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Recent Developments in the Chinese Film Censorship System

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RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHINESE FILM CENSORSHIP SYSTEM

by

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LLB, University of International Business and Economics, 2007

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Science

Department of Mass Communication & Media Arts

in the Graduate School

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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHINESE FILM CENSORSHIP SYSTEM

By

Siying Bai

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

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Approved by:

Paul Torre

Graduate School

Southern Illinois University Carbondale

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TITLE: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CHINESE FILM CENSORSHIP SYSTEM

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Paul Torre

The Chinese film censorship system is a very important administrative means for the Chinese government to control free expression and content of films. Beginning in 1978, the Reform and Opening Up policy made China's economy start to thrive, and helped China grow into a large film market. As China joined WTO in 2001, the Chinese government was forced to open up the film market. The contradiction between the development of the Chinese film industry and the government's censorship system is becoming more and more intense. Imported Hollywood films are impacting the Chinese film market, which has led to the public asking for a more practical and consistent film industry law. The unclear criteria of the system, the opaque censorship process, and the lack of public oversight have caused even more problems internally. On one hand, Chinese moviegoers urgently hope the government will learn from the west, using a film rating system to replace the current censorship system. On the other hand, China's ideological situation is not ready to end the censorship system completely in a short time. This article will introduce the historical background of Chinese film censorship system, including current problems in the system, and analyze these issues with case studies.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Liu (2012) defines the concept of the Chinese film censorship as following: “Chinese film censorship system is a system the government uses to censor the films before they are produced or released. Through forbidding the topic or content of the unproduced films, or through cutting or editing the films that have been produced, to let them meet the criteria or control the ideology expressed in the film.”

After the foundation of People’s Republic of China in 1949, the culture management department of Chinese Communist Party gradually set up a rigorous film censorship system. Its characteristic is that film scripts, sample films and completed films all need to pass self-censorship, province censorship, municipal Party committee’s check and the film bureau’s check. All film producers became state owned corporations after 1952 (Zhang, 2012).

During the Culture Revolution, political movements made film censorship a sacrifice to the politics. The fate of a film completely depended on the leader’s will (Gu, 2010). When the Culture Revolution ended, the film management department basically reused the film censorship system before the Culture Revolution (Zhang, 2012).

In 1980, there were a series of changes that affected the Chinese film industry. The Chinese Film Distribution & Release Company was responsible for films’ marketing and distribution. Before 1980, this company always paid the production company a fixed amount of money to buy the distribution rights. In 1980, the culture department published a new way to calculate the price of films, and linked the distribution fee with the amount of film copies sold.

The amount of copies sold more or less reflected the popularity of a film, thus the film distribution fee was tightly linked with the market (Zhang, 2012). Another change was that the state set a profit index for every producer, requiring that and the profit would be higher than the year before. These changes pushed producers to pursue profits (Shi, 1986), which lead to more commercial films than high quality cultural films.

In January 1986, the Department of Radio and Television and Film Bureau of the State Council Ministry of Culture merged to form the Radio, Film and Television Bureau (SARFT, 2007).

Another factor that affected film censorship was the financial difficulty of the film industry. The leader of the Film Department Shi said, “We didn’t realize that we should regard social effect as the highest and only standard for art. Putting too much emphasize on the financial difficulty forced us to pass some low quality films. We were afraid of increasing financial pressure for producers” (Shi, 1986).

In 1989, the vice leader of the Film Department Chen said: “We used to censor the films only from political angles, so we couldn’t cut or edit a film just because of its low aesthetic value. However, too many low aesthetic value films have deeply influenced Chinese films’ reputation, even caused doubt on the socialism nature of the films. So starting from this year, we will censor the aesthetic quality of films and won’t pass low quality films” (Chen, 1989). This order shows that before 1989, the authorities were not censoring the content of films but only the ideologies.

In April 1989, the Radio, Film & Television Department announced a Notice of Censoring and Grading Some Films, decided to apply the grading system beginning on May 1st, 1989.

Though the notice said to grade some films, it didn't mean the censorship standard had changed. However, this notice indeed offered the legal basis to shoot some material that is considered "unfitness to children", which lead to a more relaxed censorship standard. The department ordered the addition of the "unfitness to children" notice to four types of films, ordering such films to use posters and other channels to show the notice. However, this grading system did not last very long (Zhang, 2012).

In March 1998, the Radio, Film and Television Bureau reorganized as the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, known as the SARFT (SARFT, 2007). SARFT has set up two bureaus to be responsible for reviewing and rechecking the films, they are the Film Censoring Committee and the Film Reviewing Committee. For those films that pass the reviews, the two bureaus will give them a Film Release License (Liu, 2012).

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The preceding discussion focused on the historical background of the Chinese film censorship system. The current transition to a more relaxed film censorship system can be understood in relation to the historical background outlined above.

By studying the historical background of the Chinese film censorship system, it is easier to understand the current situation of the Chinese film industry and how the censorship system has developed into today's dilemma. Specifically, I want to know how the censorship system has affected Chinese film production and whether it is good or not to have such a system. Ultimately, I use my analysis of the Chinese film censorship system to suggest possible scenarios for the future of Chinese film regulation.

In sum, then, the following research questions guided the research process:

RQ1: What is the standard to censor Chinese films, the function of the Chinese film censorship system, the advantages and disadvantages of the system and how are the Chinese films censored and by whom?

RQ2: How does the Chinese film censorship system treat films imported into China and what are the changes in the Chinese government's attitude toward imported films?

RQ3: How has the Chinese film censorship system developed in recent years and how will it develop in the future?

To address the research questions outlined above, I conducted document analyses and case studies. This section will discuss how I employed these methods.

The first portion of my research focuses on recent changes in the Chinese film censorship system after 2000, and the analysis of the current system. Accordingly, I analyzed documents from both primary and secondary sources. Primary documents included government documents, such as Film Management Regulations (SARFT, 2001) and Scripts/Outline Record, Film Administrative Provisions (SARFT, 2006), etc. Aside from primary documents filed by the Chinese government, I also relied on press releases from corporations, professional organizations, or ad hoc entities involved.

The second portion of my research focuses on the way in which certain films are censored and the phenomenon exposed during the process. To be specific, I chose 3 films, *Hero* produced in China by mainstream director Zhang Yimou in 2002, *The Flowers of War* also directed by Zhang in 2011, and *Titanic* imported from United States in 1997 and its 3D version in 2012. For the first two films, I will compare the differences between them from their contents, government's attitude, etc. to expose the policy changes during these years. *Titanic 3D* and *Titanic* is the same story, the only difference is the more advanced technology to make it into 3D version. However, when its 3D version was imported into the Chinese market, SARFT cut one scene. From the case study of the *Titanic*, we can understand the changes of Chinese government's attitude toward imported foreign films and the focus of the film censorship process.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF THE CHINESE FILM CENSORSHIP SYSTEM

The main film censorship law in force now is the Film Management Regulations enforced in 2002. There are eleven film censorship standards in the Film Management Regulations, among which only one is aimed at technical and quality problems. The other ten rules are all about film content and ideology, such as a film cannot divulge state secrets, jeopardize national security, or harm national honor and interest, etc. (Yu, 2007).

As a supplement to the Film Management Regulations, the Chinese State Council enforced the Scripts/Outline Record, Film Administrative Provisions and the Chinese-foreign Film Coproduction Regulations in 2003.

Liu (2012) concluded in his article that there are many disadvantages of the Chinese film censorship system.

First, the criteria are very unclear. The relevant clauses are too dogmatic and are not practical. The censorship process is very unpredictable and it is the rule of man, not the rule of law. According to Yu (2007), the current censorship committee consists of 36 members who come from different industries. Whether or not a film produced can be released depends on these 36 members. It is not necessary to have all the members to be present when censoring a film. As long as most of them show up, a film can be censored.

The producer should engage in self-censorship to make sure there are no quality and ideology problems. Then the producer hands in a censorship application to the film bureau and the committee gather together to watch the film. After watching the film, the members will make

comments on the film. If there are not many comments, this film will go through directly and get the release license. If there are many comments on a film, the committee will send “revision suggestions” to the producer within 30 days. The producer then must revise the film and send the film back to the committee to be rechecked. If the film passes the recheck process, the producer will get the release license. If not, the producer will continue to revise it until passed. In this censorship process, the committee has complete discretion. Nobody knows exactly where the bottom line is for free creation. The censorship process is too unpredictable and totally depends on the committee members’ will.

Administrative bureaus apply a double standard to different films. When evaluating ideology and main content of the film the criteria are very strict. When evaluating sexual content, no matter if it is non-obscene sexual expression or obscenity, it becomes even more restricted. However, for the violent scenes, it is relatively relaxed. Even in the mainstream films supported by the government, this rule is very obvious. For example, the film *Yin Shi* (Huang, 2005) didn’t pass the censorship process because it contains too much adult content, but it was reedited. However, on the day of premiere, the producer mistakenly showed the unedited version of the film, which contained many sexual scenes. The SARFT recalled this film the next day, forced the producer to reedit the film, and the film was never shown in the theaters. In violent films, especially war films, such as *The Message* (Chen & Gao, 2009), however, they are released without limitation. Some primary schools even organize for students to watch such films, to educate them to build up patriotism.

Second, the censorship process is opaque, and lacks public oversight. The administrative

admission process should be transparent, but the film censorship process is not. The director and the public know nothing about the censorship process, and films are often forbidden or edited without giving a reason. When the film is forbidden, all the investments, money, time, energy and creation are wasted, and the creators still do not know how to avoid losses the next time. Eight films out of 406 produced in 2008 made more than \$12.5 million box office. According to SARFT record, among the 406 films, more than 80% have reality themes. However, in the eight highest budgeted movies, only one film is related to reality. High budget films do not focus on social reality because huge investors cannot bear the risk of strict censorship (Li, 2009).

Third, censorship policies are inconsistent. Even though a film has received a release license, there is still a possibility that the SARFT may take it back. One example is Lou Ye's *Mystery* (2012). Forty-one days before its premiere, SARFT told the producer that the film needed to be edited again, to delete sex scenes between the main characters, and to cut a scene in which the leading actor used a hammer to kill a junkman (SARFT said that the film could only show two blows with the hammer in the murder scene). Lou Ye published this notice from SARFT on his microblog and refused to obey. He said in his microblog and an interview that his film had passed the content check and got the license. After the content check there is the technical check. The technical check should only check the image and sound quality but not the content, but SARFT did not pass the film. Forty-one days before releasing meant that all the nationwide and international distribution contracts had been made. Even if the director agreed to edit the film himself, the editing process would need a large amount of money and time, and all the distribution contracts would be violated. Such "two blows only" advice was very arbitrary,

which may cause confusion and chaos in the industry. Even if there were few scenes that needed editing, these changes might unbalance the whole story. If the leading character only hit the junkman twice to kill him, that would show that this man was a very skillful murderer, but not his extreme action. This would have changed the whole story and the meaning of this film would become ridiculous and negative. Lou Ye said that the rejection didn't show courage, but communicated a lack of respect to the director, the film, and all the actors and crew. Seventeen days after negotiating, SARFT agreed to keep all the scenes but to fade out the murder scene. *The Mystery* finally got a release license, but Lou Ye gave up his director's credit on the release version. (Cinema World, 2012)

The fourth problem with censorship is that using the same criteria to measure all the films will cause less-control and over-control problems. *Less-control* means that Chinese children are exposed to too many violent and sexual scenes that should be controlled but are not. *Hero* (Zhang, 2002), *Fearless* (Yu, 2006), *The Promise* (Chen, 2005), for example, are all defined as PG-13 by Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA); *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow, 2004), *Curse of the Golden Flower* (Zhang, 2006), *The Warlords* (Chan, 2007) are defined as level R. However, every child in China can go to theaters to watch these films. *Over-control* means that all the sexual scenes are cut, so that adults cannot watch films that contain reasonable sexual scenes. Films like *Lost in Beijing* (Li, 2007), which contains much meaningful themes and characters, is defined as obscene film, and was forbidden by Chinese government, which means that no adult could watch the film either.

What's more, many film topics are not covered, which give foreign films and piracy films chances to enter Chinese film market (Peng & Huang, 2009). To avoid being on hold by SARFT, producers tend to produce more films with an ancient China background. Fewer films reflect current social issues. Imported blockbusters attract many film viewers, which has harmed the Chinese film industry.

At the end of 2001, China officially entered the World Trade Organization (WTO). Under such global attention, "industrialization" has become the key word for Chinese films (Jing, 2010). In order to cater to the new market, the Chinese government started to change its policies.

First, SARFT changed its policy on the script checking process. Before 2003, the producer needed to submit the script to SARFT, and then the passed script could not be edited anymore. The new policy only required the producer to submit a 1000 word synopsis, including the title, genre and topic.

Second, the policies on coproduction and foreign investments were relaxed. Brent (2003) wrote in his article that the Chinese government requires all foreign films aiming at theatrical release be sold to China Film Group, a state-owned enterprise. China Film Group had bought all foreign films for very low flat fees, and the foreign studios did not share in the box office revenue. Only ten foreign films were distributed on a revenue-sharing basis per year in China before it joined the WTO. Starting in 2002, the government finally started to relax its tight regulation. Before China joined WTO, foreign companies were forbidden to invest in movie theaters. The Chinese government announced that beginning in February 2002, it would allow private Chinese companies to produce and distribute movies independently. According to China's

WTO commitment, upon entry in 2001, China had to allow twenty foreign film imports a year on a percentage rental basis, up from the previous ten films. One of the first steps the government took to open up the domestic film industry was to end the production monopoly of the large state-owned studios in 2002. In the past, private producers were forced to buy a permit from a state-owned studio, which received a fixed quota of permits from the government each year. After China's entry into the WTO, licensed private Chinese film companies could apply directly to the government for approval to produce and distribute a film. Co-productions were allowed to print two versions of a film, one for domestic release and one for foreign release. Content control on the foreign release prints was less strict. At the end of 2004, film and television production became a restricted business for foreign investors, but not a forbidden area anymore (Jing, 2010). In February, 2012, the Chinese government further opened the market to foreign films, letting studios release an additional fourteen films if they are 3D films or in a large format like IMAX, which means a total of thirty-four films can be imported into China every year (Landreth, 2012).

Third, the gradually relaxed film policy also reflected on the reconciliation between SARFT and the "underground film" directors. "Underground films" are films which do not get release license from SARFT but are still distributed to the overseas market, at film festivals, or shown to the public. Because of the strict film censorship system and the underground directors' continuous violations, the invisible fighting between the government and those directors has prevented a new generation of Chinese directors to develop. In 2003, dialogue between the film censorship department and underground film directors indicate some progress and the opening up of the film censorship system (Jing, 2010).

Fourth, restrictions on the topics of the films are more relaxed. For example, in 2007, there are up to 12 films relevant to the Nanking Massacre (Yu, 2007). *The Flowers of War* (Zhang, 2011) also used the Nanking Massacre as the story background. This used to be a very grave and sensitive topic for the Chinese government. Zhang Yimou's film *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010) was set during the Culture Revolution, which is even more sensitive to the Chinese government. All of these films passed the censorship process.

Though the main trend of the censorship criteria is to be more relaxed, in some certain years the censorship criteria can still become strict. 2008 was a very important year for China's image, so the film censorship criteria in that year were especially strict. The situation got revised after the Beijing Olympic Games. Feng Xiaogang's *If You Are the One* (2008) was required to modify some actors' lines. "If it was former years, such lines should have been passed, but not this year. This has something to do with criticism of *Lust Caution* (Li, 2007). The censorship criteria were relaxed too much, so it shows a more powerful rebound" (Li, 2009). Li An's *Lust Caution* (2007) was criticized by SARFT because of the ideology it expressed. When facing the enemy of Chinese government, Wang Jiazhi did not show her anger, and did not fight against the spy. Instead, she showed mercy to the enemy and cried even when she was about to be killed by the spy. These scenes deviated from national principles of morality and patriotism. Professor Zheng Dongtian of Beijing Film Academy defines the time after 2008 as the post-*Lust Caution* era in Chinese films. That was the strictest time of Chinese film censorship criteria (Li, 2009).

For those films that do not pass the censorship process, there are three typical ways to recollect the investment. First is to release DVDs in the domestic market since audiovisual

products are censored by the Chinese Ministry of Culture or the local culture bureaus, but not by SARFT. Though the main rules are similar, the censorship result of a certain film can be different. Second, the film may be distributed to the international market, and then these films will reenter the Chinese market as a piracy version. Third, all the films are kept as historical records. Someday the government may lift a ban for the film and then it can be shown on the screen. (Yu, 2007)

In December 2011, the State Council announced the Film Promotion Law (Draft) and collected suggestions online from the public. There are 6 chapters and 62 clauses in total. These clauses lower the bar to enter the film market, and allow social investment to produce films. The draft also reduced administrative examination and emphasized improvements to information transparency (Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council P.R. China, 2011). This law is still in draft form, however, and is not being enforced yet.

According to an announcement made by the Chinese State Council on March 10th 2013, the State Administration of Radio, Film & Television (SARFT) is merging with the General Administration of Press and Publications (GAPP) to form a new bureau named the State Administration of Press Publication, Radio, Film and Television, which eliminates the duplication of activities across government agencies and reduces bureaucracy, buck-passing and the potential for corruption. This is the first restructuring of ministries, commissions and departments directly under state control in the film sector since 1998 when SARFT was formed (Cremin, 2013).

CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDIES

In this chapter, I will analyze three films to illustrate how the censorship criteria have changed in the recent years. These three films are *Hero* (Zhang, 2002), *The Flowers of War* (Zhang, 2012), and *Titanic* (Cameron, 1997& 2012).

Hero

Since 2000, the most important event in Chinese film production is the emergence of blockbusters. Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) represented a symbol that the blockbuster era of Chinese film industry had come.

Hero tells a story that supports union and sacrifice self-benefit to the public interest. *Hero* was the first officially sanctioned martial arts film in the People's Republic of China since the People's Revolution in 1949 (Davis & Yueh, 2008). In the film, an assassin Wu Ming (which means "without a name") came to the palace to kill the king of Qin. Wu Ming was allowed to stand close enough to the king of Qin, even though three other assassins had already tried to kill him. When Wu Ming had a chance to strike, however, he hesitated because the king had a chance to unite the six kingdoms that were fighting with each other and bring peace to the Chinese people. In the end, Wu Ming gave up the chance to kill the king of Qin. According to the Qin Dynasty Law made by the king, he killed Wu Ming, united the six countries into a single peaceful empire and became the first emperor of Qin Dynasty.

From the content of the film, Wu Ming stands for the normal people, and the king of Qin is the representative of the government. Wu Ming sacrificed himself to serve the government meant

that normal people should put more emphasis on the public interests, but not self-benefits. This was accord with the mainstream ideology Chinese government needed to propagate, and the story was helpful to build up the government's image.

Davis, D.W., & Yueh, E. (2008) gives us a look at how Chinese government has supported Zhang's films. Chinese authorities took steps to ensure box-office success for the martial arts epic, *Hero* (Zhang, 2002). They clamped down on video pirates, initiated a strict computerized accounting system for urban theatres, and prevented in-house duping. When *Hero* opened in Hong Kong in the summer of 2004, officers would stand in front of the audience monitor the entire show. These guards made announcements explaining to the audience why they were monitoring the theater. In addition, no other Chinese films were allowed to be released during *Hero's* first run in China. The film enjoyed a near-monopoly exposure as authorized by SARFT. From above, we can see that Chinese government strongly supported *Hero* and helped to make it famous.

Though the film has been criticized for advocating tyranny and totalitarianism as methods for bringing about national peace and stability (Morehead, 2011), it was accord with Chinese government's need, and was in line with the Chinese ancient philosophy of "harmony". In addition, the Chinese people also thought such sacrifice was a right thing, and Wu Ming was regarded as a hero. Such sacrifice is seen through Chinese history and those who sacrificed have always been highly respected by people. From this perspective, it is not hard to understand why the Chinese government invested so much in the success of *Hero*.

The most widely accepted Chinese film genre is the martial arts film, and so supporting

Zhang's *Hero* had a very limited risk. On the other hand, the Chinese government also needed a mainstream director to help Chinese government propagate Chinese culture and philosophy.

Zhang Yimou is strongly supported by the Chinese government and his films are good media.

Chinese films can help people in other countries better understand Chinese culture and the government's foreign policies. Zhang Yimou's later work, *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), reflected the supreme power of the emperor, and also received the Chinese government's support.

The following data indicates the significance of *Hero* (Zhang, 2002):

The budget was 250 million RMB, the highest in Chinese film history. The marketing campaign cost 10 million RMB, which was unprecedented, with 2.4 million dollars' movie advertising. *Hero* earned approximately 1.4 billion RMB for the domestic and overseas box office, a record that was not exceeded in the following decade. More importantly, for the first time *Hero* defeated imported blockbusters in the domestic market (Zhang, 2010).

The Flowers of War

The Flowers of War (2011) was Zhang Yimou's latest masterpiece, tells a story of what happened in Nanjing when Japan invaded China in 1937. Only the Christian church had not been attacked, so missionary school girls, prostitutes, a soldier, an injured boy and an American priest (played by Christian Bale from Batman trilogy) all were hiding in this small church. Japanese soldiers rushed into the church and found the school girls. The Chinese soldier shot the Japanese soldiers when they wanted to rape the girls and died. Later, more Japanese soldiers were going to

force those schoolgirls to perform for their victory celebration. The schoolgirls didn't want to be raped and prepared to commit suicide together. The prostitutes who were seen as dirty women showed their courage and uprightness. They cut their hair, changed into student uniforms, and replaced the schoolgirls to perform for Japanese soldiers. John took the schoolgirls escaped.

This film praised prostitutes who were seen as dirty women throughout Chinese history. They were full of courage and justice, and they saved those schoolgirls who had regarded them as dirty women. This is a relatively sensitive topic, but the film got the release license from SARFT and was very popular in China. Though the topic was sensitive, there were several elements in the film that "protected" it from being forbidden. First, it was based on the real story of Chinese history and the story was to reveal the Japanese soldiers' cruel behavior and the Chinese people's resistance. Though the main characters were prostitutes, they were still Chinese and even those "dirty" "low-level" prostitutes were willing to resist and protect young promising generations. Second, the sex scenes in the film were considered necessary to reflect Japanese soldiers' brutality, and such scenes were shown indirectly.

Compared to the sex scenes, there are more violent scenes in this film. For example, when a group of Chinese soldiers tried to protect the schoolgirls, they used their bodies to block Japanese tanks going into Nanjing city. The tank shot several Chinese soldiers dead and their blood was splattering everywhere. When the Chinese soldier sacrificed himself to save the schoolgirls, he was shot by a group of Japanese soldiers. He used his body to ignite hand grenades and killed all the Japanese soldiers. Similar violent scenes show up in other Chinese films with a war background, and all passed the censorship process because of the mainstream

ideology. As long as the Chinese people are fighting against Japanese invaders, the scenes will pass the censorship system.

To review Zhang Yimou's movies in a timeline, there is a distinct change from his early films (*Red Sorghum* (1988), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991), *Not One Less* (1999)) to his later films (*Hero* (2002), *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), *Under the Hawthorn Tree* (2010) and *The Flowers of War* (2011)). His early films are more about small characters and reveal rural stories. Such films are not about politics, but they can still reveal some social realities. In those films, the sex scenes are always shown by metaphors or symbolized, which is Zhang Yimou's advantage. For example, the sexual scenes in the *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) are never shown directly, even the leading actor's face is never shown to the audience. The sex activities are shown by raising the red lanterns and massaging the feet for leading actress. Such metaphors can express the meaning of the film with aesthetic skills, which easily passes the censorship process, and also improves the aesthetic value of his films (Wang, 2007).

After entering the 21st century, Zhang Yimou's films started to change from low budget films to blockbusters, and he started to aim at the international film market. The actors were chosen not because of skills but because of his or her fame overseas. In this way, Zhang Yimou could not only ensure strong domestic box office, but also the possibility of better box office overseas. In the process of globalization, Asian films earned a place in the international film market by including Kungfu heroic topics, fantastic love stories, grand scenery and eastern elements, including music, art, costumes and dance (Jing, 2010).

Table 1

Budget and Box Office of Zhang Yimou's Films (Million \$)

Film	Year	Budget	Worldwide	Domestic	%	Overseas	%
Keep Cool	1997	3.8	5.8	5.8	100%	n/a	n/a
Happy Times	2000	1.9	0.24	0.24	100%	n/a	n/a
The Road Home	2001	n/a	6.8	1.3	18.9%	5.5	81.1%
Hero	2002	31	177.4	53.7	30.3%	123.7	69.7%
House of Flying Daggers	2004	12	92.9	11.1	11.9%	81.8	88.1%
Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles	2005	8.6	3.8	0.3	6.7%	3.5	93.3%
Curse of the Golden Flower	2006	45	78.6	6.6	8.4%	72	91.6%
A Woman, A Gun and A Noodle Shop	2010	11.4	0.31	0.19	61.2%	0.12	38.8%
The Flowers of War	2011	94.5	90	90	100%	n/a	n/a

Sources: Box Office Mojo, IMDb and other sources, 2013)

Table 1 shows the budgets and box office of Zhang Yimou's films. From 2002, with *Hero's* \$ 31 million as the beginning, Zhang Yimou's film budgets have grown quickly. *Curse of*

the Golden Flower in 2006 had a budget of \$45 million, and his 2011 film *The Flowers of War* was the highest budget film ever produced in China, which has a budget of 94.5 million. From the point of box office, all the films have a higher overseas box office than the domestic office, except for *A Woman, A Gun and A Noodle Shop*. So it is not that hard to understand why Zhang Yimou started to focus on the international market. More than 90 percent of the *Riding Alone for Thousands of Miles*' (2005) and *Curse of the Golden Flower*'s (2006) box office came from overseas market. Zhang Yimou's films appeal to overseas audiences. When his films are not successful in the domestic market, he has depended on the international film market to break even.

Titanic

Titanic (1997) was directed by James Cameron, and starred by Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet.

The film is a love story between Rose and Jack that happened on a ship called Titanic in 1912. 1316 passengers and 891 crews were on Titanic when it hit an iceberg and sank. Rose was an upper-class passenger and with her fiancé Caledon. Jack, who was a drifter and artist, won a third-class ticket to the ship in a game. Rose didn't want to marry Caledon because he was a snob, so she decided to commit suicide. Jack saved Rose and they fell in love with each other. Jack showed Rose the happiness of life and Rose gave him a necklace called the "heart of ocean". When the Titanic hits the iceberg, Jack helped Rose survive, but he froze to death. At the end of the film, 101-year-old Rose tells the story to her granddaughters and then throws the necklace

into the sea as a tribute to Jack and their love.

A scene with Jack drawing a naked picture of Rose was famous in China. When the film was first shown in China in 1998, SARFT did not cut any scenes, and this scene impressed a lot of Chinese audience. However, 14 years later, when the Titanic 3D version came to China, the nude scene was cut. One fan wrote on the Internet: “The wheel of history rushed by, suddenly we found that it is backing off” (Yihuaduxiu, 2012). According to the censorship system, there should not be any frontal nudity, so deleting Winslet’s nude naked scene seems consistent. Why did SARFT leave the scene in the film in 1998, but cut it in 2012? A more relaxed ideology may explain it. What is more possible is that in 1998 the policy for importing film had only practiced for 3 years. The authority bureaus were not very sensitive to imported films then. In addition, the Chinese film industry was very much dependent on imported film box office. This was not only true in the cinemas, since the Oscar-winning film *The English Patient* (Minghella, 1996) was shown on the CCTV film channel at that time and was not censored (Liang, 2012).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The Chinese film censorship system exists because it is a tool to manage ideology and culture. Its primary function is to make sure that the leading ideology and mainstream ethics are guiding the public in cultural and ideological spheres. This is different from the rating system in America or other countries, which is aimed to allow parents to be more aware of moral and ethical issues.

The core function of the Chinese film censorship system is forbidding certain elements, which means that it is not very possible to give up this function under the current ideological situation. China has always used an allowance system to regulate media, and the film industry cannot be separated from the whole media system and switched to a grading system.

When China joined WTO in 2001, and the Chinese film industry developed, more and more blockbusters were imported into the Chinese market and more Chinese productions were exported overseas. The lack of a film grading system has caused many problems. On one hand, all approved films can be shown in theaters to both adults and children, which lead to foreign graded films to be popular in China. Too many violent and sexual scenes are considered harmful for adolescents. On the other hand, some exported films are carefully graded by other countries as needing little parental guidance because of the fighting scenes in Kungfu films, which cannot enter the children's market (Gu, 2010).

The Chinese film censorship system needs some changes, but is the film grading system suitable or not for the Chinese film industry?

The advantages of the grading system are obvious. It can help Chinese film industry to develop. The film grading system is an inevitable trend of Chinese film industry's development. Many countries have proved its rationality in practice. The grading system can be the best solutions for the contradictions and conflicts existing in the development of Chinese film industry. Depending on the grading system to legalize those forbidden films that entered the Chinese market through informal ways, is a benefit for suppressing piracy and regulate the film market. It can accelerate growth and connect the Chinese film industry to the international film market.

A film grading system can also broaden the creative space and freedom. It can guide the director to better locate the film and improve the aesthetic quality of the film. In this way, it can help those good films which contain a few controversial scenes to survive. It can encourage those good directors who care about social problems to be more active and guide the audience to face reality. Directors should be encouraged to address social problems through films, instead of producing films only to meet censorship criteria and pursue profits.

A grading system can also both protect the children and provide more choices for adults. It can help change the situation that one film should fit for all age groups. Children can have their suitable films more easily. And parents will be able to choose suitable films for their children easier. Adults can be offered more genres. Zhang Yimou said in an interview that when he was producing a film, he has to consider whether this film can fit for both 8-year-old children and 80-year-old adults (Peng & Huang, 2009).

The problem is that the grading system is not an easy solution for the Chinese film industry in the current situation because of the ideological differences and a problematic Chinese film law.

The grading system might easily guide the audience to watch limited contents. So it may influence the development of socialist culture and ethics (Wang, J. L., 2008). If China accepts the grading system, then the “unsuitable for children” phrases on posters would not protect children, but could be used by producers to pursue profits because of the problematic theater management. Even worse, producers might use the phrases to attract children (Chen, 2009). As early as 1981, People’s Daily has published some articles introducing a foreign film grading system, and recommended the government to adopt a similar system. An article named “Unfitness to Children” wrote that the grading system was not reliable and sometimes it could become a kind of advertisement. The author also recommended adding a notice of “unfitness to children” on the tickets to protect them (Zhang, 2012).

The Chinese film industry is still not ready for the grading system. As early as 1989, the Chinese government tried to grade films but failed. The United States not only has a grading system, but also very strict copyright protection and cinema management. The grading system in America is not forced by law, but is only a service for parents and the public. The current situation of the Chinese film industry does not allow the producers to shoot freely without censorship (Gu, 2010). The concept of film management, the piracy problem and the cinema management in China are all developing and are not prepared enough to use a grading system instead of the censorship system.

Thus, ending the Chinese film censorship system completely and in a short time is impossible. But maybe the censorship system and the grading system can work together to benefit the Chinese film industry?

The Chinese film grading system should be related to Chinese laws and other administrative rules. SARFT can still check the films but only check on the ideology of the films but not the content. Grading work should be handed to the Chinese Film Association. Then the two groups of people can negotiate with each other to decide the censorship result (Wang, S. S., 2008). This would be a first step towards improvement.

The grading system can work for both foreign films and Chinese films. The current film censorship system is stricter for domestic produced films than foreign films. As a result, PG-13 films are available everywhere in China and children are exposed to violent and sexual scenes. If there will be a new grading system in China, it should work equally to both domestic and foreign films. Only in this way would the grading system guide the audience to consume films of different levels correctly (Gu, 2010).

Many Chinese scholars have offered their opinions for the grading system in detail. Wang Shanshan (2008) divides the films into four levels:

Table 2

Graded Levels of Chinese Films

General	Ordinary Rated	Special Rated	Strengthen Rated
No Restrictions	13-year-old above	18-year-old above	25-year-old above

The fourth level is especially designed for Chinese audiences because 18-to-25-year-old adults who have grown up in a relatively traditional culture mature less rapidly. The concern is that if college age adults are exposed to many violent and sexual scenes it might be harmful, and so films should be restricted if they are aimed at this audience.

Yin (2005) divides the films into three categories: general films for all; restricted films for 15-year-olds and above; highly restricted films for 18-year-olds and above. This division method is more generally accepted because these age groups are similar to those in grading systems used in other countries.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This article discusses the framework of the Chinese film censorship system, analyzes the recent changes of the system, and uses case studies to give a closer look at the details and problems in the current Chinese censorship system.

Since the Chinese Communist Party came into power in 1949, the Chinese authorities have exercised an extremely protectionist and intrusive policy towards the film industry, regarding film as an influential tool for propaganda and communication. State-owned film studios have monopolized both the production and distribution of films. The SARFT was established in 1986 to control the film industry to ensure effective supervision and tightened management (Chan, Fung & Ng, 2010).

The Chinese film censorship system has very obvious disadvantages. First, the censorship criteria are very unclear. The policies are too dogmatic and are not practical, and the administrative bureaus use double standards for different films. Second, the censorship process is opaque, and lack of public oversight. Third, the policies are inconsistent. Fourth, using the same criteria to measure all the films will cause two separate problems-over-control and less-control. What's more, many film topics are not addressed, and allow foreign films and piracy films chances to enter Chinese film market.

After China's entry of WTO, the contradiction between the development of the Chinese film market and the limitation of the Chinese film censorship system has become more and more fierce. In a move to revive the weakening film industry, the Chinese government decided to open

up the market and decentralize the marketing, distribution, and production of films within the country (Chan, Fung & Ng, 2010).

SARFT has simplified the policy on script checking and the policies on coproduction and foreign investments are not as strict as before. The relationship between the government and the underground directors are also better. Though the main trend of the censorship criteria is to be more relaxed, in some years the censorship criteria has become strict.

In order to solve these problems, many scholars have advised the government to carry out a grading system to substitute for the censorship system.

The grading system can help Chinese film industry to develop by broadening the creative space and freedom. It can also protect the children from violent and sexual scenes in films and offer more choices and film genres to adults.

However, the current situation of Chinese film industry will not allow the grading system to replace the censorship system.

The Chinese film censorship system is a tool to manage the ideology. Its primary function is to ensure the leading ideology and mainstream ethics' leading position in cultural and ideological spheres. This means that the Chinese government will not give up the system completely in a short time. The Chinese film industry is also not able to accept the grading system. The legal system and the management of cinemas are still developing, and they cannot fully support the grading system. The grading system may also be used as advertisement by producers to attract children to watch the film because of theater management issue.

A cooperation of the censorship system and the grading system may work for the Chinese

film industry. The Chinese government can build up the grading system to work together with the current existing censorship system. First, the grading system should work with Chinese laws and administrative rules. The censorship system can address ideological concerns and the grading system should grade film content. Second, the grading system should measure domestic films and foreign films with the same criteria. In this way, the Chinese film industry may find a way forward and develop more rapidly.

This research report has its limitations. First, since the Chinese film censorship system is a relatively sensitive topic and this research report emphasizes government policies, English sources and materials were hard to find and most resources were in Chinese. Second, my knowledge, time and resources are limited so additional research should be conducted. Third, this research focused on the government perspective, and did not explore other elements that may affect the Chinese film censorship system, such as the power of other relevant organizations, like the Chinese Film Director Association, the Chinese Film Release & Distribution Association, etc.

This research report has addressed the three research questions proposed and it also has raised additional problems to explore in future studies. Future research and analysis could focus more on the Chinese government's policies toward China-foreign coproduction films and foreign films. In addition, further research could examine problematic theater management, the power of film associations, and the boom in theater construction, among other important topics.

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