Looking Backwards and Forwards: The Development of Film Art in the People’s Republic of China

Abstract: The development of film art in the People’s Republic of China throughout the past 70 years can be roughly divided into two stages: before and after the reform and opening-up. During this period, Chinese films not only influenced the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres, but they also produced aesthetics with uniquely Chinese characteristics, distinguishing themselves on the world film stage. However, after 70 years of development, Chinese films still have many contradictions and problems, namely: how to deal with the relationships between education and entertainment, plan and market, tradition/China/subjectivity, and modernity/world/diversity. Prejudicial tendencies can be avoided with a dialectical view of these relationships, and a healthy, integrated, and developmental track can be achieved. With this new historical contextualization in mind, to realize the transformation from a big film country to a strong film country, Chinese films should keep pace with the country’s economic and social strategic development, enhancing their quality and making contributions to a culturally advanced country with many high-standard films in the new era.

Keywords: film system with Chinese characteristics, functions of film, national aesthetics in film, development of the film industry

1 The Historical Path and Major Achievements of the Chinese Film Industry

The development of film art in the past 70 years in the People’s Republic of China can be roughly divided into two major stages, with the reform and opening-up being the critical historical transition. The first phase encompasses the period from

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the founding of the PRC to the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, nearly 30 years before the reform and opening-up; the second phase includes the period from the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China to the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC, more than 40 years after the reform and opening-up. The first stage includes the “17-year films,” which are films produced between the 17 years from the founding of the PRC to the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1949–1966), the films produced during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) and the economic restoration period (1976–1978). The second stage includes the films produced in the early years of reform and opening-up, the films of the 1990s, the films of the twenty-first century and the films after the eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

1.1 Chinese Films Before the Reform and Opening-Up: From Soviet Film Model to Nationalized Films

The film system of China and the socialist film system were established at this stage and exerted a continuous influence on the political, economic, social, and cultural fields. The manifestation was as follows:

First, in terms of the realization of the functions of film, Chinese cinema before the reform and opening-up was deeply influenced by the Soviet film model, which emphasized the functions of disseminating ideology and education. Then, the Chinese government stressed that films should serve the needs of politics and play a significant role in revolution, national construction, and the unification of the people in the fight against a common enemy. At the same time, Chinese cinema began to explore nationalization and diversification, with the latter being an especially important aesthetic development. The 17-year film period saw the birth of My This Lifetime (Wo zhe yibeizi, dir. Shi Hui, 1950), The White-haired Girl (Baimaoonü, dir. Wang Bin and Shui Hua, 1951), The Red Flag on the Cuigang Mountain (Cuigang Hongqi, dir. Zhang Junxiang, 1951), Battle in the South and North (Nanzheng bezihan, dir. Cheng Yin and Tang Xiaodan, 1952), Reconnaissance across the Yangtze (Dujiang zhenchaji, dir. Tang Xiaodan, 1954), Dong Cunrui (Dong Cunrui, dir. Guo Wei, 1955), Guerrillas on the Plain (Pingyuan youjidui, dir. Su Li and Wu Zhaodi, 1955), New Year Sacrifice (Zhufu, dir. Sang Hu, 1956), Battle on Shangganling Mountain (Shangganling, dir. Sha Meng and Lin Shan, 1956), Railway Guerrilla (Tiedao youjidui, dir. Zhao Ming, 1956), The City Does Not Sleep (Buyecheng, dir. Tang Xiaodan, 1957), Secret Post in Canton (Yangcheng anshao, dir. Lu Jue, 1957), Woman Basketball Player No. 5 (Nülan wuhao, dir. Xie Jin, 1958), The Story Of Liubao (Liubao de gushi, dir. Wang Ping, 1958), The Eternal Wave
(Yongbu xiaoshi de dianbo, dir. Wang Ping, 1958), A Chapter of Red Flag (Hongqipu, dir. Ling Zifeng, 1960), A Revolutionary Family (Geming jiating, dir. Wang Ping, 1961), The Red Detachment of Women (Hongse niangzijun, dir. Xie Jin, 1961), The Naval Battle of 1894 (Jiawu fengyun, dir. Lin Nong, 1962), Li Shuangshuang (Li Shuangshuang, dir. Lu Ren, 1962), Red Sun (Hongri, dir. Tang Xiaodan, 1963), Landmine Warfare (Didaozhan, dir. Tang Yingqi, Xu Da and Wu Jianhai, 1963), Visitors on the Icy Mountain (Bingshanshang de laike, dir. Zhao Xinshui, 1963), Struggles in an Ancient City (Yehuo chunfeng dougucheng, dir. Yan Jizhou, 1963), Heroic Sons and Daughters (Yingxiong ernü, dir. Wu Zhaodi, 1964), Two Stage Sisters (Wutai jiemei, dir. Xie Jin, 1964), Tunnel Warfare (Didaozhan, dir. Ren Xudong, 1965), and Living Forever in Burning Flame (Liehuo zhong yongsheng, dir. Shui Hua, 1965). Many classic works—including films on the struggles of workers, peasants and soldiers; war films; historical films; biographical films; anti-spy thrillers; films based on literary classics; and comedies—showcase a remarkable degree of realism against an expansive national-historical landscape. Under the aegis of political and educational development, Chinese film experienced “a hundred flowers blossoming”. However, during the Cultural Revolution, under the influence of far-left ideology, the political function of films was magnified to the extreme, and the “blossoming of a hundred flowers” became “one flower blossoming alone”. Thus, the diversification of film was severely hindered.

Second, in terms of the mechanics of film production, the film industry in China was characterized by a planned system, owned and operated by the state. This was reflected in the establishment of film studios, the planning of film production, the star system, and the censorship system. For example, after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, a state-run film production system was soon established with eight major film studios as the core, including regional feature film studios, the military-affiliated August First Film Studio, and film studios specializing in news documentary, animated films (meishupian), dubbed film, and scientific, educational, and agricultural films. In terms of film production, there were tribute films made to publicize major events and celebrations. This was directly related to the long-standing system of state-run film production in China and was also inseparable from the great importance the country attached to the role of film in publicity (Zhong 2009, 13). For instance, in the Exhibition Month of New Domestic Films held to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the founding of the PRC (1959), a large number of films of high quality were produced, including The Storm (Fengbao, dir. Jin Shan), The Opium Wars (Lin Zexu, dir. Zheng Junli and Cen Fan), Song of Youth (Qingchun zhige, dir. Cui Wei and Chen Huai’ai), A Thousand Mountains and Ten Thousand Waters (Wanshui qianshan, dir. Hua Chun and Cheng Yin), A New Biography of an Old Soldier (Laobing xinzhuang, dir. Shen Fu), Today, I Rest (Jintian wo xiuxi, dir. Lu Ren), The Youth in Flames of War
(Zhanhuozhong de qingchun, dir. Wang Yan), and Youth in Our Village (Women cunli de nianqingren, dir. Su Li). The creative teams and technical equipment of these films were arranged before the films were produced, which reflected the planned and political nature of the films. However, in the exploration of diversified film styles, they still exemplified a high level of artistic achievement. In addition, films on ethnic minorities, opera/stage art films, children’s films, animated films, science, and educational films were also arranged and shot according to pre-approved plans. The star system, marked by the selection of Excellent Film Actors of the People’s Republic of China (It is also known as The 22 Film Stars of the People’s Republic of China), also typified film production under socialist planning. Stars were selected by the major film studios, with popularity among the masses, specific criteria, and ratios considered, and finally approved by the Chinese government. Then large-scale portraits of the actors would be hung in theaters. This was a unique way of combining planning and society/quasi-market, in a way that differed from the Hollywood star system to good effect.

Third, the film dissemination mechanism is reflected in the construction of cinemas, film projection, and the dissemination of film information. A system combining theaters and mobile film projection teams were formed in the construction of cinemas and the projection of films in China. On the one hand, theaters were built in administrative districts above the county level; on the other hand, open-air cinemas, rural film projection teams and other mobile film distribution forces spread the influence of cinema into factories, rural areas, schools, enterprises, and public institutions. Film magazines represented by Popular Cinema played a unique influence in promoting film information, spreading film culture, and leading social trends. The Hundred Flowers Award held by Popular Cinema pioneered the participation of the masses in awarding film in China. During this period, the film industry became a special cultural publicity center under China’s planned economy. For the world, Chinese cinema became a unique cultural and media landscape; for China itself, films united people’s common cultural memory of the era.

Fourth, in terms of film art and aesthetics, China developed a unique theory of film nationalization. In the development of Chinese cinema, nationalization has always been a key concern and pursuit, which not only contains artists’ feelings and beliefs about Chinese cultural traditions, but also embodies people’s desire and pursuit for the survival and ascendancy of the Chinese nation (Zhong 2006, 120). During the 17-year period, filmmakers consciously experimented with aesthetic expression, keeping the practice of showing the style of videos, narration of content, music and art, which constituted a film language and audiovisual system with Chinese characteristics. At that time, filmmakers tried to integrate traditional artistic elements and artistic expression into filmic narratives, presenting distinctive
Chinese characteristics (Huang and Wang 1999, 71). Numerous classical works embodying the artistic achievements of nationalized Chinese films were produced, such as *Early Spring* (Zaochun eryue, dir. Xie Tieli, 1963), *The Lin Family Shop* (Linjia puzi, dir. Shui Hua, 1959) and *Withered Trees Revive* (Kumu fengchun, dir. Zheng Junli, 1961), which not only continued the tradition of Chinese poetic films, but also displayed unique cinematic mood and aesthetics. In addition, films dealing with ethnic minorities such as *The Serf* (Nongnu, dir. Li Jun, 1963), *Five Golden Flowers* (Wuduo jinhua, dir. Wang Jia, 1959), *Reed Pipe Canso* (Lusheng liange, dir. Yu Yanfu, 1957) and *Ah-shima* (Ashima, dir. Liu Qiong, 1964), opera films such as *The Love Story between an Mortal and an Immortal* (Tianxianpei, dir. Shi Hui, 1955), *Dream of the Red Chamber* (Honglou meng, dir. Cen Fan, 1962) and *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* (Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai, dir. Sang Hu and Huang Sha, 1954), children’s films such as *The Letter With Feathers* (Jimao xin, dir. Shi Hui, 1954) and *Zhang Ga the Soldier Boy* (Xiaobing Zhang Ga, dir. Cui Wei and Ouyang Hongying, 1963), and animated films such as *The Monkey King* (Danao Tiangong, dir. Wang Laiming, 1961) and *Baby Tadpoles Look for Their Mother* (Xiaokedou zhaomama, dir. Te Wei, Qian Jiajun and Tang Cheng, 1960), all showed rich and delicate national artistic meaning and characteristics with unique charm. This period also witnessed the rise of many film artists with distinctive creative personas and unique artistic styles, such as film playwrights Xia Yan and Hai Mo, film directors Cheng Yin, Shui Hua, Cui Wei, Ling Zifeng, Xie Tian, Xie Tieli, Xie Jin, and Wang Ping, film performance artists Zhao Dan, Bai Yang, Zhang Ruifang, Shangguan Yunzhu, Sun Daolin, Qin Yi, Wang Danfeng, Yu Lan, Yu Yang, Xie Fang, Tian Hua, Wang Xinguang, Wang Xiaotang and Zhu Xijuan, film photographers Qian Jiang, Zhu Jiming, and Nie Jing, film musicians Lei Zhenbang, Fu Gengchen and Huang Jun, animated film artists Chi Ning and Han Shangyi, and film editor Fu Zhengyi and so on. Film theory and criticism of the 17-year period also made outstanding achievements, and the published film theory monographs and translations outnumbered those published before the founding of the PRC (Chen 1999, 24). There were also many sophisticated and systematic film theory articles, and a theoretical and aesthetic system with Chinese national characteristics was initially established. Among them were the representative film theories of Xia Yan, Chen Huangmei, and Yuan Wenshu, the art theories of editing and directing of Zhang Junxiang, Shi Dongshan and Zhao Dan, the aesthetic theories of film of Han Shangyi and Xu Changlin, the studies of film history of Cheng Jihua, Li Shaobai and Xing Zuwen, and the innovative film theories of Zhong Dianfei and Qu Baiyin.

The history of 17-year films is the history of constructing a model for the Chinese films (Hu 2009, 88). It should be fully recognized for its many important achievements in the utilization of film function, the construction of industrial system, film dissemination, and artistic and aesthetic construction. During the
Cultural Revolution, the development of Chinese films was impeded by far-left politics, which led to a status combining the political functions of films and the far-left path. This resulted in a sharp decline in film production and a closed and rigid aesthetics of film art.

### 1.2 Chinese Films After the Reform and Opening-Up: From Perplexity and Confusion to the Construction of a Film System with Chinese Characteristics

After the reform and opening-up, from the 1980s to the 1990s, and from the accession to the World Trade Organization to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese films went through a process from exploration and perplexity to prosperity and well-rounded development. Along with the development of its opening up, China has gradually established a modern film system in line with the economic and social development of the country. At the same time, with social transformation and innovation, films have also become an important cultural carrier and media for the liberation of the mind and the expression of the zeitgeist.

#### 1.2.1 Chinese Films in the 1980s

In the 1980s, when “the liberation of the mind” was the main theme of the times, cinema became a key contributor and an important force for reform and opening-up. As a landmark cultural field for social trends such as scar literature, reflection, root-seeking, and reform, Chinese cinema provided ideological and spiritual impetus for the country’s comprehensive opening up. On the one hand, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the political and cultural rethinking of the whole society gave rise to a wave of nationalization in film art (Zhong 2006, 123). On the other hand, Chinese cinema also moved firmly toward modernization and diversification during reflection.

During this period, the film industry was still under a state-run system, but with the restoration of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the establishment of the Two Fors Orientation—“for the Chinese people” and “for socialism,”—the tendency of modernization and diversification of cinema became more prominent. The comprehensive opening-up and embracing of the world made Chinese cinema gradually transition from the single model of learning from the Soviet Union to learning from the films of Europe and America. Many films from Japan, Korea, Latin America, and other countries and regions were also introduced into China.
during this period. This breakthrough made the introduction of many classic foreign films possible, a prominent manifestation of which was the boom in dubbed films. At that time, dubbed films also introduced Chinese audiences to films from socialist countries such as the Soviet Union, North Korea, Vietnam, and Romania. Furthermore, many European and American films were translated, which presented China with more opportunities to expand its knowledge of cinema.

The modernization of Chinese cinema began, and the classic works and theories of famous film theorists such as André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer were introduced to China, which at the same time promoted the construction of the aesthetic system of Chinese cinema and the maturation of film art. With Zhang Nuanxin and Li Tuo’s “On the Modernization of Film Language” as a touchstone, the film industry began to rethink the creation and aesthetic construction of Chinese films in the context of global film art, and boldly launched a new exploration of film theory and practice.

At that time, the main body of film creation witnessed three different generations of directors producing films during the same time, and the trend of intellectual liberation in the new times revived their passion for creation. The third-generation directors such as Li Jun, Tang Xiaodan, Cheng Yin, Shui Hua, Ling Zifeng, and Xie Jin inherited the nationalized aesthetic tradition of Chinese cinema in the presentation of history and the use of modern film language. Their works exuded a unique artistic charm, with representative works such as Anxious to Return (Guixinsijian, dir. Li Jun, 1979), Nanchang Uprising (Nanchang qiyi, dir. Tang Xiaodan, 1981), Xi’an Incident (Xi’an shibian, dir. Cheng Yin, 1981), Heartbroken Love (Shangshi, dir. Shui Hua, 1981), Rickshaw Boy (Luotuo Xiangzi, dir. Ling Zifeng, 1982), Legend of Tianyun Monutain (Tianyunshan chuanqi, dir. Xie Jin, 1980), The Herdsmen (Mumaren, dir. Xie Jin, 1982), and Hibiscus Town (Furongzhen, dir. Xie Jin, 1987). The fourth-generation directors such as Zhang Nuanxin, Wu Yigong, Hu Bingliu, Xie Fei, Wu Tianming, Ding Yinnan, and Zheng Dongtian, built a unique aesthetic context of prose-like film while pursuing the aesthetic style of film documentary, making a new aesthetic breakthrough while restoring the tradition of realism in Chinese cinema, with masterpieces such as The Drive to Win (Shaou, dir. Zhang Nuanxin, 1981), Neighbours (Linju, dir. Xu Guming and Zheng Dongtian, 1982), Evening Rain (Bashan yeyu, dir. Wu Yonggang and Wu Yigong, 1980), My Memories of Old Beijing (Chengnan jiushi, dir. Wu Yigong, 1983), Hometown Accent (Xiangyin, dir. Hu Bingliu, 1983), Sacrifice of Youth (Qingchun ji, dir. Zhang Nuanxin, 1985), People at Their Middle Ages (Ren dao zhongnian, dir. Wang Qimin and Sun Yu, 1982), Dr. Sun Yat-Sen (Sun Zhongshan, dir. Ding Yinnan, 1986), and Old Well (Laojing, dir. Wu Tianming, 1986). The fifth-generation directors such as Zhang Junzhao, Chen Kaige, Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang,


It can be said that although Chinese films in the 1980s tended to innovate in film language and modernize its artistic style, their inheritance of national culture and film traditions and their exploration of nationalized film styles were uninterrupted.

### 1.2.2 Chinese Films in the 1990s

In the 1990s, especially after the convening of the fourteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the market economy with Chinese characteristics was formally established, and the transformation of economy and society profoundly influenced Chinese films. In the process of transitioning to a market economy, Chinese cinema experienced serious maladjustments, highlighted by the decline in productivity and the urgent need to adjust production relations.

The main body of state-owned industrial production, which had long developed under the planned economy, fell into a state of confusion and decline, while
the new body of the market, the film industry, was relatively weak and immature during this period as it underwent the pain of transition. At the same time, the rise of television in the mid- to late-1990s also brought a major impact on movies, with the loss of audiences leading to a serious decline in the popularity of movies.

Under this background, the main-melody films of this period still underwent much artistic innovation and exploration, and outstanding films were produced, such as Decisive Engagement: The Liaoshen Military Campaign (Dajuezhan zhi liaoshen zhanyi, dir. Li Jun and Yang Guangyuan, 1991), Turning Point: Fighting Hard in Shan Dong (Dazhuanzhe: Aozhan lu xinan, dir. Wei Lian, 1996), Great Battle: Liberation of Northwest China (Da Jinjun: Jiefang daxibei, dir. Wei Linyu, 1996), Jiao Yülu (Jiao Yülu, dir. Wang Jixing, 1990), Kong Fansen (Kong Fansen, dir. Chen Guoxing and Wang Ping, 1996), Country Teachers (Fenghuang qin, dir. He Qun, 1993), Red River Valley (Hong hegu, dir. Feng Xiaoning, 1997), Grief Over the Yellow River (Huanghe juelian, dir. Feng Xiaoning, 1999), Chongqing Negotiations (Chongqing tanpan, dir. Li Qiankuan, Xiao Guiyun and Zhang Yifei, 1993), Roaring across the Horizon (Hengkong chushi, dir. Chen Guoxing, 1999), and The Days without My Comrade (Likai Lei Feng de rizi, dir. Lei Xianhe, and Kangning, 1996). The biographical films of major revolutionary historical themes, revolutionary leaders and revolutionary heroes became more prominent as the newest form of main-melody films, and the classic film narratives of China contributing to the spirit of communism became mainstream again at the end of the century (Dai 1994, 12). The trend of New Year’s films started by The Dream Factory (Jiafang yifang, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 1997), Be There or Be Square (Bujian busan, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 1998), Sorry Baby (Meiwan meiliao, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 1999), and Big Shot’s Funeral (Dawan, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2001) became a major highlight of this period to overcome the difficulties in the market faced by the Chinese film industry, and Feng Xiaogang as the representative of film workers started to explore the art of commercial films and the operation of the market. In the overall trend of Chinese cinema going global, some independent films such as Farewell My Concubine (Bawang bieji, dir. Chen Kaige, 1993), The Story of Qiu-Ju (Qiuju daguansi, dir. Zhang Yimou, 1992) and Woman Sesame Oil Maker (Xianghunnü, dir. Xie Fei, 1993) gained international influence. The three were awarded the Golden Palm, the Golden Lion and the Golden Bear awards, respectively, which was the first time that Chinese films won the highest awards in each of the three major international film festivals. During this period, Chinese cinema witnessed the emergence of a situation in which main-melody films, artistic films and commercial films coexisted.

In the creative landscape of Chinese cinema in the 1990s, experienced directors such as Xie Jin, Xie Tieli, Xie Fei, Huang Jianzhong, Wu Yigong, Wu Tianming, Zhang Nuanxin, Ding Yinnan, Teng Wenji, Li Qiankuan, Xiao Guiyun, Zhai Junjie, and Sun Sha maintained a high level of creative passion, making

Many excellent children’s films were also produced during this period, including *The September of Mine* (Wo de jiuyue, dir. Yin Li, 1990), *In Their Teens* (Doukou nianhua, dir. Qiu Zhongyi and Xu Geng, 1989), *Her Smile through Candlelight* (Zhuguangli de weixiao, dir. Wu Tianren, 1991), and *Flower Season and Rainy Season* (Huaji yuji, dir. Qi Jian, 1997). Many representative documentaries, animations, and science and educational films were also produced, including *Ballad of the Past* (Wangshi geyao, dir. Zheng Ming, 1995), *Zhou Enlai’s Diplomatic Career* (Zhou Enlai de waijiao Fengyun, dir. Fu Hongxing, 1997), *Lotus Lantern* (Baolian deng, dir. Chang Guangxi, 1999) and *Genes and Genetically Modified Animals* (Jiyin yu zhuanjiyin dongwu, dir. Sun Xing and Sun Han, 1998). During this period, Gong Li, Song Chunli, Xi Meijuan, Tao Hong, Ning Jing, Li Xuejian, Ge You, Li Baotian, Liu Peiqi, Zhang Guoli, Chen Daoming, Wang Zhiwen and many other eminent actors and actresses emerged in the Chinese film industry.
Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Chinese cinema has encountered a comprehensive crisis while at the same time ushering in new opportunities for development. After China’s accession to the World Trade Organization, the film industry has experienced ups and downs, and Chinese film production has taken Hollywood, the world’s most powerful film industry, as a model and started a comprehensive exploration of industrialization during the complex transition from planned economy to market economy. The adjustment of the production relationship between investment, content production and distribution subjects of the film industry has begun to bear fruit and the industry has become increasingly diversified.

In the new exploration of marketization, Chinese films reasserted the functions of political ideology, publicity and education, artistic aesthetics, and multidimensional conflicts and contradictions among political ideology, industrial capital, and artistic aesthetics constantly evolved. This is a combination of the film functions of past eras and the factor of marketization in the new period. More importantly, it has left a lot of room for exploration and innovation, and for Chinese cinema to realize the harmonious interplay of ideological, artistic and commercial values, which has led to the coexistence and interaction of main-melody films, artistic films and commercial films (Hu 2009, 89). The tendency of mutual learning, penetration, convergence and integration has increased, and each of them has been influenced by other kinds of films while also making corresponding adjustments (Hu 2008, 10).

Against the background of WTO accession and market reform, Chinese cinema in the first decade of the twenty-first century has shown an open, diversified, and intermingled pattern. The representative traditional main-melody films maintained a high artistic standard. These films include Final Decision (Shengsi jueze, dir. Yu Benzheng, 2000), To Be with You Forever (Xiangban yongyuan, dir. Ding Yinnan, 2000), Charging Out Amazon (Chongchu yamaxun, dir. Song Yeming, 2002), Terrifying Waves (Jingtao hailing, dir. Zhai Junjie, 2002), Zhang Side (Zhang Side, dir. Yin Li, 2004), The Tokyo Trial (Dongjing shenpan, dir. Gao Qunshu, 2006), and Iron Men (Tieren, dir. Yin Li, 2009); commercial blockbusters with Chinese characteristics, such as Hero (Yingxiong, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2002), House of Flying Daggers (Shimian maifu, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2004), Curse of the Golden Flower (Mancheng jindai huangjingjia, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2006), The Promise (Wuji, dir. Chen Kaige, 2005), and The Banquet (Yeyan, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2006), greatly contributed to the industrialization of Chinese cinema; in terms of artistic films, such as Forever Enthralled (Mei Lanfang, dir. Chen Kaige, 2008), Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles (Qianli zoudanqi, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2005), Let the Bullets Fly
(Rang zidan fei, dir. Jiang Wen, 2010), Nuan (Nuan, dir. Huo Jianqi, 2003), Pretty Big Feet (Meilide dajiao, dir. Yang Yazhou, 2002), Still Life (Sanxia haoren, dir. Jia Zhangke, 2006), Tuya’s Marriage (Tuya de hunshi, dir. Wang Quan’an, 2006), Kekexili: Mountain Patrol (Kekexili, dir. Lu Chuan, 2004), City of Life and Death (Nanjing! Nanjing!, dir. Lu Chuan, 2009), and Crazy Stone (Fengkuang de shitou, dir. Ning Hao, 2006), although the themes, contents and styles are different, they reflect the common pursuit of artistic quality by experienced and new Chinese directors. The Message (Fengsheng, dir. Chen Guofu and Gao Qunshu, 2009), Assembly (Jijiehao, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2007), The Knot (Yunshuiyao, dir. Yin Li, 2006), Bodyguards and Assassins (Shiyue Weicheng, dir. Chen Desen, 2009), The Founding of a Republic (Jianguo daye, dir. Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin, 2009), Aftershock (Tangshan dadizhen, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2010) and other films that combine main-melody, artistry, and commercial genre emerged, gradually unifying the three elements in Chinese film creation. Film production in this period includes the continued work of veteran directors such as Ding Yinnan and Zhai Junjie, the pioneering and innovative work of middle-aged directors such as Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, Feng Xiaogang, Yin Li and Huo Jianqi, and the maturing work of younger directors such as Jia Zhangke, Wang Quan’an, Lu Chuan and Ning Hao.

During this period, science and educational films such as Cosmos and Man (Yuzhou yu ren, dir. Xin Yingyi, 2000), Abyss: The Nature of Cult (Shenyuan, xiejiao de benzhi, dir. Mo Jiao, 2002), The Moon (Yueqiu tanmi, dir. Duan Mingdi, 2009), and A Warming Earth (Biannuan de diqiu, dir. Ke Zhonghua, 2010), and documentaries such as The Loud Sound in the East: Documentary of Two Bombs One Satellite (Dongfang juxiang: Liangdanyixing shilu, dir. Zhang Guiyou and Luan Baoyu, 1999), Piano Dream (Gangqin meng, dir. Han Junqian, 2002), A Great Master Recaptured (Youjian Mei Lanfang, dir. Guo Lanbing and Ye Jing, 2006), 2001 + 7 (Zhumeng 2008, dir. Gu Yun, 2008), and My Garden of Eden (Tianci, dir. Sun Xian, 2010) were prominent. Zhang Ziyi, Zhou Xun, Zhao Wei, Jiang Wenli, Yan Bingyan, Xu Jinglei, Li Bingbing, Song Jia, Yu Nan, Liu Ye, Zhang Hanyu, Xia Yu, Chen Kun, Deng Chao, Huang Xiaoming and other young actors came to prominence in this period.

In addition, Film Industry Promotion Law, the first law in the cultural sector of the PRC, was also in formation during this period, witnessing the whole process of reform and development in China’s film industry. In short, despite the many problems with the industrialization of Chinese cinema, a film production and distribution system in line with China’s national conditions and the laws of the market has taken initial shape, and a new pattern has emerged in which the market is the mainstay complemented by public services.
1.2.4 Chinese Films in the New Era

As socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new era, Chinese cinema is in the process of continuing to integrate into the stream of world cinema, ushering in an era of full-scale development, signaling rapid progress after years of exploration and accumulation.

With the transfer of film management to the direct control of the Publicity Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the management of film work and its role in the development of the Party and the country have become increasingly prominent. The passage and implementation of the Film Industry Promotion Law has marked the maturation of China’s film industry and helped Chinese cinema engage in deeper dialogue with world cinema and find a path for its sustainable development (Zhang, Hu, and Liu 2016, 1). The Chinese film industry is consolidating its position as the leader of the national cultural industry, and market players, including state-owned and private production organizations, are jointly carrying the burden of China’s film development.

Box office revenues and cinema audiences continue to break record highs, and the construction of movie infrastructure continues to improve. Along with China’s urbanization and modernization, the relationship between the construction of urban shopping centers, the improvement of people’s consumption levels and the development and prosperity of Chinese movies has become intertwined. Many elements in the film industry, including the construction of film infrastructure, total box office revenues and the influence of films, are making visible progress.

New achievements have been made in the development of different film genres with Chinese characteristics. New mainstream films, comedies, action films, youth films, romance films, science fiction films, animations, tribute films and other genres have made new breakthroughs. Main-melody films such as Wolf Warrior 2 (Zhanlang 2, dir. Wu Jing, 2017), The Taking of Tiger Mountain (Zhiqu weihushan, dir. Tsui Hark, 2014), Operation Mekong (Meigonghe xingdong, dir. Dante Lam, 2016), Operation Red Sea (Honghai xingdong, dir. Dante Lam, 2018), The Bravest (Liehuo yingxiong, dir. Tony Chan, 2019), My People, My Country (Wo he wo de zuzuo, dir. Chen Kaige, Zhang Yibai, Guan Hu, Xue Xiaolu, Xu Zheng, Ning Hao, and Wen Muye, 2019), and The Captain (Zhongguo jizhang, dir. Liu Weiqiang, 2019) have performed well in many indicators such as professional evaluation, box office revenues, audience reputation and cultural influence, allowing Chinese films to achieve both critical and box office excellence. Lost in Thailand (Renzai-jiongtu zhi taijiong, dir. Xu Zheng, 2012), So Young (Zhi women zhongjiang shiqu de qingchun, dir. Zhao Wei, 2013), Journey to the West: Conquering the Demons (Xiyou xiangmopian, dir. Stephen Chow and Derek Kwok, 2013), American Dreams in China (Zhongguo hehuoren, dir. Peter Chan, 2013), Breakup Buddies (Xinhua
lufang, dir. Ning Hao, 2014), Coming Home (Guilai, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2014), Blind Massage (Tuina, dir. Lou Ye, 2014), Black Coal, Thin Ice (Bairi yanhuo, dir. Diao Yinan, 2014), Monster Hunt (Zhuoyaoji, dir. Raman Hui, 2015), Goodbye Mr. Loser (Xia Luo te fannao, dir. Yan Fei and Peng Damo, 2015), Mojin: The Lost Legend (Xunlongjue, dir. Wu Ershan, 2015), The Dead End (Lieri zhuoxin, dir. Cao Baoping, 2015), Mr. Six (Laopaoer, dir. Guan Hu, 2015), Mountains May Depart (Shanhe guren, dir. Jia Zhangke, 2015), The Mermaid (Meirenyu, dir. Stephen Chow, 2016), Time Raiders (Daomu biji, dir. Li Rengang, 2016), Song of the Phoenix (Bainiao chaoefeng, dir. Wu Tianming, 2016), I Am Not Madame Bovary (Wo bushi Pan Jinlian, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2016), Kaili Blues (Lubian yecan, dir. Bi Gan, 2016), Youth (Fanghua, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2017), Dying to Survive (Wo bushi yaoshen, dir. Wen Muye, 2018), Detective Chinatown Vol. 2 (Tangrenjie tan’an 2, dir. Chen Sicheng, 2018), The Island (Yichu haoxi, dir. Huang Bo, 2018), A Cool Fish (Wumingzhibei, dir. Rao Xiaozhi, 2018), Us and Them (Houhai de women, dir. Liu Ruoying, 2018), The Wandering Earth (Liujiang diqu, dir. Guo Fan, 2019), So Long, My Son (Dijiu tianchang, dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, 2019), and Better Days (Shaonian de ni, dir. Derek Tsang, 2019) showcase a diversity of themes, contents, forms and styles, manifesting the coexistence of different film genres and the blossoming of the film industry. During this period, Chinese films include the quality works of Wu Tianming, Zhang Yimou, Feng Xiaogang, Wang Xiaoshuai, Jia Zhangke, Lou Ye, Guan Hu, Cao Baoping and other well-known directors, as well as the works of new directors such as Diao Yinan, Wen Muye, Ning Hao, Wu Ershan, Bi Gan, Zhao Wei, Xu Zheng, Chen Sicheng, Guo Fan, Liu Ruoying, and Derek Tsang. Some young directors have shown a mature directing style in their debut films, indicating great potential.

In the new era, documentaries, animations, and science and educational films have been given new opportunities for development, with the birth of many outstanding documentary works such as Mr. Deng Goes to Washington (Xuanfeng jiuri, dir. Fu Hongxing, 2015), A Memorandum of Penitence of Japanese War Criminals (Riben zhanfan chanhui beiwanglu, dir. Fan Zhiyuan, 2015), Born in China (Women dansheng zai zhongguo, dir. Lu Chuan, 2016), Masters in Forbidden City (Wozai gugong xiuwenwu, dir. Ye Jun and Xiao Han, 2016), Himalaya: Ladder to Paradise (Ximalaya tianti, dir. Xiao Han and Liang Junjian, 2015), Twenty Two (Ershier, dir. Guo Ke, 2015), Amazing China (Lihaile wo de guo, dir. Wei Tie, 2018), and The Era of Pursuing Dreams (Fendou shidai, dir. Zhu Qinxiao, 2019), quality animations such as Monkey King: Hero is Back (Xiyouji zhi dasheng guilai, dir. Tian Xiaopeng, 2015), Big Fish & Begonia (Dayu haitang, dir. Liang Xuan and Zhang Chun, 2016), The Wind Guardians (Fengyuzhou, dir. Liu Kuo, 2018), White Snake (Baishe yuanqi, dir. Huang Jiakang and Zhao Ji, 2019), and Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child (Ne Zha zhi motong jiangshi, dir. Jiaozi, 2019), and enlightening
science and educational films such as *Climate Change and Food Security* (Qihou bianhua yu liangshi anquan, dir. Xuan Mengyang, 2013), *Run, Duckling* (Xiaoya kuaipao, dir. Liu Ning, 2014), and *The Great Green Wall* (Lüse changcheng, dir. Ji Lin and Zou Wei, 2018). The actors who performed prominently in this period include Huang Bo, Wu Jing, Xu Zheng, Wang Jingchun, Duan Yihong, Chen Jianbin, Liao Fan, Du Jiang, Huang Xuan, Chen Sicheng, Yong Mei, Bai Baihe, and Zhou Dongyu.

In short, after socialism with Chinese characteristics entered the new era, the film industry with Chinese characteristics was firmly established, and the market-oriented exploration, artistic, and technical innovation of Chinese films are gradually entering a better state.

## 2 Major Issues in the 70-Year Development of Films of the People’s Republic of China and an Outlook

After 70 years of development, Chinese cinema has made remarkable achievements, but there are still many contradictions and problems. These include how to deal with the relationships between education and entertainment, plan and market, and tradition/China/subjectivity and modernity/world/diversity. Breaking through the dilemma lies in understanding these contradictions and problems dialectically, to avoid prejudice and foster a healthy and integrated development track.

### 2.1 The Functions of Film: Relationship Between Education and Entertainment

Film has both the function of publicity and education, as well as the function of cultural entertainment. However, the Chinese film industry has been torn between singularity and diversity in the function of film. During certain historical periods in China, the emphasis on cinema as an important ideological tool, the overemphasis on the function of publicity and education, and the neglect of artistic pluralism, led to the suppression of film production capacity and the failure to fully satisfy the needs of audience.

For a movie to reach the ideal state of being excellent both in film review and box office revenues, it must integrate idea, art, and commercialism, so that the audience can be enlightened in a subtle way. To properly handle the relationship
between education and entertainment, it is necessary to follow the laws and characteristics of film art creation and dissemination, balancing its political function with its entertaining function. In fact, the more market-oriented a film is, the more conducive it is to the realization of its multiple functions, especially the functions of publicity and education.

Therefore, a dialectical view of the relationship between education and entertainment is the key to resolving the contradiction between the function of movies: entertainment without education, is harmless but lacks artistry. Whereas being educational but not entertaining, though it may be ideologically correct, is too conservative and may lead to ineffective dissemination. The grand and heavy subjects and content, if not commercialized in content production, dissemination, and operation, will have a hard time finding success on the market and amongst today’s youth. Only by being both educational and entertaining, can films find a balance between the transmission of mainstream values and artistic expression. In this way, the social pressure and aesthetic fatigue of the audience will be eased by the film fulfilling different functions, which is beneficial to the development of movies.

As a masterpiece of realism in the new era, *Dying to Survive* presents a social issue that people are widely concerned about with artistic refinement, evoking a spirit of the times beyond the story itself. Its artistic expression of the fight between goodness and evil and the complex entanglement of human nature enhances the realism and seriousness of the film, conveying the resilience of humanity. At the same time, its dynamic, humorous, and visualized style, the portrayal of ordinary people and their teamwork, and the integration of commercial genre elements add to the film’s watchability and artistry. The film has not only set a record high at the box office for literary films, but it has also triggered a huge response from the society as a whole and helped to promote the reform of important matters in the health care sector.

*The Bugle from Gutian* (*Gutian junhao*, dir. Chen Li, 2019) and *Mao Zedong 1949* (*Juesheng shike*, dir. Huang Jianxin and Ning Haiqiang, 2019) have set a new benchmark for films on major revolutionary historical themes and have launched innovative exploration in the artistic expression of historical truth. For example, both films portray a different image of the revolutionary leader Mao Zedong. The young Mao Zedong in *The Bugle from Gutian* is a brand-new screen image of the character who is vigorous and passionate, but at the same time stubborn and even impulsive, presenting the true state of mind of a great man in his youth undergoing difficulties in his life and his career. It is easier for today’s young people to accept and find resonance (Hu and Chen 2019, 18). The leader of China Mao Zedong in *Mao Zedong 1949* is closer to the daily life of ordinary people. The film focuses on the inner world of the leader through the presentation of many details of life and
emotional states, which shows his charisma. For example, his childlike behavior when catching birds together with his daughter, his sensitivity when interacting with the little soldier, his sincerity when giving suggestions to the guard in love, his modesty and piety when talking with Mei Lanfang in the backstage, and his true feelings when listening to Ren Bishi playing the piano in sickness—all of these can present a realistic image of the leader.

From *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* to *Operation Mekong* and *Operation Red Sea*, from *The Bravest* to *The Captain* and *The Climbers* (Pandengzhe, dir. Daniel Lee Yan-kong, 2019), a group of Hong Kong filmmakers have started to produce main-melody films in recent years, including Peter Chan, Tsui Hark, Dante Lam, Andrew Lau, and Daniel Lee Yan-kong. They have applied a set of mature codes of operation of Hong Kong commercial films to their creation of main-melody films, creating main-melody blockbusters and forming a new mode of creation and aesthetic style. The main-melody blockbuster emphasizes the need to conform to the basic norms of commercial films. Hong Kong directors have much experience in directing crime films, action films and disaster films, and can fully utilize the commercial elements of films to maximize their spectacle, entertainment, and fashion. At the same time, they have accurately grasped the basic spiritual core of main-melody films, promoting mainstream values such as heroism, collectivism, patriotism and national spirit, the concept of peace and anti-war, and the idea of human kindness, thus striking a balance between education and entertainment, political ideology and leisure. They have gained popularity in the market among young people, disseminating and promoting mainstream values.

### 2.2 The Production of Film: Relationship Between Plan and Market

In the process of constructing the industrial production system of the new Chinese cinema, the planned economic system played a unique role for its ability to centralize resources to do major things. The establishment of the eight major film studios and the creation of genres such as revolutionary operas, tribute films, and new mainstream films, have revealed the unique advantages of the national system. However, the planned system lacked sensitivity and adaptability to the market. After China entered a new period of reform and opening-up, Chinese films were increasingly unable to meet the diversified needs of the market and faced a crisis of survival and development.

Therefore, to construct a film system with Chinese characteristics, it is imperative to consider the relationship between plan and market: if it only includes planning without market, the industry can no longer adapt to new
economic and social transformations. However, catering to the market without planning also poses many problems. To be specific, a more market-oriented film industry is conducive to the creation of more personalized genre films and can better meet the needs of audiences through research on audience preferences. However, this approach risks the extreme of profit-driven filmmaking and the neglect of social responsibility and the transmission of cultural traditions. At present, there are some commercial types of comedies, action films and youth films, which are generally harmless, but are not in line with China’s culture. Appropriate planning is not antagonistic to the market economy, but instead accommodates the need to recognize history the need for national identity, and the embodiment of cultural confidence. For example, the successive emergence and continued existence of tribute films, films theming on major revolution and history, and new mainstream films represents the remembrance of history and the inheritance of cultural traditions under the film system with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, the development of a market-oriented film industry still requires planning and design, with the ideal state being a harmonious combination of market and plan.

In the history of Chinese cinema, tribute films, especially tribute films for China’s National Day, are produced to meet the needs of major festivals, and they are undoubtedly an important way to observe the interaction between plan and market. In 1959, a series of excellent films were produced in the Month of Exhibition of New Domestic Films dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the founding of the PRC. These films were promoted under strict plan and organization, and during the Great Leap Forward period (1958–1962), they were integrated into the framework of state ideology and nation-building projects, mobilizing the human, material, and financial resources of the Chinese film industry to the fullest extent. Although they were not yet marketable or commercial at that time, these films found a balance between state ideology and the aesthetic demands of the audience. They were politically well suited to the publicity tasks of major national celebrations and met the nation’s aesthetic and cultural demands, as well as the audience’s need for entertainment. From today’s perspective, this can be seen as a quasi-market creative strategy. In films such as Song of Youth and The Youth in Flames of War, the personalities and emotional experiences of the characters are depicted in a way that fits their mental development, integrating the state ideology of the era with a pleasurable viewing experience (Zhong 2009, 7).

As a unique phenomenon of Chinese film culture, the development of tribute films has witnessed the transformation of Chinese cinema from the planned economy to the market economy. In the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream tribute films depicted major revolutionary historical themes and biographies of leaders and heroic figures, reflecting the strength of a planned economy and political publicity.
For a long time, these films have been stereotyped as serving a particular event and carrying a strong sense of didacticism with low entertainment value. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, films released around the National Day, which is a collection of diversified genre films, have become the most popular films accompanying the maturation of new mainstream films. These films laid the foundation for the commercialization and innovation of tribute films under the market economy. In the Quality New Domestic Films Exhibition on the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC, many excellent films such as The Bugle from Gutian, The Secret of China (Hongxing zhaoyao zhongguo, dir. Wang Jixing, 2019), Mao Zedong 1949, My People, My Country, The Captain, The Climbers were shown, making significant progress in the innovative exploration of tribute films and main-melody films. In particular, My People, My Country, The Captain, and The Climbers became the three most popular films around National Day, gaining high box office revenues and good reviews. Among them, The Captain and The Climbers harmonize the main-melody theme with disaster, adventure, spectacle, and other elements of commercial films. By presenting real events in their plots and using vivid visual and audio effects, these films powerfully evoke the spirit of humanity. As a tribute film to the seventieth anniversary, My People, My Country recalls important moments in the history of China in seven different stories, bringing together seven famous directors, more than 50 outstanding actors, and many production departments from four generations of China. It is a typical film which seeks to inspire patriotism through elaborate set design while also focusing on the audience’s viewing experience and the demands of the market. The film takes a different approach by focusing on ordinary people in a major historical moment, showing the close connection between the state and the people against an expansive historical background, offering an immersive experience to the audience. The film reduces the sense of alienation produced by grand narratives, instead using small, delicate, and exquisite detail to tell the Chinese story and evoke the collective memory of the audience. For example, the multiple shots of the pocket watch in “The Eve” and “Going Home” chapters reflect the professional attitude, craftsmanship and family sentiment of the characters; an Olympic ticket represents the oscillation between sorrow and joy, gain and loss and movement and stillness, reminding the audiences of their collective memory of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing; the image shown in “The Guiding Star” is an artistic and romantic expression of the alleviation of spiritual poverty and pursuit of dreams, which avoids didactic and slogan-like expressions. Overall, the innovative practice of the 2019 National Day tribute films is a positive and effective exploration of the harmonious interplay between plan and market, integrating the main melody and core values with the aesthetic and cultural interests, commercial elements, and entertainment demands of the market.
2.3 Aesthetics in Film Art: Relationship Between Tradition/China/Subjectivity and Modernity/World/Diversity

In terms of the aesthetics of film art, Chinese cinema needs to deal with three sets of relationships, which are the relationships between tradition (nationalization) and modernization (globalization), Chinese and the world, subjectivity, and diversity.

The first is to deal with the relationship between tradition and modernization. Chinese cinema should be rooted in the soil of Chinese history and culture, adhere to its own national cultural characteristics and spiritual core, strive to manifest Chinese style, and construct a film system with Chinese characteristics. However, it is necessary to be attentive to the fact that there are both admirable ideas and corrupt ones in the traditions, and modernization and globalization should not be blindly denied in the name of nationality and tradition. The pursuit of modernization and globalization cannot be equated to the pursuit of fashion and difference, as simply searching for novelty will lead to the neglect of communalism and public spirit. The film art that truly belongs to the world must pay more attention to and absorb universal elements, thus expanding its influence and reach.

In recent years, the film and television industry has been making efforts to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of Chinese traditional culture, but there are still not many films that can be called phenomenal in this regard, and efforts to explore and innovate outstanding Chinese cultural resources are still insufficient. The animated film *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* opens a new horizon. The story of Nezha, which originated from the classical masterpieces *The Investiture of the Gods* and *Journey to the West*, has a basic narrative, and the image of Nezha is a unique and distinctive cultural symbol in Chinese cinema. It has a long history and a strong national style, with a film image that combines many aesthetic elements in religion, culture, folk art, and traditional Chinese opera. The success of *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child* lies in the fact that the film inherits the basic core and spirit of the traditional Nezha story and the image of Nezha, while at the same time being a creative adaptation. The adaptation includes a new image of Nezha as both good and evil, the ambivalent relationship between friend and enemy, the development of conflict between Nezha and Ao Bing, the new interpretation of the role of parents in the family ethical structure, and the idea that one’s destiny is decided by the one himself rather than others. In addition to promoting traditional Chinese culture and cultural self-confidence, the film also draws on and integrates new elements of commercial films and animation from around the world to create an animation with Chinese characteristics that meets international standards.
The second is to deal with the relationship between China and the world. From learning from Soviet films to learning from European and American films, and then to constructing a film system with Chinese characteristics, the development of Chinese films has always faced the problem of how to correctly deal with the relationship between China and the world. Because of the historical factors such as the closed-door policy and extreme leftist politics, Chinese cinema was once in a closed state, and rarely paid attention to the artistic contributions of foreign cinema. It was not until the reform and opening-up that Chinese cinema began to rethink its development with a global vision and re-examined its relationship with the world.

At the starting point of the new era, Chinese cinema already has the foundation and strength to dialogue with the world. Therefore, it should have the self-confidence and ambition to face the world. In dialogue with the international community and foreign film art, it should maintain a healthy mentality of neither arrogance nor humbleness, and present China’s unique culture with a high degree of self-confidence. For example, in the creation of films, the unique symbols, characters and legends of Chinese culture should be skillfully exploited, and their contemporary connotations and common values should be deeply explored. By adapting traditional thinking, connecting to the world’s common language, and integrating traditions with contemporary ideas, the film gains universal acceptance and wide recognition from the global audiences. At the same time, however, Chinese films should not be limited to representing China for its people but should also address the world, seeking to represent the common human experience.

*The Wandering Earth* is undoubtedly a new benchmark for Chinese films in the new era to reflect the spirit of a major country, express the love for the nation and show the strength of China (Hu 2019). First, *The Wandering Earth* focuses not only on China’s problems, but also on the world’s problems. This is a major change in the perspective of Chinese cinema, reflecting its concern for the survival, development, and the future of mankind, profoundly depicting the concept of a community with a shared future and showing China’s new image, mission, and constructive role as a responsible major country. Secondly, *The Wandering Earth* provides a unique solution to global issues and human crises. This solution is different from the escape from, or destruction of the Earth frequently depicted in Hollywood films, instead reflecting on how to but take the Earth with us. It is rooted in the Chinese nation’s love for family and country, while at the same time subtly integrating and creatively transforming the core values of harmonious coexistence and putting people first. The program it offers contains no racial prejudice or cultural discrimination, and it promotes equality and harmony among all nationalities, love for one’s home, and love for the Earth, the common home of mankind. Additionally, the progress in technology and artistic expression that *The
Wandering Earth has made demonstrates the strength of the Chinese film industry in scientific technology and the unique aesthetic meaning of Chinese film art. The film has injected new vitality into the development of Chinese science fiction films with its excellent production values, advanced technical means and visual effects, and at the same time has demonstrated Chinese cinema’s unique oriental charm, innovative artistic expression, and harmonious aesthetics.

The third is to deal with the relationship between subjectivity and diversity. On the issue of how to correctly deal with the relationship between the national subject and the world system, Chinese cinema faces the question of regarding China, or other subjects, as the main subject. A failure to view these relationships in a dialectical manner will often lead to loss of focus and bias.

On the one hand, overemphasis on subjectivity will lead to the rejection of diversity and differentiation, resulting in a closed and inflexible path. Only the collection of a hundred schools of thought can make one form an outstanding school of his own. From Two Fors Orientation, the Hundred Flowers Campaign to promoting the main theme and diversity, and then to promoting the full development of genre, subject, form and means and mutual learning among different ideas, contents, styles, and schools (Xi 2014, 6), it is precisely on the premise of correctly handling the relationship between subjectivity and diversity that Chinese film workers have created a rich variety of outstanding with great creativity. In recent years, main-melody commercial films have seen many new works, such as Operation Mekong and Wolf Warrior 2, which combine themselves with martial arts films, and The Bravest, The Captain and The Climbers, which combine themselves with disaster films. From the all-star cast of The Founding of a Republic, Beginning of the Great Revival (Jiandang weiye, dir. Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin, 2011), and The Founding of an Army (Jianjun daye, dir. Andrew Lau, 2017), to the lifelike portrayal of the leader in The Bugle from Gutian and Mao Zedong 1949, and then to My People, My Country, which evokes the memory of ordinary people in an epic historical landscape, the major revolutionary historical themes continue to develop new perspectives and ways of presentation. Literary films, comedies, romance films, youth films, science fiction films, fantasy films, animated films, and IP-based films have all witnessed trials and progress.

On the other hand, overemphasis on diversity may exclude national subjects. If problems such as pandering to foreigners and vulgarity are not eradicated, not only will the quality and stability of Chinese films be greatly affected, but the images of Chinese films will also be greatly damaged. Therefore, Chinese films need to maintain a high degree of self-confidence, adhere to nationalized style and local values, make great efforts to improve film creation and dissemination, and utilize the wisdom of Chinese culture and aesthetics to demonstrate their own values and charms in dialogue with world cinema, so that Chinese films can
take a leading role in world cinema. For example, *Wolf Warriors 2*, which is a model of new mainstream movies, demonstrates world-class production standards in its genre elements, visual effects and technical presentation, while promoting traditional values of heroism, patriotism and national spirit, showcasing the spirit of China and the style of a strong and confident country on the international stage.

### 3 Conclusions

Looking back at history, the Chinese film industry has created unforgettable classic films in different periods, forming a common memory that transcends the times. Many scenes of Chinese history and the lives of Chinese people have been embodied in this colorful visual world, and this is the unique contribution of Chinese cinema to the development of China. Chinese cinema has also formed an aesthetic system with Chinese characteristics through its unique nationalized and realistic style, earning China a reputation on the global film stage.

Today, in terms of total output, Chinese cinema has reached second place in the world, with a record number of box office revenues and screenings. However, there are not many Chinese films recognized globally, which indicates that the Chinese film industry is not yet competitive enough. It can be said that although Chinese cinema has a relatively strong foundation, its development, including film quality and box office revenues, is not stable enough. To meet the demand of national strategic development and show the charm of Chinese culture on the world film stage, Chinese films still have a long way to go.

After 70 years of development, Chinese cinema is now at a new historical transition from a big film country to a strong film country. Faced with the development of Chinese cinema in the new era, it is necessary to ponder the landscape and effects that Chinese cinema will form in the future, and the role, image, and responsibility that Chinese cinema should play in the national governance system. Standing at a new historical juncture, the development of Chinese cinema should be consistent with the realization of the Two Centenaries goal and the dream of rejuvenating the Chinese nation. The development of Chinese films should not only focus on immediate economic benefits and short-term sensational effects, but should always be in line with the strategic development needs of China’s economy and society, so as to continuously enhance the soft power of Chinese culture, and to write a new chapter in the development of a strong socialist film country and a culturally advanced country.
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