

Chinese Film Market: What Can Hollywood Learn from China's Domestic Success?

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In the past, Hollywood has experimented with tweaking its films to be more appealing to Chinese audiences. The Chinese release of *Iron Man III* famously incorporated Chinese actors, and *Kung Fu Panda* recently released a mandarin edition of the film. Both of these films were successful in China, but not because of these overt attempts to appeal to Chinese audiences. Many moviegoers felt that the Chinese actors were shoehorned into *Iron Man*, and the mandarin *Kung Fu Panda* was simply met with a shoulder shrug. Hollywood films are transplants, and small cameos or dubbing will not change that.

In contrast, domestic Chinese films speak directly to the values and experiences of their audiences. In *The Mermaid*, a mermaid is set on a mission to seduce and assassinate an evil industrial developer, but, in the process, she falls in love with him. The overarching theme of the movie (the struggle between industrial development and nature) is extremely relevant to the current situation in China, allowing it to connect with Chinese audiences. Additionally, the film incorporates a distinct brand of slapstick comedy known as “mo lei tau,” which is familiar to, and resonates with, Chinese audiences. The aspects that have made *The Mermaid* a success in China are lacking in Hollywood imports.

In *Monster Hunt*, a monster-hunter accidentally becomes impregnated with the prince of the monster kingdom. After the monster is born, the monster-hunter has a change of heart, seeking to protect the baby monster rather than kill it. The success of *Monster Hunt* is, in part, due to the special effects and fantasy elements that have also propelled Hollywood films to Chinese box office success. Some elements, however, are distinct to China. For instance, the film is loosely based on a Chinese classic text titled “Classic of Mountains and

Seas,” many of the jokes are aimed specifically at Chinese-speaking audiences, and the film features famous Chinese actors.

Hollywood needs to be aware of the growing strength of the domestic Chinese film market. In future years, a Hollywood transplant may not be enough. Recognizing the elements that have made *The Mermaid* and *Monster Hunt* successful may assist Hollywood films in future releases.

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