loopers.htm>

### 3.2.8 Social Media and Promotions

The promotion of *Looper* in China proved to be successful as seen by its box office results. The producers had a multi-pronged approach to promoting the film and raising awareness so that there would be a heightened pre-existing excitement regarding the film prior to release.

The Western movie posters for *Looper* focused on the roles of Bruce Willis and Joseph Gordon-Levitt.

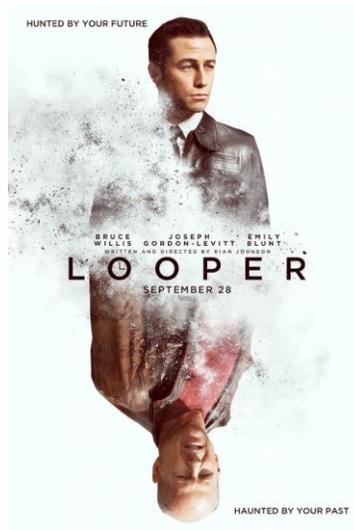


(Fig. 69) Bruce Willis looking back as Joseph Gordon-Levitt faces forward

In the first poster example, Bruce Willis and Joseph Gordon-Levitt face in opposite directions, each with their weapon pointed towards their gaze. There is a cityscape in the foreground that is largely obscured. It shows just a variety of skyscrapers, seemingly disintegrating with the larger figures of the two main protagonists over them. There are no distinguishing locational features about the skyline and merely represents any future city, dominated by larger buildings. On an equal billing to the two male actors is Emily Blunt, she at least gets her name on the poster, if not an actual image. In the small print at the bottom there are no Chinese names mentioned at all, despite the importance of Qing Xu and the character of *Old Joe's Wife*. The co-producers, DMG Entertainment are listed and their logo is present, but amongst the names of the other production companies and with no indication that they are a

Chinese entity, the lay person would not know there was any Chinese involvement or elements to this movie.

In another example, Bruce Willis and Joseph Gordon-Levitt are mirrored either side of the movie title.



(Fig. 70) Mirror image of past and future

This poster was designed to be impactful and give a small hint as to what the movie is about. Joseph Gordon-Levitt is “Hunted by your future” and Bruce Willis is “Haunted by your past”. There is absolutely no mention of any Chinese element and no clue with a futuristic city skyline. Emily Blunt again manages to get equal billing but no visual representation.

The posters for China had a different focus.



(Fig. 71) A Chinese movie poster for Looper

This Chinese version has several key features to endear it to the Chinese audience. There is the prominent position of Qing Xu, standing beside Bruce Willis in the main visual. Emily Blunt also features giving balance of the one man, one woman on each side. Qing Xu also has her name alongside her Western co-stars, rather than not being present at all in any of the Western art work. The city skyline is clear in the Chinese poster, with Shanghai landmarks dominating, there is to be no confusion as to where this movie is set. The position of DMG Entertainment is also clear, with the logo having equal positioning to the Western partner, Endgame Entertainment. These features help to drive home the Chinese presence in the film and let the Chinese audience know that the Chinese production company is equal to the Western production company, the Chinese star is equal to the Western stars and the most important location is China.

In addition to the print advertising, DMG entertainment set out on a multi-headed approach with promotions to try and get word of mouth movement in China. This included the use of wanted posters for both Joseph Gordon-Levitt and Bruce Willis being placed on lamp posts and around cities.



*(Fig. 72) Joe and Old Joe wanted posters*

Anti-Looper and anti-time travel wording placed on banners and signs that resembled pre-existing banners and signs in China helped to encourage discussions. A time travel ball, as seen in the movie, was driven around the country and helped to drive up interest. There were even live action stunts done by actors on the streets.



(Fig. 73) No time travel allowed



(Fig. 74) Time travel machine being put into position



(Fig. 75) Live action stunts to entertain the public and drive up awareness of the film

All of this was far more than the marketing and promotions that were done in the West and delivered record returns for the film in China.

The film featured prominently at the 2012 Shanghai International Film Festival and the producers took great efforts to make sure that it was viewed as one of the must-see foreign films of the year. By having such a presence at the film festival, the producers not only helped to gain exposure to the Chinese public, but also showed the Chinese authorities that they were serious about having China be a major part of the production. Much of the creative promotional elements were reserved for the Chinese audience, to great success.

### 3.2.9 Reaction

*Looper* was well received by audiences in the West and had good box office results in China. IMDB contributors scored it 7.4/10 from 430,500 reviews<sup>99</sup>, making it a very respectable score given the harshness that can occur with online ratings systems. However, even with all the pro-

<sup>99</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276104/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1276104/?ref_=nv_sr_1)

Chinese elements, the online reviewers on *Dòubàn* only scored 6.8/10 from 120,758 reviews<sup>100</sup>. There is clearly a discrepancy between how the film was perceived in the East as opposed to the West, if only a small one of 6%. The heavy Chinese promotions certainly drew in audiences as can be seen from the box office returns, but they did not overly respond to the content, with responses suggesting that the audience is more sophisticated than they were being credit for.

In looking at the responses from online Chinese commentators it is easy to identify which elements the audience liked, such as user rabbit lady tooth who stated, “最關鍵的是那臺詞好贊: *I'm from the future, you should go to China!*”<sup>101</sup> (“The key is the good lines like: *I'm from the future, you should go to China!*”), and acknowledgement from 蒙蒙 that the movie was “挺好玩的, 这么多中国元素是为了中国市场”<sup>102</sup> (“Really fun, so many Chinese elements for the Chinese market.”). Despite the positives that the Chinese audience saw, there were more negatives ranging from the content and style to the use of the pro-Chinese elements. User fundy was disappointed with Xu Qing’s role saying that “许晴出现的每一幕都很像电影中插播广告.....太让人扫兴了”<sup>103</sup> (“Every appearance of Xu Qing in the movie is like a commercial.... very disappointing”) and user 猫脑袋 thought that the content was not engrossing, writing “这是一部好电影, 因为我睡了, 还睡得很香”<sup>104</sup> (“This is a good movie, because I slept, and slept really well”), a sentiment echoed by boring monkey, “这片子 imdb 有 8.6 ? 毫无节奏可言.”<sup>105</sup> (“This movie gets 8.6 on IMDB (correct at time of writing)? No rhythm at all.”) These responses from the Chinese audience show that they have a desire to see more of China and more pro-Chinese elements in Western films, with a minority enjoying the directness of:

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<sup>100</sup> Retrieved from <https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/>

<sup>101</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?sort=new_score)

<sup>102</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?start=174&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?start=174&limit=20&sort=new_score)

<sup>103</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?start=127&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?start=127&limit=20&sort=new_score)

<sup>104</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?start=174&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?start=174&limit=20&sort=new_score)

<sup>105</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/3179706/comments?sort=new_score)

Abe  
Go to China.<sup>106</sup>

However, the reaction shows that the audience doesn't just want to see Chinese actors and locations thrown in just to say that they are there. They still require a movie that speaks to their cultural and societal desires and with *Looper* they went to see the film, driven by the large marketing presence but found what they experienced to not be enjoyable, being overly complicated and therefore boring for what they want to see.

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<sup>106</sup> Bergman, R. (Producer), Johnson, R. (Director)(2012) *Looper* [Motion Picture] USA/China: Endgame Entertainment/DMG Entertainment

### 3.3 Case Study 3 - Iron Man 3

*Iron Man 3* further brought the hugely successful Marvel universe of characters into China with elements specifically targeted at the Chinese audience, with an additional 4 minutes of the film being shown in China and significant product placement. These additions and targeted moments within the film allowed *Iron Man 3* to achieve a revenue of \$121.2 million in China<sup>107</sup> and did not harm the domestic US gross of \$409 million<sup>108</sup>. With the success of Marvel films as family friendly fun, reinforced by latest-lifestyle blog's "*12 Reasons why MCU will Outperform the DCEU*" stating that "*All of Marvel's films (save for possibly Guardians), I can be greater than fantastic with watching alongside my future kids. There are quips and jokes, however they nonetheless stay nice movies,*"<sup>109</sup> the films have already achieved maximum market penetration in their home territory and are looking at China as the fastest growing cinema market in the world and where they can see their profits rise. The targeting in Marvel films is now reaching such a peak that Marvel is working on a "Captain China" as it has been dubbed in China, as the actual film's character will not be so explicitly called. The Russo brothers, producers of the *Captain America* films for Marvel, are co-producing and working with Fangjin Media in Beijing to build "*an action sci-fi trilogy featuring an original Chinese superhero,*"<sup>110</sup> as reported by Qz.com. The work in previous Marvel films, most notably *Iron Man 3*, to gain the Chinese audience has provided the groundwork for Marvel to begin to create their own, Chinese specific superheroes. Therefore, the case study of *Iron Man 3* is important in the development of Hollywood entering the Chinese market.

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<sup>107</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=ironman3.htm>

<sup>108</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=main&id=ironman3.htm>

<sup>109</sup> (2016, June 3rd) *12 Reasons Why MCU Will Outperform the DCEU*. Latest-lifestyle.com. Retrieved from <http://latest-lifestyle.com/2016/06/03/12-reasons-why-the-mcu-will-outperform-the-dceu/11/>

<sup>110</sup> Huang, Z. (2016, May 10th) *Move Over Captain America, "Captain China" is on the Way*. qz.com. Retrieved from <http://qz.com/680045/move-over-captain-america-captain-china-is-on-the-way/>

### 3.3.1 Locational Analysis

The locations seen in the international version of *Iron Man 3* are almost entirely situated in America, whereas the additional 4 minutes of footage in the Chinese version are entirely in China. With most the film set in America, it could be seen that there is little to no influence from China, but the portrayal of various aspects of America could appeal to the Chinese market.

The initial location that the audience is introduced to is in Switzerland, where *Tony Stark* embraces his younger hedonistic lifestyle. Switzerland is not chosen for any reason, other than to further establish *Tony Stark* as being an international sensation at an event where great minds from around the world, including *Dr. Wu* from China, come together.



(Fig. 76) Bern, Switzerland sets the scene for international playboy, *Tony Stark*, at a meeting of great minds from around the world

*Tony Stark's* house sits picturesquely overlooking the Pacific Ocean, a monument to his success. It is a stereotypical view of California, with the sun, sea and panoramic vistas.



(Fig. 77) *Tony Stark's* house on the Pacific coast in Malibu

As a symbol of American affluence, the house fulfils its requirements but it is brought down and destroyed by *The Mandarin*. *Stark's* wealth, and even his technological advantages, do not protect him or his home, which could echo a sentiment in America, that terrorism can strike anyone at any time, regardless of status and lead to devastating consequences.

There is a message of hope with *Stark's* home as in his basement he has his workshop where he has created a variety of different *Iron Man* armours.



(Fig. 78) Behind Stark are a collection of his Iron Man armours

Once the house has been destroyed, it is from this underground room and the ruins of the above domicile that the suits of armour, the ingenuity of America breaks out and saves the day. This is America under threat and even if there is damage and all seems lost, American ingenuity can still rise from the rubble and overcome any obstacle or adversary.

The video released by *The Mandarin* contains no Chinese elements at all, reinforcing that “*The Mandarin*” is purely the villain’s name and has no bearing on his origins.



(Fig. 79) The Mandarin shows no sign of being Chinese

Within the video the location of *The Mandarin's* atrocities place him and his followers in a recognisable locale of the Middle East, making his terrorist activities in line with the current zeitgeist. Fear of Islamic extremism is on the rise in the Western world, as shown by the Pew Research Center's report that states, "a median of 52% across nine Western nations are very concerned about Islamic extremism."<sup>111</sup> The use of the iconic AK47 in the video helps to identify the terrorists as the weapon has become synonymous with terrorists due to the media exposure of the twenty-four-hour news cycle. By positioning *The Mandarin* as having links and ties to Islamic radicalism and the Middle East, the producers are making the character more in tune with what the West expects from a modern villain and removing any suggestion of Chinese links from the character. This would certainly appeal to the Chinese censors and audience who also see an internal threat from Islamic extremists.



(Fig. 80) The iconic AK-47 highlights the probably origin of the terrorists

In contrast to the glitz and glamour of California, *Stark* arrives semi-fortuitously in Tennessee. It's a cold, dark place but it is where *Stark* finds a child, *Harley Keener* (played by Ty Simpkins) who helps him. His upbringing is not perfect but he is still a good, kind-hearted person.

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<sup>111</sup> Pouter, J. (2015, July 16th) *Extremism Concerns Growing in West and Predominantly Muslim Countries*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/16/extremism-concerns-growing-in-west-and-predominantly-muslim-countries/>

Harley Keener

Well, my mom already left for the diner

And Dad went to 7-11 to get scratchers.

I guess he won, because that was 6 years ago.<sup>112</sup>

The Tennessee location represents an old America, one that is sweet and innocent. They are attacked by the agents of *The Mandarin* and local law enforcement are disposed of swiftly.



(Fig. 81) The Extremis soldier having just killed the local law enforcement in a bar

This America has a purity that makes it strong and able to endure, even after *The Mandarin's* goons have come to town. This is an idealistic view of small-town US values and atmosphere and would appeal to both Western and Eastern audiences as it reinforces stereotypes of the goodness at the heart of America.

The film culminates in the large fight sequences between *Stark's* various autonomous *Iron Man* armours and the *Extremis* soldiers of *The Mandarin*, building to the one-on-one fight between *Stark* and *Killian*. The location for this set piece is an old oil tanker and shipyard, which provides an exciting setting with a multitude of layers and gangways and gantries for the heroes to fight on and around. The heights involved and the abilities of the villain's henchmen means that the location is perfect for an all-out battle with multiple adversaries.

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<sup>112</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.



*(Fig. 82) The fight location means a fantastical set piece battle can commence*

This location is all about the fighting, the focus being on the most inventive ways in which the fight can progress.

In the Western version of the film, *Stark* has the shrapnel removed from his chest in a surgery suite that can only be identified that it could possibly be Chinese by the fleeting glance of *Dr. Wu* as he puts his mask on and with Chinese characters on frosted glass.



*(Fig. 83) A quick sight of Dr. Wu's face as he puts on his surgical mask*



*(Fig. 84) The Chinese characters on the frosted glass give an indication of the location of the surgery*

These are the only indications that the surgery has been done in China. The after shots of celebration and love between *Pepper* and *Stark* are against a backdrop of illuminated Shanghai, blurred but visible.



(Fig. 85) The Shanghai skyline would be instantly recognisable to a large proportion of the Chinese audience

The Shanghai background reinforces the surgery being in China, but Shanghai is not explicitly shown, merely a bright, exciting background.

In the Chinese version of the film, there are extended scenes which feature Fan Bingbing and Xueqi Wang play a larger role. These extra scenes firmly establish China as the best place in the world for medical care and the most advanced technology, literally the only place and the only doctors who are capable of the surgery that will change *Stark's* life.



(Fig. 86) Fan Bingbing, a valuable medical professional



(Fig. 87) Xueqi Wang scrubbing up for surgery

With the additional scenes, the film is stating to the Chinese audience, and exclusively the Chinese audience, that these Chinese characters are as important to the hero as anyone else in the film.

The suggested extended relationship between *Tony Stark* and *Dr. Wu* is shown in an addition with *Dr. Wu* remembering a meeting with a group of Chinese children. These close ties strongly

suggest that *Dr. Wu* is a regular part of *Stark's* life, someone who can call on him and he will answer, making him the equal to any of the American's who assist *Stark*.



(Fig. 88) *Dr. Wu and Iron Man*

The locations in both versions of the film play an important role in establishing American limitations and fears and Chinese exceptionalism.

### 3.3.2 Stars

*Iron Man 3* utilises its star power to great effect. There is a plethora of actors who are well known and instantly recognisable the world over, including Robert Downey Jr, Gwyneth Paltrow, Ben Kingsley, Paul Bettany and Guy Pearce, with the casting following the Marvel method of big names in as many roles as possible, flooding the audience with faces and voices with tangible star power. In addition to these main characters, the Chinese audience had Xueqi Wang and Fan Bingbing playing roles of vital importance to the health of *Tony Stark*, but were almost completely removed from the Western version of the film, with Xueqi Wang's "*Dr. Wu*" making a fleeting appearance, but no sign of Fan Bingbing's "*Wu Jiaqi*". With the bankable Western stars and the Chinese actor additions in the extra scenes inserted purely for the audience, rather than any storytelling or plot enhancement, that the desire to embrace the Chinese audience is greatly seen.

As an integral part of the Marvel Universe, which began in earnest with the release of the first *Iron Man* film in 2008, Robert Downey Jr. Has become the key star and standard bearer for

the series that has grossed \$2.4 billion worldwide.<sup>113</sup> 2013 saw Robert Downey Jr take the crown as the highest paid actor in Hollywood<sup>114</sup>, according to Forbes, and came number 1 in Vulture's "Most Valuable Stars of 2013"<sup>115</sup>, which takes into account domestic and international box office totals, studio value, likability, Oscars, critics' scores, Twitter mentions and tabloid value. With such a high profile, he was always going to be an international box office draw and the Chinese audience was no different. In the beginning, Robert Downey Jr's personal life story as a young, international playboy certainly helped him to inhabit the character of Iron Man, an equally extravagant playboy, who grows up and fulfils his undoubted potential. The *Tony Stark* in *Iron Man 3* has had years of being seen and known as *Iron Man* in the wider world and was the individual who almost sacrificed himself to save the planet in *The Avengers* film and as such has grown into a more responsible man, and it is his past actions that have brought about the villain, *The Mandarin*. The character of *Iron Man* is one that would be recognisable to the Chinese audience as a stereotypical American, brash, loud, confrontational and seemingly self-centred, despite his sacrifices, and it is in the development of the man that there may be hope for America to embrace a more caring future.

Gwyneth Paltrow returns as *Pepper Potts*, advanced from a side character to being a more active player as head of Stark Industries. Despite this advancement, *Pepper* is still a damsel in distress for most the film. She is the object of desire for both *Aldrich Killian* and for *Tony Stark*, and is the drive for *Tony* to defeat his nemesis. As a damsel in distress she fulfils the standard Hollywood narrative of driving the story forward as a device for the hero to save. It is only with the intervention and enhancement injected by *Killian* that *Pepper* becomes more and can become as physically strong as the men around her. Even then, it is *Tony* whom she asks for help to save her. *Pepper's* character is a modern American woman, capable of competing in the business world with men, but is stopped short of being as physically capable as her male counterparts. This attitude towards the role of women in society would be familiar to a Chinese audience as identified by Isabelle Attané, "*The Chinese government's stance on the rights of women and equality between the sexes has not, however, put an end to traditional stereotypes of*

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<sup>113</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/franchises/chart/?id=ironmanfranchise.htm>

<sup>114</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mfl45egdgg/robert-downey-jr-8/#5678685263a1>

<sup>115</sup> (2013, October 22nd) *Vulture's 100 Most Valuable Stars of 2013*. Vulture.com Retrieved from <http://www.vulture.com/2013/10/most-valuable-movie-stars.html?mid=huffpoent#/all/vulture-rankings>

*the roles and duties of men and women within the family and society*"<sup>116</sup>. The familiarity of the role of the primary female protagonist, and one played by such a well-known actress, would resonate with much of the Chinese audience as it would with a Western audience. The female roles are limited in the entire film, so a Hollywood A-lister in what is a small role for her speaks to the star power of the wider Marvel Universe.

The character of *The Mandarin* was always going to cause a potential problem with the Chinese market, with censors, government and audience all likely to disapprove of a Chinese villain against a Western hero. In a first stage to avoid any issue, the casting of *The Mandarin* was given to Oscar winner, Ben Kingsley, an English actor of Indian descent, best known for his portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi in *Gandhi*. This interpretation the principal nemesis of *Iron Man* was radically different from the comic book origins, where *The Mandarin* is Chinese. The name is transliterated in the Chinese version of the film to *Mandaren*, which has literally no meaning in Chinese. Per Movieline, Marvel Studios' Kevin Feige stated that Marvel "*wanted to blur the background*" of the Mandarin portrayed in *Iron Man 3*. "*It's less about his specific ethnicity than the symbolism of various cultures and iconography that he perverts for his own end,*" Feige explained. As the *EW's* Anthony Breznican further explained: "*From his samurai hair, to his royal robe, to his bin Laden-esque beard, and the AK-47 he keeps at his side, Kingsley's interpretation is a hodgepodge of various warrior motifs. That way, no single ethnicity, particularly one with a population of 1.3 billion, can be offended by Kingsley's portrayal or his character's evil doing.*"<sup>117</sup> This analysis of the character of *The Mandarin* shows that the casting of Ben Kingsley and the development of the villain were heavily influenced by the desire to gain access to and maximise profits in China.

Guy Pearce as *Aldrich Killian* represents American technology run amok. The desire to gain retribution on *Tony Stark* and *Pepper Potts* combined with the drive to develop a super-soldier surpasses any sense of humanity that *Killian* might have had in his first encounter with *Stark*. His declaration that,

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<sup>116</sup> Attané, I. (2012, December) *Being a Woman in China Today: A Demography of Gender*. China Perspectives.

<sup>117</sup> Digiacomo, F. (2012, October 22nd) *Marvel Studios Says Iron Man 3's The Mandarin isn't Chinese, He's International*. Movieline.com. Retrieved from <http://movieline.com/2012/10/22/iron-man-3-ben-kingsley-the-mandarin-not-chinese/>

Aldrich Killian  
I am The Mandarin!<sup>118</sup>

Further drives the original construction of a Chinese villain from the comics into a domestic American terrorist. This evil is a creation of *Tony Stark*, and therefore youthful America's, own hubris.

In a change to the American/International version of *Iron Man 3*, Fan Bingbing had a small role in the Chinese version. As the fourth highest paid actress in the world in 2015<sup>119</sup>, Fan has made a monumental amount of money despite not being known to Western audiences. As Mashable.com reported, "*If you're thinking that you've seen that porcelain face somewhere before, you probably have. She's perhaps best known to U.S. audiences for playing Blink in X-Men: Days of Future Past.*"<sup>120</sup> The *X-Men* film came out a year after *Iron Man 3* and was likely the first introduction many Western audiences had to Fan, however her inclusion in the Chinese scenes of *Iron Man 3* were definitely designed to bring in the Chinese audience. In China, Fan has over 38 million followers<sup>121</sup> on Sina Weibo and is the face of multiple advertising campaigns including L'Oreal, Chopard and Louis Vuitton, making her one of the most influential and important celebrities in China. What she wears, what she does, influences millions of potential customers and viewers. As "*Wu Jiaqi*", her role was to reinforce the importance of China to the audience. As she walks down an hospital corridor she states that,

Wu Jiaqi  
He's here.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

<sup>119</sup> Robehmed, N. (2015, August 20th) *The World's Highest-Paid Actresses 2015: Jennifer Lawrence Leads with \$52 million*. Forbes.com. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmed/2015/08/20/the-worlds-highest-paid-actresses-2015-jennifer-lawrence-leads-with-52-million/#65c113d38201>

<sup>120</sup> Truong, K. (2015, August 21st) *Meet Fan Bingbing, the 4th Highest-Paid Actress in the World*. Mashable.com. Retrieved from <http://mashable.com/2015/08/20/fan-bingbing-highest-paid-actress/#S04eHtvpEqqO>

<sup>121</sup> Retrieved from sina.com.cn

<sup>122</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

Meaning that *Tony Stark* is there in China, ready to receive his life altering surgery. She poses the question,

Wu Jiaqi

What if we accidentally kill him?  
Everyone will know it is our fault.<sup>123</sup>

To which *Dr. Wu* replies,

Dr. Wu

We won't fail.<sup>124</sup>

That is as far as Fan Bingbing's character is included. With such a small role in only the Chinese version of the film, Fan Bingbing's inclusion can only have been to pander to the mainland Chinese audience.



(Fig. 89) Fan Bingbing as Wu Jiaqi, walking down a corridor

In a similar move, there is an extended inclusion of *Dr. Wu*, played by Wang Xueqi, who is a well-known actor in mainland China. He does feature in the international version of the film in a passing moment, but has a wider role in the Chinese version. In the international version, *Dr. Wu* is introduced to *Tony Stark* at the New Year's Eve party in Switzerland, with *Stark* acknowledging

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<sup>123</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

<sup>124</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

him as a cardiologist. *Dr. Wu* is unimpressed by the young and carefree *Stark*, an attitude that could be said to be mirrored by China towards America today. China is an older, wiser country, as represented by *Dr. Wu*, in comparison to the young and extravagant American, *Stark*.



(Fig. 90) *Dr. Wu is unimpressed with Tony Stark's behaviour*

It is only at the end of the film that *Dr. Wu* returns. *Dr. Wu* is the only man in the world who can remove the shrapnel from *Tony Stark's* chest and, in the long term, save his life. *Dr. Wu's* character is included as a gateway into China, as *Stark's* Chinese friend that allows for the character to go to China, not just for surgery, but also for a scene of a supposed good will visit that involves cheering Chinese children. The inclusion of Wang Xueqi was to have a recognisable face for the Chinese audience with a character that has the sole purpose of bringing *Iron Man* to China, highlighting the expertise and superiority of the Chinese medical system and the ability of the Chinese people.

### 3.3.3 Ideology of the State

The ideology of the state in *Iron Man 3* can be tracked through multiple characters in both the Chinese and international versions of the film, with common themes found that are echoed throughout the Marvel universe. The incompetence of governments and the need for special individuals to make a difference and to save the world are the driving forces of the heroes throughout the Marvel universe.

The American government is helpless and useless in the face of an extreme terrorist, *The Mandarin*. The idea that the US state is weak would be popular in China and resonate domestically. *The Mandarin* does not have the money and resources that the US has, yet is still superior due to higher intellect and ingenuity, a sentiment that the Chinese government would be keen to foster, that despite supposed US military might, China could still succeed. The most obvious show of American impotence is *President Ellis*, played by William Sadler, who makes a lot of noise but is incapable of doing anything, easily captured by *Aldrich Killian* and requiring the intervention of a super hero to save his life and end the terror threat.

The aggression that the US government is often seen as having is addressed with the rebranding of “*War Machine*” into “*The Iron Patriot*”, to make the suit and its use to be more people friendly.

Colonel James Rhodes

It tested well with focus groups, all right?

Tony Stark

(Gruffly)

“I am Iron Patriot.” It sucks.

Colonel James Rhodes

Listen. “*War Machine*” was a little too aggressive.

All right?

This sends a better message.<sup>125</sup>

Even the real-world characters playing themselves in the film recognise this as a weak pandering to focus groups, symbolic of how the American government acts and reacts.

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<sup>125</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

Bill Maher

And how is President Ellis responding?  
By taking the guy they call War Machine and giving him a paint  
job.

Joan Rivers

The same suit, but painted red, white and blue.  
And they also renamed him "Iron Patriot."  
You know, just in case the paint was too subtle.<sup>126</sup>

In American media, China is often seen as stealing US ideas and invention, with even the US Naval Institute declaring, "*The Chinese have become proficient at cloning products ranging from designer handbags and the latest smartphones to movies and alcoholic beverages. Fake Apple stores, counterfeit KFC restaurants and imitation IKEA big-box outlets dot the Chinese landscape.*"<sup>127</sup> This concept is widespread and leads to the thought that it is China to blame. However, *The Mandarin* shows a sentiment that states that China is America's scapegoat for their own faults,

The Mandarin

True story about fortune cookies.  
They look Chinese.  
They sound Chinese.  
But they're actually an American invention.  
Which is why they're hollow,  
Full of lies  
And leave a bad taste in the mouth.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

<sup>127</sup> (2015, October 27th) *China's Military Built with Cloned Weapons*. usni.org. Retrieved from <https://news.usni.org/2015/10/27/chinas-military-built-with-cloned-weapons>

<sup>128</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

These words may come from the villain, but they speak to a very real defence that the Chinese have, that America needs to own up to its own problems instead of blaming them on other countries, China in particular, and reinforces the idea that America does not have the moral high ground on all issues.

The character of *The Mandarin* himself is a far cry from *The Mandarin* of the original source material, as 谢燕辉 wrote on the World of Chinese, “gone is the Sun Tzu-quoting descendant of Genghis Khan, replaced by an under-written terrorist plot hole who comes across as more Muslim extremist than Chinese (he sports keffiyah-clad bodyguards with AK47s, shooting people in the desert).”<sup>129</sup> The villain changed dramatically to reflect the times, with the threat seen in both America and China, as coming from radical Islam. The ideology on display here is an anti-Islamic rhetoric that resonates across the Pacific and appeals to American and Chinese audiences and censors alike.

The ideology of the Chinese state is that China is strong and inventive. It is in China where the strongest of the world come to get better themselves. The Chinese government wants to portray the image that China is advanced and capable where other nations are not and the China seen in the additional footage made for the Chinese audience reinforces that. The symbolism of the Chinese children admiring the unity of *Iron Man* and *Dr. Wu* shows China of the future, unity in a predominantly Chinese world. The surgery is performed in China, the only place on earth with the technology and the knowledge to perform advanced medical care. This states that the future is now in China.

The ideology of the Chinese state is only shown in the scenes made for the Chinese audience, but the way the US ideology is portrayed has a wider reach and can be identified by both the domestic and international audiences. The Chinese government and audience would be pleased

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<sup>129</sup> 谢燕辉. (2013, May 6th) *Iron Man 3: Nothing Chinese To 'Marvel' About*. theworldofchinese.com. Retrieved from <http://www.theworldofchinese.com/2013/05/iron-man-3-aint-nothin-chinese-to-marvel-about/>

to see America being shown as not all powerful and dominant, having to rely on outside forces to protect them, even if it is an American super hero.

### 3.3.4 Aesthetics

The aesthetics of *Iron Man 3* are a traditional Hollywood action film and follow the conventions required to continue the successful Marvel franchise. The hero must overcome his own insecurities and push beyond his comfortable boundaries, and sacrifice to eventually understand what is important and save the one he loves. It is these values that appeal to audiences the world over and what the Chinese audience came to expect and desire from a tent pole summer blockbuster.

One of the biggest aesthetic challenges with *Iron Man* are the suits of armour themselves. They have swiftly moved from comic book iconic to film iconic and so have reached a much wider audience. In *Iron Man 3*, one of the principal suits of armour is the *Mark 42*.



(Fig. 91) Iron Man armour MK 42, with gold a predominant colour

This suit has seen a change that is described by Marvel's Head of Visual Development, Ryan Meinerding, as "*for the Mark XLII, we looked back to Tony's second set of comic armour. In the early comics, Tony first wore a grey suit, then transitioned to a golden version. In the progressions of the Cinematic Universe, we felt like we could pay homage to this classic look.*"<sup>130</sup> The nod to

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<sup>130</sup> Meinerding, R. (2013, September 16th) Quoted in *Iron Man 3: The Technology Behind Tony Stark's Suit*. The Telegraph. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/10308288/iron-man-3-the-technology-behind-tony-starks-suit.html>

the comics is one reason but there is also a deep historical love of gold in Chinese culture, and the use of this colour for one of the major pieces in the film would appeal to the Chinese audience, an area that Stan Lee would not have been considering in the original comics. As described by Justin Walton, “one of the biggest consumers of gold, China has a long-standing love affair with the precious metal. In addition to wealth, Chinese culture equates gold with power, purity and beauty.”<sup>131</sup> The suit then not only appeals to the original comic fans, but also to a deep set of beliefs in Chinese culture. The suit, *Stark’s* seeming favourite and as he declares;

Tony Stark  
...Prodigal son<sup>132</sup>

Is one of his most important partners in the film. With the change to more gold, the suit embraces values that would resonate with the Chinese audience.

However, it is the wide appeal, blockbuster aesthetics that resonate with audiences the world over and the large explosions, super-hero and evil villains all play their part in fulfilling the desired effect. The characters are clearly defined, with *Iron Man* and the *Iron Patriot* representing good and *Aldrich Killian* and *The Mandarin* representing evil. This is easy to follow and sets each as the Yin and Yang that appeals to a wide range of audiences and is trans-national in its understanding and appeal. The simplicity of pitting good on one side and evil on the other creates a beautiful balance that is comforting and reassuring. As put by Imogen Russell Williams, “The greatest quest stories get their backbone from adapted folk-tale and mythology – hoary tales of heroism and magic whose familiarity lends a superb frisson to the rediscovery of their refurbished protagonists,”<sup>133</sup> and it is in this familiarity that there is cross-cultural appeal. In the case of *Iron Man 3*, the greatest asset to success in the Chinese market with its aesthetics is embracing the simplicity of the blockbuster and not trying to over-complicate with ambiguity.

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<sup>131</sup> Walton, J. (2016, March 2nd) *China’s Love Affair With Gold*. Investopedia. Retrieved from <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/030216/chinas-love-affair-gold.asp>

<sup>132</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

<sup>133</sup> Williams, I. R. (2009, March 19th) *The Eternal Allure of Good v. Evil*. The Guardian. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/mar/19/rowling-pullman-susan-cooper>

### 3.3.5 Product Placement

Product placement in *Iron Man 3* follows the idea shown by Pieterse, “*Chinese sponsors give Hollywood access to the marketing channels of Chinese brands, and for the brands it opens up entertainment marketing.*”<sup>134</sup> The Chinese merchants wanted access to the audience that *Iron Man 3* would bring and Hollywood was only too eager to embrace the Chinese brands in turn. With the additional scenes, there came an opportunity for product placement that was engineered for the Chinese audience, in addition to the regular product placement throughout the rest of the film.

One of the largest product placement deals was with Chinese electronics manufacturer TCL. As a brand name, it is unheard of in the West, even if they do trade under names that are recognisable, such as Alcatel. The tie in with *Iron Man 3* and Disney as described by Michelle Mao, president of TCL USA said, “*an image of a TCL television in a globally distributed film translates well across all languages and geographies. With a global company, such as ours, it is important to leverage assets with worldwide applicability.*”<sup>135</sup> The branding here is designed as much for the West as it is the East, but it is the strength of the Chinese brand, one that is recognisable in China, which is of utmost importance. Their name is found throughout the film, including in with the rebranded famous Chinese theatre in Los Angeles, the scene of one of *The Mandarin’s* attacks.



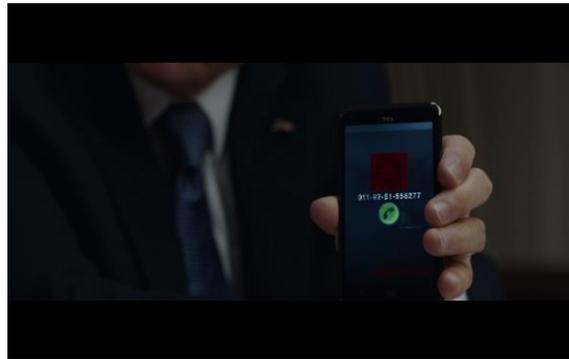
(Fig. 92) The famous Chinese Theatre in Los Angeles

<sup>134</sup> Pieterse, J. N. (2009) *Globalisation and Culture: Global Melange*. Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

<sup>135</sup> Mao, M. (2013, April 9th) Quoted in *TCL Turns to Iron Man for an Intro to the US Market*. Variety. Retrieved from <http://variety.com/2013/biz/news/tcl-turns-to-iron-man-for-an-intro-to-the-u-s-market-1200339859/>

The Chinese company now has its name on a piece of long standing Americana.

The domination goes beyond building names and the TCL CEO Zhao Zhongyao readily acknowledges the importance of showing off real world products, “*through this cross-industry collaboration, we are looking at introducing our latest smart products to consumers from around the world via a wide range of different brand promotion activities associated with the Iron Man 3 theme.*”<sup>136</sup> The ready acceptance of the brand’s presence worldwide is shown in its products, with the President of the United States using a branded TCL mobile phone.



(Fig. 93) TCL branding on the President’s phone

The phone is the best in the world, as the President would only have the very best. This phone is a statement from both the company and the nation, China makes the very best, superior to anything that is made in the US. Also on show are a TCL TV and an Alcatel phone, which all feed back into the brand as having a worldwide acceptance and superiority over rivals, such as Apple or Samsung.

Chinese brands are not alone in their presence in the international version of the film, as Budweiser makes sure that it’s clearly defined on screen. Both *The Mandarin*, although only when he has shed the pretence of being a super-villain, and *Tony Stark* has Budweiser signage illuminating the background in some of his shots, the brand does not differentiate between good or evil, it only wants it’s branding and logo to be present to seep into the audiences’ subconscious.

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<sup>136</sup> Zhongyao, Z. (2013, January 17th) Quoted in ‘*Iron Man 3*’ Product Placement Deal will See Tony Stark Wield Chinese Gadgets. The Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/iron-man-3-product-placement-413164>



(Fig. 94) The Mandarin with his Budweiser



(Fig. 95) Bud Light signage as Tony Stark walks towards a bar in Tennessee

China is an extremely important market for beer manufacturers as shown in an IBISWorld industry report, “over the five years through 2016, revenue for the Beer Production industry in China has been increasing at an average annualized rate of 3.1% to total \$32.6 billion. Steady domestic demand growth led to a 14.2% jump in industry revenue in 2011. In 2012, revenue for the Beer Production industry in China increased just 4.1% due to a slowdown in the national economy. In addition, output decreased 1.2% due to bad weather. In 2013, beer output and industry revenue increased 4.3% and 9.0%, respectively, due to the improving market and the introduction of new industry products.”<sup>137</sup> This increase in demand means that China is on course to be the largest beer market in the world by 2017 and with the increase demand is coming increased profits. Budweiser are positioning themselves with the Chinese audience as being ubiquitous and with this presence, the idea that they are a great product.

Present in only the Chinese version of the film, Yili Milk has a clearly defined product placement as they endeavour to improve their image following the China milk scandal, as described in Case Study 1. *Dr. Wu*, the world’s foremost heart surgeon and the only man who is capable of changing *Tony Stark’s* life forever, is clearly seen drinking Yili Milk. The statement that the company wishes to express is that, not only is the milk safe but it is also the choice of prominent and world leading medical professionals. If the milk can help *Dr. Wu* succeed, then it must be a product that everyone in China should be drinking.

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<sup>137</sup> (2016, August) *Beer Production in China: Market Research Report*. IBISWorld



(Fig. 96) Yili Milk gives Dr. Wu focus

The product placement in *Iron Man 3* has multiple purposes, with the Chinese version having additional scenes with placement targeted only at the domestic Chinese audience and the international version littered with products for the global audience. However, it is the presence of TCL driving itself onto the world stage with superior technology, and Budweiser showing itself as being present everywhere, that the effects of China and the Chinese market on Hollywood are best seen.

### 3.3.6 Production Values

The production values on display in *Iron Man 3* predominantly follow the demands of a Hollywood blockbuster. The audience is accustomed to seeing certain elements and expecting certain amounts of computer generated imagery and seeing it woven together to give the appearance of reality and *Iron Man 3* follows in this modern tradition.

The CGI elements of *Iron Man 3* provided the biggest bulk of the production value with 17 different VFX studios working on all the elements, including the hugely various *Iron Man* suits and each of their individual abilities. Overall VFX Supervisor Chris Townsend said that during the entire production there was only one day of downtime across the entire crew of studios saying, *"It really was a gruelling show to work on, but the result I believe is tremendous. Seven day weeks and 14 to 18 hour days and its brutal. It's just what you have to do. You can only do it with the right group of people, and we had a phenomenal group of people working on this movie."*<sup>138</sup> This level of man hours and the wide array of studios shows where a large portion of the production

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<sup>138</sup> Townsend, C. (2013, May 8th) Quoted in *Iron Man 3*. CG Society. Retrieved from [http://www.cgsociety.org/index.php/cgsfeatures/cgsfeaturespecial/iron\\_man\\_3](http://www.cgsociety.org/index.php/cgsfeatures/cgsfeaturespecial/iron_man_3)

budget was spent. It is no surprise given the number of different *Iron Man* armours that were needed to be created. And the nature of the *Extremis* soldiers who would have to be able to glow and engage with fire, utilising their abilities to heat objects.



(Fig. 97) Multiple suits of armour had to be created and rendered in action sequences



(Fig. 98) Extremis soldiers had to glow and be able to use fire

There are also the various explosive action sequences, involving the destruction of *Air Force One*;



(Fig. 99) Air Force One is destroyed

And the helicopter attack on *Stark's* house.



(Fig. 100) *The Mandarin attacks Stark's house with multiple helicopters*

Whilst reviewing the film and looking at Shane Black's (the director) work, Eric Eisenberg expressed the extremely high production value in the CGI, "*Black's a newcomer to the large-scale, CGI-heavy action sequences, but what he presents in the field is without question the best of all the Marvel Studios solo films. While Joss Whedon certainly raised the bar high with his 30-minute-long battle between superheroes and aliens at the end of The Avengers, Iron Man 3 is stunningly comparable. From a missile attack on Tony's palatial Malibu home, to a strike on Air Force One, to a firefight at a dockyard, the movie is littered with massive set pieces, with smaller-scale action sequences in between just to keep movie-goers' hearts racing at all times.*"<sup>139</sup> This use of set-piece action is a marker for the summer blockbuster and what is expected from audiences in the West and in the East, so serves a dual purpose of meeting expectations and pleasing a wide demographic.

The inclusion of a high quality medical facility in China is aimed directly at the censors and the Chinese audience. In the Western version, there are only slight markers of the surgical suites' location, the Chinese characters on the frosted glass and the presence of *Dr. Wu*, but in the Chinese version there are more shots establishing the facility and the staff who work there. The facility is pristine and looks like it is at the forefront of world medicine. The confidence that *Dr. Wu* exudes,

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<sup>139</sup> Eisenberg, E. (2013). *Iron Man 3*. CinemaBlend. Retrieved from <http://www.cinemablend.com/reviews/Iron-Man-3-6380.html>

Dr. Wu

We won't fail.<sup>140</sup>

Further shows the strength of China. They are leading the world and there is no hint that there is a possibility of failure. The money spent for the Chinese audience goes beyond the medical facility and includes two famous areas and landmarks. There is the inclusion of the Yongdingmen Gate in Beijing, primarily as a background shot, and the bright, luminous Shanghai skyline.



(Fig. 101) *Iron Man in China at Yongdingmen Gate*



(Fig. 102) *Shanghai in the background of Pepper and Tony*

The inclusions further the idea that China is as important as the US in this universe and is a comparable and superior location.

### 3.3.7 Distribution Regulations

As part of the Marvel Universe, the *Iron Man* franchise is owned and operated by Disney, who oversee production and distribution of their product globally. In China, however, Disney do not own or operate a subsidiary whom they can use for distribution, and so they negotiated and agreed a deal, as part of their initial ambition to gain full co-production status, with DMG Entertainment. DMG Entertainment ensured that the Chinese distribution was as widespread as possible.

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<sup>140</sup> Feige, K. (Producer), Black, S. (Director)(2013) *Iron Man 3*. [Motion Picture] USA/China: Marvel Studios/DMG Entertainment.

However, it was not without issue, and full co-production status was not granted, due to a lack of inclusion of enough Chinese elements. As identified by Robert Cain, *“the partners’ overall creative and business approach precluded full adherence to the co-production rulebook. Namely, their strategy made it impractical to hire enough Chinese citizens to comply with the rule requiring that one-third of “major actors” be Chinese nationals, and they didn’t incorporate the requisite level of Chinese cultural content to qualify the film as an official co-pro under the Chinese guidelines.”*<sup>141</sup> This reaction was predicted as Zhang Xun (president of China Film Co-Production Corporation) declared, *“They have not applied for any co-production. If they have already finished filming in the U.S., it might be hard for such a movie to meet the requirement for a co-production. Because you cannot make a film with a few cast members from China and a few scenes in China and expect that to be a co-production.”*<sup>142</sup> Even without the full official co-production status, the film could get many of the benefits, if not the full increase in box office revenue.

It was at the release date at box office that the film saw their biggest disappointment, with DMG unable to secure a long-weekend holiday release in April, *“ultimately, however, DMG’s connections proved fallible as China Film announced the long weekend would belong exclusively to Zhi wo men zhong jiang shi qu de qing chun (So Young, 2013), the much anticipated directorial debut of the enormously popular star Vicki Zhao Wei.”*<sup>143</sup> The slightly delayed release did not harm ticket sales and the film still managed to get widespread release throughout the country.

### 3.3.8 Social Media and Promotions

The promotion of *Iron Man 3* was a large part of the media strategy in China, with events and appearances featuring to help drive up excitement in an already excited audience.

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<sup>141</sup> Cain, R. (2013, March 7th) *Will ‘Iron Man 3’ Get China Co-Pro Status, and Does It Really Matter? Most of the Co-Pro Benefits have come already.* Chinafilmbiz. Retrieved from <https://chinafilmbiz.com/2013/03/07/will-iron-man-3-get-china-co-pro-status-and-does-it-really-matter-most-of-the-co-pro-benefits-have-come-already/>

<sup>142</sup> Xun, Z. (2012, October 30th) Quoted in *Iron Man 3 Forges Ahead with Plans for American-Chinese Co-Production.* Collider.com. Retrieved from <http://collider.com/iron-man-3-china/>

<sup>143</sup> Mingant, T. & Tirtaine, C. & Augros, J. (ed.)(2015) *Film Marketing into the Twenty-First Century.* London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan

The principal approach to China was to utilise the phenomenal international star power of Robert Downey Jr. The Chinese production partners DMG Entertainment produced the *Iron Man 3 Red Carpet Gala: A Night at the Forbidden City* which they described as, “Robert Downey Jr. and the Iron Man Hall of Armor were front and center at the Forbidden City as Marvel’s IRON MAN 3 became the first Hollywood film to be celebrated in one of China’s most revered imperial temples. Hundreds of fervent fans joined some of China’s biggest stars, including Wang Xueqi, Wu Jing, Zhang Wei (winner of *The Voice China*) and Lawrence Xu (renowned artist and gown designer) in wishing Robert Downey Jr. a happy birthday, the first birthday celebrated by a Westerner in Beijing’s Imperial Ancestral Hall. Hosted by DMG Entertainment, it was a night of ground-breaking firsts and world record setting excitement as the whole event was captured for a 90-minute nationally televised show by both Shandong Satellite and BTV.”<sup>144</sup> As can be seen from the official description, the idea was to marry the international American star, Robert Downey Jr., with the location and stars of China, all with the intention of promoting *Iron Man 3*. Not only was this an event and a spectacle the production company had the red-carpet gala nationally televised, reaching every corner of China and establishing China as an integral part of the *Iron Man* universe.

The use of Robert Downey Jr., was furthered in the pre-release promotion at the press launch of the film at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Beijing. At an on stage panel with Wang Xueqi and Wu Bing (President of DMG Entertainment), Robert Downey Jr. Stated that, “I’m interested in all things Chinese and I lead a very Chinese life in America...I made it my business to pay attention to what’s happening here culturally.”<sup>145</sup> This went further in his description of the film as “a multicultural story between the U.S. and China,” as embodied in the fact that Dr. Wu “is the reason why Tony Stark is still alive at the end of *Iron Man 3*.”<sup>146</sup> In the International version of the film it is very difficult to understand that it is Dr. Wu who is Stark’s saviour, but it is explicit in the Chinese version. The promotion targeting the Chinese market used Robert Downey Jr in China to

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<sup>144</sup> DMG Entertainment. (2013) *Iron Man 3 Red Carpet Gala: A Night at the Forbidden City*. DMG Entertainment.

<sup>145</sup> Downey Jr., R. (2013, April 6th) Quoted in *Robert Downey Jr. Rolls into Beijing for ‘Iron Man 3’ Publicity Blitz*. Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/robert-downey-jr-rolls-beijing-434026>

<sup>146</sup> Downey Jr., R. (2013, April 6th) Quoted in *Robert Downey Jr. Rolls into Beijing for ‘Iron Man 3’ Publicity Blitz*. Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved from <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/robert-downey-jr-rolls-beijing-434026>

appeal directly to the Chinese audience and speak to them about one of their own being a hero in a Western film, even if he is only shown as a hero domestically.

The promotions extended beyond the use of the stars and were permitted to be used for much longer than the standard few weeks prior to release that most foreign films are allowed. *Iron Man 3* was allowed a year of promotion within China, including a spot-on China Central Television's annual Lunar New Year's Gala, the most watched TV event in the country. The TV spots placed Chinese stars at the centre of the action alongside their American counterparts and showed China as an integral part of the film, literally juxtaposing Hollywood with China in television advertising. China is shown to be the equal to Hollywood.



(Fig. 103) The Hollywood sign in the Chinese advert



(Fig. 104) The next shot in the advert shows the Forbidden City

The extensive marketing and promotion that occurred in the build up to the film's release certainly helped increase audience awareness and built an excitement around the additional *Iron Man* products, such as Disney's theme park in Shanghai and the vast array of toys and official merchandise. The targeted use of promotions for the Chinese market shows how much value the producers placed on success in that market.

### 3.3.9 Reaction in China

With a 7.2/10 rating from 561,867 users<sup>147</sup> on IMDB and 7.5/10 rating from 186,220 users<sup>148</sup> on *Dòubàn*, *Iron Man 3* is well regarded in either its International or Chinese versions.

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<sup>147</sup> Retrieved from IMDB.com

<sup>148</sup> Retrieved from <https://movie.douban.com/subject/3231742/>

However, the high scores often came despite some of the Chinese inclusions, with Western reviewer Mark Keizer stating, “*Iron Man 3* has been too obviously massaged to earn the Chinese payday granted to American films that satisfy that country’s stringent, yet capricious, Film Censorship Committee.”<sup>149</sup> That review was without seeing the Chinese additions, which domestically were described by user 杨默默 in their 5-star review thusly, “不懂王学圻和范冰冰出现的意义。<sup>150</sup> (I don’t understand the significance of Fan Bingbing and Wang Xueqi’s roles)” and by user 娘圈圈 as “王和范完全多余呀<sup>151</sup> (Wang and Fan are completely redundant).” These reviews did not hamper the overall feeling that the film was enjoyable and a worthy part of the Marvel universe as seen by the 63% of reviewers who gave the film 4 stars or more out of 5.<sup>152</sup> The forced Chinese content in this case appears to have been unnecessary, with moviegoers enjoying the film in spite of scenes that they felt were superfluous. The inclusion of the Chinese content throughout the International version, which was much subtler than in the Chinese version, had already done its job at appealing to the domestic Chinese audience and could prove to be an indication of how producers in the West can move forward, without getting full co-production status and still gain access to the lucrative market.

The attraction of a Marvel summer blockbuster is strong whether it contains extra scenes or not, however there is a slightly higher score from the Chinese audience, suggesting that the inclusion of the Chinese elements did have a positive effect on the audience. The overall inclusions across the film and the tailoring to the Chinese market, including specific promotions and products certainly helped to make the film a great success at the Chinese box office.

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<sup>149</sup> Keizer, M. (2013) ‘*Iron Man 3*’ Review: *Worthy but Compromised Sequel*. Alt Film Guide. Retrieved from <http://www.altfg.com/film/iron-man-3-reviews-robert-downey-jr/>

<sup>150</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/3231742/comments?sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/3231742/comments?sort=new_score)

<sup>151</sup> Retrieved from [https://movie.douban.com/subject/3231742/comments?start=41&limit=20&sort=new\\_score](https://movie.douban.com/subject/3231742/comments?start=41&limit=20&sort=new_score)

<sup>152</sup> Retrieved from <https://movie.douban.com/subject/3231742/>

## 4.1 Conclusions

This dissertation has discussed the ways in which Hollywood cinema is changing to pursue the Chinese Yuan and has utilised three case studies to show how the various elements that go into the films, from pre-to-post production, are becoming more and more engineered to appeal to the mass Chinese audience. The desire for Hollywood as a business to expand has driven it to the largest single market in the world and the rapid expansion of both the infrastructure and the disposable income of the Chinese people has led to an almost “at-all-costs” attitude to be financially successful in China. In the opening to this thesis, I laid out the historical background to the relationship between Hollywood and China, in particular referencing the pre-Stipulation era, when Hollywood had limited access to the market with only the quota films being allowed entry. This helped to establish that Hollywood was going to have to adapt in order to maximise revenues. The thesis also analysed the growth of the market, how it has expanded so quickly and therefore its attraction to Hollywood. The 24-hour news cycle requires constant feeding and the emergence of a giant potential revenue stream has provided almost daily articles. Financial institutions have provided insights and predictions and this combination of coverage has aided in the rise of awareness of the Chinese market and further to this, the desire to break into the market.

Article VI of the Stipulation of Administration on Chinese-Foreign Film Co-production in 2004 acted as a commandments list and a how-to guide for trying to maximise Chinese profits. These rules have helped to shape the content of the films, both for Chinese release, with altered or additional content, or in changing the content of the film on a global scale. The changes and country specific targeting have a direct effect on the reaction from audiences, both in the US and in China. The social media and audience ratings systems used to gauge responses to each of the case studies was laid out with Sina Weibo and Dòubàn providing an insight into over 500 million unique users in China. This was supplemented with statistical data from [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com), [IMDB](http://IMDB), [the-numbers.com](http://the-numbers.com) and [cbooo.cn](http://cbooo.cn). The combination of the statistical and reactionary sources show throughout the case studies the direct effects of Hollywood adhering to the Stipulation.

Each film chosen had to attempt to navigate the co-production legalities, some more successfully than others, and work with governmental agencies to make sure that the finished product would be available to the maximum audience. All three embraced locations and promotions for the Chinese audience, helping to initially drive people to the box office. *Transformers: Age of Extinction* provided Hong Kong as a key battleground, allowing for pro-mainland statements and shows of ownership. *Looper* had a complete change in location from Paris, France to Shanghai, China, and then the non-specific Chinese countryside. *Iron Man 3* only has a passing moment of China, with Shanghai in the background in the international version, but has more scenes showcasing China for the domestic audience.

The inclusion of Chinese stars is a common theme, with minimal exposure necessary in the films, the producers have could engage the Chinese public with teases and promises of equality for domestic actors with their large salaried American counterparts. This was not the case in any of the examples, but, now, it does not seem to matter. The mere presence of Chinese actors in Hollywood films is enough to bring in the customers. *Transformers: Age of Extinction* provided the largest showcase for a Chinese actor, with Li Bingbing given a large role and able to be an action star. *Looper* brought a number of side characters and Qing Xu as a major love interest, but the amount of screen time was extremely limited. *Iron Man 3* added Fan Bingbing for the Chinese version of the film and had more screen time for Wang Xueqi but the international version was very limited for Chinese representation. The use of the Chinese actors certainly had an overall positive effect on achieving financial rewards in China.

The ideology of the state, production values and the aesthetics of the case study films have proven that the Chinese government and the film agencies that it controls are willing to work with Hollywood, if their needs and demands are met. In each case study, the producers went to great lengths to appease censors and their requirements and had to accept certain demands without always having the desired outcome, but in each case the financial rewards outweighed any negative comments from government or audiences. These financial rewards were heavily supplemented by product placement, of both US and Chinese products. The US companies want to expand their scope into China, especially Budweiser as seen in both *Transformers: Age of Extinction* and *Iron Man 3*, as China is the fastest growing beer market in the world. The Chinese

companies are predominantly for domestic audiences, but their presence in international Hollywood blockbusters raises their profile at home and international audiences get more accustomed to Chinese products and brands in their everyday experiences.

The use of promotions to drive interest in the films was very targeted in China, with an added advantage for the producers that costs are lower so the overall potential yields are far greater. Each film utilised their Chinese actors to drive interest prior to release and caused a stir and buzz to gain momentum. The promotions go together with social media in the modern world and China is no different as word-of-mouth becomes word-of-tweet (or word-of-Weibo). The post-release social media and statistical reactions show that each of the case studies was successful in garnering financial rewards, even if there were criticisms of the content.

The appetite for Hollywood to enter the Chinese market is not diminishing and, if anything, is getting fiercer and fiercer. This study has attempted to prove the multitude of different approaches to make as much money in China as possible, identifying success and failures, but linking them throughout. The research in this paper has shown how there are various changes occurring in Hollywood cinema and that the changes are proving to be a success at the Chinese box office, without necessarily harming domestic audience reaction. Only time will tell how far Hollywood will go in their pursuit of the Chinese Yuan.

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