

A STUDY ON THE DISSEMINATION OF CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FILMS IN THAILAND UNDER CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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Abstract

This research investigates the dissemination of Chinese films in Thailand from a marketing communication perspective, evaluating economic, cultural, and social impacts to propose development guidelines. The qualitative study utilized document research and in-depth interviews with 46 purposively selected key informants, ranging from producers to general audiences. Data was examined using content and descriptive analysis. Findings indicate a recent market contraction characterized by a significant channel shift from cinemas to streaming platforms. To overcome cultural barriers, distributors have increasingly employed deep localization strategies. Economically, the study identified positive impacts, most notably the generation of film tourism. Culturally, results were mixed; while audiences appreciated production technology, there was resistance to overt state-led soft power narratives. The research proposes strategies centered on cultural translation via Buddhist aesthetics, precise genre-audience matching, and co-productions emphasizing shared values. Ultimately, success requires adapting communication channels while carefully managing how audiences decode content across different cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Contemporary Chinese Films, Dissemination, Thailand, Cultural Differences, Cultural Discount.*

Introduction

In the context of the evolving global film industry, the contemporary Chinese film industry has emerged as both a significant entertainment sector and a key instrument of cultural diplomacy, known as State-Led Soft Power. This concept refers to the Chinese government's systematic strategy to enhance international influence through cultural products, particularly films, rather than through military or economic coercion (Wu, 2018).

Thailand is considered one of China's crucial strategic target markets, serving as an economic partner, filming location, and co-production partner. This relationship has produced tangible impacts, such as the film *Lost in Thailand*, which generated Film Tourism and attracted an additional 4.7 million Chinese tourists to Thailand in 2013 (Du et al., 2019). However, the dissemination of Chinese films to Thai audiences faces complex challenges rooted in cultural difference. Cultural Proximity theory posits that audiences prefer media content culturally similar to their own context (Straubhaar, 1991). When cultural distance increases, Cultural Discount emerges, whereby a film's value diminishes due to audiences'

misunderstandings of cultural references, humor, historical contexts, or embedded values (Straubhaar, 1991). This discount intensifies when films serve as State-Led Soft Power tools, as political messaging may conflict with local cultural frameworks.

Although previous research has highlighted the importance of market structure (Tangkuangkun, 2023) and digital-era marketing adaptation (Xue, 2024), a research gap persists regarding how dissemination strategies overcome cultural discount barriers in Thailand and their multidimensional impacts.

Therefore, this qualitative study systematically investigates these dynamics with three objectives: 1) To study the context of Chinese film dissemination in Thailand from a marketing communication perspective; 2) To evaluate the economic, cultural, and social impacts; and 3) To propose strategic and policy guidelines for development.

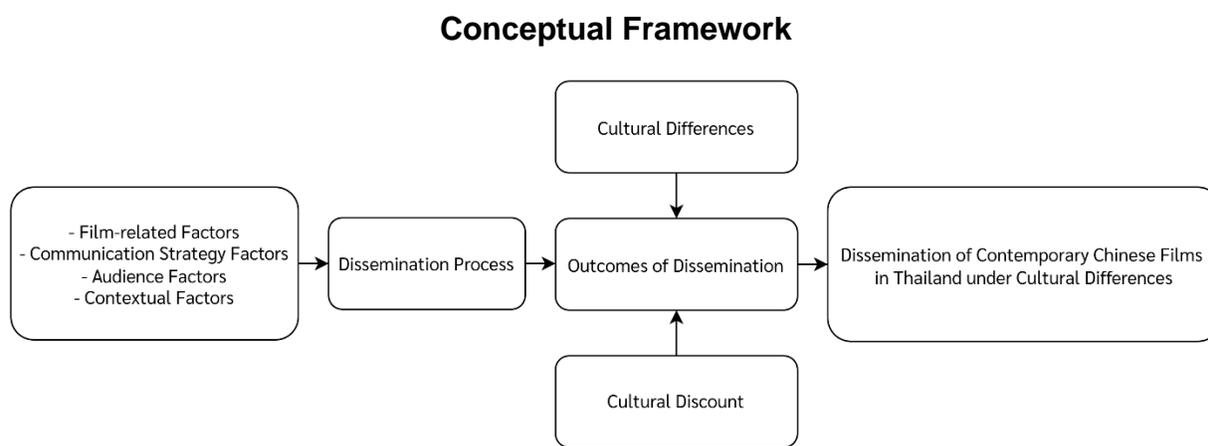


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework for Dissemination of Contemporary Chinese Films in Thailand under Cultural Differences

Research Objectives

1. To study the context of Chinese film dissemination in Thailand from a marketing communication perspective.
2. To evaluate the economic, cultural, and social impacts of Chinese film dissemination in Thailand.
3. To propose strategic and policy guidelines for the development of Chinese film dissemination in Thailand.

Literature Review

This research is grounded in three interrelated conceptual frameworks. First is Dissemination Theory, which evolved from Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovations—explaining the communication of innovations (films) within a social system—into Dissemination Science, which emphasizes strategic planning to deliver messages to specific target groups (Dearing, 2008). Second is the concept of cultural

differences, a critical factor in cross-border dissemination, particularly Hofstede's cultural dimensions (as cited in Hofstede & Bond, 1988) and Straubhaar's (1991) theory of Cultural Proximity, which posits that audiences tend to select media culturally similar to their own. This concept is directly linked to the theory of Cultural Discount, the primary obstacle in this study, which explains why a film's value may be diminished when perceived by a foreign audience. Finally, the concept of Soft Power, especially in the Chinese context, is analyzed as State-Led Soft Power (Wu, 2018), where the contemporary Chinese film industry, particularly Main Melody Commercial Blockbusters like *Wolf Warrior 2*, is systematically employed as a tool of cultural diplomacy.

The literature review revealed that Thailand is a key market for China, both as a filming location and a co-production partner (Khaosod English, 2025; Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, 2021). Research corroborates the tangible impacts; Du et al. (2019) confirmed that lost in Thailand generated massive economic effects, creating Film Tourism and increasing Chinese tourist arrivals by 4.7 million in 2013. Nevertheless, despite economic cooperation and the growth of Chinese series (Krungthep Turakij, 2022), past research indicates that success remains contingent on industry, market, and networks (Tanguangkun, 2023). It also necessitates co-production models that emphasize cultural understanding (Thongsuwan et al., 2017) and adaptation to digital marketing systems (Xue, 2024).

Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative research design. It utilized two primary research instruments: document research and in-depth interviews. A total of 46 key informants were selected using purposive sampling and maximum variation sampling. The informants were categorized into four main groups: 1) 8 Chinese film producers and exporters (executives from studios and streaming platforms); 2) 6 distributors and intermediaries in Thailand (distributors, cinema chain executives, and critics); 3) 16 supporters and influencers (members of a Chinese film lovers club); and 4) 16 general audience members who watch Chinese films. Data was analyzed using content analysis and descriptive analysis.

Research Results

The findings for the first objective revealed that the dissemination situation expanded initially but contracted in the later phase (Interview, Distribution Executive, April 10, 2024). During 2015-2019, an average of 12-15 films were released annually, but this decreased to 6-8 films per year after 2020. The market structure exhibited clear bipolar concentration: commercial films (action, sci-fi) dominated over 80% of the market, while realism films accounted for less than 5% (Interview, Film Selector, April 11, 2024). The most significant change was the channel shift from cinemas (60%) to streaming platforms (40%), with platforms like WeTV and iQIYI becoming new growth poles (Interview, Streaming Platform Executive, April 15, 2024). To manage cultural differences, Thai distributors employed deep localization strategies. A clear example was translating the phrase community of common destiny in *The Wandering Earth 2* to the shared

karma of all beings to align with Thai Buddhist concepts (Interview, Translator and Voice Actor, April 18, 2024).

The results for the second objective showed significant positive economic impacts. Blockbusters like *The Wandering Earth 2* earned over 120 million THB in Thailand and *Lost in Thailand* earned up to 600 million THB, while also generating film tourism that resulted in 4.7 million additional Chinese tourists (Interview, TAT Executive, April 20, 2024). Culturally, the impacts were mixed. On the positive side, an audience survey found 68% perceived Chinese film technology as equivalent to Hollywood's, and 81% felt connected to the values in *Creation of the Gods*, finding them compatible with Buddhist concepts. On the negative side, cultural discount remained a major barrier, particularly for historical and political films like *The Battle at Lake Changjin*, which was heavily criticized in Thai media for exporting political values (Interview, Film Critic, April 22, 2024). Socially, dissemination created online viewer communities but concurrently caused oppositional decoding phenomena on social media platforms (especially Twitter) for films with strong nationalist content, such as *Wolf Warrior 2*.

For the third objective, findings indicated that Chinese films in Thailand face a threefold structural pressure from Hollywood, Thai, and Korean/Japanese films. Key strategies to overcome this include: First, deep cultural translation, which necessitates building a system of Buddhist aesthetics for adaptation (Interview, Cultural Expert, April 30, 2024). Second, appropriate genre-audience matching (e.g., targeting Gen Z with Sci-fi/Fantasy; targeting audiences of Chinese descent with family drama and morality genres). Third, deep Sino-Thai co-productions focusing on shared values, such as Family Ethics + Buddhist Causality Narrative (Interview, Co-producer, May 5, 2024). At the policy level, it was suggested that a Sino-Thai Film Cooperation Committee and a Film Culture Translation and Review Center be established to systematically support the industry (Interview, Policymaker, May 10, 2024).

Conclusion

The research findings regarding the dissemination context, noting the market is limited by threefold structural pressure, align with Tangkuangkun (2023), who indicated that network structure and market were determinants of Chinese film success in Bangkok historically. The emergence of streaming channels as new growth poles corresponds with Xue (2024), who analyzed the transition to digital marketing and influencers in the film industry. Regarding impacts, the Film Tourism finding from *Lost in Thailand*'s massive economic impact serves as a case study that clearly confirms the findings of Du et al. (2019). Concurrently, the mixed cultural impact appreciation for technology but resistance to politics supports WU (2018) argument that China's State-Led Soft Power often faces contradictions and resistance when the audience decodes the message through their own political context.

In terms of strategy, the proposal to use deep cultural translation (e.g., common destiny to shared karma) directly corresponds with Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which states that an innovation (film) is adopted only if it is compatible with the values and social system of the recipients. Furthermore, the emphasis on co-production aligns with Thongsuwan et al. (2017), who previously

proposed a co-production model based on relationships and cultural understanding. In summary, this communication process can be explained by the fact that success depends not only on the Message but also on adapting the Channel and the audience's decoding process within different cultural contexts.

Based on this research, the following recommendations are offered: 1) Recommendations for development: To ensure the sustainable dissemination of Chinese films in Thailand, the public and private sectors should formally establish a Sino-Thai Film Cooperation Committee and a Film Culture Translation and Review Center to serve as support mechanisms for co-production and cultural translation. Producers should also create a strategic guide for reducing cultural discount, to be used in developing scripts and promotional materials that align with Buddhist and Thai societal values. And 2) Recommendations for future research, future studies should expand the time frame to investigate the dynamics of algorithms on streaming platforms and should focus on developing a quantitative cultural discount index to more accurately measure the effectiveness of cultural translation strategies.

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