

## Dreading the Dragon:

China's creative and economic influence over Hollywood and the possible Sinification of Hollywood cinema in the twenty-first century.

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## 1. Introduction

In November 2014, the Guardians of Peace hackers group exposed the database of Sony Pictures Entertainment, one of the larger studios in Hollywood, the American film industry located in Los Angeles, California. The hack revealed the various mechanism of the generally inaccessible industry, from the continuing gender gap in Hollywood to personal insults of directors and fellow producers by Sony officials (Seal). One of the most revealing revelations was the systematic forms of self-censorship conducted by company. No longer motivated by domestic forces, self-censorship in modern Hollywood is now driven by external forces, namely the access to a specific foreign market to boost the Hollywood economy. The decline of the North-American box-office as the traditional stronghold of the Hollywood economy has resulted in that Hollywood is looking abroad for profits. These foreign market not only offer different audiences but also different morals and much more visible censors (Mirlees 201). In this battle between economic possibilities and possible cultural restrictions, Hollywood is returning to old methods of self-censorship to control production.

Self-censorship is not a new phenomenon in Hollywood. Altering the content of films in fear or financial concerns, the most rigorous form of self-censorship in Hollywood occurred during the Classical Hollywood era between the early 1930s and the 1960s. The Classical Hollywood era was a time in Hollywood cinema when Hollywood was the dominant industry in the global film industry (Bordwell and Thompson 195). In this era, Hollywood's films were controlled by the Motion Picture Production Code, a series of requirements and taboos created and enforced by Hollywood. This process was oversighted by the Motion Picture Administration, an office created by the industry to enforce the Code. Through the Code and the Administration, "cinematic space (in Classical Hollywood) became a patrolled landscape with secure perimeters and well-defined borders," with the Motion Picture administration "conducting a policy of self-censorship and set the boundaries for what could be seen, hear, even implied on the screen" (Doherty 2). Created by the industry to respond to domestic demands for the moralization of cinema, the Motion Picture Production Code and the Motion Picture Administration controlled the entire Hollywood production during the Classical Hollywood era.

Looking at self-censorship in post-Code Hollywood, Hollywood's relationship with China comes to mind. In economic terms, the Chinese market has great potential for Hollywood. Estimations determine that the Chinese market grows approximately 47% on a

yearly basis. Determined by a growing middle class and rising investments in the cinematic infrastructure (cinemas, screens etc.), the Chinese market is expected to become the largest film market in the world by 2017. Looking at the cultural restrictions, Hollywood has had a troublesome relationship with the Chinese censor SARFT (the State Administration for Radio, Film and Television), who guards the distribution and production of entertainment for the Chinese market. The SARFT controls every film that enters China for specific un-Chinese elements. Films that fail the requirements of the SARFT are sent back for revision or banned from the Chinese market. Traditionally, Hollywood distributed always two versions: one version for the global box-office and one Chinese version, altered and approved by the SARFT. Nevertheless, Hollywood has also started to change films during the production stage in order to anticipate a smooth access to the Chinese film market.

Changing films for a foreign market is a new phenomenon in Hollywood. During the years of the Code, the PCA often tried to intervene in film productions, but their advice was considered intrusive and was often ignored by studios and filmmakers. Hollywood has also dealt with foreign censors before, from early European censors who tried to protect their domestic film industry to Arabic censors who fear the influence of Hollywood for their citizens. Nevertheless, these censors never meddled with the production of films, often negotiating cuts and alterations after films are distributed on the foreign market. Hollywood's stance towards China illustrates the first time when a foreign censor and market directly influences the way Hollywood creates films. The fact that Hollywood wants to change their films specifically for the Chinese market shows a rising Chinese influence on the creative and economic operations in Hollywood, but might also have consequences for the nature of Hollywood films, transforming the industry towards a Sinified cinema.

The general economic motivations behind self-censorship are well documented by scholars. In the introduction of his book *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry*, Jon Lewis argues that the “political and social utility of film censorship is altogether secondary to its economic function” (7). According to Lewis, self-censorship is deemed necessary by Hollywood to “secure the long-term health of the industry as a whole” (7). In their book on the Motion Picture Production Code, Leonard J. Leff and Jerold L. Simmons claim that the Motion Picture Code was “the passport a film needed to enter the largest and most profitable theaters in America” (xv). While the Code has been well researched by scholars, subsequent forms of self-censorship are more scarcely documented. Jon Lewis's *Hollywood v. Hard Core* and Kevin S. Sandler's book *The Naked Truth: Why Hollywood Doesn't Make X-rated Movies?* offer a similar argument

as Leff and Simmons that the current American ratings system, the MPAA ratings, “ensures a responsible entertainment, accessible by all audiences and acceptable to Hollywood various critics and detractors” (7). Nevertheless, these scholars focus predominantly on the domestic rationale for self-censorship in the industry and rarely investigate foreign influences or the consequences of self-censorship for Hollywood films. This thesis explores not only another economic dimension of self-censorship in Hollywood (namely the influence of the Chinese censors and box-office) but also investigates the consequences of self-censorship on films produced and distributed by the industry.

Further exploring the Chinese economic and creative influence over Hollywood, this thesis will investigate whether these Chinese influences transform Hollywood cinema into a Sinified cinema. This thesis will answer the following research question: *to what extent does China’s creative and economic influence over Hollywood transform the industry into a Sinified cinema?* In order to investigate this research question, this thesis will combine a literature review with a film analysis of three films affected by the Chinese influence over Hollywood. The first part of this thesis will review scholarly articles and industry reports on the Chinese economic and creative influence over Hollywood in the twentieth-first century. The central theme of these chapters is the box-office, the revenue of ticket-sales which determines the economic and creative direction of Hollywood. The second part of this thesis will conduct an ideological film analysis to determine whether this Chinese influence over Hollywood challenges the American capitalist ideological origin of the industry. Here, this thesis emphasizes how Hollywood cinema is inherently American as the economic base of Hollywood originates in the North-American box-office. This ideological origin is transmitted through the conveying of specific American capitalist values (individualism, equality and democracy) by Hollywood films that helps to promote an American capitalist message. Eventually, this film analysis helps to recover the ideological underpinnings of three affected Hollywood films (*Red Dawn*, *World War Z* and *Pixels*) to see whether the rising influence of the Chinese box-office in the economic and creative direction of Hollywood results into a transmission of a more Sinified cinema through the spreading of specific Chinese values (collectivism, hierarchy and harmonious society) in these films.

The first chapter explores the economic influence of China over Hollywood, in terms of the box-office: the revenue of ticket sales by Hollywood films which still determines the Hollywood economy. To understand Hollywood’s economic fascination with China, one must first understand the rising importance of the foreign box-office in the Hollywood economy, which was a direct result of the declining North-American box-office in the 1940s.

The tool for accessing these box-offices became the blockbuster, a film which is aimed at attracting a transnational rather than an American audience. The blockbuster is essential for Hollywood's success on the Chinese box-office. The potential growth of the Chinese box-office and the obvious Chinese interest in Hollywood blockbusters has resulted into a dominant position of the Chinese box-office in the Hollywood economy. Evidently, this chapter will answer the following sub-question: *how can the redirection towards the foreign box-office in the 1940s and 1950s be seen as a prerequisite for the Chinese economic influence over the Hollywood economy in the twenty-first century?*

This growing role of the Chinese box-office in the Hollywood economy has simultaneously resulted into the Chinese creative influence over Hollywood, namely through existing incentives for self-censorship in the industry. Hollywood always had an interesting relationship with self-censorship, as it is always been fearful of being censored but never fails to censor itself. In the Classical Hollywood era, the Code protected Hollywood against the costly revisions demanded by the local censors and the possible boycotts by interest groups but was most prominently a reinsurance for box-office revenues. In the post-Code years, the subsequent MPAA ratings provided more creative freedom for filmmakers but still restricted them to produce a lower rated film, as this would provide a wide accessibility for Hollywood films. The introduction of the Chinese censor SARFT in Hollywood has resulted into a return of these forms of self-censorship in Hollywood but also triggers the industry into new forms. The most visible form of self-censorship is the various attempts by the industry to change films during the production stages in order to anticipate a smooth acceptance by the Chinese censor and consequently an easier access on the Chinese box-office. These transitions to the production phases of filming means that these censored films are not only seen by Chinese audiences, but additionally by global audiences, as these censored films are globally distributed. In order to explain this phenomenon, this chapter will answer the following sub-question: *how is the Chinese creative influence over Hollywood visible in the various old and new forms of self-censorship used by Hollywood to anticipate a smooth access to the Chinese box-office?*

The final chapter will see whether this Chinese creative and economic influence over Hollywood results into the possible transformation of Hollywood into a Sinified cinema. As Hollywood traditionally been aimed at the North-American box-office, the ideological message conveyed by Hollywood films remain founded in the values of American capitalism: individualism, equality and democracy. Through an ideological film analysis of the three films that are censored by Hollywood, specifically *Red Dawn* (2012), *World War*

*Z* (2012) and *Pixels* (2015), this thesis will explore if the Chinese influence over Hollywood alters the American nature of Hollywood in favor of a more Sinified message. By analyzing these censored films, this thesis will investigate the transmission of values important in Chinese society, namely collectivism, hierarchy and harmonious society. By analyzing if these Chinese values are featured more prominently in these censored films, this thesis will see whether the Chinese economic and creative influence alters the conveying of values by these films into a more Sinified experience. Consequently, this final chapter will answer the following sub-question: *Do the values conveyed in the censored Hollywood films Red Dawn, World War Z and Pixels offer a more Sinified message?*

## **2. The economic influence: the preeminence of the Chinese box-office in the twenty-first century Hollywood economy.**

### *2.2. Introduction*

The Hollywood economy is concentrated around the box-office, the revenue of ticket-sales on the domestic box-office, North-American which includes the United States and Canada, and the foreign box office. This focus on the box-office is what Nathan Gardels and Mike Medavoy call: “the mandate of the box-office” which determines the direction of filmmakers, studio officials and the industry as a whole (28). In the first half of the twentieth century, Hollywood has been predominantly directed towards the North-American box-office. This American focus originated from domestic and international factors. The absence of foreign competitors following World War I and the Anglicization of the Hollywood cinema resulted into the dominant position of the North-American box-office in the Hollywood economy (Crafton 441; Klawans). In addition to domestic factors such as the growing American middle class and the rising investments in American cinematic infrastructure, these international factors helped to establish the domestic North-American box-office as the crucial source of revenue for Hollywood in the decades before 1940.

Through a literature review, this chapter explores how the dominance of the Chinese box-office in the twenty-first century Hollywood economy can be seen as a result of the redirection to the foreign box-office in the Hollywood economy in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This chapter combines academic discussions and industry papers about the Hollywood economy to show how the Chinese box-office has become fundamental in the economic shift of Hollywood towards China in the twentieth-first century. This chapter starts by arguing how the decline of the North-American box-office in the 1940s resulted into the rising prominence of the foreign box-office in the 1950s Hollywood economy. This chapter will continue by arguing how the blockbuster became the tool to attract these new, international audiences, as this form of cinema is aimed at attracting a transnational audience. This chapter will conclude by arguing how the redirection towards the foreign box-office and the introduction of the blockbuster has resulted into the dominance of the Chinese box-office in the modern Hollywood economy and consequently the Chinese economic influence over Hollywood. Ultimately, this chapter will answer the following sub-question: how can the redirection towards the foreign box-office in the 1940s and 1950s be seen as a prerequisite for the Chinese economic influence over the Hollywood economy in the twenty-first century?



### 2.3. *Hollywood's foreign outlook: the rising importance of the foreign box-office in the Hollywood economy of the 1940s and 1950s.*

The late 1940s are foundational for the shift towards the foreign box-office in the Hollywood economy. 1946 is considered the most successful year in Hollywood, in terms of the box-office, attendance and cooperate profit (Langford 5; Maltby 126). 'Going to the movies' was America's favorite leisure pastime in 1946, with more Americans buying cinema tickets than ever before. On a yearly basis, the average American went to the movies over thirty times and movie going accounted for 25 cents for every dollar Americans spent on recreation (Langford 5). While 1946 was fairly profitable for Hollywood, the decline of the North-American box-office in the following decade did surprise many Hollywood studios. Even though the total number of cinemas remained fairly stable, overall admissions dropped, with American box-office recipients declining from \$1.7 billion in 1946 to just \$1.3 billion in 1955 (7). One of the reasons behind the degeneration of the North-American box-office was the unanticipated success of home-entertainment media, especially television. Television offered the same entertainment as cinema, but in a domestic setting, meaning that people no longer needed to leave the house to be entertained. The introduction of television into American homes resulted in that cinema was no longer the only form of film-entertainment available for American audiences. Eventually, the arrival and the domesticity of television made 'going to the movies' no longer a leisure priority for Americans.

Another factor that contributed to the failing North-American box-office was the 1948 *United States v. Paramount Pictures Inc.* decision by the United States Supreme Court, which abolished the dominant mode of operation in the Hollywood Classical era: the studio system and vertical integration. The studio system was a system where a minority of major film studios (the so-called Big Five MGM, Paramount, Warner Bros and RKO and the Little Three Universal, Columbia and United Artists) controlled the entire production of Hollywood films (Langford 6). In the studio system, the dominant mode of operation was vertical integration, where Hollywood studios controlled every aspect of filmmaking: "centered on a fixed production site, an in-house division of labor (the assembly line) and producer-units" (Elseasser, King and Horwarth 55). This meant that Hollywood studios produced films in their own studios, distributed films in theaters owned by the studios, therefore controlling the exhibition of their films. The *Paramount* decision, as it became famously known, stated that integrating theaters by studios resulted into unfair competition by the major Hollywood studios, as it would sincerely limit the changes for other studios in

Hollywood. Evidently, *Paramount* effectively demolished vertical integration and therefore the control of exhibition by Hollywood studios. This meant that Hollywood films now had to compete for audiences in a continuing declining market.

The arrival of television and the renewed competition redirected Hollywood's attention abroad in the 1950s. As the domestic box-office was declining, the foreign box-office became significantly more important for Hollywood. Between 1946 and 1960, the North-American box-office declined from \$4.400 million to \$2.129 million (Hall and Neale 177). On the other hand, the foreign box-office did not suffer that same decline, with markets in Britain, Italy, West-Germany and Japan growing explosively and becoming crucial sources of revenue for Hollywood (177). These rising box-offices challenged the traditional balance of income for Hollywood; if in 1940 two-thirds of the Hollywood economy was generated on the North-American box-office; 1950 saw more than half of Hollywood's gross income arriving from the foreign box-office (177). In addition to the foreign box-office outperforming the domestic-box-office, Hollywood films started to perform better on the foreign box-office than on the domestic box-office. In the 1940s, films tended to have higher earnings on the domestic than the international box-office. In the following decade, this relationship has altered, with films appearing on top grossing list (lists that provide an overview of the highest earning films in history) earning much more on the foreign than the domestic box-office (Krämer 186). As Hollywood's attention was redirected to the foreign box-office, the industry needed a film that could address these box-offices. Eventually, the blockbuster became the tool for Hollywood to approach these new markets.

#### *2.4. Transnationalizing the experience of film: the blockbuster as the tool for the foreign box-office*

The blockbuster, "a film that boasts a huge budget, transnational audience, global marketing campaign, and a massive return at the global box office" was the perfect tool for Hollywood to address these foreign markets (Mirlees 181). The textual and economic characteristics of the blockbuster are all designed to attract a global audience. The economic characteristics of the blockbuster are (1) big marketing, the use of various forms of international media from TV-advertisements, talk-shows, newspapers and magazines adds and interviews, most often in various languages; (2) big release, the mass-release of the blockbuster in many cinemas in a variety of countries in a very short amount of time, on average over 2000 screens in the first two weeks; and (3) big synergy, generating a large profit by franchising the blockbuster through merchandise, sequels, spin-offs versions (follow-up or re-mastered films) or

licensing deals (television but also streaming website like Netflix or Amazon) (Cucco 216; Hall and Neale 216; Mirlees 183). These elements provide the economic foundation to make the blockbuster as widely available and profitable as possible.

The textual characteristics provides the transnational outlook of the blockbuster. This transnational outlook is designed to be “polysemic; intended to be open to identifications and interpretations from many people located in many different countries” (Fiske 392; Mirlees 185). The first and most important polysemic characteristic of the blockbuster are the globally recognizable, stars, who feature as an “image commodity” (Mirlees 185). An image commodity means that the star plays an important part in pre-selling Hollywood films to a transnational audience (King 152). The idea behind this is that audience are willing to see the films because it features a particular, recognizable star before knowing any other detail about the film. With the Hollywood star foundational for preselling the film on a global scale, these stars are much more international oriented. Whereas in early Hollywood films international actors were often featured as villains or secondary characters, popular Hollywood blockbuster feature no longer just American film stars, but also British, Australian, Irish, Danish or South-African stars. By casting a variety of international actors, blockbuster aim for the global identification with familiar, local stars (186)

In addition to the international stars, Hollywood blockbusters feature other specific textual characteristics. They are often “pre-sold properties: originating from pre-existing work such as best-selling novels, comics, fairy tales or computer games” (Jockel and Dolber 85). Here, the aim is to remake stories and characters already known to the global public as well as setting the drive for more sequels, prequels or remakes for both the blockbuster and the original work. These pre-sold properties illustrate also the hybridity of the blockbuster: a blockbuster is often a variety of genres “in order to appeal to a range of potential audience constituencies” (King 137). Whereas traditional Hollywood films fit a certain genre, the various codes and conventions that classify a type of film, specific blockbuster genres can be a fantasy-science-fiction mix-up such as the young-adult films like *The Hunger Games* series (2012-2015) or the *Divergent Series* (2014-2017), adventure-action films like *National Treasure* (2004-2007) and *Indiana Jones* (1981-1992, 2008-2019), or science-fiction disaster films such as *Independence Day* (1992) and *2012* (2009) (Mirlees 182).

The final textual characteristic is the narrative of these films, which is a standardized and predictable narrative sequence (Cucco 216; Mirlees 188; Olson 3). This narrative is the always “protagonist(s)-centered,” based on an individual character as leading source of action (Mirlees 188). The linear sequence starts from a situation of normalcy or stability

disrupted by a conflict and/or crisis that threatens the United States and/or world (188). This crisis drives the protagonists into action, where they “struggle to overcome certain obstacles and challenges, and finally resolves the conflict or crisis” (188). In the conclusion of the film, the crisis is averted and the world is returned to normality or changed, for better or worse (188). The narrative might also hint to the possibility of a sequel where the protagonist gets another chance to save the world and the narrative coherence repeats itself. In addition to the recognizable narrative, the global atmosphere of the narrative enhances this feeling of transnationality: the conflicts in these narratives are “universally recognizable conflicts” such as global destructions by a foreign invader or the consequences of a world war (188). These conflicts together with the recognizable narrative are designed for transnational identifications “that attempt to appeal to anyone, anywhere, anytime” (Olson 3).

#### *2.5. Chinafever: the economic influence of the Chinese box-office over the twenty-first century Hollywood economy.*

With the blockbuster as the transnational tool, the most rewarding box-office in the twenty-first century Hollywood economy has been the Chinese box-office. This relationship between the Chinese box-office and Hollywood has always been mutually beneficial. On one hand, Hollywood has been fascinated by the size (1.3 billion possible audiences) of the Chinese box-office. In the 1930s and 1940s, Hollywood dominated the Chinese box-office, taking over more than 75% of the Chinese film market (Su 41). The establishment of the People’s Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 initiated a thirty years ban on Hollywood films on the Chinese market. Even though numerous Hollywood studios attempted to reenter the Chinese box-office, Hollywood’s reentrance on the Chinese box-office in the 1980s was eventually initiated by Chinese officials attempting to revive the domestic film industry. In the decade before, China experienced a decline in moviegoers by five million every year, which resulted into the collapse of the entire Chinese film industry (Zhu and Rosen 50). In order to revive the Chinese box-office, China slowly opened the market for Hollywood films in the late-1980s, mostly for redistributed films such as *Singing in the Rain* (1952). The success of these limited releases resulted into a wider availability of American films in Chinese cinemas, with *The Fugitive* (1994) becoming the first film to be widely released in China. The film’s major success on the Chinese box-office became the standard for Hollywood films in the years to follow.

The import of American films eventually saved the Chinese film industry and was considered very profitable for Hollywood. *The Fugitive* alone increased the Chinese box-

office by 50% in the first half of 1995 over the same period in the previous year (Su 44). (44). In the late 1990s, the eight imported American films increased their profit with 45% to \$73 million, with *Titanic* covering more than 40% of the total Chinese box-office receipts. Eventually, American production conquered around 70% of the Chinese box-office, with local films only taking up approximately 30% (Zhu and Rosen 8). Despite the lack of interest in Chinese productions, the dominance of Hollywood films became also beneficial for the Chinese film industry. The deal negotiated with Hollywood by the China Film Import and Export Corporation (the only Chinese company allowed to import foreign films) is that the majority of the revenue made by Hollywood films in China goes to the Chinese film industry with the Corporation and Chinese theaters receiving more than 70% of the revenue (Su 44). Consequently, this deal ensured that Hollywood had its desired access on the Chinese market, while the Chinese film industry profited from the success of Hollywood films.

Hollywood films helped to enter the Chinese box-office in the age of prosperity in the twenty-first century. In addition to the popularity of Hollywood films, the main motivator of the booming box-office is the rapidly growing Chinese middle class, who have not only more to spend (China's GDP eight-folded in 14 years, from less than \$1000 in 2000 to over \$7500 in 2014), but also more cinemas to spend their money in, as the Chinese cinematic infrastructure grew vastly throughout the twenty and twenty-first century (O'Connor and Armstrong 5). China continues to build an average of fifteen cinema screens on a daily basis, increasing the access to the screen for the 1.3 billion Chinese citizens (5). These amounts of audiences and the easier access to cinema screens resulted into the large growth of the Chinese box-office. From 2012 to 2015, the Chinese box-office almost tripled, from \$2.8 billion in 2012 to \$6.7 billion in 2015 (5). Taking up this pace, the Chinese box-office is set to become the highest grossing box-office in the world by 2017 (5).

In this impressive growth, the Hollywood blockbuster continues to be a dominant factor. In the first few years of the twenty-first century, the twenty foreign films imported in China, including 18 Hollywood blockbusters, accounted for approximately 50% of the Chinese box-office on a yearly basis (Boyd-Barrett 172). This became increased after the successful case against China by the United States at the World Trade Organization in 2009, which resulted in China increasing the Chinese film-quota from 20 to 34 film imports per year, with an additional 14 slots for blockbuster 3D films. (O'Connor and Armstrong 5). 2012 is considered the most successful year for Hollywood in China, with Hollywood productions dominating 52% of the Chinese box-office and American blockbusters leading the Chinese box-office for over 23 weeks (158). Not only does Hollywood excel on the

Chinese box-office, individual films continue to break records in China. In 2012, *Avatar* became the highest grossing film on the Chinese box-office (158). Other films quickly broke the record, with many of them earning more on the Chinese market than on the North-American box-office. Films like *Transformers Age of Extinction* (2014, \$301 million over \$245 domestically) or *Furious 7* (2015, \$390 million over 353 million domestically) are considerably more successful in China than on the domestic box-office. Consequently, China has become very profitable for Hollywood, with the Chinese box-office taking approximately 10% of the foreign box-office on a yearly basis (Daccache and Valeriano 158). Eventually, this successful combination of growth and dominancy in China by Hollywood is illustrative for the rising importance of the foreign box-office in the Hollywood economy.

However, China is becoming a much more influential force in the Hollywood economy of the twenty-first century. This has partly to do with the Chinese quota system. While this limit the outlet of Hollywood films, it simultaneously limits the possible competition from other foreign films. In reality, this has resulted that Hollywood is often the only foreign participant on the Chinese box-office. More importantly, the potential of the Chinese box-office needs to be taken into consideration. The growing Chinese middle class and the investments in the cinematic infrastructure has resulted into a wide availability of cinema screens. Nevertheless, these investments have not yet reached every Chinese citizen, and the Chinese box-office has still room enough to grow even further. Finally, the Chinese box-office is in love with Hollywood's most profitable film, the blockbuster. Hollywood blockbusters continue to break records on the Chinese box-office (highest-grossing film, highest grossing open day, highest grossing opening weekend) and individual blockbusters perform considerably better on the Chinese box-office than any other box-office, the domestic box-office included. Consequently, this successful combination of opportunity and potential has resulted in that Hollywood has redirected almost all its attention to the perils of the Chinese box-office.

## *2.6.Conclusion*

This chapter has explored how the box-office is provide the economic base for Hollywood throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century. The main argument of this chapter is that the economic influence of the Chinese box-office over the twenty-first century Hollywood economy can be seen as a directed result of the rerouting of the Hollywood economy towards the foreign box-office in the 1940s and 1950s. This chapter started by arguing that the 1940s

and 1950s are foundational for the shift in the Hollywood economy from the domestic box-office to the foreign box-office. While 1946 was the most successful year in Hollywood history, the consequent decade resulted into a decline of the North-American box-office and the rising significance of the foreign box-office in the Hollywood economy. The tool to address this box-office became the blockbuster, a form of cinema which offers a variety of transnational economic and textual characteristics to attract a global audience. The blockbuster is foundational in the most rewarding box-office for the modern Hollywood economy, the Chinese box-office. The growth of Chinese middle class, the rising investments in cinematic infrastructure together with the love-affair of Chinese audience with the Hollywood blockbuster is illustrative for the redirection of Hollywood towards the foreign box-office. Simultaneously, the potential of China for Hollywood has resulted into a large share for the Chinese box-office in the Hollywood economy. This large presence has direct influences on the economic direction of Hollywood, which is almost entirely aimed at the perils of the Chinese box-office. Additionally, the Chinese economic influence has also consequences for the creative direction of Hollywood, most prominently through the existing incentives for self-censorship in the industry.

### **3. The creative influence: the SARFT and self-censorship in Hollywood**

#### *3.2. Introduction*

Self-censorship has always existed in Hollywood. Rooted in the fear of local censorship, private groups or the power of the federal government, censorship in Hollywood is not so much imposed by outside forces as the industry imposes self-censorship on its own productions (Kirshner 6). This fear is not entirely misjudged as cinema has not always been protected by freedom of expression clause in the United States Constitution. In the early years of the industry, the Supreme Court had ruled unanimously that motion pictures did not enjoy the same right for freedom of expression as stated in the Constitution (6). In *Mutual Corporation V Industrial Commission of Ohio* (1915), the Court argued that states could control films that were intended to be exhibited. In the following decades, this verdict gave states an enormous amount of power over Hollywood as they could decide which films would be allowed to be shown in the states. Motion pictures became finally protected in 1952 with the *Burstyn v. Wilson* case which launched the present-day nation-wide rating system (6). Nevertheless, the court's decision and the following years of censorship under the Motion Picture Production Code released a tendency in Hollywood for self-censorship, which still occurs today.

This chapter will argue that the Chinese economic influence over Hollywood helps to develop the Chinese creative influence over the industry, most prominently through the existing incentives for self-censorship in the industry. Similar to the first chapter, this chapter will review existing literature on self-censorship in Hollywood, reemphasizing the importance of the box-office in Hollywood's creative direction. This chapter starts by arguing how the most notorious form of self-censorship, Motion Picture Production Code, was widely accepted in Classical Hollywood as a reassurance for American box-office revenues. The current ratings system, the MPAA ratings, offers similar economic consequences, as higher ratings might result in lower box-office revenues. Finally, Hollywood's focus on the Chinese box-office resulted into the meddling of the Chinese censor SARFT in the industry. While the influence of the SARFT results into traditional forms of self-censorship, Hollywood has also invented new ways to censor productions, namely to edit specific films in advance to anticipate a smooth access to this lucrative box-office. This new form of self-censorship illustrates the measures Hollywood takes to gain access to the Chinese box-office. Eventually, this chapter will answer the following sub-question: how is the Chinese creative influence over Hollywood visible in the variety of old



and new forms of self-censorship used by Hollywood to anticipate a smooth access to the Chinese box-office?

### *3.3. Implementing the Code: economic incentives for self-censorship in Classical Hollywood, 1930-1956*

Censorship has many connotations, especially regarding the censorship of film. In the progressive era, film censorship had a positive connotation, namely a protection “that would benefit society by keeping profit-driven producers from eroding the proper division between the private realm and the public world, destroying young or impressionable minds in the process and demeaning intimate personal relationships” (Writtern-Keller 19). Censorship in this era was seen as an educative measure to protect the audience from the ‘bad’ influences on the screens. Nowadays, film censorship is often associated with a much more negative subtext as a result of the expansion of free speech and now revolves around ideas of authoritarianism, intolerance and repression (19). Censorship must be seen as either “the outright restriction or prohibition of expression” to the more nuanced term “any action that inhibits or changes expression” (19). Hollywood has experienced both definitions of censorship. In the 1920s alone, the Hollywood industry witnessed nearly a hundred bills promoting the banning of motion pictures, initiated on state level with local politicians fearing the corrupt and scandalous Californian lifestyle being imposed by Hollywood films (Leff and Simmons 3). However, one must look at the final definition of censorship, “any action that inhibits or changes expression” that explains the issue of self-censorship in Hollywood (Writtern-Keller 19). Ultimately, this definition of censorship leads to the definition of self-censorship in Hollywood: “the restriction of content that a person places on his own work out of fear or financial concern” (Writtern-Keller 20).

The most notorious form of self-censorship occurred during the Hollywood Classical era, performed through the Motion Picture Production Code (the Code) and the Production Code Administration (PCA). The Code and the PCA were established in the mid-1920s as the result of repeated lobbying by interest groups against the unmoral nature of motion pictures, most prominently by the Catholic Church. The Code, created by a Catholic focus-group, was based on the extensive idea that “no picture should lower the moral standards of those who see it” (171). This meant that films were not only restricted in what they were not allowed to show but also what they should show. For instance, according the Code, the idea of basic law in films should not be mocked but should be used to educate the audience of what is wrong and what is right (172). In this case, a judge can be corrupt, but the American

legal system should always be victorious. In order to obey the guidelines of the Code, the *Don'ts and Be Carefuls* offered a list of 11 prohibited, subjects with an additional 25 topics “that required great care in order to be shown on the screen” (Prince 20). Topics that were prohibited on the screen varied from the display of nudity, drug trafficking, profanity to white slavery (Black 169). Subjects that required special attention were for instance murder, rape or the branding of animals (Prince 20). The *Don'ts and Be Carefuls* were used as guidelines in the Code, examples for specific applications of the general principles of the Code (20).

The Production Code Administration (PCA) was tasked with implementing the Code, making sure that studios and films obey with the rules of the Code and punishing those who did not. While the Code was adopted by the industry in 1930, the lack of implementation of these legislations angered many pressure groups. In July 1934, the editorial of *The Commonwealth*, the semiofficial editorial of the American Catholic Church, declared that “the muck merchants of Hollywood, that fortress of filth, had been destroying the moral fiber of the American people” (167). In response to this editorial, the church had recruited millions of Catholics to protest the motion picture industry and to “pledge not to attend immoral movies” (167). In order to respond to this lingering group of Catholic activists, the industry created the PCA in 1934, an office to enforce the Code in the industry that would work independently from Hollywood (Doherty 325). The head of the PCA was Joseph I Breen, a Catholic Irishman who had been involved with the draft of the Code. As director of the PCA, Breen became the personification of the Code: he was aware of cinematic tools unlike his Catholic committee members as well as an active promoter of the Catholic doctrine of the Code. Breen and the Code became the finalization of the various attempts of self-regulation by the industry, which was to control the content of the entire Hollywood production for two decades (Black 167; Couvares 511; Doherty 327).

For Hollywood, the implantation and eventual enforcement of the Code was much more economically than politically motivated. In his final chapter of *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934*, Thomas Patrick Doherty offers three examples how the Code and the PCA became financially beneficiary for Hollywood studios. First, the Code saved the Hollywood studios from the postproduction alterations demanded by the various local censorship boards, “groups with varying, shifting, and conflicting standards” (Doherty 335). In 1931 alone, these alterations were estimated between \$8 and \$10 million dollar in post-production or editing costs. By 1934, the studios had calculated that over a million dollar on film alterations was saved as a result of the

nationwide implementation of the Code (335). Secondly, the restrictions of the Code resulted into the emergence of family pictures which could be enjoyed by the entire family (338). Celebrated by Breen as “pictures (that) are being presented without violating the screen’s primary function of entertainment,” family pictures became financially and critically acclaimed in the 1940s (336). Finally, the Code arrived at the starting point of the years of prosperity in Hollywood. While many studios rarely kept afloat in the years before, Hollywood “turned the prosperity corner” in 1934, which continued until the introduction of television in the late 1950s (336). Even though no direct link has been found between Hollywood’s prosperity and the Code, the fact that they emerged almost synchronically resulted in the celebration of the Code in Hollywood. As Doherty concludes his paragraph: “why quibble? The Code kept the Catholics happy, restored Hollywood to public respectability, greased the production machinery, and pumped up the profits in the midst of a crippling depression” (336).

#### *3.4. Implementing the MPAA ratings: economic incentives for self-censorship in post-Code Hollywood, 1950-1980*

The economic success of the Code dissolved in the economic downfall of Hollywood in the late 1940s. The gradual decline of the Code was launched by the 1952 Supreme Court Case. *Joseph Burstyn, Inc. v. Wilson. Burstyn v. Wilson* focused on the distribution of the Italian film *The Miracle* (1952), which was seized by the PCA on grounds of the film’s alleged indecency (according to the censors, the film had “offended Christian sensibilities by portraying a possible virgin birth”) (Langford 63). The court ruled in favor of the Hollywood studio who wanted to distribute the film, arguing that “cinema was an important medium for communication of ideas,” rejecting the earlier idea that film was not part of the constitutional free speech protections as was argued in the *Ohio* case (63). Consequently, the *Burstyn* case reaffirmed free speech protections for the film industry and eliminated the “rationale, economic underpinning of the Code,” the idea that if Hollywood did not regulate their own films and protect the access to the local market, local censors would regulate Hollywood films (63).

While the *Burstyn* case eliminated the economic foundation for the Code, the 1940s economic decline in Hollywood evoked the need for a more inclusive rating system. With Hollywood audiences becoming much more international, the industry needed a rating system that addressed a rapidly changing audience. The agony of the Code ended in 1968 and the successor of the Code arrived in form of the MPAA ratings. The MPAA Ratings

attempted to “rejuvenate a financially and artistically film industry, and allowed the filmmakers more artistic license” (Chong 251). Similar to the Code, the MPAA ratings was a form of self-censorship, with the industry censoring films to fit a certain rating (251). On the contrary, the MPAA rating restricted films viewer by each age group and placed the responsibility with the parents who could determine whether they would allow their child to see the film (251). This system could also be much easier applied on the rapidly changing audience as films with ratings G (General Audiences), PG (Parental Guidance Suggested) and the later added PG-13 (Parents Strongly Cautioned) were open for every age group. Moreover, the MPAA ratings provided much more creative freedom for filmmakers, as they were no longer bound to a list of content restrictions. Nevertheless, this form of censorship evolved into new forms of self-censorship in the Hollywood, mostly as a result of the notorious R (Restricted) and X (later the NC-17) ratings (Haralovich 2535)

While the MPAA ratings do not ban film from distribution, this rating system similarly shows the economic foundation for self-censorship in Hollywood (Haralovich 2535). For studios, the NC-17 rating (“no one under 17 admitted. Age limit may vary in certain areas”) is to be avoided at all costs, as it eliminates a large audience (children under a certain age) and possible distribution, as distributors and cinemas are allowed to dismiss films which are rated NC-17 (2535). This attitude results into three forms of self-censorship. First, many complete NC-17 rated films are changed and resubmitted in order to get a lower rating (2535). Another restriction is to distribute a NC-17 rated film in a limited or small arthouse release (Sandler 4). This means that the film is still intact, but the restricted release limits the possibility for a wide audience. Finally, films with an NC-17 rating often fail to find distribution, sitting on the so-called shelves for years before being released on other platforms (Video on Demand but also streaming services). Consequently, while the ratings do provide more creative freedom, they simultaneously result in a variety of self-censorship attempts by Hollywood studios in order to ensure the economic benefits of a lower rating.

For blockbusters, the R rating is also considered inadequate, as this would require parental guidance for children to enter the film. In the first two decades of the MPAA ratings, the blockbusters struggled with the ratings as there was a steep difference between the PG rating and the R and the X (the predecessor of the NC-17 rating). The solution was the creation of the PG-13 in 1984, which guarantees the acceptance of families and children to more “adult blockbusters” (Haralovich 2535). The emergence of the PG-13 rating has consequences for the creative freedom of blockbuster filmmakers. In addition to the various creative components of the blockbuster, many filmmakers are also contractual bound to

produce a PG-13 film, as the blockbuster “requires a rating that invites a mass audience” (2535). Ultimately, the common rule for blockbusters is that as the ratings are getting more ‘mature’ (from G to PG to PG-13 to R), films are typically making less money as audience are limited with each rating. Eventually, this has resulted in, what Kevin Sandler argues in *The Naked Truth: Why Hollywood Doesn’t Make X-Rated Movie*, that “Hollywood simply stopped making these rated films as this would ensure responsible entertainment, accessible by all audiences and acceptable to Hollywood’s various critics and detractors” (4).

### *3.5. Fearing the SARFT: the SARFT and self-censorship in twenty-first century Hollywood*

Despite the system generating various forms of self-censorship in the industry, the MPAA ratings is still the main ‘censor’ for Hollywood in the United States. With the rising significance of the foreign box-office, foreign censors has gained more prominence in Hollywood. The most visible foreign censor for Hollywood is the SAPPRT, the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People’s Republic of China (most commonly known as the SARFT). The SARFT is an executive branch within China’s State Council and includes thirty-seven members from various government organizations and interest groups such as civil servants, academics and filmmakers (O’Connor and Armstrong 9). The principle intentions of the SARFT is “to promote Confucian morality, political stability and social harmony” (Cain). According to Robert Cain, each film produced and/or distributed in China is subjected to a three step process to obey these intentions:

1. Filmmakers need to submit their screenplay and/or finished film to the censorship board for review after which the board has fifteen days to offer a response to the film.
2. The SARFT comments and offers suggestion to alter the film to meet the censorship requirements. Filmmakers are allowed to make modifications to the films in order to comply with the requested changes.
3. Finally, the film and/or script is send back to the SARFT for review and approval decision. (Cain)

When studios apply the changes and the SARFT agrees on the revised version, the film is allowed to find a Chinese distribution company (as is required before distributing a film in China) and allowed to enter the Chinese market.

The SARFT has similarities to earlier forms of American censorship, especially to the Code. Similar to the Code's *Don'ts and Be Carefuls*, the SARFT offer its own version of taboo topics (Cain). If a film is containing these taboo topics, it is required to be cut or altered before entering the Chinese market. The taboo topics that are included in the 2008 updated list by the SARFT are:

- (1) disparaging the image of the people's army;
- (2) showing obscene and vulgar content;
- (3) showing content of murder, violence, terror, ghosts and supernatural;
- (4) propagating passive or negative outlook on life, world view and value system;
- (5) advertising religious extremism;
- (6) Advocating harm to ecological environment;
- (7) showing excessive drinking, smoking and other bad habits;
- (8) opposing the spirit of law. (Cain)

While this list is extensive, it is not covering every taboo topic of the SARFT. Ultimately, the SARFT censors have extensive powers to decide each case individually (Cain).

Similar to the Code and the MPAA ratings, the SARFT is also known for its vague decisions. While the *Don'ts and Be Carefuls* did offer an extensive list of taboo topics, the PCA was known for its inconsistent decisions, which provided room for challenging films such as the "provocative noirs" (Salzberg 80). These provocative noirs, the Hollywood film noir genre, showed a remarkable variety of illegal issues without much interference by the PCA (80). The MPAA rating is also often accused of unreliable ratings. The emergence of the PG-13 rating resulted into a wide availability and acceptance of violence in Hollywood blockbusters. While violence in Hollywood blockbusters is often approved, other topics are often restricted by the ratings, with many films receiving an R or NC-17 rating for showing (partly) nudity, sex, drugs or foul language (Leone 939). Consequently, critics have argued that the MPAA is "far more permissive of violence in PG-13 films than fleeting nudity or a handful of expletives" ("Motion Picture Association").

The SARFT is also known for her unpredictable decisions. In her book *China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry, 1994-2013*, Wendy Su explains some of complicated decisions made by the SARFT. In general, some topics (Tibet, human rights or the 1989 Tiananmen Square Protests) remain taboo in all circumstances (112). Other topics are more difficult to comprehend, as they are censored in a "specific sociopolitical context," meaning that films with similar topics are censored for different reasons (112). In 2006, *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2006) was canceled by the SARFT as it was suspected to "spark public anger and rekindle anti-Japanese sentiment" (112). On

the other hand, films like *Shanghai* (2008) and *Lust, Caution* (2008) were banned as they “showed sympathy for the traitor (Japan)” (110). While these unclear decisions are not limited to Hollywood films, the absence of any Hollywood officials in the SARFT and the language barriers has resulted into a troublesome relationship between Hollywood and the SARFT.

Ever since the distribution of *The Fugitive*, Hollywood has always been weary of the influence of the SARFT. In the late 1990s, the SARFT clashed prominently with the industry over the release of two Hollywood films: *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997) and *Kundun* (1997). Both films featured the taboo topic Tibet but more prominently showed “communist China as a brutal tyranny attempting to crush Tibet’s religious and political traditions” (Su 110). While Hollywood still tried to find a Chinese release for both films, China immediately prohibited the showing of these films in Chinese cinemas. In addition to prohibiting the film, the SARFT and the Chinese Communist Party publicly warned for the consequences of these ‘China critical’ films for Hollywood’s efforts to explore the Chinese market (110). While the situation was eventually eased and access to the Chinese box-office was reinsured, this was the first time that Hollywood felt the influence of the SARFT and the possible consequences for the ambitions of Hollywood on the Chinese box-office.

Responding to the 1997 crisis, Hollywood usually conducts in two forms of self-censorship to ensure the access on the Chinese box-office. First, Hollywood changes a film specifically for the Chinese market, which is a similar response too other domestic and foreign censors. This means that a Chinese-approved film is distributed in China following requirements made by the SARFT. For instance, *Mission Impossible III*, a film partly shot in China with a Chinese production company, was distributed in two versions. The Chinese version did not include the establishing shot (a shot establishing a location in a film) of Shanghai, as the “censors felt that it did not portray Shanghai in a positive light” (Langfitt). Similarly, James Bond’ *Skyfall* (2012), also shot in Shanghai, was required to alter a variety of scenes, as censors felt that they did not depict China encouragingly (Langfitt). Eventually, the Chinese version of *Skyfall* did not include these scenes. Subsequently, *Skyfall* and *Mission Impossible III* show not only the interventions required by the SARFT, but also the notion that no film is exempted from the SARFT. While Hollywood often shoot on Chinese locations or engages with Chinese production companies to get a better insight in the operations of the SARFT, many films end up being distributed twice, one version for the Chinese box-office and one for the global box-office.

A more troublesome development is that Hollywood has started to alter films in

advance of Chinese interference. This means that Hollywood is no longer producing two specific versions, but alters films in the production stage in order to comply with possible Chinese demands. During the years of the Code, Joseph Breen was known for intervening in the productions of films, ‘offering advice’ to smooth access on the American market (Harmetz 162). Nevertheless, Breen was considered an outsider of film productions, only appearing occasionally and very much detested by filmmakers and studios for his advice (162). The MPPAA rating system rarely intervenes in the production phases of the film industry, only rewarding their rating when they see the complete film before distribution. In the Chinese case, Hollywood is not only editing specific versions for the Chinese market, but also willingly takes measures beforehand, editing films and/or scenario in advance without direct Chinese involvement from officials or censors. These changes have two consequences for the release of these films. First, these censored films are always released on the global box-office, meaning that global audiences no longer seeing a different version, but a version aimed at the Chinese box-office. Additionally, the lack of Chinese involvement means that there is no direct guarantee that the SARFT will allow the film to enter the Chinese box-office. The 2012 film *Looper*, despite changing the location of the film from Paris to Shanghai during the production, was still required to change the Chinese scenes before entering the Chinese box-office (Zeitnick). These uncertain prospects show that the fear of the Chinese censors and the influence of the Chinese box-office is no longer only felt in the Hollywood economy but also during the production of Hollywood films.

### 3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the box-office, in addition to the economic direction, is also fundamental for the creative direction of Hollywood. The main argument of this chapter is that Chinese creative influence is visible through a variety of self-censorship attempts Hollywood in order to ease the access to the lucrative Chinese box-office. This chapter has started with a discussion of earlier cases of self-censorship in Hollywood: The Motion Picture Production Code and the MPAA ratings. Banning specific films before distribution, self-censorship during the Code era focused on controlling Hollywood’s production and produce films that could be seen by a wide range of audiences. The current MPAA rating system produces a variety of attempts by Hollywood studios to mold films into the preferred rating and ensure the access for a wide age group. In dealing with the Chinese censor SARFT, Hollywood restores these earlier forms of self-censorship but also introduces a new form, namely the editing/altering of films during the production of films without Chinese



interference. While Hollywood edits specifically for the Chinese box-office, these alterations do not guarantee the desired access, as the SARFT in many cases still intervenes and sometimes bans the film for Chinese release. Eventually, these censored films are released on the global box-office, but rarely make it to the Chinese box-office. Ultimately, these attempts for self-censorship evolves into questions about the nature of these films: what is the effect of this self-censorship on the final version of the films? Does the sanitized version offer indirectly a Sinified version? These questions this thesis would like to answer in the following chapter.

## **4. After the SARFT: the possible Sinification of Hollywood**

### *4.2. Introduction*

The SARFT as gatekeeper over the lucrative Chinese box-office illustrates the recurrent clash in Hollywood between economic possibilities and cultural restrictions. As the Chinese box-office is vital for the Hollywood economy, this economic influence helps to develop renewed incentives for self-censorship in Hollywood. In addition to existing forms of self-censorship, Hollywood is now changing films in the production stage to comply to possible Chinese demands. This combination of economic and creative influence with a fundamental role for the blockbuster result in an economic and creative direction in Hollywood towards China. Economically, this means that Hollywood predominantly focuses on the perils of a foreign box-office, which is not only difficult to control by Hollywood officials but also much different than the North-American box-office. Additionally, the creative direction towards China results not only in an intrusive relationship with the Chinese censors in the post-production phases, but also in Hollywood taking measures beforehand, before any possible Chinese intervention and presumably easing the access on the Chinese box-office.

Evidently, as a result of the Chinese creative and economic influence, this chapter will investigate how these Chinese influences affect the nature of these censored films. By investigating three censored films (*Pixels*, *World War Z* and *Red Dawn*), this thesis will see whether these influences help to create a more Sinified Hollywood. This chapter starts by arguing how an ideological film analysis recovers the American capitalist foundation of Hollywood, which can be traced back to the dominancy of the North-American box-office in the traditional Hollywood economy. The major part of this chapter will feature an analysis of the three blockbuster films that are censored by Hollywood to see whether this Chinese economic and creative influence over Hollywood possibly transforms Hollywood films into a Sinified cinema. In order to investigate the possible Sinification of Hollywood cinema, this thesis focuses particularly on the conveying of conflicting Chinese values in interaction with American values traditionally conveyed by Hollywood films. Consequently, this chapter will answer the following sub-question: *Do the values conveyed in the censored Hollywood films Red Dawn, World War Z and Pixels offer a more Sinified message?*

### *4.3. Americanism in Hollywood: the values of American capitalism in Hollywood films*

This thesis will conduct an ideological film analysis in order to investigate the possible transformation of Hollywood into a Sinified cinema. In an ideological analysis, the way

“film represents and expresses various ideologies, the systems of social or political beliefs characteristics of a society or social community” (Prince 3). Here, this thesis explores predominantly the ideology of Hollywood films (“the set of beliefs that the film is promoting”) (Cahir 258). Scholars have argued that Hollywood’s commercial focus leaves no room for specific individual ideologies, as this would intervene with the economic direction of Hollywood, predominantly “the antagonizing of significant blocs of viewers” (Maltby 261). Richard Maltby has argued that “ideological conversions” of filmmakers remain a byproduct to Hollywood’s commercial goals. This means that filmmakers rarely express their personal ideologies as these are considered secondary to the commercial goals of Hollywood. Geoff King, interviewed for “Ameritocracy: Hollywood blockbusters and the universalization of American values” agrees with Maltby:

Filmmakers, production companies, and distributors and so on, they certainly don’t have agendas to go and spread this kind of meaning or that kind of meaning. I think they would say it’s something they do probably subconsciously. So, you’re thinking you’re going to make a big film that’s going to have a huge audience – it’s no great mystery that you are going to, in doing that, draw on some kind of resonance that’s a good way around any kind of conspiratorial view of filmmaking as being part of an ideological system in a more deliberate, intentional kind of way. (qtd. in Langley 25)

According to Maltby and King, Hollywood ideology remains founded in the economic motivations of the industry and not in the individual political ideologies of filmmakers. As Maltby argues: “Hollywood is a business, and movies avoid antagonizing significant blocs of viewers” (Maltby 361). In the end, the economic direction of the industry and not specific ideologies determines the values conveyed by Hollywood films.

Nevertheless, these economic motivations bring out their own ideologies and the box-office remains a determining factor in the values conveyed by Hollywood films. As Richard Langley argues: “in placing a profit motive over all other considerations of what a film could or should be perpetuates in capitalist ideology, and one grounded in an American model, which is thus also includes the brands of liberalism and democracy with which American capitalism is infused” (77). This means first and foremost that Hollywood’s aim for the box-office creates a particular capitalist ideological foundation in the industry, but that the origin of the box-office determines the origin of these values. The dominance of the North-American box-office in the first half of the twentieth century has resulted into an Americanized form of capitalism conveyed by Hollywood films. This resulted in

“Hollywood with its emphasis on individualism, competition and the freedom of choice - became the most influential iconographic inventory of the capitalist ethos and U.S. democracy in the twentieth century” (Wagnleitner 255).

Looking more closely at the values of American capitalism conveyed by Hollywood, individualism is considered the most important value. Individualism in Hollywood is represented as an “ideal stereotype of the American hero: brave, determined, honest, filled with integrity, selfless, hardworking, and the fighters of the bad guys .... safeguarding the American dream, practitioners of the American spirit and the achievers of the American way of life” (Su 66). Individualism in Hollywood films means that after a series of battles, the individual hero always prevails (66). Together with individualism, democracy is always perceived as the perfect form of government in Hollywood films. Here, the “freedom of choice” is emphasized in the frequent symbolism of American democracy in Hollywood films (the depiction of the American flag or the American political buildings such as the White House or the Capital Dome) but also in the narrative of the individual hero, who is escaping the constraints of the system that limits him “to choose his own destiny” (66; Scott 27). Based on the egalitarian ideal of the equal representation of the disenfranchised in public life, the value of equality in Hollywood cinema helps to reaffirm both the democratic and individual values. Here, the individual hero is fighting against the suppressing by large corporations or an overarching government (Scott 27). Eventually, the goal of the individual hero is to stop the suppression and to be represented in the system.

#### 4.4. *Sinified Hollywood: Pixels, World War Z and Red Dawn.*

*Pixels*, *World War Z* and *Red Dawn* have each dealt with the Chinese influence over Hollywood. Self-censorship in *Pixels* is documented by press agency Reuters in the article: “How Sony Sanitized Adam Sandler’s Movie to Please Chinese censors” (Baldwin and Cooke). Looking at documents of the Sony hack, Claire Baldwin and Kristina Cooke describe the changes Sony did in order to “increase the film’s chances of being shown in this (Chinese) huge market” (Baldwin and Cooke). These changes include deleting a segment of the aliens blasting a hole in the Great Wall, eliminating a scene where China was mentioned as the perpetrator behind the attack and disregarding a reference of a “Communist-conspiracy brother” hacking a mail server (Baldwin and Cooke). Baldwin and Cooke include a conversation between the chief representatives of Sony Pictures in China with other senior Sony executives that explains the motivations behind the alterations:

Even breaking a hole on the Great Wall may not be a problem as long as it is part of worldwide phenomenon: it is actually unnecessary because it will not benefit the China release at all. I would then recommend not to do it. As to relocating the Pac-Man action from Tokyo to Shanghai, this is not a good idea because it will involve destruction all over the city, and may likely cause some sensitivity. In other words, it is rather hard to say whether it would be a problem because the unwritten rule is that it is acceptable if there is no real intention in destroying a certain building or street and if it is just collateral damage. (Baldwin and Cooke)

Eventually, Baldwin and Cooke conclude that neither of the proposed scenes ended up in the final film, with the aliens striking other iconic sites such as the Taj Mahal in India, the Washington memorial and various parts of Manhattan, conveniently leaving out the Chinese icons. The leaked email-discussion and the eventual removal of the scenes in the film shows the departure from earlier forms of self-censorship in Hollywood. While the Sony could have chosen to wait for response from the SARFT, the studio decided to change the film before global release, distributing the censored version for all audiences (Baldwin and Cooke). Eventually, Sony's actions show how studios are willing to alter the film in advance to comply to possible Chinese demands.

While *Pixels* was released on the Chinese box-office, *World War Z* and *Red Dawn* were censored but failed to find release on the Chinese box-office. In his article "Fearing Chinese Censors, Paramount Changes 'World War Z,'" Lucas Shaw discusses the alterations made on the film that included a scene where the leading characters point out the possibility that the zombie attack originated in China. According to Shaw, Paramount advised the producers to "drop the reference to China and cite a different country as a possible source of the pandemic" (Shaw). The timing of the changes is remarkable; Paramount did not wait for the Chinese censors to review the film but recommended the change before negotiating the distribution of the film in China (Shaw). The Chinese censors finally rejected the version of the film for release on the Chinese box-office, and the censored film went on being released (with delay) on the global box-office. While the film took the same leap of faith as *Pixels*, changing the film before confirming access, *World War Z* was never released on the Chinese box-office and Paramount distributed the single, censored version only on the global box-office (Shaw and Waxman).

*Red Dawn* also failed to find release on the Chinese box-office after various changes were made during the production of the film. A remake of the 1984 Cold War action film

about a group of friends resisting a Soviet invasion, the film was shot in 2009 with Chinese aggressors replacing the Soviet villains of the original film (Fritz and Horn). A leaked script of the film, including the proposed Chinese villains, retrieved some attention in the Chinese party-controlled newspaper *The Global Times* and on China's popular websites Sina and Tiexu in the late 2009 (Fritz and Horn). Possibly responding to the Chinese comments, MGM decided to digitally alter the film, changing the Chinese invader to North-Koreans, "an isolated country where American media companies have no dollars at stake" (Fritz and Horn; Ford 508). Commenting on the alterations to the film, producer Dan Mitz claims that the alterations were necessary for the film to have a change on the Chinese market: "if the picture had gone out without redacting the Chinese invaders, there would have been a real backlash. It's like being invited to a dinner party and insulting the host all night alone. There is no way to look good ... The film itself was not a smart move" (Fritz and Horn). Despite the changes, the film failed to find access on the Chinese box-office, and was released on the North-American box-office in the censored form. Ultimately, *Red Dawn* best illustrates how studios are dealing with the Chinese influence over Hollywood. By changing the films in the production phase before Chinese interference, studios hope on an easy access of films on the Chinese box-office. In all these cases, the censored version was released globally with only *Pixels* getting the intended Chinese release. Taking in mind these changes, the following paragraph will analyze if this Chinese influence results into a more Sinified Hollywood.

#### 4.4.1. *Sinified Hollywood 2: Individualism in a collective foundation.*

Looking at the values conveyed in these films, this thesis will be looking particularly at the transmission of Sinified capitalist values. Similar to the American capitalist values usually conveyed by Hollywood, the Sinified capitalist values are related to the values considered foundational in Chinese society. One of the most common values in Chinese society is the value of collectivism, an important trait in Chinese society. While the Chinese society has become considerably more individualistic in the last few years, collectivism, "the responsibility and submission to the group" has been fundamental in Chinese social relations ("Chinese Core Values and Believes"). In this society, the Chinese places much more emphasis on the loyalty, self-sacrifice, generosity and sense of duty of the family than on individual achievements ("Chinese Core Values and Believes").

This idea of collectivism is evident in each of the films. *World War Z* has the most visible attention to collectivism, with the importance of the family of UN-employee Gerry

Lane (Brad Pitt) in the film. The family as a central trait to the story is a significant departure from the original book, which is a collective of individual accounts of the zombie attack narrated by Max Brooks, an agent of the United Nations Postwar Commission (Phipps). The family in *World War Z* conveys the same values as required in Chinese society. Looking at loyalty, the film shows Gerry's commitment to his family. The film starts with Gerry as a stay-at-home dad, giving up his career to take care of his family. Throughout the first thirty minutes, the film explains that his mission is to protect his family from the zombies. His sacrifice for his family is illustrated by his decision to join the mission to find a cure ("I can't help you, I can't leave your family," Gerry first rejects), as his contribution to the cause makes his family essential personal on the ship (*World War Z* 32:47). While Gerry takes on his journey, his family is never far away. The film illustrates this by the various attempts of Gerry to phone his wife and children, which provides him with a sense of reality and reassures him from the actual goal of his mission: to return to his family. Ultimately, Gerry's mission does not end when he has found the cure (which is an illness injected in himself) but when he finally returns to his family in Novae Scotia.

*Red Dawn* also stresses the importance of family over the individual. While the film focuses on the storylines of brothers Jed (Chris Hemsworth) and Matt (Chris Hemsworth), the main connection to collectivism is through the Wolverine pack, who are considered as vital as family. This is best illustrated by the various attempts by Jed to save his girlfriend. His individual actions are always followed by the death of a member of the Wolverines, first in the city center and later in the Wolverine hiding place, reminding his fellow members that the Wolverines are like family. By punishing individual behavior, the film claims that leaving the bounds of your family will get you into trouble. This idea of collectivism is further developed in the final scenes of *Red Dawn*, which visibly identifies with the idea of sacrificing for the collective good. In their final action to save the town, the Wolverines decide that their collective sacrifice in the final battle is necessary to reclaim the town for their fellow residents. The film does not offer the audience any information if the Wolverines survive the attack, but does show that their actions succeed in freeing the citizens from the prison camps. By displaying how the Wolverines are willing to die for the collective good, the film hints to the idea of the collectivist society.

*Pixels* does not offer the similar family connections as *Red Dawn* and *World War Z*, yet the film does hint to the importance of the collective good. Here, a group of nerds unite to save the planets from destruction from aliens disguised as videogames. While the film places some emphasis on Sam Brenner (Adam Sandler) and his quest to videogame

greatness, the film acknowledges the importance of working in a team. In the first battle, Sam and Ludlow Lamonsoff (Josh Gad) cooperate to save London from the Centipede. In the battle of New York, Sam, Ludlow and Eddie Plant (Peter Dinklage) collaborate to defeat Pac Man. In the final battle of Washington, the two nerds are joined by President Will Cooper (Kevin James), Lieutenant Colonel Violet van Patten (Michelle Monaghan) and her son Mattie (Matt Linz). They work together to save the world from destruction with Eddie and Ludlow trying to save the city below, while Sam, Will, Violet and Mattie cooperating in defeating King Kong on the mothership. In the end, the film suggests that a collective unit is needed to defeat the invading aliens and save the earth.

#### 4.4.2. *Sinified Hollywood 3: Equality in a society of hierarchal relations*

At the first glance, the films seem to promote the quest to equalitarian recognition. Each film features a leading white male, fighting indignity and corruption and regaining his destined place in society. In finding a cure for the zombie invasion, Gerry Lane is trying to get back to his family in *World War Z*. In *Red Dawn*, Jed and Matt are fighting the North-Korean invaders to regain control over their town and to revenge their father. In *Pixels*, Sam is trying to regain his status as videogame champion after his title had been stolen by Eddie Plant. Nevertheless, these films also stress the importance of hierarchal relations in society. The films refer to the Chinese value of hierarchy, in which the collective society is divided into various relations between the subordinate and the superior (Lu). In Chinese society, this means that the subordinate (citizen, wife, son, younger brother) always answers to the superior (leader, husband, father, older brother) (Lu). Different from the United States where hierarchal relationships are subsidiary to the quest of each individual citizen to find its equal place in society, the Chinese society emphasizes the importance of listening to one's superior when acting in society.

These hierarchal relationships are visible in the films. *Pixels* emphasizes the importance of hierarchal leadership with President Will Cooper. The film introduces President Cooper as an infantile leader through his denigration by the American press, his low approval rates and lack of respect by his subordinates. This is further developed by the behavior of the President himself from his inability to speak out difficult words to 'the cake incident' where the President decides to eat cake with his wife instead of ruling the country (which is reemphasized in the film by letting the press explain how the President should behave). After his infantilism is established, *Pixels* illustrates that when President Cooper finally expresses his leadership, his decisions are vital in succeeding the mission. His



decision to employ Sam and Ludlow in the military results in the American victory over the Centipede in London. His involvement in saving New York from the invading aliens is portrayed as the actions of the true commander in chief (“they tried to take me to some underground bunker, so I went rogue”) (*Pixels* 1:23:03). While Sam realizes his true potential, the film additionally shows how President Cooper discovers his potential. The final scene reestablishes his installment as true leader of the United States, with the people adoring him and his position restored.

*Red Dawn* offers even clearer forms of leaders and subordinates, with Jed gradually developing as the leader of the Wolverines. His experience in the army make him the appointed lead to teach his young followers survival skills (“I am going to fight, this is easier for me because I am used to it ... when you are fighting in your own backyard, you are fighting for your family”) (*Red Dawn* 29:07). When Jed gets killed, Matt automatically promotes himself as leader of the Wolverines, saving his unit from the North-Koreans and finalizing the fight on the football field, the same field where his leadership was questioned as captain of the losing Wolverine football side. In comparison, the film shows a lack of leadership in the opposition. While the film visible shows the town being invaded by the North-Koreans, the film rarely identifies the real leaders of the North-Korean force. The only North-Korean soldier most prominently features is Captain Choi, who is rarely seen in a leadership position. This lack of leadership will lead to the defeat of the North-Koreans while the hierarchal structured Wolverines free the citizens.

While *Red Dawn* and *Pixels* offers examples of true leaders, *World War Z* shows the masculine hierarchal relations in the family. In absence of real leaders, the film returns to the family for hierarchal relations. In *World War Z*, Gary is presented as the true leader in the film. His knowledge of war regions helps his family to get out of Philadelphia, his shooting skills saves his wife from being raped and his connections helps his family to escape the United States. His wife Karin (Mireille Enos) is clearly more subordinate; she is rather helpless when the zombies are chasing her family in the apartment building and is constantly calling for her husband to save her. When Gerry is called in action to find a cure, Karin is left behind to take care of their children. Preparing his family for his absence, he automatically reassures his leadership to the only man in their company; Thomas, the child of the Spanish family who was included in the Lane family (“All right tough guy, take care of the ladies for me”) (*World War Z* 34:07). The film argues that Gerry should not trust his leadership to his own blood relatives (which consists of only girls) but to the only male member of their unit, emphasizing the importance of the masculine leadership in the family.

#### 4.4.3. *Sinified Hollywood 4: Replacing democracy for a harmonious society*

In addition to collectivism and hierarchy, the films also seem to disregard specific democratic icons in favor of a harmonious society. A harmonious society, “the proper and balanced coordination between things”, is often described as the most fundamental value in Chinese society (Lihua). Similar to democracy, the harmonious society recognizes the difference existing between people in society. But while democracy establishes difference by emphasizing that people can choose for themselves, the harmonious society highlights uniting these differences into one society (Lihua). In a harmonious society, the “coordination of things by bringing them together in the appropriate manner allows them to develop from an uncoordinated state to one of coordination; from asymmetry to symmetry; and from imbalance and balance” (Lihua). The balancing of society illustrates why the harmonious society can be seen as the completion of other Chinese values: each of these values is needed to maintain a harmonious society.

*Red Dawn* visually distances from the American icons usually portrayed in Hollywood films. This is first noticeable through the lack of American flags in the film. An icon of American democracy, *Red Dawn* rarely features the American flag in the Wolverine’s quest to retrieve the United States from foreign invaders. In fact, the only American flags seen in the film are often vaguely shot, situated in the corners of the frame and barely visible for the audience. Furthermore, *Red Dawn* shows that when the Wolverines have the choice to return to the democratic United States, they decide not to return as they have lost to many to return to their previous lives and they do not want to live anywhere else than ‘home’. Their collective sacrifice at the end of the film can not only be seen as a sacrifice for the collective good but also as an attempt to reclaim balance in society. By choosing home over possible democratic freedom, the Wolverines are trying to recreate the harmonious society they experienced before.

*World War Z* offers a similar reconciliation with faith. While Gerry eventually succeeds in finding a cure, this does not eliminate the problem. The vaccine protects them against the zombies, but does not kill nor cure the zombies. In the final voiceover of the film, Gerry explains the consequences for humanity:

This isn’t the end. Not even close. We’ve lost entire cities. We still do not know how it started. We bought ourselves some time. It has given us a change. Others have found a way to push back. If you can fight, fight. Help each other. Be prepared for anything. Our war has just begun. (*World War Z* 1:53:17)

In his final speech, Gerry lies out the prospects for humans. In a world where they do no longer have the authority over the world, he recognizes that they need to live next to the zombies who are trying to kill them. In this world, democratic values are no longer required as these zombies have no idea what is right or wrong. Consequently, the film emphasizes that in order to survive, people need to live harmoniously next to the zombies.

*Pixels* still has the democratic-elected leaders that are eliminated in *Red Dawn* and *World War Z*. Nevertheless, the film's destruction of Americans icons of democracy, from the American military base (a frequent used example in American cinema as an example for American democracy) to Washington DC, does hint to the possible finalization of American democracy (Powers, Rothman & Rothman 8). In addition to the destruction of American icons of democracy, *Pixels* does hint to importance of a harmonious society in their conversations with the aliens. When the aliens claim that they witnessed the message of NASA as a declaration of war, President Cooper explains that the motivations behind the message was to live harmoniously with the aliens. The appearance of alien friends (or trophies) can be seen as the first attempt towards these harmonious relations, as they help their earth friends to reclaim the planet and end up staying on earth. While the film final conclusion for the untouched White House can be seen as a victory for democracy, the film does hint to the possibility of replacing democracy for a harmonious society.

#### 4.5. Conclusion

This thesis has conducted an ideological film analysis to see whether the films affected by the Chinese creative and economic influence over Hollywood transforms the cinema into a Sinified cinema. While these films have not completely abandoned the American values of Hollywood films, *Pixels*, *World War Z* and *Red Dawn* do feature Chinese values next to the American values traditionally conveyed in Hollywood films. This is most prominently visible in the interaction between the American value of individualism and Chinese collectivism. At first, the films do embrace the typical individual hero of Hollywood films. *Pixels* celebrates the accomplishments of Sam Brenner, *World War Z* follows the storyline of Gerry Lane and *Red Dawn* emphasizes the actions and sacrifices of Jed Eckert. Nevertheless, these films also underscore that these individuals cannot function without the collective foundation of family and friends. In *World War Z*, Gary's action is founded in his relationship with his family. His decision to join the mission to find a cure is not taken out of individual gain, but to protect his family from extradition from the boat. While *Red Dawn* highlights the actions of Jed Eckert and his brother, the film focuses predominantly on the

well-being of their surrogate family, the Wolverines. *Pixels* perhaps offers the most individualized story, but still Sam Brenner cannot accomplish his mission without the help of friends. By exploring the individual storyline through a collective foundation of family and friends, the films show an interaction between the Chinese idea of collectivism and American individualism.

This interaction is also visible when looking at the relationship between equality and hierarchy in the films. Each of the films highlights individual characters fighting indignity and finding his rightful place in society. The quest of Sam Brenner in *Pixels* offers this story most prominently with Brenner reclaiming his title as videogame champion after his title was stolen 33 years ago. In *World War Z*, Gerry Lane is trying to get back to his family, who ends up being deported from the ship. Matt and Jed in *Red Dawn* want to revenge their father and take back their town. Nevertheless, these quests simultaneously stress the importance of accepting the hierarchal relations of society and family. *Pixels* claims that the reinstatement of President Cooper as the real leader of the United States is foundational for saving earth from the aliens. In *Red Dawn*, the Wolverines can only take back town when they listen to the expertise of Jed who can teach them the skills to fight and survive. Finally, *World War Z* underscores the hierarchal relationship in family relations, with Gerry being the natural leader in his family and his surrogate son being his automatic successor. While emphasizing the individual quest to equality, these films also celebrates the hierarchal relations in society and family.

Moreover, the films seem to dismiss certain democratic icons in favor of the Chinese harmonious society. While some of these films still promote democratic icons, the films often promote the ideal of Chinese harmonious society at the expense of these democratic icons. While democracy wins eventually, *Pixels* hints to the possible destruction of democracy by destroying American political buildings. The world is much bleaker in *Red Dawn* and *World War Z*, who both deal with visible destruction of the United States. In *Red Dawn*, the Wolverines chose the possibility for a harmonious society over the possibility to live in a free and democratic United States. In *World War Z*, the ideal of a harmonious society is entirely embraced. With the world occupied by mindless zombies, *World War Z* maintains that the only solution is living harmoniously together with the zombies in order to survive. Consequently, through the (possible) destruction of various icons of American democracy, *Pixels*, *Red Dawn* and *World War Z* offer a world where democracy can be replaced for a harmonious society.

By conveying Chinese values parallel to American values, this films clearly

departure from the traditional American capitalist nature of Hollywood films. Taking in mind that these film have directly experienced the Chinese influence over Hollywood, the values conveyed in *Pixels*, *Red Dawn* and *World War Z* show definitely an affiliation with Chinese society and culture. In their article on *Pixels*, Baldwin and Cooke went as far as calling these censored films Sinified films. This is not entirely the case. The films have not entirely abandoned their American roots nor do the films show any visible connection with China, which admittedly are mostly erased as a result of the self-censorship by Hollywood studios. Nevertheless, *Pixels*, *Red Dawn* and *World War Z* do illustrate how the American capitalist nature of these films is slightly transforming in favor of a more Sinified version. In the end, these films have not been entirely Sinified yet, but they can be seen as the start towards a more Sinified Hollywood.

## 5. Conclusion

The thesis explores whether the creative and economic influence of China over Hollywood possibly transforms the industry into a Sinified cinema. In order to understand the Chinese influence over Hollywood, this thesis has started with a literary review to explore the economic and creative influence of China over Hollywood. To explain the Chinese economic influence, the mandate of the box-office for the Hollywood economy needs to be emphasized. Described as the revenue of ticket-sales, Hollywood has been traditionally oriented at the North-American box-office. The decline of this box-office in the 1940s has resulted in a foreign outlook of the industry, with the foreign box-office becoming the essential source for revenue in the Hollywood economy. The tool Hollywood uses to look abroad is the Hollywood blockbuster, a film which uses a variety of characteristics to attract a transnational audience. In economic terms, the blockbuster uses big marketing tactics (various forms of international marketing's from TV-advertisements, talk shows, magazines ads and interviews with the stars), big releases (preferable over 2000 screens in the first week) and big synergy (additional sources of income such as merchandise, sequels and spin offs). The textual characteristics provide the transnational outlook of the blockbuster. The recognizable star, pre-sold properties, hybrid genres and narrative cohesion all result in a transnational identification of the blockbusters that appeals "to anyone, anywhere and anytime" (Olson 3).

The blockbuster is centralized in Hollywood's pivot to China, one of the fastest growing box-offices in the world and an example of Hollywood's foreign outlook. After a thirty-year ban, China opened the box-office for American films in the 1980s and the *Fugitive* (1992) became the first American film to be distributed on a wide scale on the Chinese market. The success of *The Fugitive* and consequently other Hollywood films in the 1990s set the standard for a beneficial relationship between China and Hollywood. On one hand, Hollywood saved the Chinese film industry from destruction after years of decline. The popularity of Hollywood films and the profitable conditions for distribution resulted in the resurrection of the Chinese box-office. For Hollywood, the enormous potential of the Chinese market could finally be fully explored and Hollywood blockbuster immediately took a dominant position on the Chinese box-office. The seemingly unlimited growth of the Chinese box-office and the popularity of Hollywood films with Chinese audiences has resulted in a very powerful position for the Chinese box-office in the Hollywood economy and has directed Hollywood attention almost entirely to the Chinese box-office.

One direct consequence of this economic pivot to China is the comeback of various forms of self-censorship in the industry in order to gain access to the lucrative Chinese box-office. The box-office plays an important role in the incentives towards self-censorship in Hollywood. The most notorious form of self-censorship occurred in the Classical Hollywood era through the Motion Picture Production Code and Motion Picture Administration. The Code, a Catholic initiative but initiated from within the industry, controlled the content of Hollywood productions between 1930s to 1968. The motivations behind the Code were purely economic: The Code eliminated the power of the local censors, gave rise to the profitable family pictures and was consequently yielded as the savior of the Hollywood economy in the 1930s. The Code's successor, the current MPAA ratings, can be seen as a more international and accessible form of self-censorship. While the MPAA ratings does provide more creative freedom for the filmmaker, this form of self-censorship restricts filmmakers to provide a rating that produces the largest amount of audience. The notorious NC-17 rating creates various forms of self-censorship, from changing the film after release to stalling the films on the shelves for years.

While Hollywood has learned to adapt to the MPAA ratings, the Chinese SARFT (State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China) offers new challenges. The SARFT controls the entire production and distribution of entertainment in China and is known for unpredictable decision-making and influence on film productions. To deal with the SARFT, Hollywood has reused a variety of self-censorship methods, from editing specific Chinese-version of films to prohibiting films from distribution in China. Additionally, Hollywood has also been changing films during production in order to ease access on the Chinese box-office. Films are reportedly changed during production before the sanitized version is distributed on the global box-office. While the films are always distributed globally, the intended box-office is rarely reached, as many films fail to find a Chinese release. Ultimately, while the films are altered for China, they are rarely seen by Chinese audiences.

Taking in account the economic and creative Chinese influence over Hollywood, this thesis has investigated, through an ideological film analysis, whether these Chinese influences has the potential to transform Hollywood cinema into a more Sinified experience. Each of the films analyzed in this thesis experienced the creative and economic influence of China over Hollywood. *Pixels* (2015) was censored by the Hollywood studio but still found access on the Chinese market and consequently released the sanitized version on the Chinese and global market. *Red Dawn* (2012) and *World War Z* (2013) were also censored by

Hollywood but failed to find a release on the Chinese market while the censored versions were released on the global market. An analysis of these films show that these direct Chinese influences have an indirect effect on the values these films convey.

These three films convey a conflicting interaction between the American values traditionally conveyed in Hollywood and the Chinese values conveyed as a result of the economic and cultural influence from China. First, the important individualist protagonist is often placed in a collectivist foundation of family and friends. While the individual characters are still stressed in the story, they are no longer only important for the story. This was particular visible in *World War Z* and *Red Dawn*, which emphasizes the importance of family over individual actions. Evidently, both the films refer to the Chinese value of collectivism, “the responsibility and submission to the group” in favor of the American value of individualism (“Chinese Core Values and Believes”). Secondly, the films place an emphasis on the Chinese value of hierarchy in interaction with the American value of equality. The importance of the masculine family member in *World War Z*, the military hierarchy of *Red Dawn* and the search for leadership in *Pixels* hint to the importance of hierarchy in the social relations. Finally, the films offer an alternative for American democracy, in form of the Chinese harmonious society, “the proper and balanced coordination between things” (Lihua). The films suggest to the possibility of replacing American democracy for a harmonious society, through the alien-owned world in *World War Z*, the occupied United States in *Red Dawn* and the destruction of the political icons in *Pixels*. Ultimately, democracy is not entirely destroyed in these films, but they explore a world where American democracy can be replaced.

Consequently, these films exhibit the consequences of the Chinese economic and creative influence over Hollywood. Important to note is that the American foundation of these films has not entirely disappeared. Each of these films still stress the importance of the individual character looking for an equal representation in society. Nevertheless, these films show often conflicting Chinese values at the expense of the American values. This is especially the case when looking at the interaction between the American value of democracy and the Chinese harmonious society. Each of the film analyzed in this thesis seem to accept the notion of the destruction of democracy, with *World War Z* and *Red Dawn* even accepting the idea of a harmonious society at the expense of American democracy. By exploring the idea of the destruction of democracy, these films distance themselves most visibly from the American nature of the industry. While this does not automatically mean



that Hollywood is already entirely Sinified, these films do show the possibility for a Hollywood cinema that is distributed by Hollywood but created by China.

## *5.2. Discussion*

This thesis has investigated whether the Chinese economic and creative influences in Hollywood possibly transforms Hollywood cinema into a Sinified cinema. This research predominantly focuses on two cornerstones of the Hollywood industry: the box-office, which is central in the Hollywood economy and the issue of self-censorship which has been an important part of the cultural restrictions enforced by the industry. Nevertheless, the Chinese influence on Hollywood films can be also explored through other mechanisms. One important aspect in the China-Hollywood relationship are the co-productions, which this thesis mentioned briefly in the chapter on self-censorship. This form of Chinese power over Hollywood actually combines the economic and creative influence: the co-production help to ease the access on the Chinese box-office while the Chinese co-production company partly controls the production of American films. This part of the China-Hollywood relationship has rarely been investigated by scholars, but can help to further define the Chinese influence on Hollywood.

Other research could focus on the extent of self-censorship in Hollywood. The three cases mentioned in this thesis are well-known and well-documented by the Hollywood press. Nevertheless, the scale of self-censorship is not publicly known and Hollywood studios have been very careful in revealing their self-censorship attempts. By uncovering more cases of self-censorship, this would help to explain the scale of self-censorship in the industry, not only for the Chinese box-office but also possibly for other markets. The SARFT is not the only foreign censor in Hollywood and the foreign outlook of the industry resulted into the introduction of Hollywood in a variety of markets similarly restricted as the Chinese box-office. Exploring these influences in Hollywood not only helps to understand the foreign influence in Hollywood but also helps to further define the mechanisms of Hollywood in the twenty-first century.

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