

Screening China

China in Popular Geopolitics, 2000-2009

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Abstract

Looking at global box-office winners from the years 2000-2009, this paper finds that the China we encounter on the silver screen, is rarely an antagonist. It is not a China that follows traditional Yellow Peril stereotypes. On the contrary, China might be the saviour of the world, as it is in *2012*. Three broad, slightly overlapping categories have been defined to order the Chinese representations.

First we have the 'Magic Kingdom'. Including representations in such movies as *Kung Fu Panda*, *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* and *Juno*, this is the China that exists on a completely different plane than the rest of the world. It is a China marked out by its difference from the rest of the world.

Secondly we have the 'China being China' category. This is the largest group, including such movies as *2012*, *The Departed*, *The Dark Knight*, *Rush Hour 3* and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. The China we encounter in this group is a China that deals with the world, and participates in international affairs.

Thirdly, we have 'America's China'. This group, containing such movies as *Rush Hour 2*, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, and *Mission: Impossible 3* denotes movies where any Chinese state is absent. Americans are given a free hand to act as they please, in a China that seems more like an American colony than a sovereign country.

The key finding is that this time period can be called Sinophile – where images of a non-threatening, co-operative China dominates.

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Introduction

Giant robots on a rampage through the Pudong-area of Shanghai. Chinese government officials purchase stolen microchips on the black market to fit in their nuclear missiles. An American and a Chinese cop cooperate to save the day. Humanity is saved on giant arks built in the Chinese Himalayas.

The China we have been able to visit from the comfort of a movie theatre in the period 2000-2009 is clearly multifaceted. I first realized this was a topic worth exploring after seeing those Chinese-built arks save humanity in the disaster movie *2012*. This movie, which from a critical standpoint is quite awful, surprised me with China saving the day. Was this something brand new? Was China not an enemy in the stories told by Hollywood?

I remembered TV-shows, such as *24*, where Chinese were the enemies. I thought of video-games, such as the *Fallout*-series, in which the world is suffering in the aftermath of a nuclear war between China and the US. I thought of the newest album by the Guns N' Roses called *Chinese Democracy*.

With a fast-growing economy, an increasing geopolitical weight, China's geopolitical importance is growing – and is discussed in more articles, essays, books and research papers than could possibly be discussed here. However, how that transfers into popular geopolitical discourse is something that hasn't been explored in depth.

Throughout researching this paper, the gut feeling of most people I have discussed it with is that China on film must surely be a hostile and negative entity – as were my own expectations when starting out the research. The findings are that it's not. Indeed, China can be a savior nation. This essay aims to show that the popular geopolitics of globally popular movies is overwhelmingly positive to China.

The first hypothesis going into this study is that China is not China. To say it clearer: This hypothesis claims that there is no clear hegemonic discourse when it comes to

how China is represented in pop-cultural texts. This proved partially wrong. Far from a simplistic, one-sided view of China, where China is always presented with a single milieu, through a single lens, China is presented in quite different ways in all the movies present. However, the general tone the geopolitical China is described with is positive – thus a non-threatening view of China seems to be a hegemonic discourse.

The second hypothesis is that the representations of China would be negative and threatening. This too was disproven. Indeed, the period might, as hinted at easily be labeled a Sinophile period as far as the sample is concerned.

The third hypothesis is that there would be a qualitative difference in portrayals of China that mirrored the qualitative differences in the movies themselves. That is, a critically acclaimed movie would more nuanced portrayals of China than a critically panned movie. This hypothesis has been disproven. There is no evidence in this study that portrayal of China is linked to the critical acclaim a movie receives. Typical blockbuster movies, with a thin script, shallow characters and bad acting might easily have nuanced representations of China, while Oscar-winners might easily not.

Beyond these three hypotheses, this paper will claim to draw three grand conclusions:

For the field of popular geopolitics, it will show that quality of art does not equal quality of discourse. For the following, a discourse is judged to have a high quality if it's nuanced. For the study of the geopolitical discourse surrounding China, it will show that at least in some arenas, China was approached in a nuanced manner in the first decade of the 21st century. Thirdly; it will claim that these findings are due to the forces of globalization and the economic rise of China.

Literature on how China has been represented in the west is mostly limited to how Chinese are represented. There are the ubiquitous references to Fu Manchu and Charlie Chan. Other studies focus more on how China is represented by more 'reputable' sources, e.g. Peng's study of American newspaper coverage of China

(2004). This thesis aims to see how the geopolitical China is represented, both as a state, and as a nation. It will not from the outset differentiate between representations made in China or abroad, but rather limit itself to particular media being read in a certain area, in this case, the top-grossing movies on the global box offices.

This has been chosen, due to the ease of finding good resources on the box-office returns through web-sites such as imdb.com and boxofficemojo.com. Thus I created a random sample of 200 movies which I could then analyze for any reference to China.

This paper takes as its inspiration two different lines of thought. One is the idea of critical geopolitics, and its subset of popular geopolitics. Simply said, popular geopolitics seeks to explore how geopolitics are created, presented and represented in popular media. Its history and theoretical background will however be further discussed in the chapter on methodology.

The second inspiration comes from Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar's book "China on Screen; Cinema and Nation". What if the idea of a national cinema creating the ideas of its nation on screen is turned on its head and one instead tries to figure out how this nation has been created from the outside? This line, and the book inspiring it, will be further discussed in the chapter on how Chinese movies themselves deal with geopolitics, and how the Chinese nation is (re-)presented in some Chinese movies.

Readers might find some obvious elements lacking from this list of inspirations. Why, for instance, are Edward Said's orientalism theories not in the list? This omission, although his ideas will be found behind some of what will be written, is due to orientalism's focus on the academic strand of geopolitics, and the high-cultural presentations, rather than the current pop-cultural ideologies. More importantly, its focus on the Middle East makes its applicability on China quite low. I will however use his ideas at times, such as when discussing how China is seen (in contrast with the Middle East) in the Transformers-franchise.

The focus of this book will be kept on depictions of the Chinese mainland, and Hong

Kong, Macau and Taiwan, thus the depictions of the Chinese diaspora will not be addressed. Furthermore, with a focus on the state, rather than the individuals, ethnic stereotypes will likewise be consigned to the periphery of this analysis. As such, Fu Manchu or Charlie Chan like characters would be outside of this papers field of vision. However, the long existence of overseas Chinese characters in popular culture, including books and movies, highlights the often boundary-less way in which ideas of the Chinese have been (re-)created.

In the global box office hits of the last decade, how is the idea of the Chinese nation presented? As such, it becomes vital, not to explore the idea of nationhood, but rather the idea of China as a geopolitical state. Is there a single strong strand of China presented in these movies? Is it presented in a positive or negative manner, or one completely neutral? This paper will claim that all of the above are true.

That pop-cultural representations can have an effect on real life has been proven in several studies; most recently Evan W. Durnal demonstrated that the so-called CSI-effect is real. This effect has been seen in courtrooms over the last decade, and manifests itself in the higher expectations of jury members, as well as the higher sophistication of criminals. Both come as an effect of TV-shows depicting hi-tech investigations, for instance acquiring full DNA-profiles in the matter of seconds. As such, DNA as evidence is often over-emphasized, at least in US courtrooms with a jury (Durnal 2010).

A similar effect could be present in how we meet other countries, as individuals, businesses and governments. As such it is important to assess critically how other countries and places are portrayed in popular culture. It both reflects prevailing ideas, and might in itself create new ideas.

As far as the presentation of countries in movies is concerned, two main strands of academic enquiry present themselves. One, the line of thought associated with cinematic geography concerns itself with “how social and cultural meanings are intertwined with space, place, scale and narrative” as Chris Lukinbeal, one of the main researchers on the topic, put it (2004, p.248)

However, different in their goals these might be, the end result often ends up being similar. This paper will draw on both ideologies in order to see how China is (re-)presented on the Silver Screen, and how this relates to the geopolitical understandings of the day.

This paper will claim cinematic China takes three sometimes distinct sometimes overlapping forms. One is “The Magic Kingdom”. This is the China existing outside of reality – one in which geopolitics are mostly ignored. Moreover, China is exoticized and othered – it is vastly different.

A second form is the assertive China. Seen in movies such as *2012* and *Rush Hour 3*, this China is an actor on the geopolitical stage – for good or for bad. It neither resides on a separate plane, nor is it an impotent global stage where the action can take place.

The third form is both the least political, but also, in some ways, most telling form China is portrayed. That is as a neutral international scene. Far from being an exotic place, China is just a scene where action takes place. China becomes a symbol for the global, rather than the exotically different, specifically Chinese. This can be seen in e.g. *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, where the action scenes taking place in Shanghai might as well have happened in any modern city.

The last two categories could also be defined by the policy they wish the US will have towards them, with the movies depicting a more independent China following a more neoliberal approach, while the movies depicting China as nothing more than a global location, tend to pursue a more Jacksonian policy of projecting American might onto foreign lands.

These categories can of course be further divided. The second one in particular, will be analyzed based on the whether China is seen as a force for good, a force for evil or simply a neutral country on the international stage.

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Finding these categories, and analyzing the movies, does require a theoretical framework, and that is the next chapter. After that, we will move to the wider Asian region, looking at how other countries have been represented on screen. Zooming in a bit closer, we take a look at how China has portrayed itself, and been portrayed, historically. Then we move on to the meaty part: China in global blockbusters. After looking at the various problems and shortcomings of this study, some conclusions are in order. But first, an introduction to Popular Geopolitics.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will, through using discourse analysis as a method, see how China is perceived in modern western popular geopolitics. As such, it behooves us to examine the history of the idea of popular geopolitics in general, and more specifically, how movies have been used to examine the subject. However, we also need to take a more general look on the wider field known as cinematic geography.

Cinematic Geography

The larger field of cinematic geography concerns itself with “how social and cultural meanings are intertwined with space, place, scale and narrative” (Lukinbeal 2004, p.248). In recent years, the distinction between what's seen as 'reel' and 'real' has become increasingly blurred within this field – which can be seen through how politicians increasingly use pop-cultural and cinematic references to frame their discourse. And this does not only go for Reagan and former governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger. The photo shoot of George W. Bush announcing “Mission Accomplished” in Iraq is a good reminder of this. Landing on an aircraft carrier seemingly far at sea, with a speech timed for the best possible light, the whole event was staged, shot just off the coast of San Diego. Comparisons with 80s hit movie *Top Gun* were unavoidable. When 'real' events are shaped like this, it becomes difficult to set “'real' and 'reel' as binary oppositions or as a socio-spatial dialectic in a world of unlimited simulacra” (Lukinbeal 2004, p.207). This view of the real-reel relationship points to an anti-essentialist, post-structural view of discourses. With everything being representations, all representations are as important.

Seeing presidential speeches in light of 80s hit movies, hints at one role movies might have in geography. When the distinction between the real and the represented becomes increasingly blurred, we can turn to cinematic geography to make sense of how this cultural territory is mapped. Visual media can thus be seen as the social cartography (Bruno 1997) to how meaning is (re-)created and identities formed.

Lukinbeal and Zimmermann's 2004 article "Film Geography; A New Subfield" points forward to 4 future trajectories of film geography research. They do this through analyzing several key texts within recent years' film geography, and then analyzing *The Day After Tomorrow* through these frameworks.

The Day After Tomorrow is a movie they acknowledge as not being "... a very "good" movie in the classic sense of narration, filming editing and montage..." (p.321). It depicts an apocalyptic event in which sudden climate change drastically alters the face of the earth.

Firstly, they point to geopolitics, and how the movie comments on current affairs, and shapes people's opinions. As such movies cognitively map the geopolitical imaginary. Secondly, they point to cultural politics, and how movies try to pass off what is cultural as natural. Film geography is more than simple, disassociated readings of (pop)-cultural texts, rather it is

"Inquiries of cultural documents that reveal hegemonic tensions within meaning creation, appropriation and contestation. The binaries given in *The Day After Tomorrow* are not ontologically "given" or static objects awaiting inquiry; they are living testaments to a specific era's cultural political dialogue."

(Lukinbeal & Zimmermann 2004, p.318)

Thirdly, they look at globalization. This includes the predominance of Hollywood both in production, and in cinematic conventions, the use of doubling, i.e. using one geographic location as a stand in for others, exemplified the competition between Morocco and Tunisia as shooting-grounds for north-African or orientalist scenes and the rise of film tourism. Thus, globalization, when studied through the lens of film geography, denotes strengthening cultural, economical and political currents in the modern world of film making (p.319-320). Finally, there is the question of representation and mimesis. This concerns itself with the extent to which movies are seen as real. As an example they point out how several scientists saw a need to point out that *The Day After Tomorrow* depicted events wholly impossible – and how that received a comparatively larger section of the news than questions over the Bush-administrations meddling with scientific results for ideological gains. This shows that

they feared the general audience seeing the events in this movie as plausible. All four of these will be touched upon in the main chapter.

Popular Geopolitics

“If popular culture was not geopolitical, why would governments contest it?”
(Dittmer 2010, p.xvi)

Where traditional geopolitics focuses on formal models or policy statements, popular geopolitics looks at how a population tries to represent the world around them and their place in it in a consistent and regular way (Dodds 2000, p.74).

Popular geopolitics comes out of Gerard Ó Tuathail's theories on critical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics aim to analyze geopolitical discourses. According to Ó Tuathail, geopolitical discourses can be divided into three sometimes overlapping categories:

- The first is the *formal geopolitics*. This includes the discourse of think-tanks and academics – and most closely resembles what is most commonly thought of when discussing geopolitics.
- The second category is *practical geopolitics*. This form refers to the discourses used by politicians, bureaucrats and policymakers within foreign policy.
- Thirdly we find *popular geopolitics*, which will be the focal point of this essay. This consists of the discourses made by everyday people and non-professionals – including the whole spectrum from newspapers to cartoons.

As said, these can often be intertwined. As an example, an opinion piece in a newspaper can straddle the line between *formal* and *popular geopolitics*. However, geopolitical discourse is not only top down – it's not only formal geopolitics transmitting its discourse into popular geopolitics (Ó Tuathail 1996).

Indeed, political leaders often utilize pop-cultural memes in their own discourse. A good example is how Ronald Reagan, through his role as president of the USA, formulated much practical geopolitics. However, his discourse was often highly influenced by the popular geopolitics of the day: Thus the Soviet Union became the “Evil Empire”, referencing the Star Wars saga. In his role as a political actor, he, in the words of Massumi; “catalyzed processes already at work in society. He was the Great Inducer, the national actor-cum-stage director who called a country to action in pursuit of the lofty lure of post-war unity. The amputation written into this script was the ‘wound’ of Vietnam. The all-too-visible rig was TV” (quoted in Carter & McCormack, p.233). In other words, his political discourse was so successful in many ways because he appropriated the tools more often used by pop-cultural media. Thus he straddled the line between what is seen as 'real' and what is seen as 'reel'.

The first widely cited work using popular geopolitics as a framework was done in a 1993 article by Joanne Sharp. Sharp explored the idea of popular geopolitics through examining how Reader's Digest presented Cold War topics, from US military power, through the danger of a Nuclear War, to how Russia was constructed. The study, followed up in a 2000 book, found clear collusion between the official discourse and the representations in the magazine, highlighter by how the Soviet Union was vilified, and patriotic feelings toward America were glorified (Sharp 1993, 2000).

Indeed, historically Russia constitutes a great example of popular geopolitics. Hollywood’s portrayal of Russia and Russians during World War 2 was marked by a Russophilia, while the Cold War era saw a clear Russophobia (Power & Crampton 2005, p.195).

Movies have also been studied through the lens of popular geopolitics. One of the key film-series analyzed, particularly by Klaus Dodds, is the James Bond-series. A series which he claims is a late imperial fantasy of the British Empire (2003, p.132). The focus on the series is in part due to its international setting and global popularity, but more importantly, due to its longevity, which gives ample opportunity to see how global political shifts are dealt with – most clearly perhaps seen in 2002s *Die Another Day*, where hot issues of the day such as the rogue state of North Korea and

terrorism are dealt with (Dodds 2005, pp.270-271, Dodds 2006). However, just as much as *Die Another Day* can be seen as taking geopolitical developments into account, the later backlash it experienced in South Korea due to perceived offensive portrayals of the Koreans, might just as well be seen as comparable to Hollywood's problem dealing with geopolitical realities (Chung 2007, p.75). It is clear that the real-reel distinction has strong effects on how movies are read.

Die Another Day has also been used to analyze audience reaction through discussions on IMDb, a movie database by Klaus Dodds in a 2006 article. Whereas most popular geopolitics is written from the standpoint of individual readings, Dodds tries to show how audience reactions and the wider interpretive community can be gauged using IMDb, and how its members seem to converge on certain shared interests, even though they might disagree on interpretations or importance (p.120). The study clearly shows how scholars might branch out from discourse analysis to audience research – and through that opening the field of popular geopolitics further. However, as Dodds shows links between the movie and real-world geopolitics to be the least discussed area (p.124), discourse analysis, for now, seems the best way to study popular geopolitics.

That is what Dodds used in a 2003 article, comparing 1963s *From Russia with Love* with 1997s *Tomorrow Never Die*. Through analyzing how the Balkans are depicted, he discusses how overseas locations apart from the US and the UK, are most often presented as devoid of any political system or public officials of their own (p.135-136), and as such can be seen as the touristic site-seeing proposed by Bruno (1997) – a reading many of the movies explored in the main part conforms to. This reading, coupled with the traditional orientalism Dodds sees at play when dealing with the Balkans, leads him to the conclusion that Bond-movies inform, and sustain post-imperial cultures (2003, p.148). This depolitication of place is found in movies dealing with China as well, as will be shown in later chapters.

Two of the chronologically later Bond movies, *Tomorrow Never Dies* (1997) and *Die another Day* (2002), both deal directly with East Asian international relations. In *Tomorrow Never Dies* James Bond co-operates with a Chinese intelligence agent to

ward off war between the US and China. *Die Another Day* deals with the Koreans, and will be discussed further in the chapter on **Regional Context**.

Although movies might follow an official discourse put in place by governments, this is not always the case. A good example of the latter would be movies such as *Apocalypse Now!* (Dodds 2000, p.76). While *Apocalypse Now!* used material leased from the military of the Philippines, movies leasing, or attempting to lease, equipment from the US military might make the movie more pro-military, and closer to the official line (Dodds 2000, pp.78-79).

In the 2005 article “*The Frustrations of Geopolitics and the Pleasures of War: Behind Enemy Lines and American Geopolitical Culture*“, Gearóid Ó Tuathail considers the geopolitics of the movie *Behind Enemy Lines*, and how it embodies the Jacksonian ideals of geopolitical thought. This movie, about an American shot down behind enemy lines in Bosnia, presents the world as a playing field, and is in many ways a movie on the might of the American military. This is not only done through sheer military might, but also by introducing heroic, pro-human rights actions into a conflict that didn't have it. As such, it is analogous to many Vietnam War movies, or *Black Hawk Down*, and acts as a rehabilitation of US participation in certain conflicts (p.357).

From this, we can see Ó Tuathail approaching the movie in three ways. Geopolitically, he finds it espousing Jacksonian ideals. The movie is Jacksonian in how it prefers action over deliberation, and upholds American preponderance throughout the world. The work of bureaucrats is seen as slowing the process and as unhelpful to getting the job done (p.361). Historically, he sees whether the movie is accurate, which he finds it not to be (p.363). Which leads on to the third finding: War, as presented in this movie, is easy-cut, heroic and exotic – not at all marred in the confusion of cold-war era geopolitics, unabashedly unilateralist and not afraid of using violence to solve problems (pp.371-372).

Power and Crampton on the other hand looked at the ways in which political space in general has been presented on screen, and the effects these representations have had

on the real world. Thus, 911 was widely seen as cinematic; “It was like a movie”. Indeed, terrorism-movies leading up to 911 gave the general public, and the policy makers, a framework through which it could analyze and react to the events of that day (2005, p.193) . In other words; popular geopolitics is used by people to easily divide the world into manageable blocks, with invested meaning, often above any critical questioning (Dodds 2000, p.80).

These different forms popular geopolitics takes, either as causes or effects, were summed up as; “[...] in an intertextual relationship with other geopolitical knowledges. They reflect, reify, explain, author, support, undermine and challenge hegemonic geopolitical discourses.” (Power and Crampton 2005, p.195) In other words, these texts are not isolated, but rather should be seen as part of wider discourses.

Post-911 several movies have been released dealing with the so-called War on Terror, either allegorically or directly. In a 2008 article, Klaus Dodds looks at 4 action-thrillers all portraying facets of the War on Terror. A clear single strand is not present. While some of the movies portray extra-territorial extra-judicial Killings as a necessary evil, thus following the Jacksonian tradition in US foreign policy, others criticize torture and detention of terrorism-suspects.

The problem with Dodds study is that although he notes that less jingoistic movies, such as *Lions for Lambs* don't do as well as the more Jacksonian movies, such as *The Kingdom*, he doesn't fully analyze the reasons behind it. He does state that the more ambiguous conclusion of *Lions for Lambs* might be the reason, however, *Lions for Lambs* was more successful than *The Kingdom* abroad (Dodds 2008, pp.1632-1633). Thus, that the movie is not resolved in the way we're used to in Action-Thrillers does not seem to be the best explanation. Rather, it seems, it has something to do with what movie's discourse resonates best with the local popular political discourses at the time.

How nations are (re-)presented in movies is also discussed in an article with reference to the movie *Entrapment*. In this movie, shot partly on location in Malaysia

just after the Petronas Towers, then the tallest buildings in the world, were finished, the Petronas Towers are frequently juxtaposed with slums. The problem however was that those slums did not exist in Kuala Lumpur. Indeed, shots had been made in the coastal town of Malacca, with the Kuala Lumpur skyline digitally inserted in the background. Thus, the image given of Malaysia is not that of a modern, industrialized country, but rather that of a still developing nation – going counter to the government's expectations and wishes (Bunnell 2004). This had several effects. Firstly, the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, used it to criticize Western misrepresentations, while at the same time using it to defend his own political legitimacy and promoting Malaysia as a destination for FDI. Secondly, as the images were from Malaysia, they induced Malaysians to strive for fuller development (Bunnell 2004). Thus Bunnell looked at how a discourse was not only argued against, but was actively attempted to be made obsolete.

Some geographic representations can be constituted as specific genres, as John C. Eisele argued in a 2002 article. In it he argued for the existence of a specific genre of movies dealing with the Middle East. He defines genres as a form of prototypes, of the type defined in the field of cognitive linguistics. Instead of being defined in terms of essential conditions, or as institutionalized concepts, his views genres are conceived of in terms of abstract 'prototype', which can be exemplified with 'exemplars', in this case real life movies possessing the attributes inherent to the category (p.69). He calls his genre of movies depicting the middle-east 'easterns', which he then goes on to compare with the genre of westerns. This genres are not tied up to the qualitative representations of the Other, so even though native Americans have gone from antagonists to characters with which the audience has sympathy, and the Arabs have gone from heroes to villains, the genres as conceptual ideas are still valid.

In a 2010 book by Jason Dittmer, a further distinction within reading cinematic geographies is clarified. That is the difference between what he calls 'cartographies' and 'cultural geographies'. A 'Cartographies' reading, looks at how countries, nations and international affairs are portrayed on screen. As such, these readings take a larger, macro-perspective on geography. 'Cultural geographies' on the other hand

looks at individuals or subcultures. An example of the former includes readings of the comic, and later the movies, about the *X-Men*. Following a cultural geographic reading, this series can be seen as a parable of American race relations, of gay issues or simply as lighthearted entertainment (Dittmer 2010, p.114).

Finally, as this reading of *X-Men*, and the earlier comparison made of Russia and an evil galactic empire far, far away by Ronald Reagan – allegorical representations are rife. Geopolitics in film is not limited to realistic portrayals. As an example, the Klingons in *Star Trek* have been seen as symbolizing Russia, even following Russia's path in the series – being an enemy in the 1960s *Star Trek: The Original Series*, and a semi-ally in the later *Star Trek: The Next Generation* of the late 80s and early 90s (Dittmer 2010, p.xi).

Through all of this, and in what is following, it is thus important to remember: Whether or not a movie, or any form of discourse for that matter, is rooted in geopolitical fact, it's always merely a representation.

Globalization or Transnationalization

“Popular culture has never been a unilateral influence” (Desser 2003, p.180)

The transnationality of cinema is also a point to bear in mind going into the study. That I in this paper look at the top 200 grossing movies means that no Chinese movies will be included in the main part of the study, although they'll be discussed in another chapter. This is not a conscious distinction however. Many of the Chinese movies, including the top-grosser *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, are closely related to the Hollywood system, and rely on that for promotion. Similarly, some Chinese movies were made abroad, such as *House of Flying Daggers* which was shot in the Ukraine. This transnationality is nothing new, and can be compared with the Italian led trend of Spaghetti-westerns. (Chung 2007)

This transnationality leads to what Bhabha has called hybridity, which tries to

abolish traditional understanding, where culture diffuses linearly from Western cultures to the rest of the world. It goes against the distinction between center and periphery as a binary remnant of old colonial practices (quoted in Wang & Yeh 2005, p.2). This has been criticized as something that has always happened, something which does not have to be the result of globalization, but rather something taking place at the same time as it (Wang & Yeh 2005, p.3). Whether or not hybridization is timeless and distinct from trends in globalization, it is still a very valid idea when considering developments in Sino-Hollywood relations.

Indeed, most of the movies studied in this paper have strong Chinese connections, either from being filmed on location in China, to starring Chinese movie-stars, to being remakes of Hong Kong movies. Thus the dichotomy between Chinese and foreign film is an arbitrary one, and not necessarily one that has much importance to the results of this study.

This problem is also acknowledged by Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar in their book *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*, in which they define Chinese cinema wider than simply focusing on movies made on the mainland (2006, p.3).

Thus it is important to remember that the idea is media being globalized, not Americanized or Disneyfied – and that China, either as a state or as Chinese individuals, has a great impact on global media, exemplified by the increasing global reach of CCTVNews, a Chinese state-run English-language TV-channel (formerly known as CCTV9), or the popularity of movies such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* or *Hero* (Shi, 2005).

This can be seen not only as uniquely Chinese-led experience, but rather as a result of the increasing influence of the East on western pop-culture, which beyond Chinese martial arts films, can be seen in the growing popularity of manga and anime as well (Dessler 2003, p.179)

Throughout processes of hybridization it is important to bear in mind, that although entertainment might be more or less global in its reach, places remain distinct, both

in their readings, preferences and creative process (Dittmer 2010, p.20)

The Impact

Ideas repeated and reproduced on screen are seen to be reinforced, for instance if Gramscian ideas of hegemonic discourse are followed to their logical conclusion (Power 2003, pp.181-189). In this way they become internalized, thus providing a feedback loop in which discourses strengthen themselves.

Carter & McCormack, in a 2006 article “Film, Geopolitics and the affective logics of intervention” went further. Seeing how some movies promote the idea of interventionism, specifically *Black Hawk Down*, the authors were not content with merely analyzing the representations themselves, but argued:

“[...] that the relation between cinematic and geopolitical intervention must be understood not only in terms of the way one reproduces or subverts the discursively framed codes and scripts of the other, but also through the ways in which each serves to amplify and modulate the affects of the other. This, we suggest, provides the basis for an expanded engagement with the wider implication of affect in the enactment of popular geopolitics.”(p.230)

The authors disagree with a view in which the power of film can be reduced to discourse or hegemonic ideology – but rather that they amplify and resonate with the underlying culture. In other words, they don't only reinforce existing discourses, but might engender new and unintended ones.

In other words, while we have a good theoretical framework explaining how audiences can be expected to react to various discourses. There is, however, a dearth of good data on audience reception and empirical quantification of any affective impacts of movies on geopolitics. Dodds study on audience reception to James Bond mentioned earlier, is the closest we get, but it is too flawed to draw any conclusions. Moving away from strictly geopolitics however, we can find some successful audience surveys.

First we turn to a 2003 study on how movies affect destination images. Destination images are defined as “a totality of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations, and feelings accumulated towards a place over time” (Kim & Richardson 2003, p.218). As such, it does not need to have a tourism orientation, and might be transferred to theories on Popular Geopolitics.

These destination images are made up of both cognitive and affective components – in other words they are partly evaluated ideas, and partly subjective feelings (ibid, p.220). Films promote these two, both by increasing the familiarity with a place, but also by giving the audiences a sense of experiencing the place with the characters on screen (ibid. pp.221-222).

The 2003 study tried to prove that films affected audiences’ familiarity with a destination, their perceptions of it, and their interest in visiting it. This would all in turn depend on the level of emphatic involvement the audience felt with the characters on screen (ibid. p.223). The findings however, were that emphatic involvement was unimportant to how a destination was perceived, while familiarity with a destination did not significantly increase after seeing a movie set there. However, perception of said destination, as well as the commensurate interest in visiting it increased, the study was however limited both in sample and in the selection of movies (ibid.)

If these results are taken to be true, shallow popular culture should not be seen as significantly different from deeper elite cultural objects in its potential effect on audiences. However, more studies are needed.

The ever-present problem in proving a chain of causality, is present with regards to the the 'CNN-effect', a theory that holds that CNN affects war and intervention, foreign policy and diplomacy. A 2005 macro-study found this theory to be unproven – not least due to the fuzziness of the concept, and the difficulty in defining cause and effect. As it says “global television cannot force policymakers to do what they intend to do anyway” (Gilboa 2005, p.38). The findings do not mean that the 'CNN-effect' is absent, just that it has still to be studied in a methodological narrow enough

way to find it (Gilboa 2005).

The 'CSI-effect' on the other hand is found, in a 2010 article, to have a marked impact. Named after a hit US TV-show about a team of forensic investigators, the 'CSI-effect' has lead, amongst other things, to a skewed view of the resources available to a forensics team, as well as dramatically increasing the quality of evidence jurors expect. Thus, what is a harmless piece of fiction, never claimed to be 100% accurate, changes perceptions and understanding within the public of certain phenomena (Durnal 2010). Thus, fiction cannot be said to be a field without impact on the public at large – although the underlying mechanics are still not fully realized.

There is of course no guarantee that viewers will adopt the meanings directors and producers anticipated (Dodds 2000, p.79). In the same vein, any meaning attributed to the movies is meanings attributed to it by this writer, and the same readings might not be shared with the populace at large.

With everyone reading a pop-cultural text differently, coming up with a representative selection when setting out to research audience dispositions becomes difficult. A further problem is the 'when'. When should you measure an impact? Do you measure it right after the movie's been seen? A year on? 100 years? (Dittmer 2010, pp.111-132)

Research on audience readings of the TV-show *Dallas* found widely differentiated readings in Israel, Japan and the US, further complicating the global view this paper takes (Dittmer 2010, p.20).

As for this paper – the notion is that there is an impact, and that the popular geopolitical discourse must be seen as affective. With this conclusion in mind, looking at the discourse of mere movies, while ignoring other media, including those related to the movie such as commercials, scripts or posters, is problematic. It is nonetheless the first step in narrowing down the field enough for further study, even though it will only give a limited view of the greater picture.

Selecting a Sample

A great inspiration for this paper has been Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar's 2006 book *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*. In it, they move away from the traditional idea of 'national cinema' to a larger analytical framework of 'cinema and the national' (p.3). This has two effects. Firstly, they include in their study movies made within the People's Republic, in Taiwan, Hong Kong and by the diaspora (p.4). Secondly, they question the concept of nation itself, noting that it is a contentious term (pp.5-6). A problem with this definition is how they still limit themselves. They don't include movies made by people not from the Chinese diaspora in non-Chinese areas. Thus, they omit movies such as *Seven Years in Tibet*, although an analysis of that movie could tell us much about how the Chinese nation is conceived of abroad, something again which does affect local views.

This paper does focus on the territorial nation-state of the People's Republic of China – although where appropriate it will target ethnic or cultural assumptions made in the movies. It follows Berry and Farquhar in looking at a limited subject – the Chinese nation – through transnational lenses. It does not seek to discount their findings, rather it seeks to further their study both temporarily, studying the period 2000-2009, and through the wider focus, where the only common denominator is China appearing on screen.

Eisele, in his 2002 article suggesting the existence of a genre concerning itself with the middle east, acknowledges that he might be criticized for not expanding the area the genre defines to include the rest of Asia, including India and the Far East. He suggests that the depictions of these areas does not form a specific generic tradition, but that further study is needed (pp.90-91). The results of this study do indeed not find any clear generic qualities true across the board when dealing with the pop cultural China.

The films chosen will not be analyzed or grouped according to genre. For the purposes of this study, genres would not prove good categories through which these issues can be analyzed. In the 2008 book *War and Film*, professor James Chapman analyzes war on film not through the use of genre, but rather through three lineages; spectacle, tragedy and adventure, in order to analyze “the filmic representation of war, rather than to provide the history of the war film as a genre” (p.10). These lineages should not be seen as mutually exclusive, static or as defined to the same extent as genres. They do however provide a framework in which the movies can be grouped in which conventions of film-making don't really play in (p.10).

This paper, exploring the filmic representation of China, will follow a similar tactic. This is done because no true genres have been found to exist where filmic representations of China are concerned. As this paper will show, the representations are quite differentiated, with a focus on China being the only unifying constant. That is not to say that genres are completely unimportant. As an example, wuxia-movies clearly constitutes one way of portraying some facets of China, although this genre as well is not that useful for categorizing representations of China as a whole, which will be shown in the chapter on the actual movies. Finally, it's worth mentioning that this paper will not posit that there is an a priori dichotomy between how China is portrayed in the west and within China.

Screening Asia

Before the main study begins, the context it appears in will be discussed. First, I will present various studies done on how other Asian nations in the neighborhood are represented on screen. Then I will shift the attention how China has represented itself, and been represented by others.

The Regional Context

Before turning our attention to how China is represented on the silver screen, we will turn our eyes to how other countries in the region have been conceived on screen in recent years. Several of the studies covered here have also been discussed in the chapter on the methodological framework of this study.

In this section we could also look at Vietnam. However the importance of the Vietnam War on any representations of the country, and the genre of Vietnam War movies going with it, means that it will be skipped. Instead we begin further south.

We begin our Asian journey in Malaysia, where a controversy erupted in 1997 over the movie *Entrapment* in Malaysia. Shot in Malaysia, and expected to show a prosperous country highlighted by the extensive use of the then highest buildings in the world, the Petronas Towers both in the story and in background shots, the movie disappointed locally by digitally including the towers in images of slums from the smaller Malaysian city of Malacca. This controversy was studied by Tim Bunnell in a 2004 study.

Thus, what was supposed to be Malaysia's ascension into the league of developed nations, seemed to Malaysians rather to reinforce stereotypical images of Malaysia as poor. However, it cannot be simplified into a binary relationship, where Malaysians are Others to be represented by Westerners. In the words of Tim Bunnell: “Malaysian viewers – unlike the 'others' in Said's [1978] Orientalism dichotomy – are active consumers and critics of the ways in which their places are (re)presented”

(2004, p.302)

The fact that questions about the veracity of the imagery was hardly questioned in the west, as well as the perceived need to include “exotic” slums in images of south-east Asia, highlights some of the issues facing the wider region in raising their standing in popular geopolitics.

Malaysia's prime-minister used this movie as a rallying cry, claiming western pop-culture shows the East as an “undemocratic, unjust, cruel” (Bunnell, 2004, p.300) place. This counter-hegemonic view served the Malaysian government well (p.298).

Through this example, we clearly see Malaysia being exoticised, with the movie cut to fit with certain expectations of how an Asian country should look. Prevailing stereotypes are reinforced through movies, and obvious mistakes are taken at face value by audiences in other parts of the global market not able to notice them. Instead of showing a modern Malaysia entering the league of developed nations, the movie showed how far Malaysia still had to go.

It also shows the difficulty countries can encounter when trying to affect how they are represented on screen.

From Malaysia, we move north to Thailand. Through the popular book, and later film *The Beach* audiences were treated to the Thailand of tourists and backpackers. A 2007 scholarly critique of the movie by Lisa Law, Tim Bunnell and Chin-ee Chong examines how, while conforming to European colonial imagery, adds some American revisions (p.143). This imagery, mostly devoid of any Thais, or other tourists than backpackers for that matter, leads to the idea that Thailand is quite irrelevant to the movie beyond acting as the Southeast Asian backpacker-scene, and that a reading of Robinson Crusoe might be more helpful to understanding the movie (p.147). This view of places as mere stages, without any cultural or political importance, is indeed found through the main study of this paper as well.

Die another Day gained much attention, and was boycotted in South Korea for the

way it portrayed Koreans, South Korea, and North Korea. In it North Koreans harshly torture James Bond, in scenes reminiscent of Korean-war films. South Korea is presented as essentially an American colony, and a poor one at that, as the only civilian Koreans seen in the movie are poor peasants using an ox to plow a field. Beyond these depictions of the two Koreas that have, as mentioned, met with criticism from Korea, come avoidable cultural mishaps like calling the main antagonist, a North Korean officer, Zao. Zao is a Chinese, not Korean surname (Chung 2007). As such, it is apparent that, at least in this movie, Korea is bundled together with China in the popular cultural package.

This is also seen in how the separate ethnicities in the area are often seen as interchangeable. For instance, the great Korean-American actor Philip Ahn played both Chinese and Japanese in his character. When he played Japanese in World War 2 propaganda movies, he was criticized for betraying his ethnicity (Chung 2006, p.50). This both shows that east Asians are seen as interchangeable in Hollywood, but also, and perhaps more importantly, a feeling that the movies mimetic qualities are diminished because of an actor's wrong ethnic background. This criticism would be a lot milder, or probably even absent, if it was about an Irish-American playing an Italian-American.

A 2001 article on Japan in popular fiction, while focusing on books, looks at several books which were later turned into films, including Michael Crichton's *Rising Sun* – which questions doing business with Japanese, vilifying Japanese in the process. The trend present in these books shows a clear fear-mongering and a strong othering of Japan when compared to European countries. Hostility did however go down markedly when the Japanese financial bubble burst. This did of course take place at roughly the same time as Islamic terrorism became the new, great fear of popular imagination. Books from this period, such as *Memoirs of a Geisha* and *The Last Samurai* are both examples of this new, romantic period Japan enjoys in American popular fiction. (Morris 2001) Both these books were later made into movies. That the former, *Memoirs of a Geisha* stars two Chinese women, Gong Li and Zhang Ziyi is noteworthy, in as much as it shows an idea of East-Asia as one, and as such can be compared to the North Korean officer Zao in *Die Another Day* – however, this is an

issue for a study of its own.

Although Japan was an ally, hostility, tied up to fears of Japanese business, was obvious in such movies as *Black Rain* (1989), and even more the 1993 cinematic adaptation of *Rising Sun* (Dodds 2000, p.78). However, as mentioned, later imagery of Japan has been markedly more positive but still often condescending. As an example, 2003 saw two major motion pictures, *Last Samurai* and *Kill Bill* in which white heroes learn Japanese martial arts, and with it defeats Japanese practitioners who might have much more experience. However, both movies also accept Japanese culture as something that needs to be absorbed, although this might be done very quickly and easily by the main characters. Thus, although on one level, Japanese culture is discounted as easy, and the hegemony of whites over Asians is emphasized (Tierney 2006), the movies do show Japanese culture as being worthy of absorption. In that respect, Japanese culture is lifted, although Japan is obviously still seen as underneath white Westerners.

Important for the whole region, is how depictions change due to geopolitical developments. As an example, world war 2 allies, such as Korea and China, were changed to communist enemies after the war, while war-time enemy Japan becomes a friend and ally – often with the same stereotypical imagery used (Konzett 2004, p.328). In this it is also important to notice how countries such as South Korea were unimportant for anything else but being someone who needed protection from the North. Rising Japanese business might was met with fear, turning Japan into an antagonist – until Japanese economy met with problems, when it again is seen as a positive entity.

This means that even though the findings for now are that of positivity towards China that could change in the coming years, with the ever-growing Chinese economy, and the uncertainty of the course of global geopolitics in general.

With that in mind, we move to China – first to see how Chinese have conceived of themselves in movies.

China by China

Before we look at how China was presented in the global cinema, we turn our eyes to the China we find in Chinese movies. Although this paper in principle finds no reason to differentiate between filmatic depictions of China from outside China, or from within, there is a persistent line of scholarship that prefers to look at self-representations, rather than those made by others.

As already mentioned, Chris Berry and Mary Farquhar's 2006 book *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation* has been a great inspiration for this paper. In it, through the use of 7 broad categories, they discuss the contested issues of nation in the context of China. Although focusing on the broader version of nation, rather than the more limited geopolitical state studied in this paper, a short run through is in order, with greatest focus on the more recent movies.

The first category includes the movies creating a national history. As such, movies dealing with the opium wars, commonly held as the starting point for modern China, are important – and through them a change in themes are clear. *Eternal Flame*, made under the Japanese occupation, places it in the context of a race trauma, thus supporting the Japanese East Asia co-prosperity sphere against the machinations of the evil white race. 1959s *Lin Zexu and the Opium War* brings the focus away from race and over to the nation – while the only members of the nation acting the right way against the British are the working class people. Through this it brings a class-issue into the mix. The issue of class was not a major issue in neither the Taiwanese made 1963 movie *The Opium War* nor 1997s mainland produced *The Opium War*. The Taiwanese movie focuses on a shared Chineseness despite differences and historical separation, while the 1997 movie instead echoes issues in international trade important at the time (Berry and Farquhar 2006, pp.19-28).

These movies clearly show political changes and differences within China, and highlights how movies are integral parts of the current discourses prevailing within the area. Furthermore, they, and especially the last one, highlight a China moving towards capitalism.

The second category looks at movies springing out of the Chinese opera tradition – a non-realist tradition - that according to the writers gave us, amongst other genres, the martial arts genre. This genre moved from the regional market to the global one, carried by actors such as Bruce Lee and, later, Jackie Chan. More recently, Ang Lee's 2000-movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* experienced great success globally, thus leading to several movies with a similar style going global (Berry and Farquhar 2006, p.67).

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon vision of the nation is one of fairy tale, one that Ang Lee himself has admitted to being a; “dream of China, a China that probably never existed, except in my boyhood fantasies in Taiwan” (quoted in Berry and Farquhar 2006, p.67). It displays an ethnically diverse China, celebrating Western-style individualism over traditional Chinese Confucian ideals (Berry and Farquhar 2006, p.69). This last hint at the movie, despite set in a traditional era, is still very much about the emergence of a more globalized Chinese culture (p.72).

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, despite winning multiple awards abroad, and large earnings at the international box-office, none-the-less was in many ways a failure in China. This was unlike the later, but similarly styled, movie *Hero* (2002), by Zhang Yimou. These two movies have vastly different views of China as a nation. Whereas *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* invokes a globalized, or Westernized individualism, *Hero*, which has been criticized for its 'fascinating fascism', and its overt Chinese nationalism, ends with the hero sacrificing himself for the good of the emperor, and the empire.

The third category includes the so-called realist movies. The best example closer to our time might be Chen Kaige's 1984 movie *Yellow Earth*. This “postsocialist take on Chinese modernity” (Berry and Farquhar 2006, p.107). Earlier realist movies were parts of a political project to create and promote the idea of a unified Chinese Nation. By the close of the 20th century, China was already an emerging power in international politics, the nation was in many ways already built. *Yellow Earth* and other movies from the 80s until today criticize problematic aspects of that nation – in

Yellow Earth it is the suffering of peasants even after the communist revolution which is the theme. These movies do however not do as well as operatic movies, such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *Hero* abroad (Berry and Farquhar 2006, p.107).

The fourth category quite literally turns the gaze to women. Exploring how women are seen, they discuss how 4 major actresses are seen on screen. Discussing a scene from 1990s *Judou*, in which Gong Li, a Chinese movie star, when being watched with desire by a male character, returns a protesting look. This has been seen as an allegory by Rey Chow – that what is being protested is a neocolonial commodification of China by the west (paraphrased by Berry and Farquhar 2006, p.128). They go on to discuss how it might not be internationalized like this. Rather it might be seen as a critique of the Communist Party itself (ibid. p.128). However Rey Chow shows how attraction and sexuality can be linked to geopolitical readings of texts.

Next they move on to how men act. They find that Confucian moral values such as filiality towards those above you, and brotherhood influence movies – and informs readings of such dissimilar movies as *Hero* and *Rush Hour* (Berry and Farquhar 2006, pp.135-137).

Hero, portraying the attempted assassination of the king of Qin, later the first emperor of China, by an assassin called Nameless. Nameless decides not to kill the king, both out of a belief in a unified, stronger China, and through a wish to end the people's suffering in the constant state of war (ibid. p.163).

Rush Hour was Jackie Chan's first commercially successful Hollywood film. Taking place just after Hong Kong's return to China, the movie portrays a Hong Kong within China, in many ways embodied by Jackie Chan himself. The villain in the movie is a British high official who tries to steal Chinese treasures being displayed in L.A. - which would have the effect of damaging Sino-American relations. As revenge for an initial art-theft being stopped in Hong Kong by Jackie Chan's character Lee, the criminals decide to kidnap the daughter of the Chinese Consul to L.A.'s daughter.

Consul Han's requests the help of Lee, and asks the FBI to cooperate with him. However, the FBI doesn't want him to interfere, leading to Lee being teamed up with black LAPD cop Carter. Thus, the only truly moral official is the Chinese. All the American bureaucrats are seen as non-co-operative. In the end, Lee and Carter saves the consul's daughter and the Chinese art, and through it Sino-American relations (ibid, pp. 151-152). These two movies, although different, both value brotherhood and the sovereignty of states (ibid, p.139).

Through these two gendered readings, we can draw to represented China's. The feminized China does not have to be weak, but rather is an object of outside desires. It thus denotes a passiveness when compared with the masculine fighters – where the state is worth fighting, and dying for.

In the sixth category, the attention turns to minorities within and without China – both ethnic and other. In it they acknowledge the importance of Said's theories on Orientalism, and the related term of 'othering' when it comes to understanding China's relation with its minorities, although they claim it might be too simplistic and binary (ibid., pp.169-174)

Looking at Ang Lee's 1993 comedy *The Wedding Banquet*, they note how it displays both sexual and ethnic minorities, and others. In this Taiwanese movie, we meet a gay Taiwanese man living with his white boyfriend, Simon, in New York, and the pressure from his parents that he should get married and father a grandchild for them. The movie has been analyzed primarily through a sexual framework – with sexual liberalization seen as part of modernization. The only truly othered section of the movie is not the homosexuals, nor the different ethnic backgrounds, but the Chinese wedding itself. Berry and Farquhar finds the portrayal of the western other, Simon, in the movie as highly positive. He is seen as an included part of the family, a good co-operative foreigner (ibid. pp.175-188). Thus the discourse shows positivity towards the west, and the absence of any set-in-stone antagonism.

Finally they take a look at the transnational movies. By this they draw away from the pure imagery of the movies, to look at the production process. Bruce Lee is a good

example of this – as a Chinese man making movies in the US, creating a synthesis of Chinese and American masculinity (ibid, pp.197-204). A better example might be the move in China towards making blockbuster movies, and the commensurate fight against piracy (ibid. pp.204-213). Although this Americanization of the film industry can be seen as neo-colonialism, the reality is that money, markets and talents now move more freely across borders. In the words of Berry and Farquhar; “[...] the transnational is no longer the old Western imperialist order but instead one in which - as symbolized by Bruce Lee's global circulation – Chinese already participate” (ibid, p.222). With this they clearly appropriate theories of hybridization – where neither side is excessively dominant.

There are some clear pointers to bring with us into the study itself. Firstly, that the operatic movies are the ones doing best abroad, clearly demonstrates a belief in a certain China. An exotic locale. However, it might also easily be linked to concepts such as cultural discount. A realist movie would expect a much larger

As far as success abroad goes, movies such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *Hero* and, to a smaller extent *House of Flying Daggers* are all clear examples. All of these can be defined narrower than simply following the operatic mode, or calling them martial arts films, as is done by Berry and Farquhar. They are all wuxiapian, or Chinese sword-fighting movies. This genre, beyond its local and, increasingly, global popularity, is also a genre with a large effect on perceptions of what China and Chinese culture is all about. In the words of Kenneth Chan, a Singaporean Chinese researcher film studies, “The Ideological impact of this genre should clearly not be underestimated, as cinematic fantasy is sutured into the cultural and political imaginary of China, particularly for the Chinese diaspora.” (Chan 2004, p.3)

Most important of these in the last few years is, perhaps, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. It was almost a part of the main study in this paper, ending up as the 215th most profitable film on the global box-office of the movies made in the period 2000-2009. The movie criticized for not being a true Chinese movie, and pandering to the west (ibid, p.4), and the director, Ang Lee, himself sees the movie as, at least partly a Hollywood production (ibid, p.6).

Seeing it as not a true Chinese movie implicitly believes that there is such a thing as a true Chinese movie. This idea of an unadulterated prototype clearly assumes some degree of self-Orientalization – it is the idea that 'this' is what China should look like, sound like and what moral values it should have.

The question is then to what extent wuxiapian or other genres get consumed by Hollywood, and to what extent they are able to utilize Hollywood simply to advance their own standing. This question is the one that stands between a transnational view of movie-production and a globalized, Hollywood view of it. Although *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* was more critically acclaimed abroad than within China, this does not mean it was changed to a large extent by Hollywood. Hollywood was utilized, but the movie is still discernibly different – simply by being a wuxiapian. Thus it is more of a transnational movie, a hybridization, than it is Chinese, American or simply Global.

Indeed, a deeper integration of China into the global cinematic matrix makes the Chinese film industry able to repackage “with remarkably sophisticated cinematic techniques [...] what is generally believed to be Chinese national culture (which is always already mystified and Orientalized in the West) and its redistribution to the international film market” (Zhang 1997, p.84). However, even more than that, the deeper integration of Chinese in general will lead to a repackaged Chinese culture. Not only what could be termed Chinese movies, but movies made abroad financed by Chinese interests, with Chinese artistic talent behind it, maybe shot on location in China, or, simply through a growing familiarity with the country due to its growing importance in world affairs.

That at least part of the Chinese movie industry has become part of a larger, transnational film-making culture was summed up thusly by Chuck Kleinhaus;

- Production and distribution takes place within a commercially inclined capitalist culture
- The movies are exchanged and widely exported on the global market

- There are genres with generic identities, combining similar styles and themes
- Influence is going both ways
- Actual relations, such as Hollywood stars John Woo and Jet Li, working both in Hollywood and in domestic productions

(Kleinhaus 2003)

This view can however also be criticized. Although Chinese interests might become more important within Hollywood, mainland produced movies could be relegated to a role as art-house movies abroad – with China's movie industry a dependent of Hollywood's cultural clout and economic power. The reception of Hollywood movies in China is after all vastly different from the reception most Chinese movies receive in the West – highlighting a still present stronger cultural movement one way (Wan and Kraus 2002).

However, this transnationality is about more than just Hollywood and China, something which can be exemplified with how Chinese movies can also be shot abroad – as for instance *House of Flying Daggers* was. This movie, purportedly taking place in China, was indeed shot in the Ukraine (Chung 2007).

This de-Sinification of parts of Chinese cinema, exemplified by *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and the Sinification of at least some Hollywood productions clearly points to the difficulty of defining 'Chineseness' in movies (Wang 2009, p.173). However, it clearly shows that making arbitrary delineations based on the nationality of the production studio might not be successful.

One interesting point is the use of language in these movies. Movies made for the global market place, such as *Hero* and *House of Flying Daggers* uses Putonghua, or Mandarin, the official spoken language of China, throughout. However movies made for the local market, and experiencing huge popularity there, such as Feng Xiaogang's comedies, a staple around Chinese New Year's for several years, often use various Chinese dialects. This is further marked by the Mandarin in the movies released to a global market being quite accented. Thus the movies made for the global market might be attempting to portray a unified China in all possible ways (Lu

2007, pp.155-161). There is however another explanation: With the comedies being about present day, realistic events, the use of dialects marks a more realistic mode, while the use of Mandarin might be linked to the operatic mode argued for by Berry and Farquhar.

China in the Western Imaginary

With that out of the way, we turn our eyes to how China has been seen by outsiders.

The most important stereotype when going into a paper on China in geopolitics is that of the yellow peril. This sees Asians, and Chinese, as either faceless masses, or scheming villains, like Dr. Fu Manchu. Other stereotypes, such as the eroticized China dolls, the aggressive dragon ladies, the Charlie Chans or the desexualized, but masculine male are staples in Hollywood movies (Chan 2009, pp.23-25), but they are less effective when it comes to discuss geopolitical implications. The yellow peril stereotype is absent in the movies of later years, although it can be seen in e.g. 1997s *Seven Years in Tibet*.

From the great, decadent, empire, to the red peril of Communist China, to today's hyper-modern Shanghai, China's exoticism has been perpetually reinvented – and often goes from a positive view to a negative one (Morgan 2004, pp.407-408). It is however important to avoid believing in a simplistic dichotomy, where the China being socially constituted at home, and the Western other are afforded no relationship. If not, the fact that we in the west have ideas about China, and the fact that there is a country called China would be a mere coincidence (Morgan 2004, p. 415). Indeed, much othering is done by nominal experts, as shown by Said in his book *Orientalism* (1978) – but also through locals self-Orientalizing themselves and their society (Morgan 2004, p. 417)

Indeed, three layers of Orientalism are present when dealing with Asia. Firstly, there

is the Western Orientalism; this is how the West sees Asia. Secondly, we have self-orientalism. This is both how Asian societies see themselves, and how they appropriate or promote certain expectations about them. Thirdly, it is the orientalism directed towards other Asian nations, or minorities within a nation (Narumi, 2000, p.312).

However, some things do remain similar. In a study on the coverage on China in New York Times and Los Angeles Times during the time period 1992-2001, a large increase in coverage was found, but the overall tone towards China remained negative. China was mostly a 'Red China', a 'Tian'an Men China', a 'Developing and Threatening China' (Peng 2004).

In the late 90s, several movies politically aligned with the “Free Tibet”-movement were released, and did well on the global box office. These movies all included old red peril clichés, and stereotypical representations of both Chinese and Tibetans – with the Chinese being villains, and the Tibetans good. They are often overtly anti-Chinese. An example of this is in *Seven Years in Tibet*, a movie about a historical character, the Austrian mountaineer and teacher to the Dalai Lama, Heinrich Harrer. The movie ends with scenes where Chinese soldiers are seen pouring into Tibet. The Chinese invasion of Tibet happened after Heinrich Harrer was long gone from Tibet, thus making the scene's only point a criticism of China's Tibet policy (Lu 2007, p.118).

The Chinese government pressured entertainment conglomerates to follow the accepted Chinese line of discourse. Disney, the company ultimately behind *Kundun* found themselves encountering problems with many of their businesses relating to China. The entertainment conglomerates understood any depictions conflicting with the official Chinese line might lead to problems for their business in China in the longer run. This has been seen as causing the end of a period in which several movies supporting Tibetan separatism had been made (Schell 2000, pp. 298-302). It also shows how political pressure might lead to self-censorship by film studios. This might be one of the reasons why 2000-2005 only saw one Hollywood movie relating to China, while the next 4 years saw 10.

Beyond movies about Tibet, it seems it also stopped movies in which China was perceived in a threatening fashion from being made – as the main study will go on to show. Lu, in a 2007 book on representations of China, wrote: “In the realm of popular culture, Hollywood films play a part in the perpetuation of an image of China as the demonic other” (pp.120-121). This Demonic other seems almost exorcised from the cinema of the first decade of this millennium.

The same period that saw negative representations, also had positive depictions. Both the James Bond movie *Tomorrow Never Dies* and the Jackie Chan movie *Rush Hour* deals with the geopolitical implications of Hong Kong's return to the PRC. Both movies depict a scenario in which Western and Chinese have to work together – to protect Sino-Western relations. Doing this, not only do they put forth that relations between these two countries need protection, that good relations are the normal state of affairs, and that any break in those relations are instigated by outsiders and criminals – they also show the co-operation between Western countries and China embodied in the characters in the movies. In both movies the equal status of the two is clear – it is about mutual gain, rather than a power game between the two.

Positive depictions, and the increasing influence of China in Hollywood, could also be seen in Disney's 1998 film *Mulan*. Although it is based on a Chinese story, it is changed to fit traditional Western narrative structures. The movie did have trouble entering the Chinese market, due to the reactions Disney met after releasing *Kundun* – however it was eventually allowed to screen. *Mulan* is similar to *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in how both exemplify how hybridization might work. While the latter exemplifies using global financing and international movie making talent to create a movie that is seemingly local, the former takes a foreign story and makes a Disney-cartoon out of it. While both are targeting a global market, their methods of hybridization are different (Wang & Yeh 2005, p.7)

A third way of seeing China in these years was through neither seeing China as an enemy, nor as an equal partner in world peace, but as a country requiring Western guidance to enlightenment – which can be argued to be present in Bertolucci's classic

The Last Emperor, in which the emperor, and thus China, requires guidance from an English school teacher and westerners to understand the world around him, and by extension China's modernity (Zhang 2007, p.7).

In all this it is also worth mentioning the small wave of movies set in colonial Shanghai. There is a clear similarity between the depictions in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, *The Empire of the Sun* and a movie discussed in the main section of this paper, *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. This Shanghai is seen as the ultimate pre-post-modern modernity – and is one that is recreated not only in western movies, but also in Chinese films such as *Kung Fu Hustle* or *Lust, Caution*. There haven't been as many movies made about the period from the 1920s to the 1940s in Shanghai since the 1940s (Gulliver 2009)! This dream of China is an aesthetic one, heralding an earlier period where Westerners lived and worked in China, often with Chinese people. It can thus be seen as a dream of a colonial era gone by, or as depicting a period mirroring the current cosmopolitan city that Shanghai is today.

Popular Geopolitics surrounding China in top-grossing movies 2000-2009

This paper claims that the different Chinas one sees in cinemas take three different, although sometimes overlapping forms. In the following I will analyze several movies. For some I will analyze the whole movie, while others will only have certain key scenes analyzed.

The Selection

The movies under scrutiny are the 200 top-grossing movies on the international box-office of the period from 2000 to 2009, according to IMDb and Boxofficemojo.com¹. Both these websites frequently used in other studies within the field (e.g. Dodds

1 See Appendix for full list of movies

2006, Lee 2008 and others). Of these 200 movies, 11 were found to represent China on screen.

It is important here to define what is meant by mentioning China. By it, I mean the geopolitical entity of the People's Republic of China. With this definition in mind, it does not focus on the experiences of Chinese-Americans, it does not focus on such tropes as Dr. Fu Manchu or Charlie Chan, early stereotypes of Chinese, which were often targeted on the ethnic Chinese found in the diaspora.

It must be mentioned that several of these 200 movies do not deal with the real world. Movies such as *Lord of the Rings* or *Star wars* are set in a fictional geographical location, and while there might be symbolical geopolitical readings of China or global geopolitics in these, they are nonetheless not used in this study. This affects, amongst other movies, the number one grossing movie, *Avatar*, which has been seen as an allegory on evictions of Chinese residents in the name of development by, amongst others, the blogger Li Chengpeng (2010)

The dominance of this movies were explained in a 2008 article, Francis Lee researched how East Asian audiences reacted to various genres, and the cultural specificity that goes with it. He finds that the movies that travel best, are the ones in which the cultural specifics are kept to a minimum. In other words, movies such as comedies do not travel as well as action-thrillers. Media products experience what is called 'cultural discount', when audiences do not have the necessary cultural capital to appreciate it. Thus he found the movies doing best being the ones in which cultural specificity was kept to a bare minimum – which meant movies in which special effects were dominant. These are movies that are often placed 'no-where'. Movies such as the *Harry Potter*-series or *Lord of the Rings* are examples of this. These movies are non-American, removing themselves from their American context (Lee 2008).

The 200 top movies are dominated by action-thrillers, often those in which special effects play a big part. This is due to the concept of cultural discount. Thus comedies are under-represented on the list. As the sample under scrutiny is made up of the

winners at the global box-office, Lee's predictions have come true for them.

There were also some movies that had depictions of ethnic Chinese, or in other ways were found tangential to this study. There are movies such as *Live Free or Die Hard*, in which one of the antagonists is of Chinese ethnicity, *The Hangover*, where a Chinese-American is a minor character, or *Pirates of The Caribbean: At World's End*, in which we meet the character Sao Feng, Pirate Lord of the South China Seas, and visit Singapore. Even though Sao Feng's representation on screen has been likened to that of Fu Manchu (Chan 2009, p.23), as they don't deal with China as a state, their discourses won't be discussed. The study does include both movies set in China, and movies merely referencing the country.

11 movies have thus been found. They are, alphabetically: *2012*, *The Dark Knight*, *The Departed*, *Fantastic Four 2: Rise of the Silver Surfer*, *Juno*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, *Rush Hour 2*, *Rush Hour 3* and *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*.

Apart from *Rush Hour 2*, they're all from 2006 or later – showing a great increase in China related Hollywood movies experiencing success at the box office after this time.

I will first discuss these movies through what I find to be the most relevant framework. This framework essentially deals with the extent to which the geopolitical existence of China is dealt with. It ranges from movies where it's not, to movies where China is given a prominent role, to movies in which China is relegated to simply being another area in the greater global exotic. After defining these three categories through the movies that constitute them, I will look at different ways in which geopolitical representations can be seen.

The Magic Kingdom

“Legend tells of a legendary warrior whose Kung Fu skills were the stuff of legend”

**Opening narration
*Kung Fu Panda (2008)***

The first lineage when it comes to the movies of the past 10 years, is what I've chose to call 'The Magic Kingdom'. This is the fairytale China, a separate magic kingdom which exists outside of the realm of Geopolitics. The choice of magic kingdom as the name is not random. It recalls the 'magic kingdom' section of Disney World in Orlando, thus showing that this lineage is the one in which China becomes commodified, a recognizable product.

Kung Fu Panda

Year: 2008

Kung Fu Panda is a prime example from the first decade of the new millennium. Overtly set in China, its hero the panda Po, is torn between his dream of becoming a Kung Fu fighter, and his father's expectations of him taking over the family noodle restaurant.

He proves an unlikely hero, who struggles with Kung Fu until his master, the red panda Shifu, finds his one true motivation: Food. Through his training, he is eventually able to defeat the villain, the snow leopard Tai Lung, thus gaining the respect of the villagers and the other Kung Fu masters.

What is marked is how a fantasy tale, outside of reality, and, seemingly, outside of popular geopolitics, is still set in a real country; China. Thus it highlights the fantastic nature this China often assumes. As a China outside of reality, and as an imaginary world, this China truly is *Tianxia*, all under heaven – its geopolitical nature is a world of its own.

This fantastical China is inhabited by anthropomorphic animals, many of which are endemic China. This coupled with the ever-present Chinese architecture and the art of Kung Fu itself clearly shows the film makers going for making China as exotic as possible, as stereotypical Chinese as possible, and as unique as possible.

Fantastic Four 2: Rise of the Silver Surfer

Year: 2007

In this movie, the Fantastic Four, the 4 superhero protagonists of the story, begin their final showdown with the antagonist with a chase and a battle flying in the air over China. From flying over karst formations, through an aerial battle over the great wall they finally come crashing down in down-town Shanghai. Taking the obvious first; the karst formations are far from the great wall, which again is far away from Shanghai, thus the China we see on screen in this movie becomes vastly smaller – and the China we see is presented through landmarks and famous landscapes. It is an essentialized China, boiled down to its raw stereotypically known images.

While the Shanghai of the movie is shown as prosperous, modern, it is also exotic, with the crash itself going through many bicycles before ending in a Chinese looking pagoda. The streetscape is marked by neon lights, and looks more like Chinatown, San Francisco than China. This studio-recreated street-scape points to a China defined by how the Chinese diaspora is seen. Ignoring the geographical nature of China, and relying on these cultural markers, clearly shows how China can be construed as a Magic Kingdom.

As such, *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* clearly shows how important markers of China still are perceived to be by at least some movie producers. The huge distance between the Great Wall and Shanghai are ignored – the size of China being unimportant or neglected. China, in the case of this movie, is an imagined place, a magic kingdom, where all things known about it exist in close proximity to each other.

The Magic Kingdom in the examples above, is not a bad place, rather it's different. Unique. Often existing on a completely different plane from the rest of the world. This is the fantastic, imagined China. It's the stereotypical fairytale China Ang Lee, while discussing *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, called a “dream of China, a China that probably never existed, except in my boyhood fantasies in Taiwan” (quoted in Berry and Farquhar 2006, p.67).

Juno

Year: 2007

Stereotypes are however not only benign. The movie *Juno*, which is the movie with the smallest reference to China in the survey, deals with the issue of teen pregnancy and adoption. Upon meeting the prospective adoptive parents, Juno, the pregnant teenager berates them for looking for an American child to adopt: "You shoulda gone to China. You know, 'cause I hear they give away babies like free iPods. You know, they pretty much just put them in those T-shirt guns and shoot them out at sporting events." Through this an image of China far from benign is shown. Meant simply to highlight Juno's teenage ignorance (Harmanci 2008), it nonetheless highlights stereotyped images of China as a country dealing with its children as commodities – a China vastly different from the US.

These three movies, although quite different in imagery, all stereotype the country of China. Through these films we see a China that is immediately recognizable, while it at the same time retains certain ethereal qualities.

From a geopolitical standpoint, movies like this are interesting. They assume a China with which any sort of normal relationship would be difficult. While the othering of China might be done in a highly positive way, it still lets us know a China apparently existing on a different plane. How could we ever assume normal international relations with this magic kingdom?

However, this China might also be the one that travels best. Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* would have been an example of a movie which would fit in this category. By adapting to western sensibilities, while creating a dream of a China that never was, Ang Lee reduced the cultural discount the movie could otherwise

encounter on the global market. As such it does exist on a different plane from the real world.

For the sake of geopolitics, however, it is better if China is indeed a real country, with which real relations can be had – and this is what we find in the second category;

China being China

“Welcome to the People's Republic of China”

PLA-soldier to protagonists as they
arrive in the Himalayas

2012

The second form is the politically assertive China. In these movies we often see a positive and responsible China, a country culturally different, but one that can ultimately be known and dealt with by outsiders. A country seen as an equal stakeholder in the world.

2012

Year: 2009

The main example from the past few years is *2012*, which is also the movie that inspired this paper. The movie deals with how mankind, and a few protagonists, struggles to survive an apocalyptic event, drastically changing the face of the earth. It is not the first global disaster epic by Roland Emmerich, the director and producer. Amongst his earlier movies we find *The Day After Tomorrow*, which has already been mentioned on as the object of Lukinbeal and Zimmermans study of trends in modern film geography (2006).

Humankind is saved, in this movie, by huge arks built in Tibet. As one of the main

characters say when he first sees the huge structures: “Leave it to the Chinese! I didn't think it was possible. Not in the time we had.” This sentiment clearly shows one of the main strands present in this movie's portrayal of China – China as a technologically and industrially advanced super power.

The other strand shows rural Tibet. Buddhist monks, women slaughtering chicken outside their house are all present. However, the movie in no ways puts a distinction between being Chinese and being Tibetan, in deed one of the protagonists is a Tibetan working on the construction of the arks. The Tibetans displaced by the construction (claimed to be of a dam), are later shown to have been moved to a well-built new village.

Thus this movie does not follow in the footsteps of the Tibet-bashing movies of the late 90s, instead accepting Tibet as an integral part of China. When the American protagonists attempt to sneak aboard the Arks, they are helped to do so by a Tibetan family. This is however framed not as a subversive act against the Chinese, but rather against the combined political leadership of the world. The Tibetans do speak Tibetan in the movie, thus clearly marking them as

All the way through, the Chinese leadership is never shown. And when push comes to shove, the surviving heads of state turn to the Americans for leadership. The difference however, is that China in this is presented on the same level as Germany, the United Kingdom and other old powers.

The Chinese are not presented as a coherent, singular group. However, the different groups can still be seen as stereotypical, with the down-trodden, spiritual Tibetans, the united workers and the stern-faced soldiers all presenting stereotypical images of Chinese people.

The movie was one of the 20 foreign movies allowed on Chinese cinema screens in 2009, receiving high box-office results and praise for how it included China as a savior country – both in how China constructed the arks, and in how Chinese characters are seen as acting altruistically, saving the Western protagonists and

helping them aboard the arks (Zhu 2010)

It did, however, also receive criticism. The Chinese in the movie are limited to constructing the ships. All management is shown to be by Westerners. As such, it is more 'Made in China' and China as the world factory that saves the world, not the country and its citizens. Secondly comes the problem that the only part of China shown was the Himalayas. It thus plays into Orientalist beliefs of cleansing Shang-Ri Las on the Tibetan plateau, what better place for humanity to experience rebirth? (Tang 2010)

Even though China might have been portrayed mostly as a world factory, it is worth remembering movies such as *Rising Sun* in which Japanese industrial and financial power is seen as dangerous and threatening. Thus, even if it's only as a 'Made in China' we see China; it's still business and industry at its best.

This movie is also a perfect example of the international nature of Hollywood movies. A movie where the action takes place around the world, directed by a German, made in the United States, popular in cinemas all over the world, and derided by critics everywhere.

The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor

Year:2008

The third movie in a series, this outing moves the action from primarily Egypt, to primarily China. The movie begins in ancient China, with the first emperor (in this movie called emperor Han), searching for immortality. Throughout the movie, Chinese characters mainly speak Mandarin Chinese. After rehashing the old myth that builders of the great wall were buried in it, to show how cruel of an emperor he was, the movie follows his retainers journey to far west China, and what looks like Xinjiang, where a witch who might hold the secret to immortality is found. Brought back to the capital, she recites a spell in Sanskrit – clearly showing an internationalizing of the ancient world. This spell turns the emperor, and his entire

army into terracotta statues.

This is of course completely ahistorical. It does however show China as an ancient country, but not a universe unto itself, as the spell being recited in Sanskrit clearly shows. Besides the spell, all dialogue in this section is in Mandarin.

Fast-forwarding to 1946, and the protagonists' son is an archaeologist in China, while the protagonists, a couple living in England, are sent by the British government with an ancient Chinese artifact containing waters from the legendary Shangri-La to hand back to the Chinese as a sign of good will. The emperor is brought back to life by a renegade warlord, and clumsiness on the part of the protagonists. The now living mummy thus finds he needs to travel to Shangri-La, and with the magic waters found there be able to resurrect his army. They fight the mummy to the Himalayas and back to central China, where a great battle takes place. The resurrected Terracotta army and its allied forces commanded by the warlord from before combat the heroes, who have resurrected the builders of the great wall to help them. The heroes are finally able to defeat the evil emperor and put an end to his plans of world domination, with help from the Chinese witch from the beginning and her daughter – both of which apparently attained the elusive immortality the first emperor sought.

Despite being complete hogwash, taking great liberties with history and delving in supernatural legends, this movie never the less presents an image of a responsible, independent China. Firstly this is done through how the storyline of the movie. Carrying an ancient artifact back to its rightful home sees China as on-par with western countries. Throughout the movie, although China is shown as torn by warlords, it is nonetheless one China, including Tibetan areas. With a strong presence of Chinese language, it doesn't Americanize the others, and by extent not China either.

In this it can be contrasted with the early scenes in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). This movie begins in a bar in pre-world war II Shanghai. The imagery on screen is similar to a bar scene in *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. In this movie, Indiana Jones is selling the remains of Nurhaci, forefather of the Qing

emperors, to a Chinese crime-lord. Both movies thus include criminals acquiring artifacts for their own use. The difference lies in what comes before: Indiana Jones tries to trade with the crime-lord, ostensibly to acquire a precious diamond – the protagonists in *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* on the other hand carries the ancient artifact to China as a sign of good-will towards the Chinese. Good relations with China are thus seen as a goal in itself.

Although the movie ends with the clichéd notion of white males saving the day, it's overall a clear example of a movie dealing with a geopolitically real country, not a nation that doesn't exist outside of reality, or simply a playground for English-speaking protagonists.

It can however also easily be seen as a threatening geopolitical vision; that of a resurgent, dangerous China. In the movie, after a 2000 year period of sleep, the grand Terracotta army comes back to life to conquer the world. This reading however ignores the overall positive image of China in the movie. Indeed, this threat within China is stopped with the help of Chinese characters. It is also of note how the emperor was brought back to life due to the clumsy acts of these same Westerners – if this movie is thus seen as an allegory of a threatening China, it is a threat which has been created or facilitated by the West.

The two vastly different geopolitical readings, one pointing to positive relations with China, while the other pointing to China as a reawakening threat, both point to a real China. It is not a China existing on a separate plane, nor is it simply a global location in a sprawling Anglo-American empire – and thus belongs firmly in the category of China being China.

The movie might also be seen as an allegory of Chinese modern history, with the need to awaken the dormant workers to beat out the threat of warlords and reactionary imperialism analogous to some views of the Chinese civil war.

The Dark Knight

Year: 2008

In this, Chris Nolan's second Batman movie, the early plot lines deals with the attempts of a Chinese securities company laundering mob-funds, while at the same time proposing a Joint Venture with Wayne Enterprises, Bruce Wayne, Batman's true identity's company. The company decides not to follow through, amongst other reasons disbelieving a very high growth rate as too good to be true. This can of course be seen at a not-so-subtle jab at the great growth of the Chinese economy over the past few years.

The Chinese head of the corporation preemptively flees the US to Hong Kong avoid prosecution, and it is clearly stated both by him and the DA that the Chinese won't extradite a national under any circumstances. Of course Batman has no jurisdiction, and he heads to Hong Kong to apprehend the suspect.

Beyond being the renown cityscape of Hong Kong, with its modern architecture and . What is noteworthy, is that the criminal and his henchmen speak Mandarin, and not the locally more common language of Cantonese. This further reinforces the image of Hong Kong as firmly part of China. It also echoes the use of Mandarin in movies such as *Hero* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*.

Beyond this subplot, there's a scene in a court room, where a suspected mobster draws a gun on district attorney Harvey Dent. After disarming the mobster, the D.A. Scornfully notes that it is a Chinese made gun, and, addressing the suspected head of the mob, says: "If you wanna kill a public servant Mr. Moroni, I suggest you buy American!"

Thus the movie portrays Chinese business as shady, and producing low-quality items. Through this we see a two-pronged portrayal of China: As a country that can stand up to the US and say no – echoing the famous Chinese political book «Zhongguo keyi shuo bu»/China can say "No" (Song et.al. 1996), but also of a

China in which businesses are unreliable and potentially immoral. It is nonetheless in Chinese businesses the future of the funds of the mobsters is to be found, as well as potential investments from American businesses.

Rush Hour 3

Year: 2007

Rush Hour 3 once again sees odd couple detectives Lee and Carter joining forces to combat crime, in this case they travel to Paris to thwart the Triads. The movie starts off in Los Angeles, with Lee accompanying ambassador Han of China, a major character from the first movie, to the world criminal court, currently in session in Los Angeles. The movie starts with ambassador Han assigned to head the fight against triads. After declaring that the elusive Shy Shen has been found, he is interrupted by the Chinese delegate to the world criminal court declaring that Shy Shen does not exist. The UK-representative then asks “Who is Shy Shen?”. Before ambassador Han can answer, he is shot by an assassin, and Lee, and eventually Carter tries to chase him down.

These early scenes deserve to be considered more in depth. First off, the notion that the world is joined in one world criminal court, and, moreover, that China is taking a responsible leading role in, at least, some of its activities. This clearly shows China taking a responsible, cooperative role in world affairs.

However, the dissent from the Chinese representative, dismissing the existence of Shy Shen, also shows China not to be a monolithic entity, even in diplomacy. Thus China is humanized and brought into the real world – far away from a magic kingdom existing on a separate plane.

After the chase, where Lee and Carter fails to apprehend the bad guy, a man named Kenji, who turns out to be a Japanese speaking acquaintance of Lee, Lee and Carter go to the hospital to check up on Ambassador Han. While there, Carter is reprimanded for the handling of the Chase (in which he hijacked a car). He is also reprimanded and for an earlier offense some weeks earlier, when he arrested 6

Iranians for a week. As his boss points out, they were scientists at UCLA, however Carter maintains that they, by being Iranians, must have been plotting a bombing or a similar act of terrorism.

This short scene highlights what in many ways is the geopolitics of the Hollywood movies researched in this paper. While China is rarely vilified, it is perfectly OK to vilify the Middle East. The fact that the hero of a movie can be responsible for arbitrary arrest of individuals simply based on their country of origin, highlights a geopolitical current of islamophobia and fear of the middle east, and that this can be something to joke about, clearly shows the attitude towards the middle east in Hollywood. Is it conceivable that a movie could have a similar scene, where 6 Chinese scientists were arrested on suspicion of terrorism or espionage simply based on their ethnicity or nationality? This author thinks not, and from the sample of movies studied in this paper, finds it highly unlikely.

This movie, so marked in its nuanced portrayal of China and the Chinese in other words fall face down when dealing with other 'Others'. It also shows that China on screen is vastly different from the orientalizations we often find surrounding the middle east.

Back to the movie. After being told by the police commissioner that LAPD doesn't lead the investigation, Carter and Lee heads off to find a letter ambassador Han sent to his daughter, Soo Young, which she left at the Kung Fu school at which she works. Approaching the Kung Fu school, Lee tells Carter that "This is the business of China", and tells him to head off. Thus he invokes Chinese jurisdiction on American soil.

Firstly, Kung Fu in itself as marker of China and Chinese is obvious. It might be seen as a form of self-exoticism, or symbolic of the Chinese state. Furthermore, Lee sending Carter off shows us that matters relating to the world court, is none the less China's business, and furthermore, that Chinese investigations on US soil are legitimate. Thus, China is given an equal status with the US, it is to be respected, and it is expected to act responsibly. This recalls *Rush Hour 2*, in which the US performs

their own investigations within Hong Kong.

From here on the movie takes us to Paris, and China takes a back-seat to US-French relations. This in itself is noteworthy. When Lee & Carter get a taxi outside the airport, the French taxi-driver goes on a rant against the US and Americans, who he call “the most violent people on earth. Always starting wars, always killing people. Americans make me sick!” He goes on to say how the US is in decline, and how even “The Dream Team is dead”. When being threatened at gunpoint by Carter, he has to “concede” that America is great. However, he makes no mention of China. The geopolitical implications of this speech are obvious – not only is it a stereotypical anti-American French reaction, the speech also points to the view that America's time is over. The fact that China is not mentioned might be to not fan any tension between the countries. He could have gone on about how China was now becoming another superpower, and that that, partly, was to blame for America's downfall.

Needless to say, Carter and Lee end up killing all the bad guys. The aforementioned taxi-driver killing the leader of the world criminal court, after it turns out he is on the Triads' payroll. This movie is once again a movie extolling interventionism. Violence is seen as a force of good, and only through embracing it can the taxi-driver truly appreciate what it means to be American, and begin liking America and Americans.

This is contrasted with the Chinese characters as well, who uses violence sparingly, and only when forced to. This creates an image of a righteous and moral China, to the quick-to-violence Americans.

In sum *Rush Hour 3* presents a powerful, responsible China. It is a China whose police officers are free to conduct investigation within the US. Sino-American relations are thus presented as based on equality and trust – trust that is not abused. China is not seen as an emerging threat, in deed its growth on the global stage is scarcely mentioned at all.

From these more positive depictions of China, we move to the more negative – and

we'll see how the yellow peril stereotype informs plot-lines in *The Departed*.

The Departed

Year: 2006

The Departed is Martin Scorsese's remake of Hong Kong classic *Infernal Affairs*. It is set in present day Boston, and deals with moles both within the police department, and within the local Irish mob. A subplot deals with the mob trying to sell microchips for use in cruise missiles to the Chinese government. There are several negative comments made about China, ranging from predictions that in 20 years China and the US will be at war, and claims that the only way China can nuke Taiwan this century is through buying stolen American technology.

China in *The Departed* is thus portrayed negatively on several layers. Firstly we have the hostile, militaristic China – the future threat of world peace. This is seen both through the comments of characters within the movie, as well as the fact that what they are purchasing is stolen military hardware.

Secondly, the Chinese government is seen colluding with criminals. At the transaction of the microchips itself, apart from several Chinese gangsters, one obviously frightened Chinese government bureaucrat is present. Despite him being frightened, obviously not used to dealing with criminals. Later in the movie, it turns out the Chinese were stopped in customs, thus the items were not sent through diplomatic channels. This in sum lowers China and its government to the status of criminal syndicates.

Thirdly, China is seen as technologically inferior. With the microchips being worth a mere 1 million dollars, the investment is still seen as essential enough that the government sends a bureaucrat to the purchase. These three points seen together points to a belligerent China, needing to resort to crimes within the US to keep in power – in other words, China is seen as a threat, with a border-line criminal government, but not as an equal opponent. It follows the Yellow Peril stereotype in how China is believed to be a future enemy of the US.

Of the Chinese movies mentioned, *Hero* would fit well into this category. The movie clearly shows a strong, indivisible nation. It furthermore

After taking a look at the movies in which China's been afforded the position of a real country, we move on to the movies in which China is more a simple part of the global exotic.

America's China

These are the movies in which geopolitics is ignored. It's China as a scene for foreigners to do battle. Where the first category deals with an eternal, magical China, and the second one deals with an independent, yet international China, the third category introduces China as a mere stage. These are the movies in which China needs help from the outside world, and American (which they are in all the cases discussed in this paper) are the only ones who can help.

Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen

Year:2009

As a transformer smashes through the Pudong area of Shanghai, a team of Anglo-American soldiers, prepares their counter attack. This united team of humans and Autobots, that is, the good transformers, is really an alliance between USA, UK and the Autobots, but their fighting ground, fighting the evil transformers called Decepticons, is explicitly the whole world. "We hunt for what remains of our Decepticon foes, hiding in different countries around the globe", as Optimus Prime, leader of the Autobots in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* narrates during the scenes set in Shanghai. Indeed, apart from some British soldiers, it seems like the whole chain of command is in American hands, with the headquarters being at the Pentagon.

Of course this can be seen as symptomatic of an American world view, with the US as a world police, operating in every single country around the world with impunity. This is of course the main geopolitical reading of the movie, a complete reading which is beyond the scope of this paper – but it carries with it the related conclusion that China becomes a pawn of the US. When it is later explained that the US president has to take stronger control over the task force due to the events in Shanghai, China as a country and its government is shown as quite toothless – the decision of whether or not the Autobots are welcome on this planet is wholly up to the US president. The UN and other international organizations are absent. Thus, this movie can be seen as a Jacksonian, or neo-conservative depiction of world events when compared to 2012s liberalist inclinations.

The following question is how China looks on screen, that is, what is the cultural geographic reading of this movie. China and Shanghai, in this movie, is presented with little difference from how the US is. It's by industrial areas, or modern cityscapes we get to know it. The Chinese are rarely seen. In one early scene we see Chinese soldiers assisting in the evacuation of civilians from an area where Decepticon activity is suspected. They do this in a clearly courteous manner. The only Chinese shown in a close up, sitting down eating soup while a transformer flies through his apartment, with a quick musical cue of an erhu – and that is as far as Chinese stereotypes and what seems like conventions when showing China on screen goes.

Thus the clearest finding is how unexotic China is on screen. This rather bold claim would lose its potency if viewed on its own. What makes it clearer however is how other parts of the world are presented. The middle east, both in the opening scenes of the original Transformers movie, and in the climatic scenes of this, is presented in true stereotypical nature, seemingly taken straight from Said's discourse on Orientalism. Desert landscapes, veiled women, loud men, goat herders and ruined buildings are all present. This exotification is not limited to the Middle East however. The protagonist's parents are shown in Paris, near the Eiffel Tower, eating snails and being harassed by a mime, in what is a much more overtly stereotyped and differentiated image of a nation. In other words, the China of *Transformers: Revenge*

of the Fallen, while not dealt with to a large extent, is nonetheless seen as more equal to the US than what the middle east is, and in some ways more similar to the US than France is. This is achieved through the simple use of similar imagery and a similar technological level. The use of Shanghai as location in the movie could've been changed to Miami, Florida, without any real implication for events there or later in the movie.

Mission: Impossible III

Year: 2006

The Mission: Impossible series has from the beginning been international, so too for the third outing; with action taking place in Berlin, Rome and the Vatican City, the United States and Shanghai.

The agency explored in the movies is US-based, and answers to the US government, but does not shy away from extrajudicial killings, and big, terrorist like hits in allied countries and even on American soil.

Having tracked a potential super-weapon to Shanghai, the hero infiltrates a building explicitly mentioned as protected by “privately contracted ex-PLA security”. The interesting thing here is that unlike their actions in Rome or Berlin, the actual fight against local henchmen is not shown. In stead the covert operation remains just that, covert from our eyes as well. With the rest of the agents' team, we are left waiting outside, in Shanghai, while the hero does what it takes to acquire the weapon.

Action scenes continue throughout Shanghai, culminating in scenes filmed in Xitang, an old canal city not far from Shanghai. This town contains traditional Chinese architecture, and low-rise buildings, providing a clear contrast to the modern sky-line of Shanghai. This area, although containing old buildings and representing an older, more traditional China, is not mired in the over-the-top stereotypical imagery that marred *Fantastic Four 2: Rise of the Silver Surfer*.

The Mission: Impossible series is noteworthy for how it skirts grand politics. The

drama is all on an individual or group level. The US-government officials are likely to be corrupt. Thus geopolitics takes a back seat to the work of spy agencies and terrorist organizations.

With regards to how China is seen in *Mission: Impossible 3*, three points are worth mentioning.

Firstly, Shanghai, and by extension China, is shown as a modern place, and placed on similar footing as Berlin and Rome. The old canal areas of Xitang also fits well with other images in the movie, e.g. of Rome in the same movie, in which old architecture is juxtaposed with new technology. Secondly, it is still seen as a vastly more different place, highlighted by the covert nature of the fight scenes, even to the spectators view. Thirdly, the world is, as in so many movies, America's playground. Americans are arbitrators and problem solvers around the world, and do not have to fear political repercussions of their actions.

As such, M:I3 is a clear example of the Global Exotic. These movies all present China as unthreatening, but a place that yields to the will of the world police that is America (or Americans). They don't receive help from the local police when looking for the missing super-weapon – indeed Chinese police is seemingly absent, and oblivious to the super-weapon being hidden within their city.

However, it's clear that the discourse of these movies does not conform to either of the two other models presented here. It's far from exoticizing the locale, rather, we see it being used to internationalize the story being told in the movie. At the same time, it does not afford China any agency of its own.

Thus, two broad generalizations can be inferred from these last two movies. One is that China, and more specifically Shanghai, is lifted to the status of other world cities such as Berlin and Rome. Even more so than other places, Shanghai is a hyper modern place. It is exoticized, but not othered to a high degree, and such exotic markers as a foreign language are ignored.

Rush Hour 2

Year: 2001

After seeing how *Rush Hour 3* fit the politically present image of China, it is interesting to note how its prequel seems so different in its take on geopolitics.

After an explosion at the American Consulate General in Hong Kong, odd couple police officers Lee (played by Jackie Chan) and Carter must once again join forces to combat crime – a fight that this time will take them from Hong Kong, via Los Angeles to a Chinese themed casino in Las Vegas.

Throughout the movie, the Consulate General is misnamed an embassy. This hints at the more autonomous role Hong Kong plays in this movie – or one where it seems to be more under the US than under China.

Despite the Secret Service claiming jurisdiction over the bombing, something which they could have as the US diplomatic compound would technically be American soil, Lee and a reluctant Carter starts investigation. Later, after an explosion at a Hong Kong police station, and a botched operation on a Yacht in Hong Kong harbor, the local Secret Service operative tells the Hong Kong police officer played by Jackie Chan to stay off what is now a Secret Service operation. The Hong Kong police chief has to concede that he is correct. Thus what begins as a question of jurisdiction, quickly becomes Hong Kong's, and thus China's affairs when criminal acts and terrorist bombings happen against their own government buildings.

Thus, what started outside of Hong Kong jurisdiction (but where Hong Kong's police would've likely been called upon for assistance), became a matter for the Hong Kong police as soon as the bombing of the police station was a fact. The geopolitical significance of a US secret service officer claiming jurisdiction in what is Hong Kong and, ultimately, Chinese territory is significant.

However, Lee and Carter continue their investigation in the US. Thus, the

geopolitical issue changes. It is not so much about US hegemony, although that point is still there, and strong. It is more about right, wrong and bringing bad guys to justice, and that such issues as jurisdictions simply get in the way of getting things done.

They finally manage to follow the criminals, who turn out to be members of Chinese triads, to Las Vegas, and stopping their nefarious scheme to laundry fake money.

In this way it calls back to the Hollywood ethos of interventionism, and the heroics of individuals versus the reactionary attempts by government officials to maintain ineffective control so effectively examined by Ó Tuathail in his analysis of *Behind Enemy Lines* (Ó Tuathail 2005).

Rush Hour 2 is not set in Shanghai, as the two other movies analyzed in this category. However, it also depicts an absent China. It's a China accepting US operations on its own soil – and accepts orders from Americans.

While *Rush Hour 2* does have Chinese characters, Chinese culture and a global scope, it still does not portray China as a country with its own volition. Geopolitics is not as absent as it is in *Transformers: Revenge the Fallen* or *Mission: Impossible 3*. The quality of coverage it receives, however, is still far below what we find in the **China as China** section. The three movies all portray a China underneath an American umbrella.

Of course the world might look to the US for leadership in other movies as well, such as they do in *2012*. However, *2012*'s China is shown to have control in its own territories. Even though it follows old stereotypes where Chinese are guided by wise and benevolent Westerners, it is something they choose to do, unlike in *Rush Hour 2* where they are ordered to.

Synthesis

Conspicuously missing from the box-office winners of the last decade, are movies arguing for the separation of Tibet from China. Where the 90s had movies such as *7 years in Tibet* and *Kundun*, the last decade did not. This omission even more than the three types mentioned above, shows a clear movement of symbolism.

The three broad categories are not mutually exclusive. Several of the movies could fit in other categories as well, although they have been placed in the category which best sums up the China we can see on screen.

The extent to which China is othered, is not done to a larger extent than other nations. Thus one must move away from simple notions of exoticism when dealing with the cinematic China. China in these movies is a lot closer to middle America than for instance the middle east. China is exoticised to a similar degree as France or even England.

The most striking revelation to come out of these groupings is that the Yellow Peril-stereotype seem to have been mostly absent in popular geopolitics of early 21st century movies. Mostly absent, as it can clearly be seen in *The Departed*.

It is also worth mentioning that there's very little difference between how Hong Kong and Shanghai are presented on screen. Both are seen as highly modern global cities. In films, Hong Kong is truly returned to China, and is not shown as its own territory.

That the only truly negative portrayals of China come through movies not set in China. Two explanations are readily available to account for that fact. Either it is because of economical and political reasons – meaning they want to sell the movie to China, and/or shoot it on location, in which case they will have to portray China in a better light. Another explanation, is that when a movie is planned to be set in China, representations are immediately more thought through – simplistic demonization of China is thus less likely.

Although the first explanation might explain part of it, it does not explain everything. It might explain why there are few Chinese antagonists, unless the movie has Chinese protagonists as well. Chinese are thus not stereotypical villains in these movies.

Another clear point is that the quality of the movie has little to do with the image given of China. With some of the most nuanced portrayals of China being in critically panned movies such as *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* and *Rush Hour 3*, and the worst, both in terms of nuances, and in actual demonization, is seen in Oscar-nominees like *The Departed*, and *Juno*.

Thus, popular geopolitics is not dependent on whether a particular text is seen as high- or low-culture.

Transnationalism

These movies do stand as testaments to China's role in a globalized Hollywood system. Beyond simply utilizing China as a scene, we can clearly see Chinese influences on the movies. Firstly we can look at the movies from a narrative point of view. Narrative influence is seen through *The Departed*, which as mentioned was based off of a Hong Kong movie, *Infernal Affairs*. It is also seen in the multitude of Kung Fu-depictions, originating from Chinese martial arts movies.

Secondly, we see the people. Ethnic Chinese superstars are present in several of the movies, clearly showing an internationalized market where Chinese actors and actresses are not tied to a Chinese movie-market.

Thirdly comes locations. Movies such as *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, and *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* are shot on location in Shanghai. China as an international location, not necessarily one brought about through narrative necessity, clearly shows a deeper integration of China into the global Hollywood

system.

However, the larger influence of China on Hollywood might not be the cause of the more benign representations of China – in deed they might both be an effect of the economic growth of China.

The use of particularly Shanghai and Hong Kong as locations also hints at neoliberal homogenization of space. Shanghai is, as mentioned, can be seen as part of the international exotic locale of some of the movies, rather than being a Chinese place. In *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* in particular, Shanghai might as well be an American city. This neoliberal homogenization is not as apparent when it comes to depictions of the middle east in the same movie. Thus we find that China is seen as a member of the homogenized space, while the middle east is still othered.

This homogenized space might also be seen as an Americanized space. The China shown in several of the movies follows the geopolitical discourse in which the best things for geopolitical stability would be a China lying under the US. China is not taken as a separate country on equal footing with the US, but rather an area either under American suzerainty, as seen for example in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* or one swayed by US morals, such as we can see in *2012*. It thus follows a geopolitical line where US power is seen as the ultimate good in global geopolitics, and that although the various individual US bureaucrats might be corrupt, US culture eventually overcomes.

A similar view is on display in *The Departed*. China needs to steal from the US to remain competitive. They need US technology to be able to defeat Taiwan, and as such US law enforcement is key to global stability and peace. These neoconservative, Jacksonian views of US foreign policy are clearly different from neoliberalist views on geopolitics.

This stands in sharp contrast to movies such as *Rush Hour 3* or *The Dark Knight*, in which China is clearly shown as independent of the US. While the law enforcement agencies are shown to cooperate well in *Rush Hour* and poorly in *The Dark Knight*,

they are nonetheless seen as on equal footing with the US. Although one could see the capture of the criminal in Hong Kong by Batman in *The Dark Knight* as an allegory of an America working undercover outside of her jurisdiction, it might as well be seen as the superhero transcending geopolitical concerns already in place, as he transcends judicial concerns within the US. In other words, the underlying playing field, the world in which Batman acts, is a geopolitically charged area in which China and the US are both sovereign, independent countries – and the idea of a superhero crossing those boundaries does not negate the underlying geopolitical reality being played out. This does in a way compare the world with the fictional Gotham City. Whereas Batman is needed there to capture the criminals the police is too corrupt or incompetent to arrest, so he has to transcend borders to bring justice to the world. It could be seen as a call for a more powerful UN just as much as a call for a more assertive US.

Mark Lacy in a 2003 article claimed that “Cinema provides the West with moral comfort food, the geopolitical feel-good factor” (p.634). The movies in this sample show quite differing moralities on display. Even though the feel-good factor is definitely there, it is not necessarily tied up to a geopolitical victory by the US, but rather a moral victory by individuals. Indeed, a geopolitical reading, while overall not critical of China, is still critical of politics and, especially, bureaucrats. A geopolitical feel-good factor for the west is not always on display.

Exploring the Culture

Another distinction could be made within these movies that also have geopolitical implications. Beyond seeing China as an independent country, there is the question of how to deal with the Chinese culture. Some movies, such as *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, ignores it completely. However, *Rush Hour 2* does not. Being a comedy about an American and a Hong Kong Chinese cop, the comedy often hinges on their common cultural mishaps when trying to understand each other's cultures.

Only 3 movies in the sample have these attempts at cross-cultural communication happening: *Rush Hour 2* and *3* and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. In addition, *Kung Fu Panda* can be said, in the way it portrays a stereotyped China, to still attempt to draw the audiences into this China, and to give them some deeper understanding of it.

The three first movies presents neither China nor Chinese culture as vastly different – it is an area of which knowledge can be attained. At the same time, it is not trivialized either, nor presented as an area below the West, which needs to be trained and guided. *Kung Fu Panda* is slightly different, as an 'idealized' Chinese culture is indeed attainable – in deed the whole movie is about the outsider Po learning Kung Fu against all odds, and becoming a Kung Fu master in no time. The Chinese culture in *Kung Fu panda* would however be seen as exotic even in China – and thus even from a cultural standpoint the movie belongs square in the magic kingdom category. This magic kingdom still allows audiences to site-see, and through it they gain more familiarity with this foreign culture – however it does not give any tools with which to approach it.

Cultural encounters are different in *The Dark Knight* and *2012*. In *The Dark Knight*, Batman has no need to appropriate any Chinese culture – whereas the Chinese crook does speak English when meeting other cultures. Where Batman's tactics would be similar were they in Hong Kong or Gotham, the Chinese crook easily switches between English and Mandarin.

In *2012*, the only cross-cultural meeting is that between the American protagonists and the Tibetan Family near the end. In it the American mother begs the Tibetan grandmother for compassion, asking her to let them sneak into the ark with the four Tibetans. Although the grandmother does not understand English, she understands the basic meaning – that the end of the world is a time for human compassion. And the Westerners are thus allowed to join in the attempted break in. Bypassing culture, the scene instead shows that we are all the same, and that emotions such as compassion are human, and not merely a result of culture. *2012* thus skirts the issue of cross-cultural communication.

The final movie where a meeting between the cultures is portrayed is *The Departed*. The government official at the handover of the microchips does not speak English, and needs translation from a Chinese American thug. The Irish-American mobster godfather, played by Jack Nicholson, repeatedly tells the Chinese how things are done in America – from not bringing automatic weapons to a transaction, to how the transaction itself physically happens. As such he acknowledges cultural differences between Chinese and Americans, while working to minimize them. The way he does this, it can be argued, is culturally arrogant. However, as the head of a criminal organization, his whole character is arrogant.

Reception in China

Not all of these movies were allowed to screen in Chinese cinemas. Only 20 foreign movies are accepted every year – which means that critical representations are often stopped. With only 20 movies being allowed to screen, it's not only censorship that stops a movie from being shown in theaters in Beijing or Lhasa, but also commercial considerations. Thus these movies should not be seen as explicitly banned, but rather denied access to a rather big section of the market. Thus that a comedy such as *Juno* was not allowed onto Chinese screens might have more to do with the lower audience it might have received due to cultural discount. Thus it becomes difficult to decide whether a movie was actively suppressed by the Chinese government for political reasons. However, the list of films that were allowed on screen is telling: *2012*, *Mission: Impossible 3*, *Kung Fu Panda*, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* and *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*. They are all portraying China, and more importantly Chinese in flattering light.

Now to turn our attention to the movies that were not allowed into Chinese movie theatres. Removing *Juno*, we see 5 movies that were not seen on Chinese cinemas. *Rush Hour 2*, *Rush Hour 3*, *The Departed*, *The Dark Knight* and *Fantastic Four 2*:

Rise of the Silver Surfer. What is marked is that 4 of these include Chinese criminals. Thus, if placing a movie in the present day, Chinese criminals should not be portrayed on screen. Chinese can be villains, as has been seen in *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, but then they are clearly not human nor are they citizens of modern China.

Once again it's important to note that none of these movies are banned from China all together. Content on Chinese video-streaming websites is censored, but these movies are all allowed to be seen via them. Thus they are accepted by the Chinese government, while at the same time they're not promoted. This is unlike *Seven Years in Tibet* and *Kundun* which are both absent from video-streaming websites.

It is interesting how Chinese criminals are seen as more detrimental or less desirable than a weak China. It follows the official Chinese discourse of a harmonious society.

Why is China benign in pop-culture?

Although international studios took note of the Chinese reactions to *Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet*, this cannot be seen as the only, or even the leading cause of the more sinophile representations seen during 2000-2009. It can be seen as the cause of fewer movies being made agitating for Tibetan independence. The only movie in the paper truly showing Tibet, is *2012*, in which it is shown as firmly a Chinese area.

This paper has already more than hinted at the transnational nature of cinema, and the larger artistic influence given to Chinese in Hollywood being the main reason behind this change. While earlier studies have focused on the fact that Chinese have increasing influence in Hollywood, this study has shown some potential results of this influence. A more nuanced, less monolithic image of China is the result – in which Chinese can be both heroes and villains.

Transnational Hollywood being the cause of these benign representations is, however, not proven by this study. It simply reveals a correlation between the two.

Then there are the actual political relations in this period, which have been good. When, for instance, Hillary Clinton avoided criticizing human rights issues in China in early 2009. Thus the popular geopolitical discourse in movies does not necessarily differ from more formal geopolitics.

It is also worth noting that the time period most of the movies were made, 2006-2009, was just around the Olympics. Thus, the movie studios might have tried to cash in on the Olympic fever sweeping across the world.

The actual geopolitical environment of the period was also marked by access to different enemies: The period was framed by the war on terror. States might thus have been seen as less likely enemies to the American protagonists than cabals of terrorists.

Summing it up

Problems with the study

This paper looks at overt depictions of China in the movies of the past 10 years. This means that potentially strong popular geopolitical representations of China are ignored, simply due to them being covert. As the evil empire in the Star Wars saga was seen as symbolic of the Soviet Union, especially after Reagan's eponymous speech, similar analyses can be made of movies not directly representing China.

There's also the problem with the selection: The top box-office winners are not necessarily the most seen movies, as DVD-sales, downloads etc. are not included. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, these movies are but a small subset of the total potential number of movies dealing with China. Ignoring, or downplaying, such movies as *Hero*, *Crank* or *My Name is Bruce*, which all deal with China to a

certain extent means that the total picture will be distorted.

I have also chosen to narrow the selection based on movies dealing with China, rather than movies with a strong Chinese cultural background, thus the influence of directors, such as John Woo and Ang Lee, and actors such Chow Yun-Fatt becomes less apparent. Similarly, it makes it more difficult to see where stereotypes end – is a stereotype ethnically, racially based or is it based on the state itself?

The pop-cultural China does go far beyond mere movies. TV-shows, video-games, ads, music, they all portray certain Chinas. This paper has shown one subset of the popular geopolitics relating to China, and found it to be mostly positive to China. If this is a fluke, or applies to all pop-cultural mediums, needs further study.

This also goes for the temporal nature of it all. As has been highlighted in the paper, the 90s does seem to be a more critical/sinophobic period in the realm of cinematic popular geopolitics, mostly due to movies such as *7 years in Tibet*. However, this needs further study before it can be a verifiable claim.

As it stands, the biggest problem with this study is the lack of any clear results as far as real-life implications go. Although these can be assumed to be there, what forms they take and the strength of the various movies have not been shown in any way. This is of course a problem with critical geopolitics as a field as well.

This paper also has the problem that although it was open to including non-Hollywood movies, the final selection ended up with only that. This results in the thesis ignoring such items as the first Bollywood-movie shot on location in China, *Chadni Chowk to China*, or the stereotypically titled Danish movie *In China They Eat Dogs*. These movies might be highly important in the countries in which they are consumed – and fill up a comparatively larger section of public awareness.

Finally comes the most important drawback. All the analysis in this paper is based on my own readings of the texts in question. These readings might not be shared by anyone else.

Future studies

The main need for future studies would be to increase the knowledge of how China is constructed in popular geopolitics. The study in this paper has shown a positive attitude towards China in the blockbusters of 2000-2009. Further study is however needed. There are more pop-cultural texts out there from the same time period that needs scrutiny – from fields such as TV-shows, comics and music, but also in other, less-earning movies of the same period. Then there is the temporal aspect. Further study on the geopolitical China is needed for other time periods – to ascertain whether or not the depictions of China are indeed changing.

Then there is the wider issues facing the field of popular geopolitics. Audience reception is still not understood to a large enough extent that it can inform the results of this paper. Furthermore, these studies need to extend to China – however the practical problems with audience research in China are even greater, due to the fragmented nature of DVD piracy, and thus the impacts of movies.

Beyond audience receptions, further study is also needed on the impact these popular geopolitical discourses might have on practical and/or formal geopolitical discourses. Do these movies have a big enough pop-cultural impact, that a quote or idea from one of the movies could be used in a political speech for instance? Could China be the 'Kung Fu Panda' to the Soviet Union's 'Evil Empire'?

The production of these movies should also be studied more in depth. The actual impact a larger east-Asian contingent has in Hollywood could thus be quantified – and whether it simply correlates with benign or antagonistic representations of China, or actively causes them.

Conclusions

In the introduction, three hypotheses were put forward.

The first hypothesis claimed there would be no clear hegemonic discourse in representations of China. While there are movies such as *The Departed* going counter to it, overall the period is defined by a sinophilia rather than a sinophobia. From the extremes, where China is the savior of the world, as it is in *2012*, to the magical realm we're taken to in *Kung Fu Panda*. From the co-operation between American and Hong Kong-Chinese cops in the *Rush Hour* movies, to China as part of the civilized world in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. Strictly negative representations are in a minority. At the same time the representations are all hugely varied – both in the imagery used, and in the ways in which China is portrayed. Thus the hypothesis is only partially disproven.

However, this does disprove the second hypothesis. The positivity with which China has been met, surprised me. China is not an enemy in Hollywood, rather it's a go-to country for an allied in the wider world.

The third hypothesis held that the aesthetic quality of a movie is linked to how nuanced China is portrayed on screen. This proved completely wrong. *The Departed* won the Academy Award for best picture, while *Juno* received a nomination for the same. Both have monolithic images of China. Similarly, a movie such as *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor*, in which China is shown as multifaceted, at the same time received horrible reviews (Metacritic 2010).

The friendly representations of China in these movies will, if the affective theory of Carter & McCormack holds true, likely improve attitudes towards China. However, Carter & McCormack's idea that a Gramscian idea of hegemonic ideology is not a sufficient framework to analyze the role of geopolitics in movies, seems lacking. Indeed, if there is an economic explanation to the lack of Sinophobic cinema, that points to a strong hegemonic ideology held together by economic means, truly conforming to Gramscian ideas.

These representations are facilitated by the movie-industry, as well as current assumptions in the popular imagination. Thus, the represented China wouldn't push the boundaries of the imagined China to far.

Although the representations of China range from the mythical-fantastical China of Kung Fu movies, to representations of a modern, powerful empire, it rarely deals with cross-cultural problems in the same way as movies about Japan such as *Last Samurai* and *Lost in Translation* has. China is much more of a stage than a setting.

In 2011 a remake of the 1984 classic *Red Dawn* is set to premiere (although lack of funds at MGM might make that difficult). The original movie depicted a US invaded by the Soviet Union and its Latin-American allies, and the following guerilla resistance by American teenagers. In the remake, it will be China that invades the United States (IMDb 2010). Of course, it is still not known whether this movie, if ever released, will be popular enough to be compared with the blockbusters analyzed in this paper. However, if it does succeed, it does show a clear move towards more hostile depictions of China. Maybe Hollywood's honeymoon with China is coming to an end. Maybe, like was seen with Japan in the late 80s and early 90s, a counter reaction will emerge, and the yellow peril stereotype will reappear in full blossom.

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Filmography:

<i>2012</i>	Director: Roland Emmerich	Year:2009
<i>The Dark Knight</i>	Director: Christopher Nolan	Year:2008
<i>The Departed</i>	Director: Martin Scorsese	Year:2006
<i>Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer</i>	Director: Tim Story	Year:2007
<i>Juno</i>	Director: Jason Reitman	Year:2007

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Kung Fu Panda

Directors: Mark Osborne

John Stevenson

Year:2008

Mission: Impossible 3

Director: J.J. Abrams

Year:2006

The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor

Director: Rob Cohen

Year:2008

Rush Hour 2

Director: Brett Ratner

Year:2001

Rush Hour 3

Director: Brett Ratner

Year:2007

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Appendix

List of 200 top-grossing movies in the period 2000-2009, according to boxofficemojo.com.

Movies covered in this paper in bold

1 Avatar	2009
2 LOTR:ROK	2003
3 Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Mans Chest	2006
4 The Dark Knight	2008
5 Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone	2001
6 Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	2007
7 HP: Order of the Phoenix	2007
8 HP: The Half-blood Prince	2009
9 LOTR:2T	2002
10 Shrek 2	2004
11 HP: Goblet of Fire	2005
12 Spider-Man 3	2007
13 Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	2009
14 HP: Chamber of Secrets	2002
15 LOTR:Fellowship	2001
16 Finding Nemo	2003
17 Star Wars: Episode III	2005
18 Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	2009
19 Spider-Man	2002
20 Shrek the Third	2007
21 HP: Prisoner of Azkaban	2004
22 Indiana Jones: Kingdom of the Crystal Skull	2008
23 Spider-Man 2	2004
24 2012	2009
25 The DaVinci Code	2006
26 Chronicles of Narnia: Lion, Witch, Wardrobe	2005
27 The Matrix Reloaded	2003
28 Up	2009
29 The Twilight Saga: New Moon	2009
30 Transformers	2007
31 Ice Age: The Meltdown	2006
32 Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl	2003
33 Star Wars: Episode II	2002
34 Kung Fu Panda	2008
35 The Incredibles	2004
36 Hancock	2008
37 Ratatouille	2007
38 Iron Man 2	2012
39 Passion of the Christ	2004
40 Mamma Mia!	2008
41 Madagascar: Escape to Africa 2	2008
42 Casino Royale	2006

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43 War of the Worlds	2005
44 Quantum of Solace	2008
45 I Am Legend	2007
46 Iron Man	2008
47 Night at the Museum	2006
48 King Kong	2005
49 Mission Impossible 2	2000
50 The Day After Tomorrow	2004
51 Madagascar	2005
52 The Simpsons Movie	2007
53 Monsters, Inc.	2001
54 Sherlock Holmes	2009
55 WALL-E	2008
56 Meet The Fockers	2004
57 Troy	2004
58 Angels & Demons	2009
59 Bruce Almighty	2003
60 Shrek	2001
61 Mr. & Mrs. Smith	2005
62 Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	2005
63 The Hangover	2009
64 Cars	2006
65 X-Men: The Last Stand	2006
66 Gladiator	2000
67 National Treasure: Book of Secrets	2007
68 The Last Samurai	2003
69 300	2007
70 Ocean's Eleven	2001
71 Pearl Harbor	2001
72 Alvin and the Chipmunks 2	2009
73 The Bourne Ultimatum	2007
74 Men in Black II	2002
75 Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines	2003
76 The Mummy returns	2001
77 Die Another Day	2002
78 Cast Away	2000
79 The Matrix Revolutions	2003
80 Narnia: Prince Caspian	2008
81 Sex and the City	2008
82 Night at the Museum: Battle at the Smithsonian	2009
83 Signs	2002
84 X2: X-Men United	2003
85 The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	2008
86 Mission Impossible 3	2006
87 Twilight	2008
88 Superman Returns	2006
89 Star Trek	2009
90 Happy Feet	2006
91 Live free or Die hard	2007

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92 Ice Age	2002
93 Mosters Vs. Aliens	2009
94 Slumdog Millionaire	2008
95 What women want	2000
96 X-Men origins: Wolverine	2009
97 Batman Begins	2006
98 The Golden Compass	2007
99 Terminator Salvation	2009
100 Jurassic Park 3	2001
101 My Big Fat Greek Wedding	2002
102 Hitch	2005
103 Shark Tale	2004
104 Ocean's Twelve	2004
105 Planet of the Apes	2001
106 Alvin and the Chipmunks	2007
107 Minority Report	2002
108 Fast and Furious	2009
109 Catch me if you can	2002
110 Hannibal	2001
111 Dinosaur	2000
112 National Treasure	2004
113 Rush Hour 2	2001
114 I, Robot	2004
115 How the Grinch Stolen	2000
116 Flintstones	2000
117 Wanted	2008
118 Enchanted	2007
119 Over the Hedge	2006
120 The Curious Case of Benjamin Button	2008
121 Fantastic Four	2005
122 Meet the Parents	2000
123 The Perfect Storm	2000
124 The Devil Wears Prada	2006
125 A Christmas Carol	2009
126 The Proposal	2009
127 Chicken Little	2005
128 Inglorious Bastards	2009
129 A Beautiful Mind	2001
130 Ocean's Thirteen	2007
131 Bolt	2008
132 The Blind Side	2009
133 The Pursuit of Happiness	2006
134 Chicago	2002
135 The Polar Express	2004
136 G.I.Joe The Rise of Cobra	2009
137 Van Helsing	2004
138 Dr. Seuss' Horton hears a who	2008
139 Austin Powers in Goldmember	2002
140 X-Men	2000

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141 G-Force	2009
142 What lies Beneath	2000
143 The Departed	2006
144 Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer	2007
145 The Bourne Supremacy	2004
146 Bee Movie	2007
147 American Pie 2	2001
148 Wedding Crashers	2005
149 Bridget Jones' Diary	2001
150 Scary Movie	2000
151 XXX	2002
152 Scooby-Doo	2002
153 Spirited Away	2002
154 Lara Croft: Tomb Raider	2001
155 Bad Boys II	2003
156 Lilo & Stitch	2002
157 Gran Torino	2008
158 10,000 B.C.	2008
159 The Princess and the Frog	2009
160 Something's Gotta Give	2003
161 American Gangster	2007
162 Charlie's Angels	2000
163 The Incredible Hulk	2008
164 Bridget Jones: Edge of Reason	2004
165 Borat	2006
166 Michael Jackson's This is It	2009
167 Robots	2005
168 Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle	2003
169 Rush Hour 3	2007
170 The Village	2004
171 Erin Brockovich	2000
172 Wild Hogs	2007
173 High School Musical 3	2008
174 Brother Bear	2003
175 Eragon	2006
176 The Ring	2002
177 Unbreakable	2000
178 Love Actually	2003
179 Hulk	2003
180 Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs	2009
181 8 mile	2002
182 Marley & Me	2008
183 Journey to the Center of the Earth	2008
184 Click	2006
185 Gone in 60 seconds	2000
186 2 fast 2 furious	2003
187 A.I. Artificial Intelligence	2001
188 Howl's Moving Castle	2005
189 The Day the earth stood still	2008

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190 American Wedding	2003
191 Juno	2007
192 Constantine	2005
193 Get Smart	2008
194 Mr. Bean's Holiday	2007
195 Ghost Rider	2007
196 Taken	2009
197 Chicken Run	2000
198 Flightplan	2005
199 Yes Man	2008
200 Fahrenheit 9/11	2004

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<http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/world/?pagenum=4&p=.htm>

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