

# Transcultural Cinematic Narratives: Comparative Analysis of the Evolution and Socio-Cultural Impacts of Chinese and Malaysian Film Industries

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## Abstract

This article presents a comparative study of the film industries in China and Malaysia, examining their historical development, socio-cultural impacts, and political influences through the lens of cultural studies theory. It traces the origins and key milestones of cinema in both countries, highlighting the distinct historical trajectories shaped by their unique contexts. This article explores how films have been used as tools for political propaganda and cultural expression, analyzing the role of government control and censorship in shaping cinematic content. In the context of globalization, the paper discusses the challenges and opportunities faced by both industries, focusing on digitization and global cultural exchanges. By applying cultural studies theory, this research provides insights into the role of film as a cultural and political force and suggests future directions for the development of Chinese and Malaysian cinema in the global market.

**Keywords:** Comparative Film Studies, Cultural Studies Theory, Chinese Cinema, Malaysian Cinema, Globalization and Film Industry

## Introduction

Since its birth in 1895, cinema has existed as a medium of cultural and political expression, and as a product of the fusion of art and commerce to form the "seventh art" (JMW, 1975). Cinema first appeared on Malaysian soil in 1898, and was still profoundly influenced by 18th

century England in terms of censorship and creative direction (Amizah et al., 2013). At that time, China was also experiencing the Eight-Power Allied War and a series of upheavals, and it was during this historical period that the first film, *Ding Jun Shan* (1905) was born (Zhang, 2023). China and Malaysia both belong to Asia, but the course of film development is not very similar, so this article will analyze the different periods of Chinese and Malaysian films over the century to the two countries.

Present, more and more researchers pay attention to the film cultural studies. Cultural studies theory is a composite theory. It encompasses the ideas and perspectives of multiple theorists. Cultural studies theory originated in the United Kingdom in the 1950s and 1960s and led to the Birmingham School. Representative of these is Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart (Johnson, 1986; Miller, 2001). Johnson (1986) has argued that cultural studies is an interdisciplinary nature and focus on power and ideology. That also involved the impact of cultural to social reality, deeply research about the marginalization group, also will critically learn about how cultural build the human behavior.

This article aims to use cultural studies theory to analyze the impact of the cultural and political behind China and Malaysia cinema, that to resolve the problem between China and Malaysia future cinema creation. By analyzing in detail, the history of development, cultural influences and political interventions in the Chinese and Malaysian film industries, this study aims to reveal the similarities and differences between the two countries' film industries and to explore their coping strategies in the context of globalization.

To more clearly articulate the scope and direction of this study, the following section specifies the problems and objectives of this study.

## Research Question and Objective

### *Research Question*

1. How can the historical development of the film industries in China and Malaysia be compared?
2. How have films functioned as cultural and political tools in China and Malaysia?
3. How do the film industries in China and Malaysia respond to challenges and opportunities in the context of globalization?

### *Research Objective*

1. Describe and compare the historical development stages of the Chinese and Malaysian film industries, identifying key events and figures.
2. Analyze the role of films in the cultural and political contexts of both countries, exploring their significance in ideological dissemination and cultural expression.
3. Study the impact of globalization on the film industries, exploring the effects of digitization, the internet, and global cultural exchanges on Chinese and Malaysian films.

The specific objectives of this study are to describe and compare the historical stages of development of the Chinese and Malaysian film industries, to analyze their role in the cultural and political context, and to examine the impact of globalization on the film industries of the two countries. In pursuit of these research objectives, a detailed analysis of the historical development of the film industries of the two countries is first required. The following

sections will present the main stages of development of the Chinese and Malaysian film industries and their historical backgrounds respectively.

### *The History in Chinese and Malaysia Cinema Development*

Based on China cinema history, the China first cinema *Ding Jun Shan*(1905) played a seminal role in Chinese cinema (Zhang, 2023). However, the real export of Chinese cinema as art, to a mainstream audience, developed only in the 1920s to 1940s. About Chinese cinema over the past century, the history of Chinese cinema separates it in four stages: Republican Period (1920-1949), Early National Period to the Cultural Revolution (1949-1976), Reform and opening to the end of the twentieth century (1978-1999) and Globalization and Contemporary Cinema (2000-present).

In 20<sup>th</sup> century, Malaysia is still under the colonial influence of the British Government. The cinema creates also affected by the colonial factor. The British colonial government controlled Malaysian film policy in relation to film, both in terms of censorship and production (Amizah et al., 2013). The development of Malaysian local cinema is closely related to the colonial context. The section on Malaysian cinema and socio-cultural influences will also be analyzed in four stages: 1. Early Cinema and the Colonial Period (1930s-1957) 2. Nationalism and the construction of cultural identity after independence (1957-1970s) 3. Economic Modernization and the Search for Cultural Diversity (1980s-1990s) 4. The Impact of Globalization and Cinema in the New Millennium (2000-2024).

The historical development of the Chinese and Malaysian film industries demonstrates the unique trajectories of the two countries at different times in history. Understanding the context of early development is crucial to understanding the overall evolution of the film industries in both countries. The next sections will explore in detail the early stages of development of Chinese and Malaysian cinema.

### *The Early Development in Chinese and Malaysia Cinema*

Republican period of Chinese film has specific cultural meaning. Because China in wartime is relatively chaotic. In the 1920s, China began to generate its own cinema system and made feature films, such as *Yan Rui sheng* (1921). Production and distribution bases are mainly concentrated in Shanghai. Cinema of this period is clearly marked by the stigma of semi-colonialization and semi-feudalization. The "shadow play" has become a traditional form of mainstream Chinese cinema. This mode of cinema is characterized by several features: 1. social indoctrination 2. based on dramatic conflict 3. large narrative passages and dramatic scenes 4. heavy directionality and light reproduction of the environment (Shaobai, 2006).

At the end of 1920s, Chinese cinema gradually began to make new claims, and intellectual films began to emerge during this period, which could not escape the constraints of commercial laws, but had a certain degree of artistic expression. Until to the 1930s, the rise of the left-wing film movement pushed the development of artistic techniques in cinema, and the outer form page changed. This was due to the "September 18th Incident" and the war conditions outside the country, which provoked the awakening of national consciousness. *The goddess* (1934) directed by Wu Yonggang, created in this social background. *The goddess* (1934) not only reflects the individual struggles of the protagonist but also criticizes societal attitudes towards women like her. It calls for a greater societal effort to provide dignified

working opportunities for women and to address the injustices they face. The film is presented as a poignant reminder of the need for continued advocacy for women's rights and status in society.

The film is innovative in terms of content creation and editing style (Rea, 2020). This proves that war has fueled the awakening of national consciousness and the development of culture. Between 1930 and 1947, the expression of Chinese cinema began to take on a symbolic and realist turn.

However, this stage Chinese film creation affected by the foreign production mode, such as Sun Yu, his film intimates the American film's expression technique. But this exploration of the art form of cinema was decisive in the development of later Chinese cinema. To summarize, the films of this period are relatively more expressive of war and concerned with realism. In terms of content expression techniques, it is more inclined to imitation and learning. The social landscape of China during this period was relatively complex, as it was infested by war. But the role of cinema as a cultural tool fueled the awakening of national consciousness and played a supporting role in uniting the Chinese people (Dafeng & Xiaoming, 2004).

In Malaysia, the film was introduced into Malaysia during the 1930s. At this stage Malaysia was being colonized by the British government (Rosnan & Aziz, 2012). Due to the cultural background of colonization, the film production was more controlled by the British government. Also, the film content mainly expresses the colonization government's propaganda tool to communicate the ideology and education. Shahid (2019) mentioned about "In 1930s, companies such as the Shaw Brothers and Cathay Kris began to produce local Malay films in Singapore often directed by Indian directors."

The main topic of first Malay language film in Singapore and Malaysia was *Laila Majnun* (1933), directed by B. S. Rajhans (Chang, 2017; HeeWai, 2013). The *Laila Majnun* (1933) origin of a Persian-Arabic tale, this shows that the culture of the Malay Peninsula is closely linked to India (Chang, 2017). However, HeeWai (2013) also mentioned about *Xin Ke* (1927) as the first Chinese language film produced in Malaysia, which represent the Chinese have a place in the socio-cultural context of Malaysia. The film *Xin Ke* (1927) explore the Singapore and Malaysia Chinese groups interactive and conflict, also reflected the complicated cultural relationship. Meanwhile, through *Xin Ke* (1927) could be seen in that time it was racial diversity in Malaysia. This has also had an impact on later Malaysian Chinese-language films in terms of reflections on individual identity construction and cultural identity. From the 1930s to the 1957, the Shao Brothers Film Company invested in establishing the Chinese-language film market in Southeast Asia. At that time, it also became part of the Malaysian film market, and the films of Shao Brothers Film Company established the dignity of Chinese subjectivity (Davis, 2011).

During this period, Malaysia was still under the supervision of the British colonial government, and the associated censorship created certain obstacles to the development of local Malaysian cinema (Amizah et al., 2013). Chang (2017) argued that: "Indian and Chinese populations significantly affected the composition of film cultures in the Malay Peninsula. The cross-cultural history always affected the Malaysia film industry development. Until the 1950s Malaysia through the Malayan National Organization (UMNO) and other political forces

promoted the struggle for independence, Malaysia films also transform to find their national image and indicated change the identity after the colonial occupation.

These features of the early development laid the foundations for the later role of cinema as a cultural and political tool. With the development of the film industry, cinema has become not only a form of entertainment, but also used as an important tool for the dissemination of ideology. The following section examines the role of film as an ideological tool in both countries.

#### *Film as an Ideological Tool*

Since Althusser (1970) suggested the ideology is disseminated to the public in the form of culture, media, art, etc., and is used as a tool like the state apparatus. Increasingly, cultural studies have focused on critiques of the ideological nature of works of art and communication. This indirectly proves that the content creation of films is still influenced by cultural studies. This is because the theory of ideological state apparatus is also covered by the theory of cultural studies, and the ideological nature of film is gradually uncovered by scholars through the critique of cultural studies.

In the different period, there is some variation in the representation of ideology in the film. As Kellner (1991) suggested the ideology critique could as a theoretical framework to analyze the film development tendency, he based on the 20th century 60s-80s film analysis, to examine the ideological expression behind it.

In fact, it's not just ideology that's in cinema, it's not just reflected in American Hollywood films. Every country's cinema has its own ideology. For instance, in China, different stage the portrayal of the heroes presented in the film is also different. China's films from the Cultural Revolution period present images of heroes that follow three principles: 1. Positive characters are highlighted among all characters, 2. heroic characters are highlighted among positive character, 3. major heroic characters are highlighted among heroic characters (Rubo, 2003). The films of this period are known as "Yang Ban Xi" films. And current Chinese red films are also strongly ideological. Films such as *The Wandering Earth* (2019) and *The Captain* (2019), for example, emphasize the spirit of sacrifice, and China's foreign quest to help the world survive together. These are also some of the films based on current Chinese national policies. Also, this situation appears in Malaysia region theme cinema express, there are controlled by Malaysia government export their mind for strength the Muslim spirit. In 1980-1990s, there are more cinema in Malaysia talk about the region story provide Malaysia government protect their propaganda.

Thus, as can be seen from the cases of the Malaysia and China, cinema exists in some ways as a tool for ideological communication. To summarize, the cultural studies theory useful to the film analysis and production. Because the content elements of film encompass complexity and diversity, the theories of cultural studies encompass a wider range of dimensions. As mentioned previously, theories covered by the Institute of Cultural Studies include Hall's theory of cultural representation, Althusser's theory of the ideological state apparatus, and Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony. All these theories have been applied to the content analysis of films.

Through the application of these theories, we can better understand the role of film in ideological communication. However, as societies modernize and cultural diversity increases, the role of film is evolving. The next section looks at the impact of modernization and cultural diversity on the film industry.

#### *Chinese cinema Cultural Revolution Period (1948-1976)*

This stage, 1949-1966, China is in a period of recent statehood. During this time, the Chinese government has issued the “Double hundred Guidelines” for art policy (Tiegang, 2012). Emphasis is placed on focusing on different types of cultural outputs. The poetic film genre was more prevalent in China during this period, showing Chinese social landscapes through shots in the form of poetic brushstrokes, such as *The Lin Family Shop* (1959), directed by Shui Hua. *Spring in a Small Town* (1948), directed by Fei Mu. Early poetic cinema, rather than forming a specific genre altogether, focused on the portrayal of characters' emotions in the expression of the film's content. And this type of film works depicted the beautiful Chinese social landscape. China's second generation of directors, such as Fei Mu, Yuan Muzhi, and Wu Yonggang, have made tremendous contributions to the Chinese film industry.

After the 1966, China gradually enters the cultural revolution stage, the film industry development has stagnated. During this period, 1966-1976, China films only have one standard that is “Yang Ban Xi” film, the principle of “Yang Ban Xi” is highlight the positive characters among all the characters, the heroic characters among the positive characters, and the main heroic characters among the heroic characters (Rubo, 2003). The representative works of the “Yang Ban Xi” films include *Wise to Wei Hu Mountain* (1970) and *The White-haired Girl* (1972). In terms of the content of the film, it is a work of art derived from a highly focused ideology. Althusser (1970) had suggested the cultural as the ideology tool service for the country. The films that audiences are more familiar with, from the 1949-1970 productions, closely serve the ideology of the state. But this period was overly ideological, resulting in a lack of artistic expression in the films. Especially between 1966-1976, the decade of the Cultural Revolution, the boilerplate ideological output leads to the art of cinema taking a back seat.

Therefore, during this stage, cinema has been used primarily as an ideological tool to disseminate images of some China's collective heroes (Yanbing, 2006). The “Yang Ban Xi” is an artistic representation of the essential order of society, a metaphor for the social landscape and policies of the time. But this export of heroic images went downhill after 1976. Because of the reform and opening, a real cultural liberation was ushered in.

#### *Malaysia Nationalism and the Construction of Cultural Identity after Independence (1957-1970s)*

1957 is a specific year for Malaysia. In this year, the country gained its independence. That effected the film industry rapid develop. Shahid (2019) mentioned about on this stage more and more who live in the urban could watch film as entertainment. When 1963, Malaysia introduced the television broadcasting that made a huge increase for the number of film audiences. Due to the creation of some early Malay local films in the 1930s, in the 1960s spearheaded by talented local film actors including the late P.Ramlee and Nordin Ahmad (Shahid, 2019).



Wok et al. (2014) suggested the Malay films directly or indirectly serve as religious purpose. "Film as the powerful tool in learning process" (Rahman et al., 2010). During the 1957 and 1970s, religious cinema in Malaysia took off. It was more useful as an educational tool than as a cultural art. Since Islam is the main religion in Malaysia, the films of this period mainly Islamic teachings and values. Indeed, during the Middle Ages, the role of culture and the arts as a tool for religious propaganda came to the fore. Althusser (1970) argued that the theory of the ideological state apparatus is designed to control the minds of the people through tools such as culture and the arts. The application of this theory to Malaysian religious cinema makes clear the instrumental nature of the ideological state apparatus of religious cinema.

The representation film of this stage was *Tun Fatimah* (1962), the storytelling of this film mainly focuses on the story of the Sultan of Penang's queen. The film shows the traditional history background. Also, as a milestone in the Malaysia film industry history. Bakar (2021) argued that the women beautiful was affected the relationship between a woman's beauty and power is subverted in this film. In this expression of cinematic significance, the perception of female characters during this period was pejorative. The film content reflected during the 1957-1970s, Malaysia cultural and social landscape still stay a woman on the margin position and the notion of religious supremacy. Chang (2017) mentioned about during the 1970s, decreasing in producing Malay-language film phenomena became a fact. That was affected by multi-perspective, such as the Hollywood, Bollywood, China mainland, Hongkong and Taiwan. Although the government support the Malaysia mainland film produce, but the national film was depression.

In summary, the development of the Malaysian film industry, particularly religious cinema, from 1957 to the 1970s not only reflected the country's cultural and social changes, but also demonstrated the potential of cinema as a powerful cultural and educational tool. The production and consumption of films during this period revealed the plurality and complexity of Malaysia society, while also pointing to issues of gender and power that need to be further explored and addressed. The film industry during this period of history demonstrated how cultural products intersected with broader socio-political forces that shaped public consciousness and national identity.

#### *Cinema in a Period of Modernisation and Cultural Diversity*

Hall (1989) in his research explain the cultural identity and cinematic representation. Hall's argument is that film as a representational system has an impact on cultural identity.

*'Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact, new cinematic discourses then represent, we should think, instead, of identity "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.'* (Hall, 1989)

As Hall argued that cinema and the visual arts can challenge and redefine cultural identities, especially by unearthing histories that have been suppressed or forgotten. For the cultural identity, there are two features: continuity and rupture. From this perspective, we could find that cinema as a tool for the cultural identity product. Through Hall's research, cinema is not only a means of expressing cultural identities, but also a tool for the study of culture and history. Through film, researchers and viewers can explore how cultural identities are formed in specific historical and social contexts and how these identities evolve over time and space.

In the process of film distribution, it plays the role of encoding, while the audience receives it as a decoding process. The code system Hall mentions is then used as a tool to dismantle the cultural meanings of the film used (Hall, 1985). In the process of audience reception, there is a reconfiguration of cinema and culture, and of course there is a mirrored refraction of the audience's feedback on the narratives and images of the cinematic work on themselves. Film as a product of cultural representation can be used to parse multiple aspects. And this parsing is by far more popular. In the era of postmodernism, the explosion of the Internet has brought us an era of pan-entertainment, and at the same time Internet users have begun to create content, which is also known as UGC (Yang & Yecies, 2016). Cultural studies theory can now be more involved in the study of film, for example, it can be accessed from the Internet to user reviews, to reflect critically with a cultural studies framework, and the impact of the film to the audience. Based on the Internet era, cultural research theories should also take more account of the subjectivity and diversity of the audience, which can be added to the analysis as a new indicator.

#### *Changes in Chinese and Malaysian Cinema 1980-1990s*

About China, in 1976, after China's reform and opening policy, the film policy was gradually relaxed and initially had an international outlook (Zhang, 1995). From the 1990s onwards, China Film Production Factory proposed a programmed of importing and distributing ten blockbusters each year on a split-budget basis that expressed the world's outstanding culture, a method that pushed for reform of China's film industry at the time. At this time, the Chinese film market began to go beyond domestic films and innovate several models: first, overseas investment with mainland creators; second, overseas creators with mainland labor. Under these models, some bourgeois ideas from the West also came to China as cultural imports, another manifestation of postcolonialism. This is another manifestation of post-colonialism. How to cope with the influence of post-colonialism is a serious test for the importation of Chinese films (Sun, 2021). In the 1970s, the prevalence of the French New Wave brought about a profound change in the creativity of the fifth and sixth generations of Chinese directors (Curtin, 2007).

*Farewell My Concubine* (1992), directed by Chen Kaige, won the Palme d'Or that year. *Red Sorghum* (1987), directed by Zhang Yimou, won the Golden Bear that year. That present Fifth-generation directors' portrayal of Chinese realism has come into the limelight of the West. However, in the other perspective, some scholar mentioned that it is a post colonialism express, the opinion points the fifth generation try to use the stereotypical aspects of Chinese society are used to satisfy the Western world's curiosity about Third World countries (Yang Erdem, 2008). The Six generation director also appear in the international view, such as Jia Zhangke, Lou Ye, Wang Xiaoshuai and so on. Some of the films of the sixth-generation directors have been set to be banned in China, due to their overly radical expressions. The films of the sixth generation directors have injected new power into the Chinese film industry, focusing on their personal experiences and changing the power structure and aesthetic expression of Chinese cinema (Nie, 2021). Meanwhile, according to Said (2023) in his research mentioned the orientalism is a system of thought that expresses Western domination and power relations over the East. By describing and defining Eastern cultures and societies, the West constructs an image of the East that is often stereotypical, negative, and simplified. But what is unavoidable is that the films created by the fifth generation of directors have indeed enabled Chinese cinema and culture to achieve the path of export to global.



Zhang (1998) in his research had argued that there is an emphasis on the need to reassess the methodologies used in Western studies of Chinese cinema, particularly the tendency to focus predominantly on political narratives and ignore deeper cultural and aesthetic elements. China's historical image of this period was presented to the world through the lens of realism by the fifth and sixth generation of directors, which not only exported the film culture of China in the countries of the Western world, but also inwardly some of China's social systems and culture were reformed because of the content of the films.

This is the role of artwork as a feeder to ideology, fueling the construction of China's social landscape through critical cinematic artistic expression.

Also, During the 1980s and 1990s, the Malaysian film industry underwent significant changes, particularly as independent filmmakers began to receive widespread attention. During this period, filmmakers paid more attention to marginalized and alternative groups, challenging conventional imaginings of the nation's image. In addition, Islamic cinema made a breakthrough during this period, with producers looking to address the problems of the modern world through Islamic teachings.

According to Muthalib (2002), film production during this period shifted towards low-budget films. This low-budget film production environment was associated with the changes that Mahathir Mohamad became the fourth prime minister in 1981 and promoted, which profoundly affected the foundations of the country. And in Chang's (2017) study, it was shown that the political changes in Malaysia significantly affected the film production environment at that time.

*Fenomena* (1990), directed by Aziz M. Osman, discusses the modernization of urban Malaysia. Based on the socio-cultural context, Malaysia experienced a period of social change in the 1980s and 1990s. Many Malaysians were in search of self-identity and change usually involves the issue of personal identity. Especially as a multi-ethnic country, this search for identity is particularly complex (Sulong et al., 2019). By analyzing the case of Malaysian cinema, Abas (2010) concluded that the emotional behaviors shown in films are not only personal expressions, but also comment on the social and political structures that exist in Malay society. This suggests that cinema is a cultural symbol of the Malaysian social landscape that can reflect the current state of society.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the Malaysian film industry reflected social and cultural changes. This period not only saw the rise of independent filmmakers, but also a focus on marginalized groups and alternative voices. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's policy reforms have had a profound impact on the production environment for the film industry, particularly for low-budget films. These changes reflect the complexity and diversity of Malaysian society as it faces the challenges of modernization.

These films played an important role in challenging Malaysia's national image and traditional cultural identity. However, they also faced commercial pressures and censorship in both domestic and international markets. While Malaysian films of the 1980s and 1990s made important strides in cultural expression and social criticism, they still have room for further development in terms of depth and breadth of expression. The film industry during this period

embodied the power of cinema as cultural criticism and social reflection through the exploration of sensitive themes, albeit one that was challenged and limited in many ways.

#### *Modern Cinema and Future Development*

With the modern changed and the digital media technology rapid development, the cultural studies theory applies in film industry face to new challenges and opportunities. Film, as a form of cultural expression, not only circulates its content globally, but also continues to influence and shape the way cross-cultural communication takes place.

#### *Chinese Globalization and Contemporary Cinema (2000-Present)*

After the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China's film market has become commercialized, but behind this rapid commercialization has resulted in many shoddy, small-handed films. The emergence of *Wandering Earth* seems to have brought a ray of hope to Chinese film fans. *The Wandering Earth* (2019) is a leap in quality compared to previous Chinese sci-fi films. Though it still lacks in story structure and character setting as well as the film's own thinking about sci-fi, the film itself breaks through the shackles of the so-called post-colonialism and expresses the Chinese people's sense of family and country. When the film went to the international market, it didn't make a big splash, which also indirectly shows that Chinese films have not really achieved ideological output. Firstly, the global audience has a stereotypical image of the Chinese nation. After the introduction of post-colonialism, it can be said that Chinese films in this period somehow satisfied the fantasies of the western world countries about China. On the contrary, the values conveyed by *The Wandering Earth* (2019) are that China saves the world and establishes the character of selflessness and dedication. But the analysis of human nature has not been perfect, compared to similar American science fiction film *The Martian* (2015) or *Interstellar* (2014) always running through the main line is human nature and emotion, *The Wandering Earth* (2019) can be said to be empty of its surface, but not its essence. Wu Jing played the role of sacrificing himself to Mars, the role is not very three-dimensional performance but more to the side portrayal of the main, the role of the audience's sense of conviction is not strong enough, then it also caused the establishment of the national image is not strong enough problem (Sun, 2021).

Sun (2021) has argued about in recent years, there have been more and more Chinese main melody films, such as *My People, My Country* (2019), *The Bravest* (2019), *Wolf Warrior* (2015), etc. These films have gained high box office at home, but they are obviously low in foreign markets because the "national image" established in Chinese films is not enough to make the audience around the world identify with them. The film itself starts from the story, how to tell the story well is the main task, but also to establish a good Chinese film "national image" is a major problem. Yau (2019) argued about the main melody film have lost the beginning advocate with the social media development, the audience self-choice affected the main melody film transmission. Contrasting these views, we can see that melodramatic cinema has relatively lost its previous role of collective control in terms of creation and audience selection during this period. And this is due to the influence of diversified cultural development and the development of the Internet.

However, the 21st century has seen a diversification of film genres, and cinema has also served as a tool for China to export abroad as a strategy for diplomacy (Becard & Menechelli Filho, 2019). Currently China is led by the Party Central Committee with President Xi at its core, and

the main ideology propagated is to strengthen cultural confidence and build a modern civilization for the Chinese nation. Chinese cinema continued to serve as a tool for spreading ideology during this period, but in the 21st century it has become more diversified in terms of genres and has increased its role as a tool for diplomacy.

*The Impact of Globalization and Malaysia Cinema in the New Millennium (2000-2024)*

At the beginning of the 21st century, with the internet development, the Malaysia film industry gradually diversified. Ahmad et al. (2017) suggested that after the 21<sup>st</sup> century Malaysia film space gradually democracy, and the Freedom Film Festival is a powerful tool to promote the film expression more freedom. The Freedom Film Festival usually shows the films which involved the religious, gender and political, that reflected the “taboo” of Malaysia. The stage of Malaysia film development gradually individual and critical thinking about the social hegemony. The origin of this types film from the 1980s, with filmmakers like Bernice Chauly and Mansor Puteh, who addressed social injustices (Ahmad et al., 2017).

With digital cinema and free film festivals leading the way, horror films is also becoming a major genre in Malaysian cinema (Grgić, 2023). Horror films often draw on Malaysian folklore, as Lee (2016) suggested the Pontianak is the symbol of Malaysia films. These films are not only entertaining, but also reflect the social anxieties and cultural narratives of a particular historical period. As an example, *Pontianak Harum Sundal Malam* (2004), directed by Shuhaimi Baba, the film content integrates the multi-factors, such as the religious, gender and society problems, that reflected the conflicting views of Malaysia society. They explore the tension between modernity and traditional beliefs, especially in a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse society like Malaysia. Although, the horror film usually became the censorship target, the OTT (Over-The-Top) became the horror film communicate main platform. However, the growth of the Internet has also played a role in impacting the traditional Malaysian film industry.

As Hassan et al. (2015) argued about the Malaysia industry should focus on the medium factors on the film promotion. Based on the internet background, more audience choose used other way to watch movie, the film industry and promotion industry must find a right way to maintain their position. AMRY in his research was suggested after Covid-19, the GSC (Golden Screen Cinema) should optimize the film management team for better revenue efficiency. Combine with these articles, the most focus on the film industry management and mentioned about the government should attach importance to the development of the film industry, which is a pillar of the national economy. Meanwhile, the television industry development also affected the film producer (Dawam et al., 2015).

Currently, Malaysia film industry faced to transform and made the genre multiply. Meanwhile, the phenomenon of more diverse and independent expressions of female characters in films and the increasing participation of women in the Malaysian film industry has attracted the attention of more scholars during this period (Wahyuni & Adnan). Which represents a relatively more open and liberal Malaysian society as it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cinema has gradually diversified as a work of culture and art that is critical of society and ideology.

*Future Challenges and Opportunities for the Chinese and Malaysian Film Industries*

With the time changed, Chinese cinema has become more than a form of artistic expression; it reflects cultural, political, and social change. From the early days of *Ding Jun Shan* (1905) to the modern *The Wandering Earth* (2019), cinema has played a crucial role in Chinese society. The evolution of cinema is closely related to the history of the country, especially in expressing national consciousness, social issues, and cultural identity.

From artistic exploration during the Republican era to political propaganda during the Cultural Revolution to the globalization of the film industry after the Reform and Opening, the evolution of Chinese cinema demonstrates how a nation explores and expresses its cultural complexities and social realities through the medium of film. The rise of Chinese cinema on the international stage, especially the work of the fifth and sixth generation directors, has brought Chinese cinema to the global arena, and at the same time triggered discussions about Orientalism and post-colonialism. These films, as cultural exports, have not only enhanced China's position in the global cultural market, but also promoted a deeper understanding and awareness of China's social and cultural diversity at home and abroad.

In conclusion, the development of Chinese cinema is part of China's modernization process, reflecting the diversity and complexity of Chinese society. In the future, with the advancement of technology and the deepening of global cultural exchanges, Chinese films will undoubtedly continue to play an important role in the field of global culture and art and display an even more multi-cultural landscape.

The Malaysian film industry has undergone remarkable development and change from the 1930s to the present day, and its history can be divided into four main phases, each with its own distinctive cultural representations:

1. Early Cinema and the Colonial Period (1930s-1957): Cinema, as a medium of propaganda, reflected the ideology of the colonial government and was subjected to rigorous censorship controls. (Amizah et al., 2013).
2. Nationalism and the Construction of Cultural Identity after Independence (1957-1970s): In the period following the country's independence, cinema began to explore the concept of nationalism and the country's cultural identity. This was accompanied by an influx of religious films which focused on the teachings of Islam (Chang, 2017).
3. Economic modernization and multicultural exploration (1980s-1990s): In response to the economic modernization of the film industry, there was a notable shift in focus towards marginalized groups and the exploration of multicultural themes.
4. The impact of globalization and cinema in the new millennium (2000-2024): The advent of globalization and the Internet has led to a proliferation of content, with film festivals serving as a platform for the expression of diverse perspectives and the exploration of sensitive issues. (Ahmad et al., 2017).

In Summary, the development of the Malaysian film industry reflects the country's cultural and social changes from the colonial period to modernization. In each period, cinema was not only a vehicle for entertainment, but also an important tool for cultural introspection and social criticism. It explored and expressed Malaysia's complex multicultural identity and social issues through the art of cinema.

Film, as a form of cultural expression, not only disseminates its content globally, but also continues to influence and shape the way intercultural communication takes place. In the future, the China-Malaysia film industry faces many challenges and opportunities.

### Conclusion

Our article reveals that the film industries of China and Malaysia have developed through distinct historical phases, shaped by their unique cultural, political, and social contexts.

Chinese cinema, beginning with *Ding Jun Shan* (1905), has undergone significant transformations, from the nationalist awakening during wartime to the highly ideological productions of the Cultural Revolution, and later to marketization and globalization after the Reform and Opening period. The emergence of Fifth- and Sixth-Generation directors played a crucial role in bringing Chinese cinema to the global stage, but also sparked debates on Orientalism and postcolonial narratives. In recent years, Chinese cinema has navigated between commercialization and national ideological promotion. While the domestic market thrives, the global reach and cultural export of Chinese films remain challenging.

Malaysian cinema, dating back to the 1930s colonial period, was initially controlled by British authorities and primarily served as a tool for colonial propaganda. After gaining independence in 1957, the Malaysian film industry gradually developed a sense of national identity, particularly through Islamic-themed films emphasizing religious values. In the 1980s and 1990s, filmmakers began focusing on marginalized groups and social issues, though commercial pressures and strict censorship policies hindered their growth. Entering the 21st century, digital technology and independent film festivals have diversified film content, with horror films emerging as a prominent genre. There has also been an increasing representation of women and critical social themes. However, challenges such as market competition and government regulation continue to shape the industry's development.

The application of cultural studies theory in film analysis highlights that cinema is not merely an entertainment medium but also an ideological apparatus. Different historical periods have influenced how films construct national identity and cultural representation. Theories such as postcolonialism, cultural representation, and Althusser's ideological state apparatus help explain how Chinese and Malaysian films have been used to shape and reinforce social narratives. In recent years, globalization has significantly impacted both film industries, with digital technology and streaming platforms reshaping film distribution and consumption. While this creates new opportunities for international market expansion, it also challenges traditional filmmaking practices.

Looking ahead, both China and Malaysia face a mix of opportunities and challenges in their film industries. The digital era offers greater creative freedom and diversified storytelling, catering to increasingly varied audience demands. However, issues such as government censorship, intensified market competition, and the need to balance local cultural identity with global market appeal remain critical concerns for the future of both industries.

This comparative analysis of the Chinese and Malaysian film industries has highlighted the unique trajectories and socio-cultural impacts of cinema in both countries. By examining their historical development, political influences, and the role of globalization, we have gained insights into how films serve as cultural and political tools. The application of cultural studies

theory has provided a robust framework to understand these dynamics, revealing both commonalities and divergences in the cinematic landscapes of China and Malaysia (Althusser, 1970; Hall, 1985).

Despite the comprehensive nature of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. Firstly, the reliance on secondary sources and historical accounts limits the immediacy of the findings. Primary data collection, such as interviews with filmmakers or audiences, could provide more nuanced insights. Secondly, the broad scope of the analysis means that some details, particularly regarding lesser-known films or niche genres, may be overlooked (Ahmad et al., 2017; Zhang, 1995). Additionally, the rapidly changing nature of the global film industry, influenced by technological advancements and shifting cultural trends, means that some observations may quickly become outdated.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating primary data collection methods, such as interviews and surveys, to gather contemporary perspectives on the film industries in China and Malaysia. Additionally, more focused studies on specific genres, filmmakers, or periods could provide deeper insights into aspects of each country's cinematic development (Abas, 2010; Dawam et al., 2015).

In terms of industry development, both China and Malaysia could benefit from embracing digital transformation more fully. This includes not only the production and distribution of films but also leveraging digital platforms for marketing and audience engagement. Collaborative projects between Chinese and Malaysian filmmakers could also foster cross-cultural understanding and create opportunities for innovative storytelling that appeals to a global audience.

Furthermore, both industries should consider strategies to balance commercial success with artistic integrity. For Chinese cinema, this might involve finding ways to resonate more deeply with international audiences without compromising cultural authenticity. For Malaysian cinema, continued support for independent filmmakers and the exploration of diverse narratives can help to strengthen the industry's unique voice.

In conclusion, while this study has provided a foundational understanding of the comparative evolution and socio-cultural impacts of Chinese and Malaysian cinema, there remains significant potential for further exploration and development. By addressing current limitations and pursuing strategic future directions, both film industries can continue to grow and contribute meaningfully to global cultural discourse.



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