

Monga: Anatomy of a Movie Blockbuster Made in Taiwan

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Abstract

In 2008, the box office success in Taiwan of *Cape No. 7* (*Haijiao Qihao*, dir. Wei Desheng, 2008), alongside several other movies produced in the country, revealed the potential vibrancy of the Taiwanese film market as well as the appetite for local stories among Taiwanese audiences. Niu Chengze and Li Lie, director and producer respectively of the subsequent *Monga* (*Meng Xia*, dir. Niu Chengze, 2010), seized this market opportunity to design a business plan to produce what became a made-in-Taiwan blockbuster. *Monga* is a very significant film in the history of Taiwanese cinema. Upon its release, it broke several records, including the highest-grossing opening for a Taiwanese film in Taiwan, the quickest time to earn 100 million New Taiwan dollars, opening launch on the greatest number of screens, and the first Taiwanese film to be released during the important spring festival holiday season for twenty years.

This thesis poses the following research question: what does *Monga*'s popularity reveal about film production, distribution, promotion and reception in Taiwan, in Greater China and for film industries and culture overall? To address this question, the study adopts a multidimensional approach to investigate the film's production, distribution, promotion, and reception. Because of this intention to provide a full analysis of the multifaceted complexity of the Taiwanese blockbuster as a cultural product, the thesis uses a mixed research methodology. Its bilingual (English/Chinese) cultural-industrial approach, therefore, encompasses interviews with relevant Taiwanese film workers, economic and industrial analysis, textual analysis of media coverage, film consumption data from media platforms, and consideration of the project's relationship to scholarly debates on contemporary Taiwanese cinema.

The project's findings demonstrate that *Monga* marked a new stage of evolution for contemporary Taiwanese cinema and the Taiwanese blockbuster. Using a business plan encompassing governmental funding, the support of Hollywood distributor Warner Bros., and a strategic marketing campaign, the film was a box office triumph. The project also functioned as a stepping-stone

for Taiwanese filmmakers to attract more sizeable investments to help them break into the booming film market in mainland China, as *Monga's* distribution there through informal media platforms aided the production of Niu's next project, *Love (Ai)*, 2012), a coproduction facilitated by a major investment by Huayi Brothers.

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Key Credits in *Monga*

Producer

Yu Zhongyuan 于仲渊
Zhan Yawen 詹雅雯
Yao Zhengzhong 姚政仲
Zhang Xueyao 张学尧
Dong Junyi 董俊毅
Niu Chengze 钮承泽
Li Lie 李烈

Executive Producer

Li Lie 李烈
Niu Chengze 钮承泽

Associate Producer

Zeng Liting 曾莉婷
Yin Huiwen 尹慧文
Huang Zhiming 黄志明

Screenplay By

Zeng Liting 曾莉婷
Niu Chengze 钮承泽

Edited By

Niu Chengze 钮承泽
Zeng Liting 曾莉婷
Lin Yongyi 林雍益

1st Assistant Director

Lin Shuyu 林书宇
Hao Fangwei 郝方葳

Line Producer

Li Lie 李烈

Wang Chuanren 王传仁

Cai Xinhong 蔡信弘

Director of Photography

Jake Pollock 包轩鸣

Gaffer

Li Longyu 李龙禹

Production Designer

Huang Meiqing 黄美清
Chen Boren 陈伯任

Costume Designer

Fang Qilun 方绮伦
Li Daqi 李大齐

Action Director

Yang Kil-Yong

Sound Director

Du Duzhi 杜笃之

Music By

Chen Shanni 陈珊妮

Behind the Scenes/Featurette

Li Zhong 李中

A Note on Romanisation

The transliteration system used to romanise Chinese in this thesis is *pinyin*, which is applied in mainland China and most international publications. However, some names of people and places associated with Taiwan and Hong Kong, such as Taipei, Hou Hsiao-hsien, and Tsui Hark, are kept in their original forms of romanisation, since they are commonly used in these two locations and internationally. All Chinese films mentioned in this thesis are referred to by their officially released English titles, and the romanisations through the *pinyin* system of these titles are provided on their first appearance.

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Introduction

The success of *Monga* (*Meng Xia*, 2010) is not a coincidence but the result of a well-executed business plan. The Taiwanese film, directed by Niu Chengze, was released in January 2010 in Taiwan. Soon after its premiere, its box office broke several records, including the highest-grossing opening for a Taiwanese film in Taiwan, the quickest film to earn NT\$10 million (New Taiwan dollars),¹ opening launch on the greatest number of screens, and the first Taiwanese film to be released during the important spring festival holiday season in twenty years. This research seeks to answer the following question: what does *Monga*'s popularity reveal about film production, distribution, promotion and reception in Taiwan, in Greater China and for film industries and culture overall? To answer this question, the thesis is structured to explore different industrial stages of *Monga*,² namely film production, formal and informal distribution, promotion, and reception. By doing so, the thesis aims not only to analyse how a local Taiwanese blockbuster was produced, distributed, and consumed in Taiwan but also to depict the development of contemporary Taiwanese commercial cinema.

Niu Chengze and Li Lie, the two key people in the project, initiated the plan to make *Monga*. Niu Chengze began his career as a young actor and built his reputation through his performances as A Qing in *The Boys from Fengkuei* (*Fenggui Lai De Ren*, dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1983) and Xiao Bi in *Growing Up* (*Xiaobi De Gushi*, dir. Chen Kunhou, 1983), two highly appreciated Taiwanese films in the Taiwan New Cinema period. After the success of his directorial debut in the 2008 low-budget feature film, *What On Earth Have I Done Wrong?!* (*Qingfei Deyi Zhi Shengcun Zhi Dao*, 2008), Niu aspired to participate in a larger budget commercial film. Teaming up with Li Lie, a long-time friend, later as the producer of *Monga*, the two successfully secured

¹ Approximately equivalent to US\$330,000. In this thesis, the box office and other related data are quoted at the time when the film was released or when the data were generated and are not adjusted for inflation. The equivalent value in US\$ is provided in the footnotes.

² As the film is repeatedly discussed in the thesis, it is simply referred to as *Monga*.

a deal with the Taiwanese sub-branch of Warner Bros. so that the spring festival release schedule would be guaranteed for *Monga* if the postproduction was completed on time.³ Released as scheduled, *Monga* became one of the best-selling Taiwanese films in history.

The year 2010 was a fruitful year for Taiwanese cinema, with forty domestic Taiwanese films released, the highest number since 2001. Among these forty films, eight achieved Taipei box office of over NT\$10 million.⁴ With a high budget of NT\$80 million,⁵ *Monga* was the only domestic film that reached box office over NT\$100 million in the Taipei area, NT\$117,007,196 to be exact.⁶

To answer the key research question, this thesis seeks to understand the film industrial environment for producing and consuming commercial blockbusters in Taiwan in the period of the national cinema revival, *guopian fluxing* in Chinese. As I argue throughout the following chapters, from the perspectives of production culture, distribution networks, and marketing strategies, the success of *Monga* is not a coincidence. Rather, it was achieved through a well-organised, well-executed commercial plan designed by the team led by Niu and Li, which could be considered a new type of Taiwanese blockbuster production model. By anatomising the production, distribution, and consumption of one film, *Monga*, this research also aims to offer a

³ A festival period in Taiwan and other Chinese cultural spheres. In Taiwan, there is normally a week-long public holiday around the spring festival. Thus, the spring festival release schedule is promising and profitable for films released in Taiwan.

⁴ Approximately equivalent to US\$330,000; The number of tickets sold is not provided due to lack of resources and tools for calculation; Qinghua Wang, “2010 中外电影市场总览 [Review of Film Market of 2010],” in *2011 年台湾电影年鉴* [2011 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook], (Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute, 2011), 40–65.

⁵ NT\$80 million approximately equivalent to US\$2.66 million; In the early 2010s, the average budget for Taiwanese films was around NT\$30 million (US\$996,231). A budget of NT\$50 million (US\$1.66 million) was considered a medium-sized production, and NT\$80–100 million (US\$2.66–3.32 million) was considered a blockbuster. See Valkyria, “电影营销人谈国片瓶颈：台湾观众不看国片是不争的事实，国片打不过好莱坞，也打不过中国 [Film Distribution and Marketing Expertise Talking About Challenge of Taiwanese Film: Taiwanese Audience Do Not Watch National Film is a Fact. National Film Cannot Compete with Hollywood or Mainland China],” *The News Lens*, December 14, 2015, <https://www.thenewslens.com/article/32180>.

⁶ Approximately equivalent to US\$3,885,539.

possible methodological approach to study the film industry through a multidimensional perspective.

Research Background

When discussing Taiwanese cinema, the Taiwan New Cinema movement of the 1980s is often the first thing that comes to mind. Indeed, a group of young filmmakers at the time, including Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien, challenged the traditional melodramatic aesthetic by portraying realistic everyday life in Taiwan. The realism style and the innovative narrative techniques involved were highly praised both domestically and internationally among filmmakers, film critics, and academics. Research on both the film auteurs and the films in the movement has blossomed in academia.⁷ There is no doubt that the Taiwan New Cinema movement is considered a highlight in Taiwanese film history. However, some scholars point out that from an industrial or commercial point of view, it had very little impact on the domestic film industry. In other words, it neither contributed significantly to the domestic box office nor created a new industrial paradigm for Taiwanese cinema in terms of encouraging the industrialisation of local film production, boosting the development of domestic film distribution networks, or cultivating audiences for Taiwanese national cinema on a large scale.⁸

⁷ See Chris Berry and Feiyi Lu, eds., *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005); Jianye Huang, 杨德昌电影研究——台湾电影的知性思辨家 [The Cinema of Edward Yang: The Intellectual Philosopher in Taiwan New Cinema] (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Company, 1995); Wenqi Lin, Xiaoyin Shen, and Zhenya Li, 戏恋人生——侯孝贤电影研究 [Passionate Detachment: Film of Hou Hsiao-hsien] (Taipei: Rye Field Publishing, 2000); Zou Mi and Xinhua Liang, eds., [新电影之死——从《一切为明天》到《悲情城市》] [Death of New Cinema: From Everything for Tomorrow to A City of Sadness] (Taipei: Tonsan Publications, 1994); James Udden, *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-Hsien* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Emilie Y.-Y. Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁸ Feiyi Lu, “从数字看台湾电影五十年 [Observation of Taiwan Cinema from Data],” *The Database of Taiwan Cinema*, January 20, 2003, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070808220318/http://cinema.nccu.edu.tw/cinemaV2/squareinfo.htm?MID=13>.

The Taiwan New Cinema movement generally attracted more attention abroad than domestically. Felicia Chan describes it as ‘more “national” abroad than at home’.⁹ Compared to Taiwanese art house cinema, commercial cinema in the 1980s was seriously challenged by both the invasion of Hong Kong films in the Taiwanese film market and the prevalence of videotape recordings.¹⁰ Both the number of film titles produced and the number of cinemas in Taiwan decreased dramatically in the 1980s, which started a long period of recession for the Taiwanese film industry that lasted until the mid-2000s.

A turnaround began in the late 2000s. The *2009 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook* states that ‘many Taiwanese young directors broke out in 2008. Several popular and flowing debuts within personal characteristics witnessed a milestone for young filmmakers trying to find their direction. This collective energy has pushed to a peak, which has not been seen for a long time’.¹¹ The debuts mentioned above include *What On Earth Have I Done Wrong* (2007), *Orz Boyz* (*Jiong Nanhai*, dir. Yang Yazhe, 2008), *Winds of September* (*Jiu Jiang Feng*, dir. Lin Shuyu, 2008), and the box office phenomenon *Cape No. 7* (*Haijiao Qihao*, dir. Wei Desheng, 2008). The triumph of these Taiwanese films in the local market enhanced the morale of the film industry in Taiwan. The president of Chinese Taipei Film Archive expressed that the success of these films ‘created the most amazed phenomena of Taiwan cinema in the past twenty years’.¹² Moreover, the president cheerfully stated that ‘the success of *Cape No. 7* displays the long-term accumulation of creative energy and size of the market, and influential position of Taiwan in the Chinese language world. This also serves as a boost of Taiwanese film production and market’.¹³ This is the time that the Taiwanese film industry was recovering from the downturn

⁹ Felicia Chan, “The International Film Festival and the Making of a National Cinema,” *Screen* 52 (2011): 253–60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjr012>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “In Brief,” in *2009 台湾电影年鉴* [2009 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook], Taiwan Film Institute, December, 2009, 15. Original text directly quoted from the English version of the Yearbook’s abstract.

¹² Zhikuan Chen, “Foreword,” in *2009 台湾电影年鉴* [2009 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook], Taiwan Film Institute, December, 2009, 10.

¹³ Chen, “Foreword.”

of Taiwanese commercial cinema since the 1980s. The period of Taiwanese film revival after two decades is the background for this research, because it was when *Monga* was produced and released in Taiwan.

As a by-product, this research contributes to two areas of discourse surrounding Taiwanese cinema and the Taiwanese film industry, namely Taiwanese blockbusters and Taiwanese national cinema. A common feature shared by the films of this new wave of Taiwanese cinema revival is that rather than following the aesthetic legacy of the Taiwan New Cinema movement, filmmakers have attempted to be more market oriented and have experimented with different film genres. In other words, since the late 2000s, there has been a revival of Taiwanese commercial filmmaking.

During the recession in the Taiwanese film industry in the 2000s, a few Taiwanese films that had rewarding box office returns, including *Blue Gate Crossing* (*Lanse Damen*, dir. Yi Zhiyan, 2002), *Eternal Summer* (*Shengxia Guangnian*, dir. Chen Zhengdao, 2006), and *Island Etude* (*Lianxiqiu*, dir. Chen Huairen, 2006), followed the model of low budget – low market expectation – low financial risk. However, a new model appeared since 2008, with more and more locally produced *dapian*, which can be literally translated as ‘big film’ in English, being released in Taiwan. The word *dapian* is used not only by the media and film critics to describe film production projects that have high budgets and high market expectations, but also by the filmmakers and marketing teams as promotional highlights of their films. According to Chris Berry, the closest translation in English for *dapian* would be ‘blockbuster’,¹⁴ a word that was first used in the film context in the mid-1940s in American media. In 1975, the release of Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* created a new cultural phenomenon of the ‘blockbuster era’, when film production companies wanted to copy the success of *Jaws* (1975) and *Star Wars* (dir. George Lucas, 1977) by approving more projects with increasingly large budgets and extensive advertising and promotion.¹⁵

¹⁴ Chris Berry, “What’s Big About the Big Film?: “De-Westernizing” the Blockbuster in Korea and China,” in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁵ Tom Shone, *Blockbuster: How the Jaws and Jedi Generation Turned Hollywood into a Boom-Town*, (London: Scribner & Schuster, 2005).

Berry argues that the concept of a blockbuster has been de-Westernised into local critical discourse to refer to both American and locally produced blockbusters. In mainland China, the word *dapian*, as a direct translation of ‘blockbuster’, is used in association with ‘America’.¹⁶ However, after being borrowed and localised into a Chinese context, the word is also used to describe locally produced films. For example, it is used in the context of ‘mainstream big film’, a unique genre of film that combines ideological propaganda with commercial blockbuster production.¹⁷ Put differently, once the concept of a blockbuster was borrowed and localised, it was given a different meaning according to the social, cultural context. As in mainland China, in Taiwan, the word *blockbuster* has also been used to describe Hollywood films like the Marvel Studio superhero films. Moreover, it is applied when describing locally produced Taiwanese films with relatively larger budgets. For example, the Taipei Film Commission published an article titled ‘*Monga* the No. 1 Taiwanese Big Film in Twenty Years Born in Taipei’, which stresses that both the scale of production and the scope of its exhibition were exceptional and record-breaking in Taiwanese film history.¹⁸

However, in Lee’s research on the South Korean film industry, the author notes that the notion of de-Westernisation is problematic since it reinforces the dichotomy between the West and the non-West, Hollywood and non-Hollywood.¹⁹ Moreover, her study stresses that though the industry practice behind Korean blockbusters may differ from that in Hollywood due to the different Korean cultural and social background and economic limitations, the Korean film industry attempts to achieve ‘Hollywood’s system of funding,

¹⁶ Berry, “What’s Big About the Big Film?”

¹⁷ Huiyu Zhang, “从主旋律影片到主流大片的嬗变 [The Evolution from Main Melody Film to Mainstream Film],” *Film Art* 2 (2011): 16–23.

¹⁸ “二十年来台制第一大片[艋舺]诞生在台北! [Monga the No. 1 Taiwanese Big Film in Twenty Years Born in Taipei],” *Taipei Film Commission*, January 28, 2010, <http://www.filmcommission.taipei/tw/MessageNotice/NewsDet/568>.

¹⁹ Nikki J. Y. Lee, “Localized Globalization and a Monster National: “The Host” and the South Korean Film Industry,” *Cinema Journal* 50 (2011): 45–61, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2011.0031>.

production control, distribution and marketing.²⁰ Stephen Teo approaches blockbusters in Asia through the historical epic film genre, a form that most Asian blockbusters take as a channel to express ‘one’s national identity through an appropriation of classical heritage’ and at the same time to compete with Hollywood in an international market.²¹

In this research, the investigation of *Monga*’s popularity and success is conducted by examining the different industrial stages of production, distribution, and reception. At the same time, I respond to the issues addressed above in the case of Taiwanese blockbusters, specifically analysing the characteristics of Taiwanese blockbusters, exploring the key elements during the production phase, investigating the distribution and promotion networks for local blockbusters, and studying how audiences respond to Taiwanese blockbusters.

Another important discourse surrounding Taiwanese cinema and the Taiwanese film industry is national cinema. In Taiwan, whether in the media, the film industry, or academia, the notion of national cinema that is called *guo pian* (国片) has been repeatedly mentioned and discussed. As this research indicates in the following chapters, the word *guo pian* was used as a marketing point for *Monga* to motivate local audiences to support the domestic film industry. It was also used in the media coverage of *Monga* in the context of the film as a *guo pian*, with its box office success proving the revival of Taiwanese cinema. Moreover, the word *guo pian* is used frequently in online audience reviews. Thus, in the Taiwanese context, *guo pian*, or national cinema, is more than a research regime. It is also a marketing selling point of a film and a discourse generated during the film’s reception.

In the existing English literature on national cinema, the notion of the term and the paradigm of research on this topic have been constantly inspected and deconstructed. For instance, John Hill proposes approaching national cinema from a cultural perspective rather than the previously dominant

²⁰ Lee, “Localized Globalization and a Monster National,” 61.

²¹ Stephen Teo, “The Historical Blockbuster Style,” in *The Asian Cinema Experience: Styles, Spaces, Theory*, (London: Routledge, 2013), 52–71.

economic approach.²² Andrew Higson, in his article ‘The Concept of National Cinema’, emphasises the importance of including the film consumption perspective in national cinema research, in addition to the film text, film production, and the cultural dimensions of films.²³ Even in the age of transnationalism and globalisation, national cinema as a research concept as well as a research paradigm is still under scrutiny.²⁴ It is not the intention of this research to join the multifarious discussion on the concept of national cinema. However, this research argues that national cinema is still an important research paradigm in which ‘national’ should be considered a contested and fluid term, the meaning of which changes depending on historical and social specifics in different nations or nation-states.

In the current literature on Taiwanese national cinema in both English and Chinese, the research frequently adopts textual analysis as the methodology, with auteur studies and historical studies as the research approach. Two examples of studies in this category are *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* and *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After*. The former discusses the discourse around nationhood, national identity, and presentation of history in Hou Hsiao-hsien’s films. And the latter, the first anthology on the Taiwan New Cinema movement from English academia, embodies research on the important titles made by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and more.²⁵ Another similarity shared by most research on Taiwanese national cinema is the focus on art house cinema. However, there is an emerging conversation that explores national cinema through commercial cinema. For

²² John Hill, “The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Production,” in *New Questions of British Cinema*, ed. Duncan Petrie (London: BFI Publishing, 1992).

²³ Andrew Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” *Screen* 30 (1989): 36–47, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/30.4.36>.

²⁴ See Will Higbee and Song H. Lim, “Concepts of Transnational Cinema: Towards a Critical Transnationalism in Film Studies,” *Transnational Cinemas* 1 (2010): 7–21, <https://doi.org/10.1386/trac.1.1.7/1>; Andrew Higson, “The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema,” in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2005), 57–68.

²⁵ Berry and Lu, eds., *Island on the Edge*; June C. Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

example, Chialan Sharon Wang examines how the commercial Taiwanese film *Cape No. 7* (2008) constructs a nostalgia that portrays a flexible national identity.²⁶

This research joins the conversation on Taiwanese national cinema through the perspectives of production, distribution, promotion, and reception of *Monga*, a local blockbuster. By doing so, this study argues that national cinema is still a significant research paradigm for understanding Taiwanese cinema, including the production model of the blockbuster. The study also seeks to fill the research gap in the existing literature by giving an industrial perspective on the Taiwanese film industry.

Research Method

Due to this multidimensional research focus and the complexity of blockbusters, a mixed research method was adopted for this research. Throughout the study on *Monga*, the research uses a cultural-industrial method borrowed from John T. Caldwell, which includes interviews with Taiwanese film workers, textual analysis of media coverage and publications, film consumption data from media platforms, economic and industrial analysis, and secondary research materials that include research on Taiwanese cinema in both the English and Chinese languages.²⁷ It is also necessary to point out that the research materials were collected bilingually, in English and Mandarin Chinese, and some of the materials were translated by the author for this study, as footnoted in the thesis.

Original research was conducted in the field in Taiwan in 2017. During this field trip, I was able to conduct interviews with five filmmakers who participated in the film *Monga*: Li Lie (producer), Yin Huiwen (executive producer, marketing team leader), Guan Weijie (second assistant director), Lin

²⁶ Chialan S. Wang, “Memories of the Future: Remaking Taiwanese-Ness in *Cape No. 7*,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6 (2012): 135–51, https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.6.2.135_1.

²⁷ John T. Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

Yongyi (editor), and Cai Weicheng (leader of the digital marketing team).²⁸ As a research method, interviewing the filmmakers not only allowed me to gain insight on the film industry from the practitioners, but also provided systematically performed marketing discourse that is valuable for this research. Moreover, since the interviews were conducted roughly eight years after the release of *Monga*, it was helpful to use a diachronic review with the filmmakers. Interviews were conducted with both the well-known, above-the-line practitioners and staff who have less media exposure, which is relevant for understanding the environment of the Taiwanese film industry.

The materials collected from media coverage and publications about *Monga* or Taiwanese cinema in general include interviews with directors, actors, or distribution companies, box office records, film criticism, and celebrity and social news. It is noteworthy, because of the time gap between the release of *Monga* and the execution of this research, and the limitations of the research location, there were difficulties collecting original printed copies of media coverage and the publications mentioned above. Thus, the sources of the collected materials are mainly online archives.

This research also uses numerical data regarding production and consumption figures that were collected through various sources. The Taiwanese box office data collected for this research are mainly from the *Taiwan Cinema Yearbook*, a yearly publication by the non-profit, government-sponsored and supervised corporation Chinese Taipei Film Archive. The box office data include annual box office earnings, box office income for individual films, distributors' market share in Taiwan, and the like.²⁹ The box

²⁸ During the research period, I also sought to contact the director, Niu Chengze, the general manager of Warner Bros. Taiwan subsidiary, Shi Weiming, and other filmmakers and actors. However, due to various reasons, such as no response from the potential interviewee(s), company policy prohibiting interviews, or limitations in time and space, these attempts were not successful.

²⁹ Though the statistics published on *Taiwanese Cinema Yearbook* could be considered a reliable source, there are inconsistencies in the data, for various reasons. First, as pointed out previously, until 2016, there was no nationwide box office income statistic system in Taiwan. Only the box office revenue in the Greater Taipei area was exact, and data on the rest of Taiwan were calculated based on the Taipei box office income. Second, there are differences between the box office statistic system of the Taipei Film Trade Association and the sub-

office data that the yearbook uses are based on data collected from the Taipei Film Trade Association, as well as websites like *Box Office Mojo*, *Atmovies.com.tw*, and *Taipeiibo.com*. Other data regarding the box office for Taiwan and other areas were collected from related industry reports, such as the China Film Report launched by Entgroup, a leading Chinese culture and entertainment statistical data provider,³⁰ and academic publisher.

Chapter Structure

As stated above, this thesis explores the elements that contribute to the success of *Monga*. To do this, it is structured to analyse (1) production of *Monga*, (2) distribution and promotion of *Monga*, (3) reception of *Monga*, (4) informal distribution on *Monga*, and (5) a coproduction case study of *Love* (2012).³¹ The last section functions to show how *Monga*, in the wake of its success, was a stepping-stone for the director to approach the booming film market in mainland China.

The first chapter locates this research in the fields of national cinema studies and Taiwanese cinema studies. The chapter establishes the broad background of the theoretical framework, which is used later in the thesis to examine *Monga* and answer the research questions this thesis proposes. Given this purpose, the chapter starts by summarising the general discussion on the terms *nation*, *nation-state*, and *national identity*, which deeply influences the

branches of Hollywood distribution companies in Taiwan. For marketing and advertising cinema chains, free tickets and promotional tickets were offered by the cinema. The price difference between these promotional tickets and the original tickets was added to the total box office income in the system of the Hollywood subsidiaries but not in the data published by the Taipei Film Trade Association. Third, there are differences in film origin classifications between different organizations, essentially because of increasing levels of cross-border activities. These conditions bring confusion and questions when reading the statistics about the Taiwanese film market and the film industry, but they also present the complexity and reality of contemporary Taiwanese cinema.

³⁰ See Entgroup, "China Film Industry Report 2011-2012 (in Brief)," Industry Report (Entgroup), accessed November 18, 2010, <http://english.entgroup.cn/uploads/reports/2012ChinaFilmIndustryReportB.pdf>; Entgroup, "China Film Industry Report 2012-2013 (in Brief)," Industry Report (Entgroup), accessed November 18, 2010, <http://english.entgroup.cn/uploads/reports/ChinaFilmIndustryReport2012-2013inbrief.pdf>.

³¹ As the film is repeatedly discussed in the thesis, it is simply referred to as *Love*.

discussion of national cinema in the field of film studies. I propose that the paradigm of national cinema should not be limited as a research regime that serves any unity of national culture or any homogeneous national identity. It should also not be regarded as a research approach that contradicts transnational cinema studies. I argue in this chapter that the paradigm of national cinema still influences the study of film production, promotion, and perception, even in the twenty-first century, an age of transregionalism, transnationalism, and globalisation. The chapter then outlines the existing literature on Taiwanese cinema and highlights studies in the field that directly contribute to the discussion on national cinema.

The film industry, as part of the media and cultural industry, has developed under certain social, economic, and political circumstances. Moreover, the production, distribution, and reception of a blockbuster as well as the popularity and the success of a film are multidimensional subjects that involve a considerable amount of capital, manpower, and material resources. Thus, chapter 2 outlines the social, cultural, and economic background of Taiwan since the early 1900s, with a specific focus on the time since the 1980s, the period of political demoralisation and the Taiwan New Cinema movement. The chapter begins by introducing contemporary Taiwan, including its language diversity, minority ethnic groups, and cultural policies. Then, to sketch out the context for analysis on *Monga*, the second half of chapter 2 provides a general picture of the Taiwanese film industry from the Taiwan New Cinema movement in 1980s, through the decline of the industry around the early 2000s, to the revival marked by the box office success of *Cape No. 7* in 2008. The chapter thus attempts to present the social and economic circumstances under which *Monga* was produced, distributed, promoted, and consumed.

As mentioned earlier, the thesis aims to examine the elements that contribute to *Monga*'s popularity from different industrial stages namely production, distribution and promotion, consumption, and informal distribution in mainland China. Chapters 3 through 6 address each of these stages in turn. Chapter 3 seeks to unpack the industry practices surrounding Taiwanese blockbuster production to establish the background for

understanding the production environment of *Monga*. The chapter aims to answer which elements during the production stage contributed to the popularity of *Monga*, a local Taiwanese commercial blockbuster. To answer this question, production studies are taken as the research approach. The chapter further discusses the term *blockbuster* and compares it with the corresponding translation in Mandarin Chinese, *dapian* (大片). I argue that though the notion of blockbusters was created in Hollywood, the term has been localised, and it was borrowed and translated in Taiwan. The chapter then examines the four aspects of the production of *Monga*: the key people on the production, the involvement of the government subsidy, the national sentiments designed in *Monga*, and the impact of Warner Bros. as its distributor. By asking what roles the director and producer play in the project, how the sub-branch of the Hollywood distributor benefits local film production, what influence the government subsidy has on Taiwanese commercial film production, and how *Monga* appeals to the national sentiment in both narrative and aesthetic dimensions, the chapter aims to depict Taiwanese national cinema production in the context of globalisation and glocalisation.

Following the thread from the examination of the production of *Monga* in chapter 3, chapter 4 focuses on the environment of film distribution and the promotion of *Monga*. The first half of the chapter aims to answer how *Monga* was distributed as a locally produced blockbuster by Warner Bros. and what elements in the distribution stages contributed to the popularity of *Monga*. To do this, the research first investigates distribution activities in Taiwan generally to illustrate the commercial film distribution culture, then narrows the focus to the distribution of *Monga* in Taiwan specifically. The latter half of the chapter explores the marketing and promotion of *Monga* through both traditional media and digital media marketing. Two interlinked sections, focusing on distribution and promotion respectively, depict the Taiwanese film industry in a transition period, in which the traditional distribution and promotion methods were widely applied while the new practices, including utilising social media and digital media in film marketing, were also rapidly spreading.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus from the industrial side to the reception side of *Monga* to address how the film was read by the local audience, what discourses that have been raised in the industry echoed throughout its reception, how discussions around the reception differed from the industry perspective, and how the meaning of the film has changed in the decade since its release. To answer these questions, the chapter adopts the ‘total history’ of film reception approach reinforced by Barbara Klinger, which includes synchronic as well as diachronic reception.³² Thus, the research on the total history of the reception of *Monga* begins with a synchronic moment when the film was released in 2010, then moves to a diachronic perspective from the point when the research was conducted. This chapter is also compartmentalised according to different types of research materials. For the synchronic moment, the research draws attention to review journalism, media references, online audience reception, and cross-cultural reception. For the diachronic research, the study discusses media references and academic criticism of the film.

After the investigation of production, formal distribution, and consumption of *Monga* in Taiwan, chapter 6 centres on the informal distribution of the film outside Taiwan, specifically in mainland China, a potential market for *Monga*. Because *Monga* did not pass the mainland China film censorship process, the film was not released in cinemas there. However, it did not remain unknown for the mainland audience, and its success quickly spread over the border. Through file sharing and other forms of informal distribution,³³ the film as well as the director gained awareness and reputation in the Chinese mainland. This chapter examines this phenomenon through the informal distribution of *Monga* on douban.com, a Mandarin Chinese media platform established in mainland China that provides functions like reviewing and commenting on films. By doing this, the chapter aims to present how *Monga* was informally distributed in mainland China through media platforms

³² Barbara Klinger, “Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies,” *Screen* 38 (1997): 107–28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/38.2.107>.

³³ Ramon Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

and how the Taiwanese national characteristics in the film were accepted by audiences outside of Taiwan.

After the triumph of *Monga* in Taiwan, its director, Niu, in cooperation with Huayi Brothers, one of the largest private entertainment groups and now a Chinese multinational entertainment company, presented his next title, *Love*. As Niu's first coproduction film with a mainland China company, *Love* represents a possible option for Taiwanese filmmakers to expand their project scales and reach a wider audience. Chapter 7 introduces *Love* into the research focus and explores the collaboration between Taiwan and mainland China in film production. The research begins with background on the Chinese film industry and film coproduction in general. It then provides a brief introduction of the history of film coproduction between Taiwan and mainland China. Furthermore, the chapter investigates the challenges and advantages of this coproduction relationship, using *Love* as a case study. By doing this, I argue that the success and the popularity of *Monga* enabled Niu Chengze as a filmmaker to step forward to reach a sizeable and booming film market in the Chinese mainland. This research disagrees with the argument that Taiwanese films would lose their characteristics and cultural identity through coproduction with the mainland. However, the Taiwanese film industry has advantages in cooperating with mainland China due to its geo-cultural proximity and favourable government policies on film coproduction, which would benefit Taiwan from the relationship financially.

Finally, a conclusion summarises and emphasises the key points and findings of my doctoral research. This section also discusses the limitations of the study as well as the contributions of the findings. Moreover, it addresses how the research could be further developed in the future.

Chapter 1. National Cinema as A Contested Concept and A Shifting Research Paradigm

As mentioned in the introduction, the concept of national cinema is a pervasive discourse surrounding Taiwanese cinema. It has been adopted frequently by the academia in both English and Chinese as a research framework in Taiwanese film studies. Moreover, in industrial practices, the term, national cinema, has been used throughout different industrial stages of *Monga* by filmmakers, film critics, audiences, and in the media coverages. *Monga*'s status as a national film is a highlighted selling point, which was presented by the filmmakers' interviews, film posters and trailer designs and other marketing materials. This led to a national status, which was then constantly repeated in the media coverage of *Monga*. The two factors together influenced the audience's perception of *Monga* as a national film. Thus, before going into analysis of *Monga*, it is important for this chapter to focus on building a broad background and theoretical framework around national cinema and specifically Taiwanese national cinema, which is fundamental for examining the case study of the thesis and answering the research question proposed in the previous section.

Susan Hayward points out that 'the cinema was born in the age of nationalism', and soon after its invention, 'books were being written entitled *L'Histoire du cinéma*, and by the 1920s, calls were being made for a truly national cinema as a defence against the American hegemony'.¹ Since the beginning of the emergence of national cinema, there has been a dichotomy between the national cinema and the other, and in many cases, 'the other' indicates the dominant American cinema. In the early years, the term *national cinema* was used to refer to films and film industries of particular nations, such as British cinema, French cinema, or Chinese cinema. However, along with the emergence in the 1980s of the modernist debates on the concepts of nations, nation-states, and nationalism, the notion of national cinema has also

¹ Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993), 5.

been critically scrutinised.² More recently, in the discipline of film studies, the establishment of transnational cinema studies not only shifts the debate's focus from national to transnational, but also bluntly points out the limitations of national cinema studies.

Thus, in what follows, I first review the existing academic conversations on national cinema and why it is still worthwhile to look back and revisit national cinema in the age of globalisation and transnationalisation. Once the broader framework has been established, the focus of the chapter narrows to a specific national cinema: Taiwanese cinema. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on how this project contributes to and expands on existing literature.

Definition, Doubts, and Defence of National Cinema

When discussing national cinema, one fundamental question that appears in the scholarly debate is what the word *national* means, a question that has been asked by almost every national cinema writer.³ The debates surrounding the concepts of nations, nation-states, and nationalism are extensive and exhaustive, and it is not the intention of this research to thoroughly explore and contribute to them. A concise summary of these debates can be stated as follows. Although nations and sentiments towards a nation were considered by nationalists as an inborn feature of human society, this notion was sharply criticised and disproved by a group of modernist scholars, including Benedict Anderson, Eric J. Hobsbawm, Anthony Giddens and so on, who argued that nations and nationalism are not natural or innate characters of countries, but are instead a series of constructed ideologies formed under certain historical and social milieus.⁴ For instance, Benedict Anderson focuses on the

² Stephen Crofts, "Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14 (1993): 49–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509209309361406>.

³ Tom O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema* (Routledge, 1996); Yingjin Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004); Hayward, *French National Cinema*; Sabine Hake, *German National Cinema*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2008); Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780:*

imagination of individuals when defining nations and claims that a nation is 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'.⁵ This imaginary community was created and spread by capitalism and print technology.⁶

The discussion about nations, nation-states, and other relevant notions unavoidably affects the discourse surrounding national cinema. Generally speaking, the term *national cinema* is used in academia by researchers in two areas. On one hand, it is interchangeable with a country's domestic film industry. On the other hand, it refers to film texts, themes, characters, and styles that are distinctly expressed national characteristics.⁷ As Yeh Yeuh-yu explained in her article, "French cinema" means cinema of or made by French people... It also denotes the linguistic, cultural, social and formal codes that can be recognized as something called French'.⁸ However, not only the industrial, but also the cultural perspective used to define national cinema has been questioned in academia.⁹

Noting that there is no fixed, well-accepted, universal definition of national cinema, Andrew Higson critically summarised four common approaches in studying national cinema.¹⁰ First, there is the possibility to define national cinema in an economic direction. The studies in this area focus on the domestic film industry. Second, national cinema can be approached from a film text-based perspective. Third, it is possible to analyse national cinema from the consumption side with studies of the national audience, including what films they watch and how. The fourth approach is what Higson

Programme, Myth, Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State and Violence: Volume 2 of A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷ O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema*; Hayward, *French National Cinema*.

⁸ Emilie Y.-Y. Yeh, "Defining "Chinese": Reviews on *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*," *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* (1998): 73–76.

⁹ Richard Collins, *Culture, Communication and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Catherine Fowler, "Introduction," in *The European Cinema Reader*, ed. Catherine Fowler (London: Psychology Press, 2002); John Hill, "The Issue of National Cinema and British Film Production."

¹⁰ Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," 36–47.

named 'criticism-led', which has a tendency to focus on art cinema and high art, instead of the popular cinema desired by the broader audience.

There is an emerging agreement among scholars in this field that national cinema cannot be identified as an unproblematic unification of films from a given territory. Higson points out that 'to identify a national cinema is first of all to specify a coherence and a unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and a stable set of meanings. The process of identification is thus invariably a hegemonising, mythologizing process, involving both the production and assignation of a particular set of meanings, and the attempt to contain, or prevent the potential proliferation of other meanings'.¹¹ As Moran also states, 'there is no such thing as a "national cinema" if the phrase is used to designate a single, unitary object', because 'there is no such thing as a single national cultural identity'.¹² Scholars like Nowell-Smith go a step further by questioning the necessity of studies on national cinema.¹³ According to Nowell-Smith, the history of British film culture has intensively correlated with the history of 'American film popular with the British public'.¹⁴ This is to say that it would be mistaken to narrow the studies of national cinema to only the studies of films produced in a certain nation, since Hollywood has become part of the experience of the national audience.¹⁵

Acknowledging the limitation of the national cinema research paradigm, Higson proposes that the study of national cinema, besides focusing on film text, film production, or film culture, should also incorporate the consumption side.¹⁶ In other words, the study of national cinema should analyse 'how actual audiences construct their cultural identity in relation to the various products of the national and international film and television

¹¹ Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," 37.

¹² Albert Moran, "Terms for Readers: Film, Hollywood, National Cinema, Cultural Identity and Film Policy," in *Film Policy: International, National, and Regional Perspectives*, ed. Albert Moran (London: Routledge, 1996), 10.

¹³ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "But Do We Need It?," in *British Cinema Now*, ed. Martyn Auty and Nick Roddick (London: BFI Publishing, 1985).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 151–2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema."

industries, and the conditions under which this is achieved'.¹⁷ Higson's research pushes the boundary of national cinema studies to include the exhibition and consumption aspects.

However, Crofts points out the 'strange lacunae' of textual and generic aspects of national film in the thesis Higson proposed.¹⁸ He argues that 'texts do, after all, mediate between exhibition and audiences'.¹⁹ Instead, he proposes that the analysis of national cinema should engage with the following factors: production, distribution, audiences, discourses, textuality, the cultural specificity of genres and nation-state cinema movements, the role of the state, and the global range of nation-state cinemas.²⁰ Moreover, he identifies eight varieties of national cinema in the global range: (1) United States cinema, (2) Asian commercial cinemas, (3) other entertainment cinemas, (4) totalitarian cinemas, (5) art cinemas, (6) international coproductions, (7) third cinemas, and (8) sub-state cinemas.²¹ Crofts illustrates these varieties of national cinema through two axes, the horizontal for state regulation and control and the vertical for different production modes, namely industrial, cultural, and artisanal.²²

Both Higson and Crofts, acknowledging the complexity and contestability of the concept, provide viable approaches for analysing national cinema. However, the paradigm of national cinema has been deconstructed and criticised in the circumstances of the rapid progression of globalisation. Hjort and Petrie outline the environment as 'the aggressively transnational imperative of finance capital, the deregulation of markets, the increasing geographical mobility of labour, and the global penetration of communications networks facilitating business, information, entertainment and other forms of

¹⁷ Ibid., 46.

¹⁸ Crofts, "Concepts of National Cinema," 385–94.

¹⁹ Ibid., 386.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Stephen Crofts, "Reconceptualizing National Cinema/s," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 14 (1993), 49–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509209309361406>.

²² Crofts, "Concepts of National Cinema," 389–390.

cultural exchange'.²³ Higbee and Lim point out that the notion of 'national as a means of understanding production, consumption and representation of cultural identity' has widely dissatisfied scholars working in the humanities in 'an increasingly interconnected, multicultural and polycentric world'.²⁴ For instance, a decade after publishing his milestone article 'The Concept of National Cinema', Higson declared the limitation of the term *national*, instead suggesting that 'the concept of the "transnational" may be a subtler means of describing cultural and economic formation'.²⁵ Martín questions the typology of national cinema in the case of Japanese cinema studies, asserting that Japanese national cinema was theorised by the West from a Eurocentric perspective, which not only results in the isolation of Japanese cinema from the rest of the world, but also contradicts its transnational intertextuality.²⁶ Moreover, Tim Bergfelder points out the insufficiency of using national cinema to analyse European cinema, which he suggests should be placed in a transnational and cross-cultural dimension.²⁷

The arguments for transnational cinema thus raise the question of whether, in an era when a transnational framework has gradually replaced the national thesis, it is still worth defending the necessity of national cinema. Hill contends that 'discourses of the "national" do, nevertheless, continue to structure and inform how films of various kinds are categorised, funded, promoted and made sense of by a range of social actors ranging from politicians and civil servants to filmmakers, critics and audiences'.²⁸ By examining the different stages of film policy in the UK, from a protectionist

²³ Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie, "Introduction," in *The Cinema of Small Nations*, ed. Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 8.

²⁴ Higbee and Lim, "Concepts of Transnational Cinema," 8.

²⁵ Higson, "The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema," 57.

²⁶ Marcos Centeno Martín, "Introduction. The Misleading Discovery of Japanese National Cinema," *Arts* 7 (2018): 87, <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts7040087>.

²⁷ Tim Bergfelder, "National, Transnational or Supranational Cinema? Rethinking European Film Studies," *Media, Culture & Society* 27 (2005): 315–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443705051746>.

²⁸ John Hill, "Living with Hollywood: British Film Policy and the Definition of "Nationality"," *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 22 (2016): 707, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2016.1223646>.

character in 1920s to a ‘market-friendly’ nature from 1990 onward, Hill further indicates that “national” discourses and practices have continued to inform and structure the economic and cultural dynamics of contemporary “British” cinema as well as engaging with, rather than necessarily standing in opposition to, “transnational” and globalising trends’.²⁹

Hjort and Petrie argue for national cinema from another perspective.³⁰ According to them, ‘the unequal character of globalisation also raises the problem of structural domination and subordination within a system that may be global and international, but in which nation-states continue to function as key actors within prevailing patterns of power relations’.³¹ In other words, the concept of national cinema is still a practical and strategic way to understand the hierarchical structure of power related to film production, distribution, exhibition, and reception in certain areas, nation-states. For example, the edited collection by Hjort and Petrie, *The Cinema of Small Nations*, presents some generalisable problems faced by all small cinemas. However, it also demonstrates, through its comparative pictures, that different small cinemas with different industry models and different film cultures face different forms of problems. Moreover, the research in this collection also acknowledges the opportunities the global and international era offers small cinemas through the formation of regional networks and alliances.³²

In this thesis, I propose that the reinforcement of national cinema neither serves any unity of national culture or homogenous national identity nor isolates films produced in a certain territory in the established international and transnational network. Instead, the analysis of a national cinema is important in grasping the complexity of specific national social and cultural configurations in the era of transnationalisation and globalisation.

So far, this chapter has revisited the notion of national cinema and its surrounding academic debates. The following section focuses on one specific

²⁹ Ibid., 720.

³⁰ Hjort and Petrie, “Introduction.”

³¹ Ibid., 12.

³² Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie, eds., *The Cinema of Small Nations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

national cinema, namely Taiwanese. The debate begins by reviewing the existing literature on terms like *Chinese cinema* and *Chinese language cinema*, placing Taiwanese cinema studies in their proper scope. After establishing the position of Taiwanese cinema in the current academic debates, the review focuses on the studies on Taiwanese cinema, where a gap in the current research on Taiwanese cinema is highlighted: the industrial perspective on Taiwanese commercial cinema.

Literature on Taiwanese Cinema

The research on Taiwanese cinema has often been positioned under the scope of Chinese cinema or Chinese language cinema. Due to the historical, cultural, and political complexity among mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, the discussion around national cinema of one of the three mentioned subjects unavoidably involves the other two.³³ Thus, before going into detail on Taiwanese cinema, this section first reviews the discussion about the scope of Taiwanese cinema, Chinese cinema, and Chinese language cinema as research disciplines.

Before moving into further discussion, it is necessary to briefly examine the term *national cinema* in the context of the Chinese language.³⁴ It is difficult to find an equivalent word in Chinese to the words *nation* or *national*. In mainland China, ‘nation’ can be translated in two ways, as either *minzu* (民族), which is used to refer to ethnic groups, or *guojia* (国家), which means nation-state. However, in Taiwan, ‘national’ is translated as *guozu* (国族), a combination that focuses on both nationality and ethnicity.

There are four major paradigms in Chinese film studies, namely Chinese national cinema, transnational Chinese cinema, Chinese-language

³³ For example, see Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar, *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*, Film and Culture Series (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Nick Browne, ed., *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*.

³⁴ Chinese language, here means Mandarin or Standard Chinese, which is called *putong hua* (which literally translated means common speech) in Mainland China and *guoyu* (which literally translated means national language) in Taiwan.

cinema, and Sinophone cinema.³⁵ As Sheldon Lu points out, this range of terms and theories ‘grows out of a genuine dissatisfaction with existing critical models’.³⁶ In the existing literature, Chinese cinema, or Chinese national cinema, is an unstable and expansive research paradigm. Yingjing Zhang argues that the term *Chinese cinema* ‘may simultaneously refer to pre-1949 cinema based in Shanghai, mainland cinema of the People’s Republic (1949 to present), Taiwan cinema, Hong Kong cinema, and even Chinese diasporic cinema (for example, works by directors like Ang Lee)’.³⁷ Along similar lines, the book, *New Chinese Cinemas: Forms, Identities, Politics*, a collection of essays on Chinese-language cinema, includes studies on the cinema of mainland China, Taiwanese cinema, and Hong Kong cinema.³⁸

However, in her criticism, Yeh Yueh-yu highlights ‘the problematic nature of the term itself’.³⁹ Yeh argues that the colonial histories of Hong Kong and Taiwan have led to different identities that cannot be unified as simply Chinese. Moreover, she notes that the tendency for scholars in this area to do so is caused by two potential reasons: ‘an assumption that there is some homogeneity existing in the three cinema, that as a result, invites a unifying discourse’ and ‘a hope of generating an all-inclusive discourse to “illuminate” the homogeneity’.⁴⁰ The complication of the term *Chinese cinema* exists not only in the manner that Yeh has argued but also linguistically. The meaning of the word *Chinese* is unclear in the English language. The equivalent translation of Chinese cinema could be *zhongguo dianying* (中国电影 cinema of Chinese nation-state) or *huayu dianying* (华语电影 Chinese-language cinema). Sheldon Lu points out the dilemma: if Chinese cinema means *zhongguo dianying*, can films made outside China be considered Chinese

³⁵ Sheldon H.-P. Lu, “Notes on Four Major Paradigms in Chinese-Language Film Studies,” *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6 (2012): 15–26, https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.6.1.15_1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷ Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 19.

³⁸ Browne, *New Chinese Cinemas*.

³⁹ Yeh, ‘Defining “Chinese”’.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

films? If not, does it mean films like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wo Hu Cang Long*, dir. Ang Lee, 2000) is not a Chinese film?⁴¹

To overcome the limitations and the ambiguity of the term *Chinese cinema*, Chinese-language cinema, *huayu dianying* (华语电影) in Chinese, is an appropriate alternative. It is defined as ‘films that use predominantly Chinese dialects and are made in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and other Chinese diaspora, as well as those produced through transnational collaborations with other film industries’.⁴² As the definition indicates, the research scope of Chinese-language cinema is not limited by the idea of the nation-state, and as Lu stressed, it enables scholars to do research ‘without getting into the pitfalls of the politics of the modern Chinese nation-state’.⁴³

Lu also proposed the fourth research paradigm, which is Sinophone cinema. The term *Sinophone*, Lu explains, includes China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau, and the Chinese diaspora. Sinophone cinema as a research paradigm is ‘a field of multilingual, multi-dialectal articulations that constantly challenge and re-define the boundaries of groups, ethnicities, and national affiliations’.⁴⁴ He further explains the concept of Sinophone cinema in his article ‘Notes on Four Major Paradigms in Chinese-Language Film Studies’, stating that it can be used interchangeably with Chinese-language cinema, though with extra emphasis on issues like the diaspora, identity formation, colonialism, and postcolonialism.⁴⁵

Bearing in mind the arguments in the field of Chinese cinema studies mentioned above, I argue that it would be mistaken to overgeneralise the cultural, historical, and social similarities among the Chinese cinemas, namely mainland Chinese cinema, Taiwanese cinema, Hong Kong cinema, and diaspora Chinese cinema. However, it is inappropriate to assume that there is a

⁴¹ Lu, “Notes on Four Major Paradigms in Chinese-Language Film Studies,” 17.

⁴² Sheldon H.-P. Lu and Emilie Y.-Y. Yeh, “Introduction: Mapping the Field of Chinese-Language Cinema,” in *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics*, ed. Sheldon H.-P. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 1.

⁴³ Lu, “Notes on Four Major Paradigms in Chinese-Language Film Studies,” 20.

⁴⁴ Sheldon H.-P. Lu, “Dialect and Modernity in 21st-Century Sinophone Cinema,” (2007), <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc49.2007/Lu/>.

⁴⁵ Lu, “Notes on Four Major Paradigms in Chinese-Language Film Studies.”

stable and fixed national identity discourse in any one of the cinemas mentioned above. In other words, in the case of Taiwanese cinema, although there is a general colonial and postcolonial historical background of Taiwan, it is important to acknowledge the ethnic, linguistic, class, and other diversities within Taiwan. It would also be ignorant to undermine the connections and dynamics among cinemas in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the diaspora.

The above section sought to provide a broader background on where film studies on Taiwanese cinema are positioned in academia. The next section focuses on the existing literature on Taiwanese cinema in both the English and Chinese languages.

Within English-language academia, there is currently relatively little scholarship on Taiwanese cinema. As mentioned above, quite often, Taiwanese cinema has been studied under the framework of Chinese cinema, Chinese-language cinema, or Asian cinema.⁴⁶ Aside from a few articles published in the *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, there are two book-length anthologies that focus on Taiwan cinema: Chris Berry and Feii Lu's *Island on the Edge: Taiwan New Cinema and After* and *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, edited by Darrell William Davis and Ru-shou Robert Chen.⁴⁷ The former contains research that varies in both theme and approach, but all focus on a particular title from the Taiwan New Cinema movement or after as the research subject. As the editors claim in the opening chapter, this anthology aims to provide a close read of the cinematic text to fill the gap in the English-language research among the general historical, political, and economic reading of Taiwanese cinema.⁴⁸ However, while some

⁴⁶ See Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Gary Needham, eds., *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Sheldon H.-P. Lu, ed., *Transnational Chinese Cinemas: Identity, Nationhood, Gender* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997); Sheldon H.-P. Lu and Emilie Y.-Y. Yeh, eds., *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005); Zhang, *Chinese National Cinema*.

⁴⁷ Berry and Lu, eds., *Island on the Edge*; Darrell W. Davis and Ru-Shou R. Chen, eds., *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity, and State of the Arts* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

articles in this collection try to provide a wider background of the film discussed, the textual analysis approach fails to grasp the industrial context of the field. The essays selected in the latter anthology, *Cinema Taiwan* and covers a wide range of research focuses and approaches, offering a new observation on contemporary Taiwanese cinema through writing on young talented filmmakers, documentary filmmaking, the regrowth of commercially originated filmmaking projects, and audience behaviour in Taiwan.⁴⁹ This selection goes beyond the popular authorship and textual reading of Taiwanese film and examines the film industry context in the late twentieth century in Taiwan.

Since the Taiwan New Cinema movement has been considered ‘one of the most exciting areas of international film culture’,⁵⁰ the associated film directors and their work have become popular research subjects for scholars. Examples for research in this category would be *Edward Yang, No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien*, and *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island*.⁵¹ Both Anderson’s and Udden’s books are structured chronographically to analyse the auteurs’ works throughout different periods in their careers. Moreover, Udden adopts narrative analysis to examine Hou’s work and investigates the cinematic aesthetic form through cultural, historical, and contextual perspectives.⁵² Similarly, Yeh and Davis’s book closely analyses the work and the careers of four Taiwanese directors: Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang.⁵³ By positioning the auteur studies in the specific Taiwanese filmic, political, and cultural context, the book reviews contemporary Taiwanese cinema and the cinematic culture. These auteur studies tend to adopt the textual analysis approach, which presents a unique version of national cinema through the individual directors

⁴⁹ Davis and Chen, *Cinema Taiwan*.

⁵⁰ Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010), 652.

⁵¹ John Anderson, *Edward Yang* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Udden, *No Man an Island*; Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*.

⁵² Udden, *No Man an Island*.

⁵³ Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*.

and the filmic text from their works. Though the term *national cinema* may not be highlighted clearly, the mentioned studies consistently explore ‘what sort of projections of the national character do they offer? To what extent are they engaged in “exploring, questioning and constructing a notion of nationhood in the films themselves and in the consciousness of the viewer”?’⁵⁴

Furthermore, there are some studies on Taiwanese cinema that directly engage with the discussion on national cinema. The first book-length research on Taiwanese film history within English-language academia, *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen*, thoroughly presents the history of Taiwanese cinema from the pre-1945 period to the 1990s.⁵⁵ The author, Guo-juin Hong, argues that the study of Taiwanese cinema should be situated in relation to mainland China, East Asia, and the global context and that it is fundamental to ‘examine how “nation” has been shaped historically, discursively and cinematically’.⁵⁶ In his framework, nation or ‘national’ is not the discursive border to frame the cinema, but constitutive of the cinema mutually. In other words, ‘nation is imagined and imaged in cinema and, in turn, shapes cinema’s continuing and changing construction of nation’.⁵⁷ The book reviews the changing and dynamic historical, political, and cultural circumstances in which the idea of nation is constructed, conceptualised, and contested in Taiwan. Moreover, it pays attention to not only the art house narrative and aesthetic, but also the film genres and styles that were embraced by the popular audience throughout different historical periods in Taiwan. However, the research provides more accounts of texts, either filmic or otherwise, and thus is deprived of the industrial perspective.

Chris Berry and Mary Ann Farquhar, in their co-authored book *China on Screen: Cinema and Nation*, also challenge the framework of national

⁵⁴ Higson, “The Concept of National Cinema,” 36.

⁵⁵ Gou-Juin Hong, *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on Screen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 6.

cinema.⁵⁸ The authors point out the importance of the term *national* in studying Chinese cinema, including films from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the diaspora, noting that the term not only permeates the filmic image construction and narrative style but is also shaped through the representation of national identity in the cinema traditions.⁵⁹ However, after explaining the limitations of the old national cinema framework, which takes national as an unproblematic, innate characteristic, the authors propose a larger framework, that of cinema and nation, which regards *national* as a contested term and highlights the question of how the nation is ‘constructed, maintained and challenged’.⁶⁰

Chris Berry further asserts the necessity of the national framework as a reference in film study and elaborates on the entwined relationship between national and transnational cinema under the larger analytical framework of cinema and nation, which he proposes from three perspectives.⁶¹ First, in the general political and economic area, the same force that proliferates globalisation and free trade, which is considered the terminator of the boundaries between nation-states, has stimulated new nation-states and new national disputes.⁶² For example, while travel and trade between mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan are more frequent, each nation-state’s nationalism has also escalated dramatically. Second, it is outdated and unnecessary to reaffirm the frame of the national in the realm of film production when transnational coproduction, distribution, and exhibition has become the norm.⁶³ For example, the capital and personnel flow between mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and coproductions with other overseas forces have increased recently. However, the notion of protecting the local film industry and film culture is not dissolved in the transnational

⁵⁸ Berry and Farquhar, *China on Screen*.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 3.

⁶¹ Chris Berry, “From National Cinema to Cinema and the National: Chinese-language Cinema and Hou Hsiao-hsien’s “Taiwan Trilogy”,” in *Theorising national cinema*, ed. Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemsen (London: BFI Publishing, 2006), 148–57.

⁶² Ibid., 149.

⁶³ Ibid., 149.

environment. Rather, *national* is still an important label when it comes to film policy making and the marketing and interpreting of films. Third, the emphasis on transnationality in film studies is accompanied by a growing acknowledgement of the national perspective. By presenting both the invalidity of the traditional notion of the national and the necessity of the national perspective in the political and economic realms, film production, and film studies, the article demonstrates the versatility of *national* in the framework of cinema and the national. In other words, national is not a stiff concept within the nation-state paradigm; it could be national in the sense of a cultural level, or it could be national in the sense of a particular experience of both domestic life and national space. Through a textual reading of Hou's Taiwanese Trilogy, Berry reveals that the *national* is not a monolithic, uniform frame but consists of multiple versions that are 'proliferating, contested and overlapping'.⁶⁴

Because the political environment in Taiwan has changed dramatically both internationally and domestically since the 1970s, there has been an emergence of the popularity of identity politics. This trend also led to the popularity of national identity as a research focus when writing about Taiwanese cinema. Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley revisits the national identity of the Taiwanese through a textual reading of Hou Hsiao-hsien's *A City of Sadness* (*Beiqing Chengshi*, 1989).⁶⁵ By exploring the representation of Taiwanese historiography and identities through the external historical and social context of the February 28 Incident in 1947 and an internal textual reading of language usage, narrative style, and Hou's aesthetic signature, the author reveals how the Taiwanese identity and nation are constructed and contested. Similarly, Douglas Kellner's article reviews how the Taiwan New Cinema in the 1980s depicted the Taiwanese history, society, and identity through reading

⁶⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁵ Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, "Cinema, Historiography, and Identities in Taiwan: Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *A City of Sadness*," *Asian Cinema* 22 (2011): 196–213, https://doi.org/10.1386/AC.22.2.196_1.

cinematic text.⁶⁶ Moreover, June Yip in her monograph *Envisioning Taiwan: Fiction, Cinema, and the Nation in the Cultural Imaginary* explores the emergence of the ‘Taiwanese consciousness’ through two cultural phenomena in Taiwan, the nativist literature movement in the 1970s and the Taiwan New Cinema in the 1980s.⁶⁷ In the second half of Yip’s book, the author analyses in detail the cinematic text of Hou Hsiao-hsien’s work and discusses the discourses around nationhood, the presentation of history, the usage of different dialects, the ‘alternative conceptions of identity’,⁶⁸ and the representation of everyday life experiences in Hou’s films. By doing so, she emphasises the shift from ‘conceptions of national and cultural identity based on unitary coherence and authenticity towards alternative models that emphasize multiplicity of fluidity’.⁶⁹

In contrast to the scholarship presented above that approaches Taiwanese national cinema either through textual analysis or auteur studies, James Udden in his chapter-length research focuses on the government policy making aspect of Taiwanese cinema as a national cinema.⁷⁰ By examining the film policies made by the Taiwanese government since 1945, the author argues that the current situation of the Taiwanese film industry, in which the film production, distribution, and market are dominated by Hollywood and other overseas cooperation, is because film has been used as a tool of the state, but not as art or a commercial product in the policy making.⁷¹

As for Chinese-language literature, which includes research conducted by scholars from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, there are a few preferred overlapping subjects when engaging with the academic discussion on national cinema, namely authorship, historical research, and national

⁶⁶ Douglas Kellner, “Exploring Society and History: New Taiwan Cinema in the 1980s,” *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* (1998): 101–15.

⁶⁷ Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁰ James Udden, “Taiwan,” in *The Cinema of Small Nations*, ed. Mette Hjort and Duncan J. Petrie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 144–59.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

identity representation and construction. In the following section, I review the Chinese-language literature covering these topics.

As presented earlier, since the art house cinema in Taiwan established its reputation internationally in the 1980s, Taiwanese auteur studies have become a research interest in Western scholarship. A similar preference exists among Chinese-language scholars. There are several book-length studies that focus on particular film auteurs, such as *Passionate Detachment: Film of Hou Hsiao-hsien*, *The Cinema of Edward Yang: The Intellectual Philosopher in Taiwan New Cinema*, and *From Imaginary Expression in Ang Lee's Films: From Text, Culture to Cross-Culture*.⁷² This tendency also led to growing attention on some key figures before the Taiwan New Cinema, including King Hu, Li Xing, Xin Qi, and Li Hanxiang, and the publication of interviews with filmmakers.⁷³

Apart from the authorship studies, there have been fruitful outcomes in historical studies on Taiwanese film history by Chinese-language scholars. One of the common approaches among these historical studies is to consider film as a cultural production and examine the political, social, and cultural context in which films have been made in Taiwan. For example, *The Story of Taiwan Film History* chronographically reviews film history in Taiwan from the Japanese colonial period, the late nineteenth century to 2004.⁷⁴ However, writing the history over a century while touching upon film production, distribution, authorship, film genre, and other topics, the study fails to grasp

⁷² Wenqi Lin, Xiaoyin Shen, and Zhenya Li, *戏恋人生——侯孝贤电影研究* [Passionate Detachment: Film of Hou Hsiao-Hsien] (Taipei: Rye Field Publishing, 2000); Huang, 杨德昌电影研究; Jigu Ye, *李安电影的镜语表达——从文本、文化到跨文化* [From Imaginary Expression in Ang Lee's Films: From Text, Culture to Cross-Culture], (Taipei: Xin Rui Wen Chuang, 2012).

⁷³ Bingjun Liang, *胡金铨的艺术世界* [The Art World of King Hu] (Taipei: Culture & Life Publishing, 2007); Xiongping Jiao and Guizhi Ou, *李行——一甲子的辉煌* [Li Hsing: A Glorious Sixty-Year] (Taipei: Culture & Life Publishing, 2008); Ren Huang, *辛奇的传奇* [The Legend of Xin Qi] (Taipei: Ya Tai Publishing, 2005); Guizhi Ou, *李翰祥——台湾电影（产业）的开拓先锋* [Li Hanxiang: The pioneer of Taiwan Film (Industry)] (Taipei: Culture & Life Publishing, 2007); Lin and Wang, *台湾电影的声音*.

⁷⁴ Baofei Chen, *台湾电影史话* [The Story of Taiwan Film History] (Beijing: China Film Press, 2008).

the developments in the Taiwanese film industry systematically. Li Tianduo's *Taiwanese Cinema, Society and History* revisits Taiwanese film history from the colonial to the post-authoritarian periods by focusing on the mutual influence between cinema and the social environment.⁷⁵

Besides the writing on the general history of Taiwanese cinema, some events or periods in the history are particularly favoured by researchers. For instance, the Taiwan New Cinema movement is a popular research subject in this category.⁷⁶ There is also growing interest among Chinese-language scholars in Taiwanese film history before the Taiwan New Cinema movement. For instance, Ye Longyan's book-length research focuses on Taiwan's film history during the Japanese colonial era; the author not only investigates the rise and the development of the local film industry in the early age, but also examines the transregionality and transnationality of Taiwanese cinema.⁷⁷ Furthermore, along with the rise of nativism in Taiwan since the 1980s, Taiwanese-language cinema, which appeared briefly from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, has attracted many researchers' attention.⁷⁸

As a rule, the historical studies reviewed above tend to pay more attention to the social film history and investigate the national, social, and political context in which the cinema was created. In contrast, in *Taiwan Cinema: Politics, Economics, and Aesthetic, 1949–1994*, Lu Feiyi not only explores the political and social context of Taiwanese cinema, but also examines the economic activities and industrial structure of the construction

⁷⁵ Tianduo Li, *台湾电影、社会与历史* [Taiwanese Cinema, Society and History] (Taipei, Taiwan: Ya Tai Publishing, 1997).

⁷⁶ See Xiongping Jiao, *台湾新电影* [Taiwan New Cinema] (Taipei: China Times Publishing Company, 1990); Mi and Liang, eds., *新电影之死*.

⁷⁷ Longyan Ye, *日治时期台湾电影史* [The History of Taiwanese Movies during the Japanese Colonization] (Taipei: Xing Yue Publications, 1998), 37.

⁷⁸ See Ren Huang, *悲情台语片* [The Sadness History of Taiwanese Language Cinema] (Taipei: Wan Xiang Publication, 1994); Jinfeng Liao, *消逝的影像——台语片的电影再现与文化认同* [Fading Image: The Representation and Cultural Identity in Taiwanese Language Film] (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Company, 2001); Junqi Wang, ed., *百变千幻不思议：台语片的混血与转化* [The Transformation of Taiwanese Language Film] (Taipei: Lingking Publishing Company, 2017); Longyan Ye, *春花梦露：正宗台语电影与衰落* [The Genuine History of Taiwanese-Dialect Cinema] (Taipei: Bo Yang Publication, 1999).

and development of the film industry from the late 1940s to the early 1990s, including box office statistics, the film market structure, and the environment of film production, distribution, and exhibition.⁷⁹ Though the research I conducted does not focus on a long historical period, like Lu's work, it does map out the production culture, structure of distribution, and film reception by investigating both statistical data and the social, cultural context through one case study.

Conclusion

Monga as a national film is a clear message from the filmmakers, the media and the audience reception. To answer the key research question what *Monga*'s popularity reveals about film production, distribution, promotion and reception in Taiwan, in Greater China and for film industries and cultures overall, the thesis began with the most prevalent and pronounced discourse surrounding *Monga*, namely national cinema.

The first half of the chapter illuminated the changing debate on the conception of nation cinema. As presented above, while the concept of nation is constantly shifting, the term national cinema is also a debatable research paradigm. However, completely abandoning national cinema is arbitrary, since it is important in the political and economic realms, film production, and film studies. The latter half of the chapter focused on the literature on national cinema related to Taiwanese cinema. As addressed above, the researchers who have examined Taiwanese national cinema have mostly adopted textual analysis as a methodology or a historical approach that regards films as cultural objects and focuses on the political, historical, and social context in which the films are made.

To examine what *Monga*'s popularity and success reveals about film industry and film culture in Taiwan, this research joins the emerging conversation of scholars like Andrew Higson and Stephen Crofts by inspecting *Monga*, a so-called Taiwanese blockbuster, from both an industrial

⁷⁹ Feiyi Lu, *台湾电影：政治、经济、美学 (1949-1994)* [Taiwan Cinema: Politics, Economics, and Aesthetic, 1949-1994] (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Company, 1998).

perspective and under the framework of national cinema. In other words, I examine different industrial stages of the successful Taiwanese film *Monga*, namely film production, formal and informal distribution, promotion, and reception. This research thus attempts to extend the existing analysis on Taiwan national cinema, which mainly focused on historical research and author studies, by building a bridge between the commercial film production and national cinema.

Chapter 2. Imagined Taiwan: National History, Cultural Identity, and an Overview of Taiwanese National Cinema

To outline the theoretical background of this study that examines the popularity and the success of the Taiwanese blockbuster, *Monga*, the previous chapter reviewed the existing literature in the areas of national cinema in general and Taiwanese national cinema specifically. This chapter presents the social, cultural, and historical background of Taiwan. By doing this, the chapter has two aims. Firstly, the chapter provides the social and historical background, including the language policies, conflicts between mainlanders and islanders and White Terror era and so on, so readers can have a sense of the time period that is depicted in the film *Monga*. Secondly, the chapter aims to reveal the social, cultural and industrial context for the time period when the film was produced in 2010, offering a broader background for the industrial analysis in the following chapters.

Taiwan, also known as the Republic of China (ROC), though its international status remains ambiguous, has been governed separately since 1949. It is a highly urbanised industrial society, with more than 70% of its population living in urban areas.¹ There are four main ethnic groups in Taiwan, namely Aboriginal, Mainlander, Hakka, and Hoklo, which comprise about 1.7%, 13%, 12%, and 73.3% of the population respectively.² The ethnic diversity and the social and political history in Taiwan mean that the identity of Taiwan is contested and unstable.³ As Christopher Lupke argues, ‘Taiwan is purely indeterminate, undecidable, an open-ended signifier, resistant to a fixed identification as either cohesive Chinese national-state or a novel and

¹ “World Urbanization Prospects - Population Division - United Nations,” *United Nations*, accessed May 12, 2020, <https://population.un.org/wup/Country-Profiles/>.

² Mandy Scott and Hak-Khiam Tiun, “Mandarin-Only to Mandarin-Plus: Taiwan,” *Language Policy* 6 (2007): 53–72, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-006-9040-5>.

³ Christopher Lupke, “Fractured Identities and Refracted Images: The Neither/Nor of National Imagination in Contemporary Taiwan,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 17 (2009): 243–59, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2009-001>.

independent body politic of and on its own'.⁴ In this chapter, I examine the contested identity through three aspects. First, I briefly review three important periods in Taiwanese history to illustrate that the Taiwanese identity has shifted throughout history. As I mentioned in the last chapter, a nation or national identity(s) is characterised not only by imagining what it is, but also by clarifying what it is not. In other words, to name the opposite or other aids in developing the national identity itself. Thus, in the second section of this chapter, I inspect the construction of Taiwanese identity through the relationships between Taiwan and mainland China and between Taiwan and the United States. The chapter then focuses specifically on how the contested identity and imagined community are constructed and presented through Taiwanese film and film industry practices.

A Brief History of Taiwan since 1895

The history of Taiwan since 1895 can be separated into three different historical periods, namely the Japanese rule period (1895–1945), the nationalist period (1945–2000), and the democratic period (2000–present). This section seeks to present how the national identity of Taiwan has varied through these different historical periods.

In 1895, the Qing dynasty of China was defeated by the Japanese in the First Sino-Japanese War.⁵ The subsequent Treaty of Shimonoseki declared Taiwan a dependency of Japan, and the island remained under Japanese control until Japan surrendered at the end of World War II. As a resistance to Japanese control, the Republic of Formosa was established in Taiwan after the cession from the Qing dynasty in 1895. This first republic of Asia's history

⁴ Lupke, "Fractured Identities and Refracted Images," 246.

⁵ There were two Sino-Japanese Wars. The first was between the Qing dynasty and the Empire of Japan (1894–1895). The Chinese defeat in this war led to a series of upheavals, including the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, led by Kang Youwei. The Second Sino-Japanese War was between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan from 1937 to 1945, which from 1941 was part of World War II.

ended only 150 days after its establishment.⁶ Other rebellions, such as the Beipu uprising in 1907, the Tapani incident in 1915, and the Musha incident in 1930, all failed.⁷ From 1937, when the Second Sino-Japanese War began, to the end of World War II in 1945, the colonial government implemented a Japanisation process in Taiwan.⁸ Under Japanese rule, Taiwan had a colonial economy, in which Taiwan's resources were used to support the development of the home island of Japan. As a result, the sugar and rice industries in Taiwan were highly developed during this era.

After Japan surrendered to the Allies in 1945, Taiwan was returned to the control of the ROC.⁹ Since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, which was marked by Chiang Kai-shek's escape to Taiwan and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by Mao Zedong in mainland China, Taiwan has been the persistent 'other' of China.¹⁰ As Schubert states, 'it chose capitalism to develop its post-war economy when China embarked on socialism, even though that was changed to "socialism with Chinese characteristics" after the end of Maoism in the late 1970s'.¹¹

Though during the Japanese rule in Taiwan, the domestic economy and living standard were developed, the Kuomintang troop from mainland China was welcomed in Taiwan. However, the tension between the local people and

⁶ The Republic was founded on 25 May 1895 by Tang Ching-sung and ended on 19 October 1895.

⁷ The Musha incident, also known as the Wushe Rebellion, was the last major uprising against colonial Japanese rule in Taiwan. To fight against their long-term oppression, the Seediq people killed over 130 Japanese. In the counterattack, the Japanese killed more than 600 Seediq.

⁸ The process, also known as the Kōminka movement, was one of the three principles proposed by Kobayashi, the first non-civilian governor general since 1919. It included teaching Japanese at school as the official language, adopting Japanese names, and encouraging young people to serve the emperor as soldiers.

⁹ The 1943 Cairo Declaration was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of the Republic of China. The text states that 'all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa and The Pescadores, shall be restored to the Republic of China'.

¹⁰ The Chinese Civil War was waged from August 1927 to 1937 and from 1946 to 1950 between the Kuomintang, also known as the Nationalist Party, and the Communist Party of China.

¹¹ Gunter Schubert, "Introduction," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Taiwan* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1.

the mainlanders' government was built up quickly for several reasons. Firstly, the then governor Chen Yi took over and sustained the Japanese state monopoly system in most key sectors in the market, including sugar, tobacco, team mining and cement. The mismanagement in the economic area led to the appearance of large black markets, dramatic inflations and food shortage. For example, the price of rice rose to 400 times the original price in half a year. Secondly, due to the maladministration system, the key positions in all industry, governmental department and judicial offices were assigned to mainlanders, replacing the local Taiwanese employees. These tensions were ignited by a street accident that became one of the most significant historical points in Taiwanese modern history, the February 28 Incident of 1947, also known as 2/28 or Ederba. On 27 February 1947, two KMT policemen beat a female Taiwanese street cigarette seller, and one bystander was shot during the incident and died the day after. The news triggered a protest, which later escalated into large-scale unrest.¹² Triggered by a random accident, the incident turned into a near revolution that caused thousands of Taiwanese citizens to be killed by the Nationalist army.¹³

The incident and the term 2/28 was taboo during the rule of KMT, when it was forbidden to be discussed in public, not referenced in history text books and scarcely mentioned in the newspaper archives. Some scholars consider the incident to be an action of islanders (*benshengren* 本省人) against mainlanders (*waishengren* 外省人), who formed the government. However, others stress the angle that it was civilians fighting against a corrupted government.¹⁴ In either case, the incident and the KMT's authoritarian rule have deeply changed the dynamic between native Taiwanese people and the mainland Chinese who resided on the island since the 1940s,

¹² Gary D. Rawnsley and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, "Chiang Kai-Shek and the 28 February 1947 Incident: A Reassessment," *Issues & Studies* (2011): 77–106.

¹³ Rawnsley and Rawnsley, "Chiang Kai-Shek and the 28 February 1947 Incident."

¹⁴ "吕正惠：陈明忠访谈纪录 [Lü Zhenghui Interview with Chen Mingzhong]," *Humanities and Society*, August 14, 2008, <http://wen.org.cn/modules/article/view.article.php/394>.

which was filled with distrust and animosity.¹⁵ Moreover, the incident in 1947 led to the White Terror era, which lasted from 19 May 1949, when the government implemented martial law, to 15 July 1987, when martial law was lifted by Chiang Ching-kuo, the son and heir of Chiang Kai-shek.

During the White Terror era, the KMT implemented a series of measures as a process of re-nationalising Taiwan in order to reinforce a national consciousness and an imagined community, which involved various everyday institutions like schools, the media, families, the military, and workplaces.¹⁶ For example, as propaganda tools, the media, including broadcasting, television, newspaper, and film production, was placed under the government's control, and the contents were censored by the KMT government.¹⁷ Moreover, the Mandarin Chinese language and Chinese history and geography were compulsory subjects in school for the purpose of reconsolidating Chinese tradition and culture in Taiwan and removing the influence of Japanese culture that remained in Taiwan after fifty years of colonisation.¹⁸ One positive side effect of this renationalisation process is that due to the heavy level of investment that the KMT made after 1945, the illiteracy rate in Taiwan dropped from 34.6% in 1951 to 6.6% in 1990.¹⁹

Economically, with the help of American aid that began in 1949 and was terminated in 1965, the KMT government transformed the Taiwanese economy from an agricultural to a commercial, industrial economy and established its solid economic foundation.²⁰ Chiang Ching-kuo also began a series of state projects, including what became known as the Ten Construction

¹⁵ Cheng-feng Shih and Mumin Chen, "Taiwanese Identity and The Memories of 2-28: A Case for Political Reconciliation", *Asian Perspective* 34, no. 4 (2010): 85–113.

¹⁶ Allen Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing: Cultural Imagination and State Formation in Postwar Taiwan," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 31 (1994): 49–69, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2949900>.

¹⁷ Táňa Dluhošová, "Censorship and Publication Control in Early Post-War Taiwan: Procedures and Practices," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47 (2018): 15–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261804700202>.

¹⁸ Chun, "From Nationalism to Nationalizing."

¹⁹ Steve Y.-S. Tsang, and Hung-Mao Tien, eds., *Democratization in Taiwan: Implications for China* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

²⁰ David W. Chang, "U.S. Aid and Economic Progress in Taiwan," *Asian Survey* 5 (1965): 152–60, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2642405>.

Projects. These developments led to rapid economic growth, and ‘the general capita gross national product (GNP) increased from US\$167 in 1953 to US\$3,784 in 1986...and to US\$10,566 in 1993’.²¹

Politically, during the period of KMT authoritarian rule, both domestic and international forces pushed the democratisation process in Taiwan. As Hu argues, the democratisation of Taiwan did not occur naturally and rapidly but was instead influenced and caused by many factors.²² For example, after 1970, when the formation of opposition parties was still forbidden, some opponents of the KMT, classified as independents, started to be elected to seats in the Legislative Yuan.²³ This group of politicians were called *dangwai*, which means ‘outside the party’. From the mid-1970s to the 1980s, *dangwai* politicians gained more and more support from the people and won multiple local elections, including to important positions like provincial councillor and city councillor of Taipei. To respond to the force of democratisation, the KMT also initiated reforms of the party through two moves, accepting ‘the principle of separation of party and the government’ and reforming the party into ‘a policy co-ordinator rather than a policymaker’.²⁴ As a result of the *dangwai* movement, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was formed in 1986 and legalised in 1991, which also signifies the end of the KMT’s authoritarian regime. In the presidential election of 2000, the candidate from the DPP, Chen Shui-bian, was elected, marking the first peaceful power transition to an opposition party and the end of the KMT’s monopoly governance in Taiwanese history.

Pressure to democratise came not only domestically but also from outside Taiwan. For example, Taiwan lost its seat in the United Nations in 1971, since the UN decided to recognise the PRC as the only legitimate representative of China instead. Soon after, diplomatic relations between the United States and the PRC were normalised, leaving Taiwan in isolation.²⁵ As

²¹ Tsang and Tien, *Democratization in Taiwan*, 10.

²² Ching-Fen Hu, “Taiwan’s Geopolitics and Chiang Ching-Kuo’s Decision to Democratize Taiwan,” *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 5 (2005): 26–44.

²³ The Legislative Yuan is the unicameral legislature of the ROC.

²⁴ Tsang and Tien, *Democratization in Taiwan*.

²⁵ Hu, “Taiwan’s Geopolitics and Chiang Ching-Kuo’s Decision to Democratize Taiwan.”

a result, Taiwan had diplomatic relationships with only twenty-one countries in the late 1970s.

As mentioned earlier, with the help of American financial aid for two decades, the economy of Taiwan grew dramatically and transformed from an agricultural entity to an industrial one, when Taiwan was recognised as one of the four Asian newly industrialising economies.²⁶ According to Howe, Taiwan ‘achieved rapid growth, market structural change and an exceptional export performance’.²⁷ In 1995, Taiwan ranked only behind Japan and the United States as the third largest producer of machinery and electrical goods. According to a report from the Executive Yuan,²⁸ from the 1950s to the mid-1990s, the inter-sectoral economic structural shift was dramatic, with the share of agriculture in the economy dropping from 28.5% to 3.6%. The percentage share of industry increased to 36.8% in 1994–1995, and the services sector represented 59.7% of the economy.²⁹ In 2002, Taiwan joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) under the name the Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu.

However, membership in international financial organisations could not save Taiwan from its economy slowing down in the past two decades. Although the governments of both Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou carried out their economic policies, both domestic crises, like the credit and credit card crisis in 2005, and international crises, such as the 1997 financial crisis, severely impacted the economy of Taiwan. In 2001, the Taiwanese economy faced negative growth for the first time since 1947. In 2015, Taiwan was ranked the seventeenth largest exporter and eighteenth largest importer of merchandise.³⁰ GDP growth in 2015 was 0.65%, down from 3.92% in 2014, with the services sector accounting for 62.80% of GDP and the industrial

²⁶ Also known as the Four Asian Tigers, including Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea.

²⁷ Christopher Howe, “The Taiwan Economy: The Transition to Maturity and the Political Economy of Its Changing International Status,” *The China Quarterly* 148 (1996): 1171–95, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000050591>.

²⁸ The Executive Yuan is the executive branch of the government of the ROC.

²⁹ Howe, “The Taiwan Economy.”

³⁰ *The Republic of China Yearbook 2016* (Taipei: Executive Yuan, 2016).

sector for 35.41%. In a financial forum organised by Bloomberg LP, Tsai Ing-wen, the president of Taiwan, indicated the importance of structural reform.³¹ Moreover, Tsai stated that ‘Taiwan needed to improve the function of capital markets and increase domestic investment’.³²

Throughout Taiwanese history since Japanese colonial rule, language policies have been modified and adapted to the national identity building processes of the different authorities. As Anderson points out, language has the capacity to unify the population into an imagined community. In the case of Taiwan, language is also considered an entity that can reflect a collective memory of the historical experiences of its people.³³ Language education and language policies are highly intertwined with ‘ethnicity, national identification, and economic and global concerns’.³⁴

In the late seventeenth century, immigrants from Fujian province in mainland China brought the Hokkien and Hakka languages to the island. During the Qing dynasty period, which ended in 1895, the official language of officials on the island was Mandarin, although Hokkien was the most widely spoken language.³⁵ The Japanese colonial government that followed implemented a series of actions to popularise the Japanese language in Taiwan. For example, the Japanese language was a compulsory curriculum in schools. Moreover, the Japanisation process also included name changing, in which the government encouraged Taiwanese people to adopt Japanese names. After the KMT’s retreat to Taiwan in 1949, the KMT government started to reinforce Chinese identity through Chinese language popularisation and to reinvent Chinese cultural traditions in Taiwan. For example, dialects, including Hokkien and Hakka, were banned in schools, the media, and any

³¹ Adela Lin and Benny Kung, “Taiwan’s Tsai Urges Structural Overhaul to Jumpstart Economy,” *Bloomberg*, July 20, 2016, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-07-20/taiwan-s-tsai-urges-structural-overhaul-to-jumpstart-economy>.

³² Lin and Kung, “Taiwan’s Tsai Urges Structural Overhaul to Jumpstart Economy.”

³³ Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*.

³⁴ Scott and Tiun, “Mandarin-Only to Mandarin-Plus,” 53.

³⁵ Scott and Tiun, “Mandarin-Only to Mandarin-Plus.”

publication. Instead, Mandarin Chinese was set as the official language and was taught in school.

This situation shifted in 1987, when Chiang Ching-kuo lifted martial law. Other dialects besides Mandarin were promoted in both political and cultural concerns. Since 2001, the year that the opposition party, DPP, was elected to form the government for the first time in Taiwanese history, all first-year elementary school students have to take a mother tongue class.³⁶ Despite the promotion of local languages by the government and the media, there has been ‘a shift toward the predominance of Mandarin as evidenced by its growing use in the intimate domain’.³⁷ The *Republic of China Yearbook 2016* states that the official language of the ROC is Mandarin (with the traditional Chinese character system), and other important languages include Hokkien, Hakka, Austronesian languages, English, and Japanese.³⁸

Taiwan from a Regional and Global Perspective

Mainland China and Taiwan have developed into two different political entities since the Chinese civil war (1945–1949), and the status of Taiwan has become a ‘non-resolvable issue’.³⁹ Since the KMT retreated to Taiwan from mainland China in 1949, there have been two priorities of the island’s security strategies: building up a highly equipped army to prevent invasion by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and developing diplomatic relationships with the United States. In this section, I briefly present the political image of Taiwan from a regional and global perspective.

³⁶ Todd L. Sandel, Wen-Yu Chao, and Chung-Hui Liang, “Language Shift and Language Accommodation across Family Generations in Taiwan,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 27 (2006): 126–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630608668544>.

³⁷ Yae Lim Lee, “A Study on Code-Switching in Taiwan,” *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 11 (1981): 121–36, quoted in Scott and Tiun, “Mandarin-Only to Mandarin-Plus.”

³⁸ Executive Yuan, *The Republic of China Yearbook 2016*, 10.

³⁹ Winberg Chai, “Xi Jinping and Ma Ying-Jeou’s Historic 2015 Meeting in Singapore: An Interpretation,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 42 (2015): 195–202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00927678.2015.1124630>.

Cross-Strait Relations

The relationship between mainland China and Taiwan, from 1949 until the present, has been through four periods: the statement of diplomatic war (1949–1979), the thawing of relations (1979–1998), the no-contact period (1999–2008), and the resumption period (2008–present).

From 1949 to 1979, both the KMT government in Taiwan and the CCP government in Beijing denied each other's legitimacy by claiming their sovereignty over both the mainland and Taiwan. In 1979, the year a diplomatic relationship was officially established between the PRC and the United States, the relationship between the mainland and Taiwan broke off when Taiwan enacted the 'three noes' policy: no contact, no negotiation, and no compromise.⁴⁰

However, following the hijacking of a China Airlines cargo plane in 1986,⁴¹ the three noes policy was revised, followed by a series of thawing policies that softened the relationship between the ROC and the PRC. For example, in 1987, the ROC government allowed Taiwanese citizens to visit mainland China, and in 1988, the PRC government encouraged investment from the ROC, guaranteeing that it would not be nationalised. In the 1990s, both authorities across the Taiwan Strait agreed that there was only one China, though there was no mutual agreement on what that meant. For example, in 1992, the Mainland Affairs Council of the ROC claimed that 'To Peking, "one China" means the "People's Republic of China (PRC)," with Taiwan to become a "Special Administration Region" after unification. Taipei, on the other hand, considers "one China" to mean the Republic of China (ROC), founded in 1911 and with de jure sovereignty over all of China. The ROC, however, currently has jurisdiction only over Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and

⁴⁰ Executive Yuan, *The Republic of China Yearbook 2016*.

⁴¹ A cargo airplane from China Airlines, a state-owned national carrier of the ROC, was hijacked by the pilot, Wang Xijue. The plane was en route to Don Mueang Airport, Thailand. However, Wang managed to subdue the other two crew members and landed in Guangzhou, China. The incident forced the ROC government to contact mainland China to negotiate the return of the aircraft and the crew members. The negotiation took place in Hong Kong between the delegates from Taiwan and the officials from mainland China and is considered a turning point in cross-strait relations after the three noes policy.

Matsu. Taiwan is part of China, and the Chinese mainland is part of China as well'.⁴²

In November 1992, a meeting was conducted in British Hong Kong between the mainland China-based Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) and the Taiwan-based Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF). Through these two semi-official organisations, both sides of the strait agreed to disagree on the interpretation of 'one China', namely, PRC in Beijing and ROC in Taiwan. This agreement was later recognised by the CCP and the KMT as the 1992 Consensus, though it is denied by the DPP in Taiwan. Since then, together with the semi-official agreement of 'one country, two systems', the 1992 Consensus has been the major policy statement from the Chinese mainland. On the other side of the strait, in 1995, former Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui visited the United States in the name of a private visit to Cornell University, which was a ground-breaking international diplomatic event for the ROC. After the visit, Lee won the first Taiwanese presidential election that was held in March 1996. This series of actions led directly to the postponement of the SEF-ARATS negotiation and, more seriously, the 1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, also known as the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis.⁴³ Three years later, in 1999, in a German radio interview, Lee stressed the cross-strait relationship as a 'state-to-state relationship or at least a special state-to-state relationship'.⁴⁴

In 2000, Chen Shui-bian, the candidate from the DPP, was elected president of the ROC, breaking the KMT's one-party ruling history. Chen is a pro-Taiwan independent politician, and thus, his win led to further tension in the cross-strait relationship. In March 2005, the Anti-Secession Law was passed by the National People's Congress in mainland China, adding 'non-

⁴² "Consensus Formed at the National Development Conference on Cross-Strait Relations Mainland Affairs Council," February 28, 1997, quoted in Shirley A Kan, *China/Taiwan: Evolution of the "One China" Policy—Key Statements from Washington, Beijing, and Taipei*, Washington D. C., Congressional Research Service Reports, October 10, 2014, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30341.pdf>, 49.

⁴³ The Third Taiwan Strait Crisis lasted from 21 July 1995 to 23 March 1996. It was an effect of a series of missile tests conducted by the PRC in the waters surrounding Taiwan.

⁴⁴ Executive Yuan, *The Republic of China Yearbook 2016*.

peaceful means' as an option in response to Taiwan's intention for independence. Although the non-contact political situation was very intense during Chen's administration, in 2001, the ROC government lifted a half-century ban on direct trade and investment with the PRC.⁴⁵ When the Anti-Secession Law was passed in the PRC, the mainland government pursued conversations with anti-independence groups in Taiwan, contacting them on a party-to-party level to loosen the relationship. In the same year, Lien Chan, the former KMT chairman, visited China and met with Hu Jintao, then-president of the PRC. On March 22, 2008, the KMT party won the presidential election in Taiwan, and two months later, a meeting between Hu and Wu Po-Hsiung, the KMT chairman, marked the first conversation between the heads of the CCP and the KMT. During this meeting, both sides agreed on the 1992 Consensus.⁴⁶ Wu stressed that Taiwanese identity does not mean Taiwanese independence.

Since Ma Ying-jeou won the Taiwanese election in 2008, the agreement between Hu's and Ma's administrations on the 1992 Consensus became the basis of further negotiation and cooperation between mainland China and Taiwan. On 15 December 2008, the 'Three Links' policy was officially established, starting with direct flights, shipping, and post between the Chinese mainland and Taiwan.⁴⁷ This policy was first proposed in 1979 by the National People's Congress, but it took thirty years to finally reach agreement. From 2008 to 2010, both sides also agreed on 'food safety, financial cooperation, Mainland investment in Taiwan, agricultural inspection, industrial standards and finishing'.⁴⁸ These agreements and cooperation resulted in reaching the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) in June 2010. From 2008 to 2015, more than twelve million mainland

⁴⁵ "Taiwan Profile – Timeline," *BBC News*, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16178545>.

⁴⁶ Yan-Chih Mo, "'One Country, Two Areas' Proposed by Wu Po-Hsiung," *Taipei Times*, March 23, 2012, <https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2012/03/23/2003528495>.

⁴⁷ Fulong Wu, ed., *Globalization and the Chinese City* (London: Routledge, 2006), 7.

⁴⁸ Richard C. Bush, *Uncharted Strait: The Future of China-Taiwan Relations* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 3.

visitors travelled to Taiwan, and more than five million Taiwanese people visited the mainland.⁴⁹ Encouragement from the offices of Ma and Xi Jinping, who became president of the PRC in 2013, has enhanced communication between both sides of the strait politically, economically, and culturally. The November 2015 meeting between Xi and Ma in Singapore is considered a turning point in the history of mainland China and Taiwan, since this is the first time the leaders of the two states have met since 1945.

Taiwan-U.S. Relations

Officially, the United States government has supported the ‘one China’ policy since the Second World War. In 1949, when Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan, the U.S. government recognised only the ROC as the government of all China.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Washington supported economic progress in Taiwan enormously. As mentioned earlier, the U.S. government invested in three four-year plans for Taiwan (1953–56, 1957–60, 1961–64).⁵⁰ During the first four years, the American assistance mainly focused on rehabilitation of war damage. From 1956 to 1960, the aid was used mainly for the improvement of transportation, power, and manufacturing. In the early 1960s, the economic assistance program changed the aim to help Taiwan achieve the capability to finance its capital and external economic requirements through domestic savings and borrowing from typical world capital markets. Overall, from 1949 to 1965, Taiwan received economic and military aid from the United States in the forms of defence support, development loans, and development grants totalling about US\$3.7 billion, of which US\$1.4 billion was directly invested to boost the economy, with the rest used to build the military defence system.⁵¹

Besides the financial grants Washington gave to Taiwan, the United States and the ROC signed the Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty in

⁴⁹ Winberg Chai, “Xi Jinping and Ma Ying-Jeou’s Historic 2015 Meeting in Singapore,” 195–202.

⁵⁰ Chang, “U.S. Aid and Economic Progress in Taiwan.”

⁵¹ Chang, “U.S. Aid and Economic Progress in Taiwan.”

1955, which aimed to prevent the PRC from taking over the island. This treaty stated that one party would provide military support when the other party was under attack. Article 10 in the treaty stated that either side could terminate the treaty after notice had been given to the other side one year in advance. The treaty was terminated one year after the United States recognised the PRC as the representative of the ‘one China’ and established formal diplomatic relations in 1979.

Nevertheless, shortly after the termination of the Sino-American Mutual Defence Treaty, the U.S. Congress passed the Taiwan Relations Act, which used ‘governing authorities on Taiwan’ to refer to Taiwan, instead of ‘Republic of China’. The act said that it was ‘necessary to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character and to maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan’.⁵² Currently, the U.S. government states that ‘the United States and Taiwan enjoy a robust unofficial relationship’.⁵³

This section has thus far reviewed how the national identities of Taiwan have been shaped and reshaped by different authorities from the Japanese colonial era to the early twenty-first century. The section also presents the relationship between Taiwan and mainland China and between Taiwan and the United States. By doing this, I aim to reinforce the argument in the last chapter that the word *national* is not a consistent, unified term but is instead fluid and changing through different time periods and political, economic, and cultural situations. The next section provides a brief Taiwanese film history since 1949, presenting how the film industry shifted in the past decades and how the contested identity is constructed through film and film practices.

⁵² “Taiwan Relations Act (Public Law 96-8, 22 U.S.C. 3301 et Seq.),” American Institute in Taiwan, January 1, 1979, <https://www.ait.org.tw/our-relationship/policy-history/key-u-s-foreign-policy-documents-region/taiwan-relations-act/>.

⁵³ “U.S.- Taiwan Relations,” *American Institute in Taiwan*, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://languages.usembassy.gov/our-relationship/policy-history/>.

Taiwanese Film History in Brief

The rise of Taiwanese film has been a painful process. In the early twentieth century, the production of local films in Taiwan was suppressed by the Japanese colonial government. However, the Taiwan Motion Picture Association and the Taipei News Picture Association were both established during the colonial era.⁵⁴

After the KMT retreated to Taiwan in 1949, the party established and managed many ideological apparatuses, including publications, radio stations, newspapers, and film production companies. On one hand, during this period, Taiwan was considered a part of greater China, and therefore the existence of a Taiwanese national identity was suppressed, hindering the development of Taiwanese-language films. On the other hand, the KMT's policy of renationalising Chinese identity in Taiwan focused on promoting Mandarin-language cinema, and investments from the government in local film production boosted the film industry from the 1950s until the 1970s. In the 1970s, there were around 200 films produced in Taiwan every year. The productions that benefited from government support did not challenge the KMT's political propaganda framework.

In the 1960s, the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), a state-owned film production company, started to invest in a new type of film, branded 'healthy realism' (*jiankang xieshi*).⁵⁵ Though this film genre was often criticised as a propaganda method,⁵⁶ it was also successful from a box office revenue perspective. One output of the success of the healthy realism

⁵⁴ Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*.

⁵⁵ Healthy realism is defined as a genre that 'mixes the interior/private mise-en-scène specific to family melodrama with the civil, public space to accommodate government policy, enabling a smooth integration with the state ideological apparatus'; Emilie, Y.-Y. Yeh, "The Road Home: Stylistic Renovations of Chinese Mandarin Classics," in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity, and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-shou Robert Chen (London: Routledge, 2007), 206.

⁵⁶ For example, one of the well-known films of this genre is *Beautiful Duckling* (*Yangya Renjia*, 1965), directed by Li Hsing. It tells a story about a family that earns their income by raising ducks. The story is full of conflicts between generations that, in the movie, are solved by the traditional Chinese moral standards.

genre was the growing popularity of the Mandarin language, which assisted the language policy mentioned in the last section.

Other types of films also became popular on the island in the 1970s. One such genre was traditional martial art films, with stories set in ancient China, such as the films directed by King Hu, including *Dragon Inn* (*Longmen Kezhan*, 1967), *A Touch of Zen* (*Xia Nü*, 1971), and *The Valiant Ones* (*Zhong Lie Tu*, 1975). Romantic films based on novels by the writer Qiong Yao were also extremely popular in the 1960s and the 1970s, including *Fire and Rain* (*Yanyu Mengmeng*, dir. Wang Yin, 1965), *Outside the Window* (*Chuang Wai*, dir. Song Cunshou, Yu Zhengchun, 1973), and *The Unforgettable Character* (*Zai Shui Yi Fang*, dir. Zhang Meijun, 1975). According to June Yip, both genres were thematically and stylistically driven by economic imperatives and were also prompted by political control and censorship.⁵⁷

The Taiwanese film industry blossomed during this period of external political challenges and the withdrawal of the ROC from the United Nations. The industry also faced external commercial challenges from the United States, Japan, Europe, and Hong Kong.⁵⁸ In addition, videotape pirating began at the end of the 1970s, which resulted in more and more foreign films from the United States, Japan, and Europe being brought to the island. Because of the convenience and low cost of the tapes and the diversity of their content, these illegally imported videotapes were extremely popular. The Taiwanese film industry also faced challenges from Hong Kong in three main ways. First, the KMT wanted the support of Hong Kong society for its legitimacy as a ruling government, and it thus offered the Hong Kong film companies tax breaks in Taiwan. Second, film productions in Hong Kong were usually better equipped, which led directly to more diverse and complicated content favoured by Taiwanese audiences. The third aspect of challenges from Hong Kong was the rise of the Hong Kong New Wave, which began around 1978, led by Ann Hui, Allen Fong, and other young Hong Kong directors. These

⁵⁷ Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*.

⁵⁸ Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, "Cultural Democratisation and Taiwan Cinema," in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Taiwan*, ed. Gunter Schubert (Routledge, 2016), 374-90.

challenges that the Taiwanese film industry faced motivated and boosted its reformation in the 1980s.

As part of the national cultural reconstruction program, the Taiwan New Cinema movement was supported and sponsored by the KMT government. In the 1980s, the CMPC began development production of *In Our Time* (*Guangyin De Gushi*, 1982), a collection of four short stories directed by four young Taiwanese directors, Tao Dechen, Edward Yang, Ke Yizheng, and Zhang Yi, who were not well known at that time. All four stories in this film reveal the directors' understanding of the island's history and the society. This film marks the beginning of the Taiwan New Cinema movement, which officially lasted until 1987, with its influence being extended throughout the 1990s.⁵⁹ In 1983, the second film of the movement, *The Sandwich Man* (*Erzi De Da Wanou*, 1983), which was also an anthological work, was released. This movie was composed of three short stories directed by Hou Hsiao-hsien, Wan Jen, and Zeng Zhuangxiang. All three stories from *The Sandwich Man* (1983) were based on the literature of Huang Chunming, who is known as a Taiwanese *xiangtu* writer.⁶⁰

These two films are considered milestones in Taiwanese film history and marked the beginning of the Taiwan New Cinema movement. This group of young filmmakers,⁶¹ who did not take the traditional path to enter the film industry and break the rigidity of the film production format, were the new blood of Taiwanese film. Though these filmmakers disagreed about the definition of the Taiwan New Cinema, the way they directed films challenged the traditional large studio production model. For example, both *In Our Time*

⁵⁹ Kellner, "Exploring Society and History," 101–15.

⁶⁰ *Xiangtu*, in Chinese 乡土, can be translated as nativist literature in English. The Taiwan *xiangtu* literature movement began in the late 1960s in Taiwan. Writers, including Huang Chunming, Wang Zhenhe (王祯和), and Chen Yingzhen (陈映真), were native islanders who wrote about contemporary Taiwanese society, the Taiwanese people, and their problems, which were largely ignored by Western-oriented modern literature writers from the 1950s to the 1970s. See more in Yip, *Envisioning Taiwan*.

⁶¹ Aside from the seven directors mentioned above, this group also includes directors Li Youning (李佑宁) and Chen Kunhou (陈坤厚); screenwriters Xiao Ye (小野), Wu Nianzhen (吴念真), Zhu Tianwen (朱天文), and Ding Yamin (丁亚民); cinematographers Li Pingbin (李屏宾) and Yang Weiha (杨渭汉); editor Liao Qingsong (廖庆松); and producer Zhang Huaqun (张华坤).

(1982) and *A Sandwich Man* (1983) had very low budgets, and the directors used non-professional actors and actresses. Moreover, highly influenced by the *xiangtu* literature movement, the Taiwan New Cinema turned back to reality from the escapism of the 1970s, focusing on the island's history and the Taiwanese experience. The films produced in this period started to involve local dialects besides Mandarin Chinese, which not only directly challenged the government language policy but also built up the Taiwanese national and cultural identities through their use.

Building a reputation and gaining recognition as a Taiwanese film industry at international festivals was one of the objectives of the CMPC's investments.⁶² Since the movement began, Taiwanese film productions have developed a special role not only in the industry but also among scholars at an international level.⁶³ Another contribution of the Taiwan New Cinema movement as a part of cultural democratisation, quoting from Rawnsley, was that 'thought is liberated, the spectrum of cultural values and aesthetic tastes widened, alternative modes of artistic and cultural productions experimented with, more access for social and cultural participation created, as well as the expansion of debates about questioning/self-questioning, exploration/self-exploration and expression/self-expansion'⁶⁴. Through the movement and the years after, the group of Taiwanese filmmakers and their works constantly challenged censorship and the ruling party's ideology. Rawnsley uses the term 'cultural democratisation' to label the significant achievements of democratisation in the 1980s in the cultural dimension, especially in the forms of cinema and theatre.⁶⁵ She argues that this cultural democratisation was triggered by democratisation in the political and economic domains.

Though the Taiwan New Cinema movement blossomed especially at international film festivals, the local commercial film industry collapsed in the

⁶² Weichuan Sun, 后 '解严' 时代的台湾电影 [Taiwanese Film after Lifting Martial Law] (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2014).

⁶³ Kellner, "Exploring Society and History."

⁶⁴ Rawnsley, "Cultural Democratisation and Taiwan Cinema," 374.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

1990s.⁶⁶ Local film production reached its lowest point in history in 2000 and 2001. In the late 1990s, Hollywood accounted for 93%–95% of the Taiwanese film market.⁶⁷ In the early 2000s, a few Taiwanese films, including coproductions, gained reputational or financial success. For example, *Yi* (dir. Edward Yang, 2000) won the Best Director award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2000, and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (dir. Ang Lee, 2000) won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. However, these sporadic occasions were not enough to revive local film production, which saw fewer than ten Taiwanese films released each year.

The solutions for climbing out of this recession were found through debates, namely on increasing government funding, subsidising filmmakers, and encouraging cross-strait coproduction.⁶⁸ The downturn of the film industry lasted around a decade until 2008, when several Taiwanese debuts, including the box office hit *Cape No. 7* (dir. Wei Desheng, 2008), were released. This film in particular was considered a sign of the revival of the Taiwanese film industry.⁶⁹ During the dark days of the industry, a group of filmmakers persisted; for example, Chen Huai'en directed *Island Etude* (*Lian Xi Qu*, 2006), which stimulated the trend of around-island bicycle touring. A new generation of Taiwanese filmmakers, including Lin Shuyu, the director of *Winds of September* (2007), Ya Yazhe, the director of *Orz Boyz* (2008), and others, adopted commercial genres in their work, including comedy, romance, and youth films, which, compared to the work during the Taiwan New Cinema movement, are more audience friendly in terms of narrative and editing style. However, following the lead of the Taiwan New Cinema movement, in which directors stressed their personal experiences and their understanding of everyday life as Taiwanese, the new generation's directors also focus on local stories happening in Taiwan.

⁶⁶ Lu, “从数字看台湾电影五十年.”

⁶⁷ Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁶⁸ Rawnsley, “Cultural Democratisation and Taiwan Cinema.”

⁶⁹ Wang, “Memories of the Future,” 135–51.

Conclusion

The chapter presented a cultural, social, and historical background for both understanding the film text and analysing the film production context in the following chapters. Taiwan has witnessed a dramatic political, economic and cultural shift since the KMT took over Taiwan in 1945. The terrifying 228 incident not only intensified the strain between the mainlanders and islanders in Taiwan but also forced KMT to carry out a series of schemes to build the unified Chinese identity on the island. By presenting the history in this period, I provided a social and historical context for understanding the film story and the key narrative, which will be further analysed in the following chapter.

In the last section of this chapter, the study briefly reviewed the rise and development of Taiwanese cinema since its birth in the late 1890s. Although the case study film *Monga* was released in 2010, the film industry background presented in this chapter pinned this time spot in a longer history. Through the analysis, the chapter has shown that the development of Taiwanese film industry was always intertwined with government film policy, economic environment and preference of audience at the time, which are also the key elements for understanding *Monga*'s popularity and success in 2010.

Having established the theoretical framework in chapter 1 and outlined the social and cultural background in this chapter, the study now moves on to the case study analysis. The next chapter begins the analysis of the production of *Monga* as the first step in unfolding its success and popularity.

Chapter 3. Producing *Monga*: The Strategic Business Plan of a Taiwanese Blockbuster

Co-written by Niu Chengze and Zeng Liting, *Monga* is set in the 1980s in the Monga area of Longshan District in Taipei and features the ‘Gang of Princes’, formed by five young men including Mosquito (Zhao Youting), Monk (Ruan Jingtian), Dragon (Feng Xiaoyue), who is the leader of the gang, and two others. The gang is protected and trained by Geta (Ma Rulong), Dragon’s father, who is one of the Monga area’s old triad leaders, a *gatao*.¹ A new gang, led by Mainlander Grey Wolf (Niu Chengze), proposes a power-sharing agreement to Geta. After Geta turns down the Mainlanders’ request, they seek to gain power in an alternative way. Using their arsenal of handguns, they recruit Monk as their spy and kill two old triad leaders, including Geta. Monk, who grew up with Dragon, was Dragon’s protector and assistant, but he is resentful towards the traditional authority of the triad and thinks joining forces with the Mainlanders could be the hope of Monga. After a sequence of bloody encounters between the gang of Mainlanders and the Gang of Princes, Monk’s double identity is exposed by Mosquito, and Monk is killed by Dragon after almost killing Mosquito.

With its use of popular celebrities, a touch of the gangster film genre, and a setting in a lively and vibrant time and location, the success of *Monga* seems self-evident. However, it would be mistaken for film researchers to take this for granted. Thus, the ultimate research question that this thesis attempts to answer is: what does the popularity and the success of *Monga* reveal about the film production, distribution, promotion and reception in Taiwan, in Greater China, and for film industries and cultures overall? The previous chapter presents the theoretical, historical, and industrial background for further analysis of the production, distribution, and reception of *Monga*. In this chapter, I investigate the key elements in *Monga*’s production, namely the

¹ Historically, the Monga area was in the charge of dozens of local cliques, called *gatao* (角头). Each *gatao* controls a small section in Monga. The role of the *gatao* is complicated. They collect protection fees, taking advantage of local citizens. However, it is said that the more powerful the *gatao*, the more prosperous the businesses in that area are.

people involved, government funding, choice of genre, and production design, and argue that these elements facilitated the outstanding box office performance of the film. By analysing these factors, I also argue that the production model of *Monga*, which I call the Taiwanese local blockbuster production model, is the new type of response from the Taiwanese film industry to the global film marketing system.

This chapter begins by introducing production studies as a principal research method for this chapter, which remains a gap in contemporary Taiwanese film studies. The research then moves to the discussion of one key concept of this research, blockbusters. Engaging with the works of other scholars, like Chris Berry, Nikki J. Y. Lee, and Zhang Huiyu,² I argue that in a film industry on the edge of the global film production circuit, the borrowed term *blockbuster* has a localised interpretation due to the social and cultural environment and the industrial limitations in Taiwan, which may differ from its origins in Hollywood. However, Taiwanese blockbusters like *Monga*, with systematically designed production development, government funding, and purposeful choices about film genre, narrative style, and production design, also attempt to achieve the ‘bigness and exceptionality’ of a Hollywood blockbuster.³ This chapter then examines the production practices of *Monga* in three aspects: the influence of key people on the project, the involvement of government subsidies; the national sentiment aroused in *Monga* through film narrative, the choice of film genre and production design. In doing so, the study attempts to examine the factors that were considered in the decision making during the production stage of *Monga*, which reveals the production culture and the film industry in 2010. The chapter also seeks to investigate factors in the production stage that assisted *Monga* in becoming a blockbuster at the regional level in Taiwan.

² Chris Berry, “What’s Big About the Big Film?.”; Lee, “Localized Globalization and a Monster National,” 45–61; Zhang, “从主旋律影片到主流大片的嬗变,” 16–23.

³ Julian Stringer, “Introduction,” in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 8.

The Taiwanese Film Industry Against the Globalised Film Market

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Taiwan New Cinema movement in the 1980s not only challenged the traditional narrative of national identities and historical memories artistically and ideologically but also gained a reputation via international film festivals and developed its market in global art house cinema. However, in the 1990s, the Taiwanese local film market showed signs of decline, which continued into the new millennium.⁴ In fact, the years from 2000 to 2007 were considered the darkest time in the Taiwanese film industry.⁵ There are a number of reasons for this, which can be summed up as follows. First, the government's removal of movie import quotas in 1997 caused Taiwanese films to lose their protection against competition with foreign films, especially Hollywood films, in the domestic market. The popularity of Hollywood films in the market also reveals the second reason, which is that the interest in Chinese-language films from the film audience in Taiwan declined in general.⁶ Third, the advent of optical discs, including VCDs and DVDs, and online piracy became a common means of access for audiences in Taiwan.⁷ Fourth, local distributors failed to adjust their distribution methods to face the more competitive environment.⁸

In the article 'From Local to Global: A Critique of the Globalization of Taiwan Cinema', Wei Ti presents three types of responses from the Taiwanese film industry and filmmakers when facing challenges in the 'global film market system'.⁹ The first type of response, represented by filmmakers like

⁴ Kuei-Fen Chiu, Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, and Gary D. Rawnsley, eds., *Taiwan Cinema: International Reception and Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁵ Daw-Ming Lee, "The Journey of Taiwan Cinema: From Taiwan New Cinema to Post-New Cinema," *Taiwan Insight*, October 31, 2018, <https://taiwaninsight.org/2018/10/31/the-journey-of-taiwan-cinema-from-taiwan-new-cinema-to-post-new-cinema/>.

⁶ Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience*.

⁷ Shujen Wang, *Framing Piracy: Globalization and Film Distribution in Greater China* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003). See also Darrell W. Davis, "Compact Generation: Vcd Markets in Asia," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 23 (2003): 165–76, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0143968032000091095>.

⁸ Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience*.

⁹ Ti Wei, "From Local to Global: A Critique of the Globalization of Taiwan Cinema," *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* (2004): 65.

Hou Hsiao-hsien and Tsai Ming-liang, is that films were financed and therefore oriented internationally, especially by French or Japanese companies. However, the production of those films was grounded in Taiwan. The second type of response is what Wei calls ‘enter in the center of the Hollywood system as labor force’.¹⁰ The example in this category, and so far the only example, is Ang Lee.¹¹ The third type Wei presents is ‘locally-made and Hollywood-financed film’,¹² exemplified by *Double Vision* (*Shuang Tong*, dir. Chen Guofu, 2002). Examining these three types of responses from the Taiwanese film industry, Wei argues that all are not only restrained by ‘the logic of foreign film systems and markets’¹³ but also have negative influences on the local Taiwanese film industry. On one hand, art house filmmakers have more freedom for their creativity, but their works are more designed to satisfy the tastes of the global art film audience rather than the local mainstream audience. On the other hand, commercial films produced in Taiwan need to depend on the investment, production, and distribution system of the major Hollywood studios. Thus, Taiwanese filmmakers lost their autonomy over their choices of film themes and narrative styles.

Following on Wei’s work, Fran Martin suggests another type of response, which she categorised as ‘trans(national) Taiwan cinema’.¹⁴ Martin defines this term as ‘an independent but – unlike the ‘art cinema’ of the Taiwan New Wave – relatively populist cinema whose production is

¹⁰ Ibid., 65.

¹¹ Born and raised in Taiwan, Ang Lee was considered an art house film director locally in the beginning. His first film was supported by both the CMPC and the national film subsidy and was coproduced with Good Machine, an independent company based in New York. See Ibid. p81. Ang Lee moved his focus to a global audience and worked as a Hollywood director after his third film’s success in the United States. After directing *Sense and Sensibility* (1995), *Ice Storm* (1997), and *Ride with the Devil* (2000), three stories adapted from Western classic novels or based on Western society, Lee directed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000), a Chinese Wuxia theme film funded by Columbia Pictures Film. This film was successful both internationally and in Taiwan at the box office and won the Best Foreign Film at the 73rd Academy Awards. See Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*.

¹² Wei, “From Local to Global.”

¹³ Ibid., 87.

¹⁴ Fran Martin, “Taiwan (Trans)national Cinema: The Far-Flung Adventures of a Taiwanese Tomboy,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts*, ed. Darrell William Davis and Ru-shou Robert Chen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 131–45.

transnationalised by its reliance on overseas investment'.¹⁵ In other words, though similar to art house films in terms of production, which is normally based in Taiwan and funded with foreign investments, films under this category 'target a broader international and domestic audience beyond hard-core auteurist art-film fans'.¹⁶ Martin claims that films like *Blue Gate Crossing* (*Lanse Damen*, dir. Yi Zhiyan, 2002), a Taiwanese-French coproduction, are another type of response from Taiwanese filmmakers to the Hollywood-dominated local film market.

Although the films and filmmakers mentioned above, to a certain degree, brought some hope and light to the sluggish local film market, the expected revival did not happen until 2008, when several debuts from Taiwanese directors were released. The debuts, including *What On Earth Have I Done Wrong* (2007), *Orz Boyz* (2008), *Winds of September* (2008), and the box office phenomenon *Cape No. 7* (2008), boosted and enhanced the morale of the Taiwanese film industry. Moreover, with the record-breaking performance of *Cape No. 7* (2008), 2008 was marked as the year of Taiwanese cinema revival.¹⁷

Since the late 2000s, filmmakers in Taiwan have been exploring alternative approaches to respond to the Hollywood-dominated local film market that are distinct from the approaches that Wei and Martin summarised in their work. This group of films, including *Cape No. 7* (2008), *You Are the Apple of My Eye* (*Naxienian Women Yiqi Zhui De Nühai*, dir. Jiubadao, 2011), *Our Times* (*Wode Shaonv Shidai*, dir. Chen Yushan, 2015), and *Monga*, were produced locally in Taiwan and had medium to high production budgets.¹⁸ Moreover, to approach a wider range of local audience, films in this category, unlike art films that focus on a global niche market or international coproduction that adopt Hollywood narrative style, are more likely to adopt

¹⁵ Martin, "Taiwan (Trans)National Cinema," 131.

¹⁶ Ibid. 132.

¹⁷ Wang, "Memories of the Future," 135–51.

¹⁸ As mentioned in the introduction, in the early 2010s, the average budget for a Taiwanese film was around NT\$30 million (US\$996,231). A budget of NT\$50 million (US\$1.66 million) was considered a medium-size production, and a budget of NT\$80–100 million (US\$2.66–3.32 million) was considered a blockbuster. See Valkyria, "电影营销人谈国片瓶颈."

genres such as youth films, gangster films, or comedies to tell stories with local Taiwanese sentiments and popularised narration to speak to the local mainstream audience. This could be framed as another type of response of the Taiwanese film industry to the global era. Here I frame this type of response as Taiwanese blockbusters.

Thus, in this chapter, I investigate the production stage of *Monga* in order to reveal contemporary production culture in Taiwan. I also seek to contribute to the existing conversation on how the Taiwanese film industry reacts and responds to the changing global film market by attempting to frame the type of response, namely Taiwanese blockbusters, through the industrial analysis of the production of *Monga*.

Introducing Production Studies

As mentioned in chapter 1, since the Taiwan New Cinema movement drew attention on the international art house cinema stage, auteur and cultural studies have been the main approaches to Taiwanese film studies. Various theories have been applied in this area, namely, national cinema, third-world cinema, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and so on.¹⁹

However, as Paul McDonald points out, though industry is fundamental for film, especially for feature film production, it has not been acknowledged by many film scholars.²⁰ The same blind spot also exists in contemporary Taiwanese film studies. This research seeks to fill this gap in the existing literature by analysing the production stage of *Monga* through the principle of production studies to answer the main research questions.

Production studies, in Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell's work, is summarised as an area that 'gathers empirical data about production: the complexity of routines and rituals, the routines of seemingly complex processes, the economic and political forces that shape roles, technologies, and

¹⁹ Xihe Chen, and Yan Wang. "The Approach to the Taiwan Films in the Perspective of Multi-Factors," *Journal of Shanghai University (Social Sciences Edition)* 1 (2009): 86–95.

²⁰ Paul McDonald, "Introduction," *Cinema Journal* 52 (2013): 145–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/cj.2013.0025>.

the distribution of resources according to cultural and demographic differences'.²¹ In other words, as a subfield of media industry studies, production studies, borrowing 'theoretical insights from the social sciences and humanities',²² theorises the practices in the production field.

The earliest publications that focus on production culture date back to the 1940s. Despite being from different disciplines, namely sociology and anthropology, both Leo Rosten and Hortense Powdermaker set examples in terms of fieldwork and methodologies for production studies.²³ However, the production field did not attract academia's attention due to the prevailing interests in the nonindustrial aspects, including auteur studies, national cinema, psychological aspects, and film aesthetics. According to Caldwell, the industry was rediscovered in academia through archival studies in the field of history studies and two book-length studies that look directly at contemporary Hollywood production culture, namely *The Producer's Medium* by Horace Newcomb and Robert Alley and Todd Gitlin's *Inside Primetime*.²⁴

Since the late 1990s, more studies that focus on production have been done in three fields, namely sociology, anthropology, and media studies.²⁵ In the last-mentioned area, both Hesmondhalgh and Hartley outline the culture of

²¹ Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell, eds., *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

²² Ibid.

²³ Leo Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, the Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt, 1941); Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood the Dream Factory: An Anthropologist Looks at the Movie-Makers* (Eastford: Martino Publishing, 2013).

²⁴ Horace Newcomb and Robert S. Alley, *The Producer's Medium: Conversations with Creators of American TV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

²⁵ See Laura Grindstaff, *The Money Shot: Trash, Class, and the Making of TV Talk Shows* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Allen J. Scott, *On Hollywood: The Place, the Industry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Barry Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Richard M. Ohmann, ed., *Making & Selling Culture* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996); Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, eds., *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); Sherry B. Ortner, *Not Hollywood: Independent Film at the Twilight of the American Dream* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

production alongside political and economic analysis.²⁶ In addition, John Thornton Caldwell's monograph, *Production Culture*, specifically focuses on the production practice of film and television in Los Angeles.²⁷ In the same spirit, a collection of articles, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, was published in 2009.²⁸

In terms of research methods, works that centre on productions have adopted various methods, from sociological to critical, from ethnographic to political and economic. Caldwell's ground-breaking book, *Production Culture*, utilises a synthetic approach that the research of this chapter also adopts, which combines textual analysis, interviews, ethnographic field observation, and economic and industrial analysis. This integrated method avoids the limitation of any individual research mode by 'cross-checking' and 'placing the discourses and results of any one register in critical tension or dialogue with the others'.²⁹ It also bypasses a difficulty that academics constantly confront: gaining access to an enclosed and secretive community when applying a single research method, such as archival research, interviews, or textual analysis.³⁰ As Ortner argues, compared to ethnographers on television, who have better luck gaining access to the inside, considerable works that focus on film industries are usually done by journalists or Hollywood insiders themselves.³¹ Barry Dornfeld, as both a scholar of industry studies and a production assistant, breaks the research boundary between academia and industry professionals.³² However, the work of Dornfeld also faces critiques that question whether the simultaneous roles enhance or compromise the analysis.³³

²⁶ David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE, 2013); John Hartley, ed., *Creative Industries* (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2005).

²⁷ Caldwell, *Production Culture*.

²⁸ Mayer, Banks, and Caldwell, *Production Studies*.

²⁹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 4.

³⁰ Sherry B Ortner, "Access: Reflections on Studying up in Hollywood," *Ethnography* 11 (2010): 211–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138110362006>.

³¹ *ibid.*, 212.

³² Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television*.

³³ Caldwell, *Production Culture*. 382.

Throughout this chapter, I analyse the four key elements in the production stage of *Monga* using a mixed ‘cultural-industrial method’ borrowed from Caldwell,³⁴ which extracts data from textual analysis of media coverage and publications on the case study *Monga*, interviews I conducted with film workers, and economic and industrial analysis.³⁵ Even though resistance was encountered when I attempted to contact the director of *Monga*, Niu Chengze, and Shi Weiming, the general manager of the Taiwan branch of Warner Bros., for interviews, which directly underscores the problem of accessibility, I conducted personal interviews with film crew of *Monga*, including the producer, the marketing manager, the assistant editor, the second assistant director, and the digital marketing staff, on my research field trip to Taipei, Taiwan.

As Caldwell stressed, there is no doubt that interviews and statements made by industry professionals are intriguing since they can be ‘conceptually rich, theoretically suggestive, and culturally revealing’.³⁶ However, the statements are always presented in the context of self-interest, promotion, and spin. Interviews, including the ones I conducted myself, and published interviews in the media or other publications are treated in this research as both insiders’ stories of their own experiences during the production of *Monga* and as text that needs to be further decoded and interpreted in a broader social, cultural context.

In sum, this chapter engages production studies as a method to review a rarely touched dimension in Taiwanese cinema studies through the investigation of *Monga*, the production of a Taiwanese blockbuster, the most significant form of production in any film industry.

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁵ Unfortunately, due to the spatial and temporal limitations that this UK-based research was conducted nearly a decade after the production of the case study *Monga*, there are no on-site observations of the production as primary material for the research nor an interface, which is a research method, ‘interface ethnography’, mentioned in Ortner, ‘Access’. Due to the access difficulties Ortner encountered during her research, the author searched for ‘halfway’ or ‘interface’ to conduct the observation of the Hollywood insiders. That said, Ortner uses the public events where professionals, including directors, producers, and screenwriters, talk to audiences, for example in film festival panels, public lectures, and Q&As that normally occur after film screenings.

³⁶ Caldwell, *Production Culture*. 14.

Blockbusters vs. Dapian

As I argue, Taiwanese blockbusters, as represented by *Monga*, are another response from the Taiwanese film industry and filmmakers when facing the increasingly globalised film market system. But what are we talking about when we talk about Taiwanese blockbusters? In this section, the study seeks to decode the meaning of the term *blockbuster* and what it means in the context of the Taiwanese film industry.

The Mandarin Chinese word *dapian*, which can be literally translated as ‘big film’, was used in Taiwanese media to describe the movie *Monga*. For example, in a Taipei Film Commission news report, the writer uses the word *dapian* in the title ‘*Monga* the No. 1 Taiwanese Big Film in Twenty Years Born in Taipei’.³⁷ This report states that *Monga* broke the national record by circulating over one hundred copies in Taiwan and appearing in the Cannes Film Festival ahead of the film shooting. In Taiwan around the same period, typical locally produced films were released with eight to ten copies.³⁸ For example, for the Golden Horse Awards winner *Cannot Live Without You* (*Buneng Meiyou Ni*, dir. Dai Liren, 2009), there were ten copies circulating in all of Taiwan during the week it was released. The box office record breaker *Cape No. 7* (2008) was released with forty copies in Taiwan during its premier week and added to ninety-eight later on due to its exceptional box office performance.³⁹ It is safe to say that the release scale of *Monga* was substantial and ambitious. Moreover, since the late 2000s, Taiwanese films have had little exposure on international stages, with the exception of a few art house directors like Hou Hsiao-hsien and Tsai Ming-liang. Invited by the Cannes Film Festival before the production stage, the director and the producer brought their one-minute film trailer, which was purposely made for the festival, to the festival screening. As the producer, Li Lie, stated, this exposure at the international film festival was not for the Western audience to get to

³⁷ Taipei Film Commission, “二十年来台制第一大片[艋舺]诞生在台北!.”

³⁸ Jinchun Zhang, “父后七日看俏 票房拼海角[The Box Office of Seven Days in Heaven Comparable to Cape No.7],” Liberty Times Net, July 17, 2010, <https://ent.ltn.com.tw/news/paper/411799>.

³⁹ Zhang, “父后七日看俏 票房拼海角.”

know *Monga*, but when Taiwanese media reported on this event, it was great publicity for Taiwanese people to learn about the film.⁴⁰

Additionally, the same source indicated that the Taipei government offered assistance to *Monga*'s production team due to the large scale of the production.⁴¹ It also reported that Li Yongping, the vice-mayor of Taipei and the chief executive officer of the Taipei Film Commission at that time, stressed the length of time since the last large film like *Monga* was produced in Taiwan.

So what does *dapian* mean? Chris Berry in his work 'What's Big About The Big Film?: "De-Westernizing" the Blockbuster in Korea and China' explains that in the Chinese language context, the word *dapian* is the closest translation of 'blockbuster'. Comparing Chinese and Korean blockbusters, he argues that the term *blockbuster* has been borrowed from the United States and translated by both China and Korea and 'is made sense of and practiced according to local cultural and filmmaking contexts'.⁴²

As Berry argues, the different reactions of China and Korea towards the pressure of Hollywood films have their own historical and political reasons. The film industry in mainland China faced Hollywood blockbusters with resistance, where state-owned corporations controlled the importation and exportation of films in the country. The copyrights of Hollywood films were bought at a flat fee by China Films until 1995, when there were up to ten films that were permitted to be imported to mainland China with a 'box office split' deal.⁴³ On the other hand, the Korean reaction to Hollywood blockbusters was not only to set up a mechanism like the screen quota on foreign film exhibitions but also to produce local versions of blockbusters.⁴⁴

Despite the differences in these reactions, the localisation of Hollywood blockbusters can be summarised as follows. The first step was that

⁴⁰ Lie Li, Interview by author, September 26, 2017.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Berry, "What's Big About the Big Film?."

⁴³ Cited from Berry; film local rights in China were bought for between US\$30,000 and US\$50,000 per film in 1992; *ibid.*, 219.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

Hollywood blockbusters were accepted by the local audience by speaking to the ‘local historical cinematic and economic circumstances’, then reshaped through the production of local versions of blockbusters.⁴⁵ Film industries from both China and Korea raised their large-budget films to compete with Hollywood films in the domestic market. Looking at 2019 box office returns in both countries, the competition between locally produced films and Hollywood films is about equal. In the Chinese top ten grossers list for 2019, only two Hollywood films were on the list, *Avengers: Endgame* (dir. Joe Russo and Anthony Russo, 2019) and *Fast & Furious Presents: Hobbs & Shaw* (dir. David Leitch, 2019).⁴⁶ Moreover, it appears that the diversity of the Chinese *dapian* genre has increased. In the top ten grossers list, besides the main melody films *My People, My Country* (*Wo He Wode Zuguo*, dir. Chen Kaige et al., 2019) and *The Captain* (*Zhongguo Jizhang*, dir. Liu Weiqiang, 2019), there was also a sci-fi film, *The Wandering Earth* (*Liuliang Diqu*, dir. Frant Gwo, 2019), and an animated film, *Ne Zha* (dir. Yang Yu, 2019).⁴⁷ In Korea, four of the top ten films in 2019 were locally produced, and local films accounted for 51% of the film market, which means local films have held a greater market share than foreign titles for nine straight years.⁴⁸

Similar to the film industries in China and Korea, the Taiwanese film industry has also been highly influenced by global forces, especially Hollywood, since the late 1990s.⁴⁹ Taiwan was pressured to open its film market in order to become a member of the WTO. For example, in 1997, the number of foreign films that could be imported increased from thirty-one to

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rebecca Davis, “China’s Box Office Hit New Heights in 2019, as Hollywood’s Share Shrank,” *Variety*, January 3, 2020, <https://variety.com/2020/film/news/china-box-office-2019-review-ne-zha-wandering-earth-avengers-1203455038/>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Jean Noh, “Korea’s Box Office Broke Records in 2019, but Was Also More Skewed towards Big Movies,” *Screendaily*, February 19, 2020, <https://www.screendaily.com/news/koreas-box-office-broke-records-in-2019-but-was-also-more-skewed-towards-big-movies/5147269.article>.

⁴⁹ Tianxiang Wen, *过影——1992–2011 台湾电影总论* [Taiwan Cinema 1992-2011], (Taipei: Bookman Books, 2012).

thirty-eight and was later raised to fifty.⁵⁰ As an outcome, in 1997, the total box office income of foreign films increased 20% compared to 1996. Compared to 1994, the foreign film income in Taiwan doubled within three years.⁵¹ Being in a situation similar to that of the Korean industry in the late 1990s, the Taiwanese film industry responded to the global pressure by seeking engagement with overseas environments, including finding investments from abroad and producing films that pandered to Western tastes, as Wei and Martin present in their works.⁵²

As Berry points out, around 2000, in mainland China, “*dapian*” or “big film” most frequently appears coupled with “*Meiguo*” or “America” in the phrase “the American big film”.⁵³ On the other hand, aside from being a direct translation of ‘blockbuster’, *dapian* has another layer of meaning. Zhang Huiyu elucidates the evolution from ‘main melody’ to ‘mainstream big films’ in the cultural, social, and political context of mainland China.⁵⁴ He argues that *dapian* in mainland China is now the meeting point between ‘main melody’ films and commercial blockbusters.⁵⁵ The appearance of ‘main melody’ (*zhuxuanlü*) is related to the ideological transformation in mainland China from late 1970s to early 1980s. The Central Committee of the CCP published a notice in 1984, in which it defines ‘main melody’ as works with revolutionary and historical themes that carry forward the national spirit, reflect the zeitgeist with realistic style, and highlight the glorious achievements of the party and the army.⁵⁶ However, aside from a few that achieved some success in the box office in the 1990s, main melody films in general have had difficulty being accepted by audiences.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁵¹ Ibid., 78.

⁵² Wei, “From Local to Global.”; Martin, “Taiwan (Trans)National Cinema.”

⁵³ Berry, “What’s Big About the Big Film?,” 217.

⁵⁴ Zhang, “从主旋律影片到主流大片的嬗变.”

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁶ Boqing Zhang and Leilei Jia, 中国当代电影发展史 [Contemporary Chinese Film History] (Beijing: Culture Art Publishing, 2006), cited in Zhang, “从主旋律影片到主流大片的嬗变.”

Since China joined the WTO in 2001, Chinese film organisations have been through a series of reforms, including reform of the joint-stock system, conglomeration of film companies, and the transformation of the film chain system. ‘Nationally produced big films’ (*guochan dapian*) were born under these circumstances. In 2002, the film *Hero* (*Ying Xiong*, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2002) opened the door to the Chinese blockbuster era.⁵⁷ Directed by Zhang Yimou, the film tells a story from the Qin dynasty about a nameless warrior who is summoned to meet the emperor and describe his victories in defeating three assassins who were threatening the emperor’s life. Set in ancient China, the film presents spectacular scenes with splendid costumes and eye-catching martial art actions. Following the same production and marketing pattern of *Hero*, a series of costume drama films were subsequently released, including *House of Flying Daggers* (*Shi Mian Mai Fu*, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2004), *The Promise* (*Wu Ji*, dir. Chen Kaige, 2005), and *The Banquet* (*Ye Yan*, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2006). Even though these films had very impressive box office income, their reviews were relatively poor. For example, *The Promise* (2005), an attempt by the Palme d’Or winning director Chen Kaige for commercial cinema, was criticised by the audience as being incomprehensible.⁵⁸ A review of *The Banquet* (2006) reported that the audience could not resist the urge to burst into undue laughter during the film.⁵⁹

In the late 2000s, main melody film production in mainland China was reshaped by a new form of film investment – coproduction between state-owned corporations and private enterprises. This coproduction model made main melody film production no longer fully dependent on government investment and created a complete separation among entertainment film, main

⁵⁷ Zhang, “从主旋律影片到主流大片的嬗变.”

⁵⁸ Dumou, “时代造导演：‘摇摆’的陈凯歌们，遇上‘坚定’的郭敬明们 [Time Creates Directors: The Endeavoring as Chen Kaige Meet the Staunch as Guo Jingming],” Sina Tech, December 16, 2019, <https://tech.sina.com.cn/roll/2019-12-16/doc-iihnzhfz6150627.shtml>.

⁵⁹ Jiaxin Zeng, “《夜宴》上映叫座不叫好 影院与观众评价相异 [The Banquet Good Box Office with Poor Critics, Difference Between Commercial and Critic Performance],” Sina Entertainment, September 17, 2006, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2006-09-17/01591251260.html>.

melody film, and art film production.⁶⁰ It also accelerated the evolution from main melody films to mainstream blockbusters.

Having established the connotation of *dapian* in the Chinese context in mainland China, it is important now to consider whether the meaning also fits in the Taiwanese context. Similar usage of the word *dapian* appears in media coverage in Taiwan. For instance, one article in the ELLE Taiwan magazine is titled ‘25 Must Watch Big Films in 2018, *Ant-man 2*, *Deadpool 2*, *Avengers*, and *The Incredibles All Coming Back*’.⁶¹ A journalist from NOWnews, a Taiwanese news feed website, published an article titled ‘2017 Most Booming Year of Films, Every Film is a Box Office Hit Big Film’.⁶² In these examples, it seems that *dapian* is an interchangeable term for ‘blockbuster’ in the Taiwanese social linguistic context.

Hollywood blockbusters have occupied the Taiwanese film market since the 1990s. However, the development and emergence of Taiwanese blockbusters did not happen straight away. Influenced by the Taiwan New Cinema movement, *auteur* and *art* were the two key words in Taiwanese film since the 1980s. Yeh and Davis argue that the unique characteristics of the Taiwan New Cinema movement – localism, low budgets, autobiographical features, abridged narration, and lack of celebrities – made it difficult to integrate into commercial cinema.⁶³

During the decline of the Taiwanese film industry in the 2000s, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) had a successful box office income in the Taiwanese market. However, this prosperity was just a flash in the pan. Moreover, although the Academy Award listed this film as Taiwanese, the film was a coproduction among companies based in mainland China, Hong

⁶⁰ Zhang, “从主旋律影片到主流大片的嬗变.”

⁶¹ Inna Chou, “2018 必看 25 部大片! 《蚁人 2》《死侍 2》《复仇者联盟》《超人特攻队 2》…全都回归 [25 Must Watch Big Film in 2018, Ant-Man 2, Deadpool2, Avengers, The Incredibles All Coming Back],” *Elle*, November 19, 2017, <http://www.elle.com/tw/entertainment/drama/g31984/25-must-see-movie-2018/>.

⁶² Xinhan Weng, “2017 最强电影年 部部卖座大片 [2017 Most Booming Year of Films, Every Film Is Box Office Hit Big Film],” *NOWnews*, December 31, 2017, <https://www.nownews.com/news/20170101/2357643>.

⁶³ Yeh and Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors*.

Kong, and Taiwan, and its global success is attributed to the marketing machinery of Sony Columbia Pictures.⁶⁴ Taiwanese film critic Wen Tianxiang states that the success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) in Taiwan only proves that the Taiwanese film market has potential. It does not indicate that Taiwan has the environment to produce such a big film.⁶⁵

In recent years, both *Cape No. 7* (2008) and *Monga* have been labelled as ‘Taiwanese Big Film’⁶⁶ or ‘Taiwanese big production’.⁶⁷ However, their patterns of success are not the same. As Steve Neale argues, there are two kinds of blockbusters; some are produced and marketed as ‘event films’, and others ‘become event films by dint of their growing and unexpected success’.⁶⁸ *Monga* is the first kind, and *Cape No. 7* (2008) is the second. However, in this research, Taiwanese blockbusters as a response to the global film market refers to the first type of blockbuster, like *Monga*, which is planned in advance and designed as a blockbuster.

Monga’s success is not a coincidence. Rather, it is the result of a well-planned, well-executed, expected business plan. With approximately NT\$70 million⁶⁹ for production and an extra NT\$10 million⁷⁰ for marketing, the production scale of *Monga* was definitely large in Taiwan at that time.⁷¹ However, compared to the average Hollywood movie budget, which was around US\$65 million in 2007 (plus US\$35 million for film marketing and promoting),⁷² the US\$2.6 million budget of *Monga* is extremely low. It is

⁶⁴ Chiu, Rawnsley, and Rawnsley, eds., *Taiwan Cinema*.

⁶⁵ Wen, 过影.

⁶⁶ Taipei Film Commission, “二十年来台制第一大片「艋舺」诞生在台北！.”

⁶⁷ “台湾电影年度大制作 《海角七号》 6/20 台北电影节世界首映 [29/6 The Premiere of Cape No. 7, Big Production of the Year],” *Cape No. 7 Official Blog*, Pixnet, June 15, 2008, <http://cape7.pixnet.net/blog/post/18771807>; According to Wang, the budget of Cape No.7 was US\$1.6 million, Wang, “Memories of the Future,” 135–51.

⁶⁸ Steve Neale, “Hollywood Blockbusters: Historical Dimensions,” in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁶⁹ Approximately equivalent to US\$2.6 million.

⁷⁰ Approximately equivalent to US\$340,000.

⁷¹ Valkyria, “电影营销人谈国片瓶颈.” In this article, Wang Shi, a famous film promotion expert, states that the average Taiwanese film budget is around NT\$30 million, which is approximately US\$1 million.

⁷² Annie Mueller, “Why Movies Cost So Much To Make,” *Investopedia*, June 13, 2011, <https://www.investopedia.com/financial-edge/0611/why-movies-cost-so-much-to-make.aspx>.

therefore necessary to clarify that even if the word *blockbuster* is used in Taiwan for both Hollywood blockbusters and Taiwanese-produced films, the production scale of Taiwanese *dapian* and Hollywood blockbusters are not comparable. However, the essence of the blockbuster stays the same: to achieve bigness and exceptionality.

So far, this section has examined how the concept of a blockbuster has been borrowed and localised outside Hollywood, especially in mainland China and Korea. I suggest that, bearing in mind the differences between the industrial scales in different areas, the term *blockbuster* can be used to characterise local film production.

A Taiwanese-produced film may seem insignificant from a global industrial perspective. However, it is worth investigating its domestic importance and the surrounding industry practices. Thus, the following sections in this chapter analyse the production practices in the case study *Monga* in four aspects, starting by introducing the two key people in this project, the director, Niu Chengze, and the producer, Li Lie, and the dynamic between these two significant agents. The next section focuses on the governmental funding for film production and how *Monga* benefited from this funding during its production stage. In the section that follows, I investigate the choice of film genre of *Monga* and argue that the gangster film and youth film elements are not only a choice of aesthetic but also a business decision, because they make the film attractive to the potential audience. In the last section, the research aims to examine the production design to present the perspectives through which the film attempts to speak to the national sentiment, where textual and contextual analysis of the time and location, Longshan, *Monga* in 1980s will also be presented, which clears the nature and its addresses to the viewers and give the reader an overall sense of the film.

Key People

As Caldwell points out, the auteur myth that ‘individual, artistic directors stand at the centre of the creative enterprise in film’ is still a dominant

understanding.⁷³ Following Bordwell, Thompson, and Staiger,⁷⁴ Caldwell argues that ‘the negotiated and collective authorship is an almost unavoidable and determining reality in contemporary film/television’.⁷⁵ Based on this understanding of authorship in film production, why are the two key people in this project, the director and the producer of *Monga*, still worth examining? What does their participation in the project reveal about the production culture in Taiwan? There are two perspectives on the answer to the questions above.

The first perspective is the multiple identities these key people played in creating *Monga*. Niu Chengze, the director, is also the co-scriptwriter and main editor of the film. Thus, he not only made artistic decisions during the primary production phase but also controlled the narrative style and structure in both the scriptwriting and final editing phases. Both Yin Huiwen, the associate producer and marketing manager, and Lin Yongyi, the editor of *Monga*, mentioned Niu’s dominant working style, in which he tended to join in every decision during the marketing, editing, and other stages of the filmmaking.⁷⁶

In the official promotion brochure, Li Lie’s name was listed as producer, executive producer, and line producer. In other words, she not only dealt with the creative, artistic aspects of the production, which included modifying the script, participating in casting, and controlling the direction, but was also primarily responsible ‘for obtaining production finance and handling business matters’.⁷⁷ The multiple identities of these key people reveal both the significance of their roles in this project and the reality of how filmmakers operate in Taiwanese film production.

The second perspective on why these two key people are worth investigating is their roles as financial investors in the project. Indeed, film is

⁷³ Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 198.

⁷⁴ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁷⁵ Caldwell, *Production Culture*. 190.

⁷⁶ Yongyi Lin, interview by author, October 5, 2017; Huiwen Yin, interview by author, September 26, 2017.

⁷⁷ Andrew Spicer, A. T. McKenna, and Christopher Meir, eds., *Beyond the Bottom Line: The Producer in Film and Television Studies* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 10.

art, which is collectively created by both ‘above the line’ and ‘below the line’ filmmakers. However, ‘film and television are so capital intensive, a script also functions as a financial prospectus, a detailed investment opportunity, and a corporate proposal’.⁷⁸ In the matter of the production of *Monga*, the roles that Niu and Li played were not only as above-the-line filmmakers but also as two of the six project investors, in other words, business partners. Thus, in this research, the director and the producer are considered both ‘the centre of the creative enterprise in film’⁷⁹ and the centre of the implementation of a business project, which is the production of *Monga*.

Monga is one of the most famous and celebrated films in the new millennium, especially after the dreadful decline of the Taiwanese film industry in the late 1990s. The film is also an excellent example of how the director and the producer teamed up, carried out a film production project, and gained both financial and career success. The film was nominated for six awards in the 2010 Golden Horse Awards, including Best Leading Actor (Ruan Jingtian), Outstanding Taiwanese Filmmaker of the Year (Li Lie), Best Sound Effects (Du Duzhi), Best Original Film Score (Chen Shanni), Best Art Direction, and Outstanding Taiwanese Filmmaker of the Year (Niu Chengze) and won the first three of the awards listed above. Moreover, critic Peter Debruge called it ‘an ambitious, broadly appealing genre pic tracking the rise of a teen gang, featuring Hollywood-calibre production values, an attractive young cast and a number of stunning setpieces.’⁸⁰

The scriptwriting of *Monga* started years before its production in 2008. According to an interview with Niu,⁸¹ the idea of *Monga* actually came from Jay Chou, the most famous Taiwanese pop music singer, who was called the ‘New King of Asian Pop’ by *Time* magazine in 2003.⁸² Niu described a phone

⁷⁸ Caldwell, *Production Culture*. 232.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 198.

⁸⁰ Peter Debruge, “Taiwan’s Offbeat Choice for Oscar Entry,” *Variety*, December 13, 2010, <http://variety.com/2010/film/awards/taiwan-s-offbeat-choice-for-oscar-entry-1118028624/>.

⁸¹ *Ma lai mo*, “与钮承泽面对面：漫谈[艋舺]，缅怀青春时代 [Face to Face Conversation with Niu Chengze],” *PChome Online*, accessed November 6, 2017, <http://mypaper.pchome.com.tw/wyp2221/post/1320495711>.

⁸² Kate Drake, “Cool Jay,” *Time*, March 3, 2003, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2047401-1,00.html>.

call with Chou on a night after Niu completed the shooting of *Say Yes Enterprise* (*Qiuhan Shuwusuo*, 2004), in which Chou offered the creative ideas for *Monga* and suggested that he could be the leading actor in the film. Due to the reputation of Chou, *Monga* caught the media's attention as early as its scriptwriting phase. However, Chou unexpectedly dropped out of the project, supposedly because his family opposed the idea of him acting and investing in the project due to the unpromising film market in Taiwan.⁸³ This caused the temporary cessation of the production of *Monga*.

The partnership between Niu and Li started when Li reached out to Niu to revive *Monga* after the project had been interrupted for a couple of years. Li's decision to bring *Monga* back to life was made not only because of the self-confidence she gained after the success of her first attempt at being a film producer for the film *Orz Boyz* (2008) but also her evaluation of the director Niu and the potential of the Taiwanese commercial film market. Li started her career as an actress in the late 1970s, performing in movies such as *The Story of a Small Town* (*Xiaocheng Gushi*, dir. Li Xing, 1979) and *That Day on the Beach* (*Haitan De Yitian*, dir. Edward Yang, 1983). She also appeared in several locally produced Taiwanese TV series. Afterwards, she disappeared from public view in the late 1980s for nearly a decade. When she moved back to Taiwan after spending five years in mainland China as a businesswoman, two years in Hong Kong, and another three years in New York, she decided to go back to the media industry as a TV drama producer. Li started her career as a film producer on the film *Orz Boyz* (2008). Distributed by Warner Bros. (Taiwan) Inc. (hereafter 'Warner Bros.'), this NT\$17 million budget project had a box office of NT\$34 million and another NT\$1 million from selling the copyright to Japan.⁸⁴ The success of *Orz Boyz* (2008) encouraged Li to go a step further as a film producer.

⁸³ Dong dong, "周杰伦自掏腰包拍《艋舺》 母亲反对难开机 [Jay Chou Pay from the Own Pocket for Shooting *Monga*, Opposition from His Mother Causing Delay]," *Sina Entertainment*, July 27, 2005, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2005-07-21/0747786192.html?from=wap>.

⁸⁴ NT\$17 million is approximately equivalent to US\$596,000, and NT\$34 million is around US\$1.19 million. NT\$1 million is approximately equivalent to US\$35,000.

The decision to collaborate with Niu was also made based on Li's evaluation of his capability as a director. As Li stated in a personal interview,

I did not work together with him because we are friends. For me, he is a director who can tell a coherent story. In my opinion, telling a coherent story is a very important capability as a director.... Moreover, I think about commercial film production, he has his sensitivity and consciousness.⁸⁵

As with Li, Niu started his career in the film industry in the 1970s as an actor. In 1983, Niu played A Qing in *All the Youthful Days* (1983) and Xiao Bi in *Growing Up* (1983), which are the most famous roles in his acting career. He changed his career path to directing when he directed his first TV drama, *Xiao Guang* (2000). After the success of *Kiss of the Toast* (*Tu Si Nan Zhi Wen*, 2001), Niu established his own production company, Honto Production, in August 2002. He directed *Say Yes Enterprise* (*Qiu Hun Shi Wu Suo*, 2004), *Wayward Kenting* (*Wo Zai Ken Ding Tian Qi Qing*, 2007), and other TV dramas, music videos, and commercial advertisements. In all four TV dramas mentioned above, Niu not only directed but also played a role in each series. Since both *Say Yes Enterprise* (2004) and *Wayward Kenting* (2007) were produced by Honto Production, Niu was also the producer of these two television series, which illustrates his ability as a director as well as a producer. In 2007, *What On Earth Have I Done Wrong?!* (2007), Niu's first feature film, was released. Using a mockumentary style, Niu played himself in the film and expressed his discontent towards society and the film production environment in Taiwan. In the case of *Monga*, Niu was not only a co-screenwriter, the director, and an editor but also one of the six investors in this project. Even though Niu exercised extensive creative control over *Monga*, the project would not have been initiated without the producer's collaboration.

Moreover, as Li said in her interview, she took this project up because of her judgement about the film market in Taiwan:

⁸⁵ Lie Li, interview by author, September 26, 2017.

Now considering the whole situation of the Taiwanese film industry, I think Taiwan needed a film like this. First, it is a gangster film. So called a gangster film, it is also a story about some young people.... It has the gangster, the youth, the brotherhood elements. These are the elements, which I think the film market in Taiwan needed, and it is a theme that the audience would be curious about.⁸⁶

The phenomenal success of *Cape No. 7* (2008) has been considered the revival year of Taiwanese cinema, illustrating the capacity of the Taiwanese local film market as well as giving hope to filmmakers and film investors to enact relatively large budget projects.⁸⁷

Li's insight on Taiwanese film industry was crucial to the project of *Monga*. Commercially speaking, the evaluations Li Lie made towards both the script of *Monga* and the director proved to be accurate. This NT\$70 million⁸⁸ budget film appealed to a large scale of audience in Taiwan and generated Hollywood-level box office success, NT\$260 million,⁸⁹ which ranked third in 2010 Taiwan box office income, following *Inception* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2010) and *Iron Man 2* (dir. Jon Favreau, 2010), according to the *2011 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook*.⁹⁰

To reach this achievement, the director and the producer carefully planned every stage of development and production. The highlights of this profit-making success can be summarised in four points: utilising government support, responding to the national sentiment, bringing Warner Bros. on board as distributor, and creating a marketing and promotion strategy. The first three points are investigated later in this chapter, and the last element is discussed separately in the following chapter.

The partnership between Niu and Li plays a crucial role in the project of *Monga*. They secured and contributed to the film as investors, the initiators,

⁸⁶ Li, interview by author.

⁸⁷ Wen, 过影.

⁸⁸ Approximately equivalent to US\$2.3 million.

⁸⁹ Approximately equivalent to US\$8.9 million.

⁹⁰ 2011 台湾电影年鉴 [2011 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook] (Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute, 2011).

and the director and the producer of the film. They also negotiated a promising release date for the film during the spring festival season. However, the working relationship between Niu and Li as colleagues, business partners, and long-time friends was not simply in harmony throughout the project. Disagreements and differences appeared during their partnership. These disputes may have added some complexity to their cooperation, but generally speaking, they did not weaken the film project. Rather, they kept the project organised and moving forward at the necessary pace. Disputes between the key people also add another dimension for understanding the dynamic working relationship during film production in the Taiwanese film industry.

Despite their nearly three-decade-long friendship and the success of their collaborative work, *Monga* is the first and only film project Niu and Li worked on together. In this relationship, instead of one person being the other's employee, Niu and Li were partners, and both of their opinions were valued approximately equally. However, both Niu and Li expressed in interviews on various occasions that arguments were part of their daily work. Reading through the media coverage, published documents, and personal interviews, the conflicts between Niu and Li can be grouped into a number of categories.

The first type of conflict was over time and money, the two elements that intertwine together when producing a film. Conflicts about money between film directors and producers are very common. They happened in the great partnership between Hitchcock and Selznick on every film they worked on together.⁹¹ They also happened to other directors and producers in Taiwan. For instance, Huang Zhiming, the producer of *Cape No. 7* (2008), referred to the difficulties of balancing the director's artistic and narrative pursuit and the budget when working with the director Wei Desheng.⁹² This also happened to

⁹¹ Leonard J. Leff, *Hitchcock and Selznick: The Rich and Strange Collaboration of Alfred Hitchcock and David O. Selznick in Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁹² Meiwen Tang, “专访《海角七号》制片黄志明 [Exclusive Interview with the Producer of *Cape No. 7* Huang Zhiming],” in *2009 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook* (Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute, 2009), 48-52.

Niu and Li when they teamed up for *Monga*. Being given a promising release schedule during the spring festival period in 2010 by Warner Bros. left Niu and Li less than a year to complete the project, from finding funding for primary shooting to finishing the postproduction. Besides the time pressure, as two of the six investors on the project, both Niu and Li risked their personal financial statuses by investing in *Monga*.⁹³ As Li expressed in an interview conducted by Ge Daxiong,⁹⁴ due to lack of experience in handling a large-budget project like *Monga*, during the primary production phase, the director and the film crew faced difficulties in keeping to the shooting schedule. This situation led to exhaustion for the crew and caused pressure on budget control.

As the producer of the film, it was Li's responsibility to ensure that the shooting took place at the planned pace. For the same reason, Li pushed Niu to complete the postproduction editing within a month due to lack of time, which caused another disagreement between the director and the producer, with the former accusing the latter of lacking respect for his job.⁹⁵ There were also arguments about hiring Yang Kil Young as the action director. Indeed, Yang's participation complimented Niu's artistic pursuit in visual effects and added value to the final product. However, from the perspective of the producer, bringing Yang on board meant extra costs from hiring translators and other expenses. Despite these disagreements between Niu and Li, the compromises that Niu had to submit the final cut to the distribution company on time and that Li had to calculate the budget of hiring a foreign crew member were made after negotiation and arbitration, and the project was the better for them.

Besides the conflicts over time and money, personality and temperament also caused difficulties between Niu and Li. Despite Li's attempts to clarify on various occasions, including during her personal interview by the author,⁹⁶ that the disagreements and conflicts between her and

⁹³ Li, interview by author.

⁹⁴ Daxiong Ge, “《艋舺》的成功经验——专访制片李烈 [Successful Experience of *Monga*-Interview with Li Lie],” in *2011 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook* (Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute, 2011), 78-89.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Li, interview by author.

Niu were only at the business level, it appears that Niu's short temper became an issue in this working relationship. Both Li and Yin Huiwen expressed that Niu's temperamental manner caused discomfort and anxiety among the film crew.⁹⁷ In these cases, Li needed to play the role as bridge between the crew and the director to explain the situation.

Finally, coming back to the public eye as the director of a large-budget film two decades after his career climax playing Xiao Bi in *Growing Up* (1983) was not only a chance for Niu to reshape his professional path but also an opportunity to achieve fame as a celebrity. However, as a former famous actress and a rare female producer, Li's reputation skyrocketed, which also secured her win of the award for Outstanding Taiwanese Filmmaker of the Year at the Golden Horse Awards, the same award for which Niu was nominated. Additionally, after *Monga* went viral in Taiwan, one of the leading actors, Ruan Jingtian, has become a box office guarantee. Niu and Li intended to share their success by founding an agency company with the only signed actor, Ruan, but this undertaking collapsed, reputedly due to further disagreement among the three parties soon after its establishment.⁹⁸

In sum, this section has looked closely at the role of the two most vital people in the project, Niu Chengze and Li Lie. As I argued in the earlier chapter, the concept of blockbuster is borrowed and localised in Taiwan. However, due to the film industry scale, the blockbuster production scale in Taiwan varies from Hollywood blockbuster. Here through the multiple identities of Li and Niu, it shows two aspects of contemporary Taiwan commercial film making. First, the division of work between the above the line staff is blurred by one person in charge of multiple aspects of the project. Second, the tradition of Taiwan New Cinema that the film auteur as the centre of creativity of the film still has influence on the film industry in Taiwan in 2020. However, the dynamic between Niu and Li also challenged the auteur centred tradition that the producer of a film has garnered as much attention as

⁹⁷ Ge, “《艋舺》的成功经验——专访制片李烈.”; Yin, interview by author.

⁹⁸ “合伙 2 个月闹失和，阮经天传惹恼李烈 [Dispute After Two Month Cooperation, Ruan Jingtian May Irritate Li Lie],” *Liberty Times Net*, May 15, 2015, <https://ent.ltn.com.tw/news/breakingnews/807712>.

the film's director. In the next section, the thesis focuses on the next elements of government support that the project received and how it benefited the film production.

Government Support

In Taiwan, film production support and a subsidy system at the national level have been available for over half a century. According to the Encyclopedia of Taiwan, when the foreign film quota was established in Taiwan in 1954, film workers or companies needed to pay NT\$100,000 for every imported foreign film to the subsidy system to fund the production of national films.⁹⁹ In 1988, Liao Xiangxiong, director of the film department at the Government Information Office (GIO), established a film subsidy grant application committee, aiming to motivate filmmakers to produce films that are both entertaining and have cultural value.¹⁰⁰ At first, there were ten films granted NT\$3 million every year.¹⁰¹ If the film made a profit at the box office, excess funds had to be given back to the GIO. A good example of a film that benefited from these grants is *The Dull Ice Flower* (*Lu Bing Hua*, dir. Yang Ligu, 1989), which was funded in the first year and achieved box office success as well as a good reputation with audiences.

After the initial success of the subsidy grants, in 1992, the total amount available was raised from NT\$30 million to NT\$100 million.¹⁰² In 1998, grants for short films and documentaries were added to the subsidy category, and the grants for feature films were raised again to NT\$120 million.¹⁰³ The standards for film selection have been changed and revised over the years, and variations on the grants have been added to the list. For instance, there is now

⁹⁹ Huang Ren, “国片辅导金 [National Film Subsidy],” Encyclopedia of Taiwan, accessed February 15, 2018, <http://nrch.culture.tw/twpedia.aspx?id=20931>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Approximately equivalent to US\$100,931.

¹⁰² Approximately equivalent to US\$1 million and US\$3.4 million.

¹⁰³ Approximately equivalent to US\$4 million; Huang, “国片辅导金.”

a grant for importing advanced photographic equipment and upgrading to digital screening apparatus.¹⁰⁴

The national film subsidy grant from the GIO has benefited many filmmakers. Many successful Taiwanese directors, including Tsai Ming Liang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, and Edward Yang, have been supported by the program.¹⁰⁵ However, since the 1990s, arguments about these subsidy grants have continued. On one side, it has been argued that since films have cultural value, financial support from the government should focus on art house cinema instead of commercial feature films. On the other side, the argument is that since films are commercial products, a focus on art house films might push Taiwanese films in a direction that is not welcomed by the mainstream audience, which looks for entertainment in the cinema.¹⁰⁶

In the late 1990s, the number of Taiwanese films being produced declined, even though the total amount of grant money being given out continued to grow. Hu argues that this is because production companies moved their investment interest to Hong Kong and mainland China due to the poor production conditions and low attendance rates in the cinema in Taiwan.¹⁰⁷ Li and Huang point out that in recent years, even though the industry has been supported by the government, the number of local films being produced is similar to the number of films that have received the subsidy grant from the GIO.¹⁰⁸ It seems that instead of being motivated by the subsidy grants from the GIO to produce more films, the filmmakers and the companies in the film industry have become more dependent on the grants.

Since the turn of the new millennium, two major plans related to the film industry have been introduced: the Film Industry Revitalization Plan (振

¹⁰⁴ Tianduo Li and Jianhan Huang, “光影幻象与汉江奇迹：韩国电影产业发展对台湾电影启示[The Enlightenment of Korean Film Industry to Taiwan’s],” *Contemporary Cinema*, no.6 (2008): 86-99.

¹⁰⁵ Steve Hu, “从台湾电影辅导策略观察电影现状 [The Policy and Situation of Taiwan Film],” *Contemporary Cinema*, no.8 (2012): 108–12.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁰⁸ Li and Huang, “光影幻象与汉江奇迹.”

兴电影产业计划) in November 2002 and the Film Industry Developing Flagship Plan (电影产业发展旗舰计书) in March 2009. In 2002, the cultural industry was listed as one of the ten key investment areas by Taiwanese government, and a team within the Ministry of Economic Affairs that focused on promoting cultural industries proposed the Film Industry Revitalization Plan.¹⁰⁹ The plan ran from 2002 to 2007 and spent around NT\$1 billion.¹¹⁰¹¹¹ The proposal stated that the plan had short-term, mid-term, and long-term aspirations, which were enhancing the quantity of film productions, forming a film industry system, and becoming the centre of Chinese-language cultural production respectively.¹¹² Similarly, the Film Industry Developing Flagship Plan was also carried out by the GIO from 2010 to 2014. This plan mainly focused on three aspects: film production, marketing and promotion, and film education.¹¹³ The budget of this plan was over NT\$6 billion.¹¹⁴

The film *Monga* was produced during this period when the film industry, as part of the creative industry and the cultural industry, had drawn the attention of the government. The exact amount of grants from the government may be insignificant compared to the total budget of *Monga*, but as Chen Xiuru points out, government funding has become a standard for evaluating whether a project is worth investment.¹¹⁵ In other words, whether a project receives government grants can determine whether it receives other private or business investment, which directly links to whether the project can

¹⁰⁹ Xiaoyan Chen, “台湾电影产业的支持性策略 [The Supportive Strategy of Taiwan’s Film Industry],” *Contemporary Cinema*, no.10, (2015): 117-20.

¹¹⁰ Approximately equivalent to US\$33.4 million.

¹¹¹ Ruiting Chu, “台湾电影辅导政策的检讨与建议 [Rethinking Taiwan Film Subsidy and Suggestions],” *National Policy Foundation*, October 6, 2011, <http://www.npf.org.tw/2/9776>.

¹¹² Chu, “台湾电影辅导政策的检讨与建议.”

¹¹³ Chen, “台湾电影产业的支持性策略.”

¹¹⁴ Approximately equivalent to US\$201.9 million.

¹¹⁵ Xue Ruoyi et al., “拍片入场券， 辅导金的现实面 [The Pass for Film Making, The Reality Aspect of Film Subsidy Grants],” *National Chengchi University Online News*, April 14, 2017, <https://unews.nccu.edu.tw/unews/%e6%8b%8d%e7%89%87%e5%85%a5%e5%a0%b4%e5%8d%b7%e3%80%80%e8%bc%94%e5%b0%8e%e9%87%91%e7%9a%84%e7%8f%be%e5%af%a6%e9%9d%a2/>.

be launched and executed. Thus, the next section focuses on the subsidy grants and other kinds of support that *Monga* received at various production stages and at both the national and local levels.

Monga and Government Subsidies

According to the *Taiwan Cinema Yearbook*, *Monga* was financially supported by three different film subsidy grants at the national level.¹¹⁶ It received funding for marketing and screening a national film, which were NT\$3,000,000 and NT\$1,500,000 respectively.¹¹⁷ There was another NT\$60,000¹¹⁸ grant for film digitalisation technology. Furthermore, due to the success of *Monga* at the box office, Niu's following work, *Love*, received a box office return of NT\$46,557,299.¹¹⁹

Huang points out that city governments in Taiwan, including Taipei, Kaohsiung, and other cities, aim to promote and market their cities through films in the name of subsidising film production.¹²⁰ In the same article, she introduces the concept of place placement, explaining that its nature is the same as that of product placement. In other words, the logic behind place placement and product placement is the same: 'the insertion of branded products or services into mass media content with the intent of influencing consumer attitude or behaviour'.¹²¹ However, in the case of place placement,

¹¹⁶ 2010 年台湾电影年鉴 [2010 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook], (Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute, 2010).

¹¹⁷ For marketing subsidy grants, NT\$3 million (approximately equivalent to US\$100,908) is the maximum a project can receive. As for the grants for screening, for films released during the spring festival, winter vacation, and summer vacation periods, the maximum amount a project can receive is NT\$1.5 million (approximately equivalent to US\$50,454), which is NT\$0.5 million (around US\$16,818) higher than grants for films released during other periods; Taiwan Film Institute, 2010 年台湾电影年鉴.

¹¹⁸ Approximately equivalent to US\$20,181.

¹¹⁹ Approximately equivalent to US\$156.7 million; Taiwan Film Institute, 2011 年台湾电影年鉴.

¹²⁰ Shuling Huang, "地点置入：地方政府影视观光政策的分析 [Place Placement: An Analysis of Local Government's Film Tourism Policy in Taiwan]," *Mass Communication Research* (2016): 1–46.

¹²¹ Jay Newell, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang, "The Hidden History of Product Placement," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 50 (2006): 575–94, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem5004_1.

as Huang describes it, the product that is being inserted into the mass media is the city and its touristic image.

Kaohsiung was the first city in Taiwan to initiate film subsidy grants at the municipal level. In 2003, the Kaohsiung city government invited the director Tsai Ming-liang to Kaohsiung to shoot *The Wayward Cloud* (*Tian Bian Yi Duo Yun*, 2005). In 2005, the TV crew of *Black & White* (*Pi Zi Ying Xiong*, dir. Cai Yuexun, 2009) was supported by eight departments of the Kaohsiung city government, including the security and technical departments.¹²² This TV drama won five awards at the 44th Golden Bell Awards. Setting its major filming locations in Kaohsiung, the TV drama not only built up a good reputation for the city but also benefited tourism in Kaohsiung.¹²³ The success of this case also caused criticism of the Taipei city government because they rejected an application by the production team of *Black & White* (2009) to use the Taipei Metro as a filming location. Seeing how the success of place placement caused tourism to blossom in Kaohsiung, the Taipei city government was urged to enact a series of policies to support the film industry as well as to promote the city. By the end of 2007, the Taipei Film Commission was established to provide services like location scouting, traffic control, advertisement broadcasting, talent cultivation, and a funding scheme for film production in Taipei.¹²⁴

Following the example of the Kaohsiung city government, many cities in Taiwan enacted new policies to subsidise film and television production. Huang points out that the film subsidy policies put in place by the city governments all over Taiwan can be summarised as having at least one of the following four requirements: (1) using the city's history, culture, locations, or industry as background or having the plot highly related to the city; (2) shooting at least one-fourth to one-third of the film in the city; (3) having

¹²² Yirong Wu, “《艋舺》，行銷了“谁”的艋舺？[“Whose” Monga Has Been Marketed by the Movie Monga],” Master Thesis, National Taiwan University, Graduate Institute of Journalism College of Social Science, 2011.

¹²³ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁴ “About TFC,” *Taipei Film Commission*, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://www.filmcommission.taipei/en/AboutFilmCommission/Static/6720>.

identifiable locations in the city in the film; or (4) revealing the spirit of the city or benefiting the city's interests. As the former New Taipei City Principle argues, the city government has different responsibility from the GIO.¹²⁵ In other words, the film subsidies from the municipal level focus more on benefiting the economy of the city rather than the development of the film industry.

There is no doubt that subsidies at the municipal level are an important source for funding film production in addition to the film subsidy grant from the GIO. According to Huang, from 2007 to 2013, one-third of Taiwanese films were subsidised at a municipal level. In 2012, twenty-seven out of forty-three films produced in Taiwan, over 60%, received grants at the municipal level.¹²⁶ The data indicate that aside from the national film subsidy from the GIO, subsidies and grants from city governments have become another important financial source for local productions.

According to Wu, the Department of Cultural Affairs of the Taipei city government has two policies that promote the city through film industries, namely subsidising film productions and establishing the Taipei Film Commission.¹²⁷ The Commission was established at the end of 2007 and started operations in 2008. There were two main reasons for establishing the commission: creating a friendly shooting environment to attract more film crews to Taipei, and promoting the city as a tourist destination. According to the official website of the Taipei Film Commission, besides the director of the city's Department of Cultural Affairs, there are around ten committee members on the board, including experts in film directing, production or distribution, and other film-production related areas.¹²⁸ Li Lie, the producer of *Monga*, was one of the members of the commission. In 2008, when the commission first began its film subsidy grant program, the budget was NT\$12 million,¹²⁹ which was given to seven film productions, including *Parking*

¹²⁵ Cited from Huang, “地点置入.”

¹²⁶ Huang, “地点置入.”

¹²⁷ Wu, “《艋舺》，营销了“谁”的艋舺？.”

¹²⁸ The full list of the current committee members see “About TFC.”

¹²⁹ Approximately equivalent to US\$403,632.

(*Tingche*, dir. Zhong Menghong, 2009) and *How Are You, Dad?* (*Ba, Ni Hao Ma?*, dir. Zhang Zouji, 2009). The grants were not only offered to Taiwanese films and companies but also open to coproduction projects, which are discussed in detail in chapter 7.

When the Taipei Film Commission was first funded, an example case needed to be set to let people see the determination of the commission in supporting the film industry, and *Monga* was chosen as the example.¹³⁰ *Monga* was one of the three bustling market districts in Taipei in the late Qing dynasty. The word comes from an indigenous group known as Taiwanese Plains and means ‘little boat’ in their language. Later, the word was adopted as the name of the area where the Plains people traded with the Han people. In 1920, the official name of this area was changed to Wanhua, which means ‘prosper forever’ in Mandarin. However, the name *Monga* is still widely used today to refer to this district in Taipei. As Li Youping states, the film *Monga* was the symbol of the Taipei Film Commission, and she hoped tourism and business in the *Monga* area (Wanhua District) would be boosted through the film. Therefore, at the municipal level in Taipei, *Monga* received support throughout its production.

In 2009, two groups of films, eight films in total, were subsidised by the film subsidy grant program of the Taipei Film Commission. *Monga* was one of four films in the second group, which received NT\$4 million.¹³¹ Aside from the direct financial support, the project received other forms of assistance during the production phase. According to Wu’s report, around 500 people were sent by the city government to assist in various aspects during the shooting of the film, including traffic control police, community office coordinators, and others. As mentioned above, the producer, Li Lie, also organised over fifteen coordination meetings in the neighbourhood in cooperation with the city government.¹³²

¹³⁰ Wu, “《艋舺》，行銷了“谁”的艋舺？”

¹³¹ Approximately equivalent to US\$134,554; Cited in Wu, “《艋舺》，行銷了“谁”的艋舺？”

¹³² Ibid., 11.

One particular scene provides a good example of the Taipei Film Commission's assistance to the production of *Monga*. The scene, the largest in the film, starts with Mosquito (Zhao Youting) jumping down from a pavilion on the ground and fighting besides his gang against a large group of enemies. Over 500 amateur actors were deployed from the middle-south part of the island to act as extras.

As Guan Weijie, one of the assistant directors, said, 'at that time, *Monga* was the biggest budget film in Taiwan. So there were complications during the process. Moreover, there were obstacles when this case was put into execution.'¹³³ According to Guan, the camera movements were not complicated, but it was challenging to work together with hundreds of amateur actors. Without any rehearsal before the shooting day, the scene took the crew the whole day to complete. According to one official behind-the-scenes video, it took twenty takes to complete. Originally, the directing group of *Monga* consisted of five people, including two first assistant directors (ADs), two second ADs, and one clapper-loader.¹³⁴ Lin Shuyu, one of the first ADs, was in charge of the shooting schedules, and Hao Fangwei, the other first AD, was responsible for on-scene management. However, Guan said during the interview that 'except for Shuyu, Fangwei, I, and another AD, there were another three to four ADs equipped to the scene that day. Because it's a scene of a group fight, we were worried that accidents could happen.' Guan continued that 'it was really hot that day. And it was difficult to control the amateur actors. It was hard to tell whether the people transferred here as amateur actors were really actors or not.... So we separated the street into small blocks, and everyone took charge of one block.' To prepare for shooting this scene, signs were put up over seven days before to give people notice in advance. Moreover, there were traffic police helping to block the street for shooting as well.¹³⁵

To conclude, even though the role of the national film subsidy is contentious, as mentioned above, in the case of *Monga*, the governmental film

¹³³ Weijie Guan, interview by author, September 30, 2017.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Wu, "《艋舺》，行銷了“谁”的艋舺？."

grants at both the national and regional level relieved the financial pressure on the production team. Being labelled a government subsidised project also reassured investors that *Monga* was a financially promising project in which to invest. In addition, the practical support from the Taipei Film Commission facilitated communication between the production team and related government departments and also softened tensions between the team and the local communities.

Nonetheless, *Monga*'s dependence on government grants and subsidies at both the national and municipal level reveals the reality of film production circumstances in Taiwan. Though *Monga* can be considered a locally produced blockbuster, for the project to gain investment, it first needed to secure national film subsidy grants as insurance for its investors. Even with its NT\$70 million budget for production and the assistance of the Taipei Film Commission, the production team still faced difficulties shooting the largest scene of the film. It appears that filmmakers in Taiwan at the time still lacked experience in the production of blockbusters. In the next section, the focus shifts from a macro level of production to a micro level. Following from formal analysis, the next section seeks to investigate how *Monga* appealed to the national sentiments through a brief textual reading that provides the sense of the film text before moving to the choice of film genre and production design.

National Sentiment Aroused in Monga

Promoted as a Taiwanese blockbuster, the Taiwan-ness of *Monga* derives not only from the majority of the film crew coming from Taiwan and the main filming locations being in Taipei but also from the fact that it appeals to the national sentiment from various angles, namely the context of the 1980s in Monga, Taipei, the choice of film genre, the choice of title, the production design and reconstruction of film locations, the use of the local dialect, and the use of a reminiscent soundtrack. In this section, I examine these 'Taiwanese touches' to investigate how these elements were integrated into *Monga* and what they reveal about the production culture of Taiwanese film. Through this analysis, I argue that by using characteristic symbols to recall audiences'

memories and speak viewers' national sentiments, *Monga* stands out in the Taiwanese film market, which has been dominated by Hollywood productions.

Before moving into detailed analysis of the national sentiment aroused in *Monga*, it is necessary to discuss what national sentiment means here. As I argued in chapter 1, the word national in Taiwanese context is highly contested. And the better way to approach nation and national is to consider it as a fluid concept that does not consist of any stable, unified paradigm. Similarly, here the concept of national sentiment is not a summary of a unified sentiment that derived from a unified national concept. In Emilie Yeh's article, she differentiates *xiangtu* and *bentu*.¹³⁶ The former, which means the homeland in Mandarin Chinese, derived from Nativist literature, *xiangtu wenxue*, is presented by Taiwan New Cinema with images and sounds in an understated and oblique style that is close to the experience of the local audience. However, it together with Taiwan New Cinema has become museum pieces nowadays that are showcased in museums, festivals, galleries and universities. At the same time, the young filmmakers are rebuilding local popular film through, which she calls it, *bentu* cinema. *Bentu* comes from the word *bentuhua*, which means root-land in Chinese. As Yeh states, it refers to 'the indigenization movement, and the ideology fundamental to Taiwan's political reforms and democratization in recent decades'.¹³⁷ The author argues that the *bentu* cinema reaches out to local audiences. And more importantly, it is a topography that 'Japanese colonial past and KMT rule are preserved together as vestiges of local time, and lasting marks of Taiwan identity'.¹³⁸ In other words, *bentu* Taiwan is a more richer and spacious approach to Taiwan as a nation. And the *bentu* Taiwan includes not a unified discourse but different identities, conflict of interest and so on. But different from *xiangtu* in that the homeland refers to either Taiwan or mainland China, '*bentu* is more sharply defined as a Taiwan-based sentiment'.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Emilie Yeh, 'Bentu: Marketplace and Sentiments of Contemporary Taiwan Cinema', *Asian Cinema* 25, no. 1 (1 April 2014): 7–13, https://doi.org/10.1386/ac.25.1.7_7.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

In the same direction of *bentu*, here national sentiment does not indicate that there is a unified Taiwanese identity. But it consists of varied historical memories of Taiwan of different time periods, sentiments that belong to the people who considered Taiwan as their home. And in *Monga*, the national sentiment is articulated through several aspects, namely the setting of the film in 1986, the location of Monga, Longshan, the Taiwanese gangster genre and the nostalgic production design. Thus, the following analysis consists of two sections. I examine firstly the broader cultural and historical context of the film and then the industrial focused aspects including the genre, the title and the production design.

The film starts with the main character Mosquito 's first day in the new school in Monga area. He gets into trouble with the *houbicuo* gang because of a chicken leg in his lunch box. After seeing Mosquito fighting the *houbicuo* gang himself, Dragon and Monk, decide to include Mosquito in their Gang of Princes, a section of the *miaokou* gang, which leads by the father of Dragon, Geta. The opening sequence pictured the gang underworld in Monga area. In late 20th century, Monga is controlled and governed by different *gatao*, which they separated their territories by train stations, theatres, night markets and landmarks. Normally, *gatao* do not expand their territories and also won't go into other *gatao*'s territory. This is the reason why in the opening scene, when chasing Mosquito , the *houbicuo* gang run into the territory of *miaokou* gang, it causes tension between the two gangs. In 1980s, the local *gatao* consisted of *benshengren*, the islanders, are only one part of the gangster world. In *Monga*, the gang led by Grey Wolf has become a threat to the local *gatao*. Through the story of *Monga*, the filmmaker pin points two key elements in the film, Monga as the key location, and the 1980s as the transitioning period in Taiwan's history.

As mentioned earlier, Monga is one of the oldest districts of Taipei, which can date back to the early 18th century. As one of the most prosperous trading areas, the film portrays the area as a local, bustling and diverse district through the settings of night market, the temple and the red light district. In the Monga area, the most visited temple is Longshan Temple, built in 1738, and has been an important landmark in Taipei since then. The frequent flow of

people led to the rise of the surrounding shopping streets and the development of Monga from the riverside area to the interior. During the mid to late Qing Dynasty, Longshan Temple became a centre of faith, self-government and self-defence for the Monga area, with all matters of discussion, litigation and mediation being adjudicated by the spirits. During the period of martial law, *dangwai* activists often gathered at the area around Longshan temple, where the most of the population were *benshengren*. Thus, Longshan temple was referred to as the politically most sensitive spot in Taipei. On 19th May 1986, Zheng Nanrong and the other *dangwai* activists started the 519 Green Action to protest against the rule of martial law. More than 200 *tangwai* people were gathered in the Monga area and their procession plan was stopped by thousands of police force and blocked inside the Longshan Temple.

The perspectives of *benshengren* and *waishengren* towards domestic politics may be different. But the sentiments of the 1980s as a turbulent period are alike. Outside of Monga area, in Taiwan, the force of democratisation from both the people on the island and international pressure accumulated, which pushed the KMT government to lift the nearly four decades' martial law and reform the government structure. And in Monga, like presented in the film, the old order set by *gataos* was also challenged by the growing power of other gangs. And the traditional value, for example Geta said in the film that guns are inferior people, was also challenged by the development of the new world. Thus, the film aroused the national sentiment of the transitioning 1980s that on one hand the flourishing and bustling market and the temples that represent the nostalgic good old days are still there. On the other hand, the old orders were threatened as well as forced to be reformed.

Niu disclosed in an interview in the official behind-the-scenes publication that for him, the 1980s were the good old days, full of his personal memories of his youth.¹⁴⁰ He put his personal experience of having a close relationship with a local gangster group leader into his scriptwriting. Li also recognised the gangster elements in the script, as mentioned earlier, as a factor

¹⁴⁰ Yanshuo Feng, 艋舺：精装写真与幕后纪实 [Monga Portray in Hardcover and Behind-the-Scenes Record] (Taipei: Guo Ji Jiao Chuan Taiwan, 2010).

that could lead the project to success.¹⁴¹ As Neale stressed, genres consist of both a group of films and expectations which ‘spectators bring with them to the cinema, and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process’.¹⁴² Although *Monga* was accused by academics of being a fake gangster film that only used gangster elements to add complexity to the narrative,¹⁴³ it cannot be denied that these gangster elements not only became a marketing point, which is examined in the next chapter, but also revealed some of the special characteristics of Taiwanese gangster films since the 1970s, as listed below.

First, the story of *Monga* was based in the 1980s in Monga District, Taipei, and the main conflict in the storyline is between the islanders (*benshengren*) and mainlanders (*waishengren*). American gangster films are said to feature a key conflict between the ‘two fundamental and opposing American ideologies... America as a land of opportunity and the vision of a classless, democratic society’.¹⁴⁴ However, in contrast to American gangster films, Taiwanese gangster films, after the lifting of martial law in 1987, often focused on the conflicts between islanders and mainlanders.¹⁴⁵ Films like *A City of Sadness* (*Beiqing Chengshi*, dir. Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1989), *Dust of Angels* (*Shaonian Ye, An La!*, dir. Xu Xiaoming, 1992), and *A Brighter Summer Day* (*Gulingjie Shaonian Sharen Shijian*, dir. Edward Yang, 1991) all explored the unique connection between the Taiwanese national and cultural identity and the gangster film genre, and *Monga* uses a similar theme. In *Monga*, the gangsters led by Geta represent the islanders, who face the emerging power of the newly formed gang of mainlanders led by Grey Wolf.

¹⁴¹ Li, interview by author.

¹⁴² Steve Neale, “Questions of Genre,” *Screen* 31 (1990): 45–66, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/31.1.45>.

¹⁴³ Dominique Y.-C. Liao, “帮派、国族与男性气概：解严后台湾电影中的帮派男性形象 [Gangster, Nation and Masculinity: Gangster Men in Taiwanese Post-Martial Law Films],” *Router: A Journal of Cultural Studies* (2015): 53–78.

¹⁴⁴ Jack Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster Film*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6.

¹⁴⁵ Liao, “Gangster, Nation and Masculinity.”

Second, the appearance of the gang members in Taiwanese gangster films is distinct from the trim suits with creased trousers of *Once Upon a Time in America* (dir. Sergio Leone, 1984) or the gangsters in *A Better Tomorrow* (*Yingxiong Bense*, dir. John Woo, 1986). As Liao pointed out, the dress style of gangsters in Taiwanese gangster films is usually casual and rugged; they often have buzzcut hairstyles, wear flowery casual shirts, flip-flops, and baggy jeans, and hang around the neighbourhood while chewing areca nuts.¹⁴⁶ The distinct appearance of the Taiwanese gangster not only reveals the character of Taiwanese culture but also the social indications, while the rough, rugged image shows the conflict between urban and rural, civilised and uncivilised in 1990s Taiwan.

On one hand, publicity, marketing, and the media play an important role in building the narrative image of a film genre, including gangster films. On the other hand, the elements of genre in a film can become perfect marketing points and word-of-mouth discourses. Whether *Monga* can be categorised as a gangster film may be arguable, but producing a film with these catchy elements to attract an audience lowers the risk of the film being successful in the film market.

Besides the choice of genre, the choice of film title was also intended to arouse the national sentiment among the potential audience. As mentioned earlier, the concept of *Monga* came from the famous Taiwanese hip-hop singer Jay Chou. He presented the idea to the director, Niu, and suggested using the name of the area Monga as the film title. As Simon Huang, the marketing manager of United International Pictures (Taiwan), said during an interview with Michael Curtin, 'when [people] go to the theatre, they have to have a feeling about the title. The title is more important than the trailer'.¹⁴⁷ For the local audience, *Monga* could be the area name of where they grow up, could be a district where the legends of the gangster come from. Choosing *Monga*, the name of a well-known area in Taipei, as the film title may be a

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 63.

¹⁴⁷ Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience*, 91.

coincidence, but it certainly had an impact on the audience's perception of the film before watching the trailer or the film.

According to Niu, it was not the filmmakers' intention to simply copy the 1980s. On the contrary, the goal was to use elements from that period to create a story based in the 1980s with their own personal memories.¹⁴⁸ To describe the style of the film *Monga*, Niu said it is retro as well as modern, ornate as well as vigorous. To fulfil Niu's fantasy, the production design team, led by Huang Meiqing, together with costume designers and the director of photography, built sets and redecorated the existing construction based on their field research, memories, imaginations, and aesthetic considerations. Four-time Best Art Direction winner at the Taipei Film Festival, Huang Meiqing studied theatre design in Paris and began her career in production design in 1996. She has participated in *The Wayward Cloud* (Tsai Ming-liang, 2005), *Amour Legendre* (Wu Misen, 2006), and *Exit No. 6* (Lin Yusen, 2006). Moreover, as Huang stressed in her interview, her cooperation with the cinematographer, Jake Pollock, was surprisingly smooth. Through Pollock's creative use of light and colour, a sentimental youth gangster film is presented on the screen.¹⁴⁹ Jake Pollock, an American cinematographer, is highly active in Taiwanese film production. His work on *Monga* has been appraised by film critics as 'superb widescreen lensing' in which 'saturated colors bring a vividness to both the day- and nighttime backstreet scenes that the screenplay only fitfully matches'.¹⁵⁰

In the first half of the film, the narrative is from Mosquito's point of view. Following his view, each member's personal history since their childhood is delivered through Mosquito's voice-over in the opening sequence. Meanwhile, onscreen, a sequence of action scenes showing the Gang of Princes fighting hundreds of local thugs, filmed in a medium shot and edited with slow motion, is presented with a lively and cheerful soundtrack.

¹⁴⁸ Feng, 艋舺.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Derek Elley, "Monga," *Variety*, February 13, 2010, <https://variety.com/2010/film/markets-festivals/monga-1117942167/>.

Niu thus sets up the tone of the film, which is not simply a gangster action film but also a reminiscent youth film.

This six-and-a-half-minute sequence, from when Mosquito jumps down from an archway and enters the frame from the top until the title appears, and the sequence in which Mosquito is chased by a group of gangsters in the alley when he orders octopus congee function not only as the backdrop of the story, mapping the main locations in the film, but also as an expression of national sentiment by showing everyday life in the Monga area, including common street food stands, grocery shops, and game booths in the night markets. These elements are designed to be close to the day-to-day life experiences of the local audience.



Figure 1: *Monga*, the night market setting created by the production design team

The creations of the production design team include Geta's house, which was located in a recreation based on the historical buildings on Bopiliao Old Street; the warehouse, where the Gang of Princes congregate; the red light district, which was a built interior setting; and the Monga Qingshui Temple. With the intention of ensuring that this analysis is thorough and meticulous, hereafter I focus on one set, Geta's house, to demonstrate how the design of this filmic space supports the storytelling and appeals to the national sentiment.

The setting of Geta's house is first presented in the film after the history of the Monga area is given through Monk's voice-over. In Monk's narrative, *gataos* in the Monga area separated their territories using roads or

small pathways as borders. They controlled the businesses and the people in their territories. Picturing Geta as a heroic and noble figure, a sequence of Geta fighting against a group of rivals appears on the screen and is described through Monk's voice-over. This creates a dramatic contrast with the first shot of the next sequence, a close shot of Geta cooking in the kitchen with a shower cap on his head, smiling and welcoming Mosquito to his house. After showing the surprised facial expression of Mosquito through a medium close-up shot, the image cuts to a high view medium shot of the kitchen from outside the building. A tracking shot is taken in conjunction with Geta's movement in the house through the kitchen to the courtyard. Followed by a pedestal down shot and a dolly backwards shot, this series of camera movements reveals the structure of Geta's house, the separate private spaces – including the courtyard, the bathroom, the kitchen – and the public spaces, including the living room, a Western-style bar table, and the dining table, which are all visible from the main entrance. Moreover, within this sequence, the camera captures a space full of symbolic props of Taiwanese-ness and the 1980s period, such as the plaque engraved with fidelity and filial piety, which are two of the most valuable virtues of Confucian philosophy, the sculptures of divinities in front of the door, and the decorating style, which is a combination of Western influence and traditional wooden furniture.

In addition to providing a filmic space that reveals the gangsters' everyday life and adds some Taiwanese touches to the film, the first appearance of Geta's house also functions as an overview of the setting for further storytelling. In other words, as one of the important settings in the film, Geta's house is the setting for some key scenes, including Geta punishing the Gang of Princes for killing a mainlander, the *gataos* negotiating a peace deal with the mainlander gang, Geta's funeral, and the like. In these scenes, with the foundation laid by the sequence described above, a single section of the house is used as a setting without the possibility of disorienting viewers.



Figure 1: *Monga*, a close shot of Geta, the most powerful Gatao in the Monga area



Figure 3: *Monga*, a deep focus shot showing the residence structure

Besides the production design and the title choice, using the Taiwanese Minnan dialect in the dialog is another element worth noticing here. Minnan, also known as Hokkienese or Hoklo, is the Fujian-derived dialect spoken by most of Taiwan's residents. Sheldon Lu underlines the fact that dialect usage in Chinese-language films functions differently in different cases. It can 'address the domestic audience of mainland China...or resonate with the tastes and aspirations of a local audience...or spill over national boundaries and target global audience and markets'.¹⁵¹ Focusing on the Taiwanese context, the dialect in a film can be a political as much as an aesthetic issue. Since the KMT, the nationalist party, took control of Taiwan in 1949, the government promoted Mandarin usage in Taiwan and forbade the use of dialects in school

¹⁵¹ Lu, "Dialect and Modernity in 21st-Century Sinophone Cinema."

and the media. Taiwanese-language film production, which started in the 1950s and declined in the 1970s, had little support from the KMT because the ruling party wanted to see Taiwan as part of China instead of as an independent nation-state. It was not until 1987 and the lifting of martial law that the Taiwanese dialect was embraced again as a label of national identity. Film directors like Hou Hsiao-hsien have ‘consciously explored the intricacies of Chinese/Taiwanese politics and history by featuring a variety of dialects’.¹⁵² Bearing in mind this political, cultural complexity behind the dialect used in film, this thesis prioritises the aesthetic and commercial aspects. In other words, I argue here that using the Minnan dialect in *Monga* creates an ambience of cinematic verisimilitude and appeals to the local audience's national sentiment in Taiwan.

The 1980s in Taiwan was a hybrid period that saw rapid economic development, leading Taiwan to being ranked as one of the Four Asian Tigers together with South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore. At the same time, the traditional social structure and community had not been fully dissolved by modernisation and urbanisation. To show the complex atmosphere in this period, the mixed usage of Mandarin and the Minnan dialect was planned in the scriptwriting. To accomplish this goal, the main actors were taught in the preproduction phase how to speak the dialect. Moreover, using Mandarin and the Minnan dialect in the dialog supports the cinematic storytelling by differentiating the islanders’ gang, led by Geta, who mainly uses the Minnan dialect in the film and the mainlanders’ gang, led by Grey Wolf, who use Mandarin.

In sum, this section has closely investigated textually the elements in the film that appeal to the Taiwanese national sentiment, including the choice of genre, film title, production and costume design, and the dialect usage. In an era when the Taiwanese film market was dominated by big Hollywood titles, these elements were all important in identifying *Monga* as national cinema and attracting a local audience from all over the island. By identifying these characteristics, I argue that even if critics claimed that the story of the

¹⁵² Ibid.

film was not localised, since it could be moved to other areas with different settings, props, and costumes, the production team on *Monga* intentionally added Taiwanese and reminiscent elements that attracted audience from both urban and rural areas on the island. These elements also differentiated the movie itself from dominant genre films made by Hollywood. Of course, the discussion can be extended into the (trans)national cinema framework, but this section mainly focuses on the film production and the aesthetic dimension. After examining the key agencies in the project, analysing the government subsidies at both the national and regional level, and evaluating the Taiwaneseeness attached to *Monga*, in the next chapter, I focus on the distributor and distribution practice, where this project is highly intertwined with the global film industry.

Conclusion

Contemporary Taiwanese film production has faced a great deal of pressure globally and domestically in the past two decades. As Wei and Martin argue in their studies, filmmakers in Taiwan have tried various approaches to meet these challenges from Hollywood. In this chapter, I identified films like *Monga* as another approach: the Taiwanese blockbuster. This group of films, represented by *Monga*, has relatively high budgets and large scales of production with attractive genres and localised stories.

That being said, this research of the production stage of *Monga* revealed some aspects of the production environment of Taiwanese film in the 2010s. Firstly, due to the low level of development of Taiwanese film industry, the division of roles among filmmakers can be blurred. Also, some key people play a significant part of the whole project that on one hand labels the film with a very recognisable personal mark, on the other hand the whole project highly depends on one or two single people's performance. Secondly, due to the inadequate industrial system, not only art house cinema but also commercial film productions depend on governmental funding at both municipal and national levels. Last but not the least, from the new Taiwan New Cinema that was dominated by the narrative of *xiangtu* and the story of

waishengren, Taiwanese films since 2008 speak to the *bensheng* national sentiments that includes different Taiwanese experiences, historical memories, and various identities. In this chapter, I argue that Taiwanese blockbuster is another response from the Taiwanese filmmakers to the globalised film market. Through the analysis, it reveals the necessity that when studying Taiwanese blockbusters, it is important to consider both elements, the bigness and exceptionality as the goal of a blockbuster, and the Taiwanese industrial environment.

After providing a clearer picture of the production stages, the next chapter focuses on Warner Bros., the distributor of *Monga*, to answer the following questions: To what extent was this major Hollywood studio involved in the promotion and distribution practice? What does it reveal about the distribution of Taiwanese blockbusters?

Chapter 4. Distributing and Promoting *Monga*: Working with a Major Hollywood Studio and the Film Market in Transition

After exploring the development stage of production and production practices in filming *Monga* in the previous chapters, following the thread of the film industry practice chain, this chapter examines the distribution aspect. Parallel to the previous chapter on production, methodologically, I apply the ‘cultural-industrial method’,¹ which involves data collection through textual analysis of media coverage, industrial publications, and some promotional materials, personal interviews that I conducted through my research field trip, and economic and industrial analysis. By doing so, this chapter first aims to answer the key research question from the distribution and promotion perspectives. Second, this chapter aims to present the Taiwanese film industry in a transition period in the late 2000s, when traditional film distribution and marketing methods were still widely applied in the industry, while new practices were being adopted. Film distribution and film promotion are two inseparable industrial procedures that often happen simultaneously. However, in the interest of structural clarity, this chapter first describes the distribution of *Monga*, then moves to a discussion about the film’s promotion.

Warner Bros. as the Distributor

In film studies, distribution has been referred to as ‘the invisible art’² and has been a neglected area in academia.³ This is due to the preference for film text and production context as well as the trend of, to borrow a term from Crisp and Gonring, ‘an exhibition turn’, which focuses on the exhibition spaces and practices.⁴ On one hand, audience studies indeed enrich understanding of the industrial and social circumstances after a film’s production and strengthen the

¹ Caldwell, *Production Culture*.

² David Sin, “Distribution: Introduction: What Is Distribution,” *BFI Screenonline*, accessed October 30, 2018, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/distribution/distribution1.html>.

³ Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, “Distribution and the Question of Diversity: A Case Study of Cinenova,” *Screen* 49 (2008): 354–65, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/hjn040>.

⁴ Virginia Crisp and Gabriel M. Gonring, eds., *Besides the Screen: Moving Images through Distribution, Promotion and Curation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 3.

grip on how and in what context a film is consumed. On the other hand, they fail to spot the process that determines which films can be consumed by audiences in the first place: distribution.

There are emerging conversations on film distribution that cross different disciplines, namely film studies, media industry studies, cultural studies, and marketing research. In the past two decades, film distribution has been included as a section in film industry studies like *Global Hollywood* and *How Hollywood Works*.⁵ In Taiwan, publications that focus on the film industry, such as the *Taiwan Cinema Yearbooks*, have regularly published content related to film distribution performance. Besides the studies on traditional distribution, both theatrical and non-theatrical release, the definition of film distribution has been revisited and expanded. For example, in his book, Lobato distinguishes between formal and informal distribution.⁶ By focusing on the latter, which is unregulated and unmeasured compared to traditional distribution, the author has enlarged the scope of distribution research from film studies to media and cultural studies.⁷ Also focusing on the unconventional side of distribution, the collection *Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line* reveals the turbulence that the film industry has faced because of digitalisation. Moreover, following Lobato's work, Crisp adopts the terms *formal and informal distribution* and applies them in the digital era.⁸ In her research, Crisp investigates both formal and informal distribution, from Hollywood distributors to informal file-sharing practices.

Bearing in mind these studies, in this chapter, I do not examine the informal distribution of *Monga* or the expanded definition of film distribution, which are discussed later in chapter 6. This chapter focuses on the theatrical distribution of *Monga*. From an industrial perspective, film distribution is the

⁵ Toby Miller, ed., *Global Hollywood*, 2nd ed. (London: BFI, 2005); Janet Wasko, *How Hollywood Works* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2003).

⁶ Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.

⁷ Hayley Trowbridge, "Contemporary Film Distribution and Exhibition: A Review of Recent Studies," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 11 (2013): 224–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2013.766835>.

⁸ Virginia Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age: Pirates and Professionals* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

practice that links the production and exhibition, making the film available for the audience in the cinema or in other formats. From a cultural studies point of view, ‘the “distributor” may have the power to dictate many parts of the process of content production, dissemination, marketing, exhibition, consumption and preservation’.⁹ By exploring the distribution of *Monga*, this chapter attempts to discover what role Warner Bros., a sub-branch of a major Hollywood studio and the distributor of *Monga* played in distribution of a Taiwanese blockbuster and what it reveals about Taiwanese film industry in general.

Film Distribution in Taiwan

The film market in Taiwan has its own character compared to other film industries. For example, in early 2000s Hollywood, DVD sales and rentals were a robust component of gross that forcefully competed with box office revenues.¹⁰ Subscription videos on demand soon joined this game and surpassed disc sales in 2016.¹¹ However, in Taiwan, the box office gross still accounts for the majority, 70%, of total revenues.¹² That is why in this chapter, the discussion is mainly on theatrical distribution. To examine how *Monga* was distributed as a locally produced blockbuster by Warner Bros. and deepen the understanding of the contemporary Taiwanese film distribution practice, the research begins with an examination of the major Hollywood studios’ film distribution activities in Taiwan generally. Then, based on the understanding of the Taiwanese commercial film distribution culture, the study moves on to the case study *Monga* and its distributor, Warner Bros. (F.E.) Inc. Taiwan Branch (U.S.A; abbreviated as Warner Bros. hereafter).

⁹ Crisp and Gonring, *Besides the Screen*, 5.

¹⁰ Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010).

¹¹ Andrew Wallenstein, “Home Entertainment 2016 Figures: Streaming Eclipses Disc Sales for the First Time,” *Variety*, January 6, 2017, <https://variety.com/2017/digital/news/home-entertainment-2016-figures-streaming-eclipses-disc-sales-for-the-first-time-1201954154/>.

¹² See more Lu, “从数字看台湾电影五十年.”; Minping Kang, Huiwen Luo, and Youying Xie, “台湾电影发行商能力建构途径与美商合作关系之研究 [Capability Building of Local Film Distributors in Taiwan and Their Cooperation with Hollywood Majors],” *Mass Communication Research* 113 (2012): 199–238.

Before going into detail about specific data on film distribution and box office in Taiwan, the development and the status quo of the box office statistic system in Taiwan need to be clarified. In general, there are two box office split systems between distributors and local theatres in Taiwan. The first split system is based on a pre-agreed proportion of the actual box office revenue; this system is used by most theatres, especially chain theatres, in the Taipei-Keelung metropolitan area (commonly known as the Greater Taipei area).¹³ The second system, which is used by most theatres outside the Greater Taipei area, has the theatre pay the distributor a fixed fee, which is normally 1%–10% of the film's box office income in the Greater Taipei area.¹⁴ The latter system, as Hong claims in his article, to some extent benefits independent and small theatres in rural areas and helps them survive when facing the more powerful distributors and competing with franchised theatres.¹⁵ However, it also blocks film distributors from knowing the actual box office income of these smaller theatres, which could lead to inaccurate marketing strategies based on incomplete demography of the audience as well as dismissive reactions towards film investment due to the unpredictable revenue.

Because of the opacity of the national box office revenue as the result of these two parallel statistics systems, the total box office income in Taiwan has normally been calculated based on a multiple of the revenue in the Greater Taipei area. Depending on the film genre, the multipliers can be slightly different. For example, the multiplier for action movies is 1.2, 0.8 for art house films, and 4 for domestic comedies. However, in film industry studies, scholars normally use 2 as the multiplier to calculate the total box office revenue overall.¹⁶

¹³ Jianlun Hong, “电影特写：电影法跛脚，票房系统装蒜——国片振兴路遥遥 [Film Close Up: The Crippled Film Law, the Pretended Box Office System - A Long Way to the Revival of the National Cinema],” *Funscreen*, accessed January 6, 2019, http://www.funscreen.com.tw/Feature2.asp?FE_NO=1574.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Lihan Gao, Dabai Shen, and Huiru Zheng, “Exploratory Study for Determinants of Motion Picture Box Office Performance in Taiwan,” *Soochow Journal of Economics and Business* 82 (2013): 59–92.

According to Hong, this opaque film box office leaves some grey area for making business deals between the distributors and local small cinemas to increase their income. The lack of transparency also prevents local film production, distribution, and marketing companies from grasping the whole picture of the film industry, based on which they make business decisions, such as who the target audience is and what marketing strategies should be used.¹⁷ To a certain degree, this situation restricts the progress of the Taiwanese film industry.¹⁸

Despite the credibility of the historical and current box office statistic system as discussed above, in this chapter, data collected from industrial publications, Taiwanese national institutes, and their publications are presented to demonstrate the composition and development of Taiwanese film marketing in the past three decades

It is difficult to argue whether the decline of both the Taiwanese film industry and the influence of cinema from Hong Kong resulted in the dominant position of foreign films in the Taiwanese film market or the other way around. However, from the data listed in Tables 1 and 2, in the 1990s, the market share and numbers of both Taiwanese-produced titles and films

¹⁷ Hong, “电影特写.”

¹⁸ In the new Motion Picture Act enacted in May 2015, Article 13 states that theatres should set up a nationwide digital box office statistic system and report box office revenue data to the assigned national institute, organization, or film-related legal person. However, since the new act has come into force, it has been criticised through various perspectives by the public as well as the film industry. One of the controversies is the credibility of the statistic system. According to the Ministry of Culture, the statistic system is set up by the Theatre Association of Taiwan, and the calculation is completed in two steps. First, individual theatres report their box office revenue to the Theatre Association of Taiwan by manually entering data. Then, the association uploads Excel files to the statistic system of the Ministry of Culture. The dispute on this data collection procedure focuses on two points. In the first step, it is not possible to ensure the data are entered correctly and honestly. Second, without connecting the final statistic system and the ticket-selling computer systems, it is impossible to inspect the correctness of the data, which directly causes questions on the credibility of the system. Another dispute is over the publishing of the box office income data. The Motion Picture Act only asks the industry to provide box office-related data; it does not entitle any party to have the right to publish the data. With the imprecise Motion Picture Act and the passive attitude of theatres, the scheme of publishing box office data was delayed until December 2016. See “电影法 [The Motion Picture Act],” Ministry of Culture. October 10, 2008. Last updated July 20, 2012. https://www.moc.gov.tw/information_306_19796.html.

imported from Hong Kong weakened. Meanwhile, the number of films imported from overseas (excluding films imported from Hong Kong and mainland China) steadily increased. Another interesting observation that can be made from the data is that even though films imported from Hong Kong accounted for 20%–30% of the total number of film titles, their contribution to the total box income dropped from 28.50% in 1990 to 2.87% in 1999. The box office income of foreign films increased from 65.72% of the total box office revenue in 1990 to 96.67% in 1999.

Table 1: Box office income (NT\$) and percentage for Taiwanese-produced and imported titles in the 1990s

Year	Taiwanese Films	Hong Kong Films	Foreign Films
1990	104,916,389	517,264,727	1,192,898,615
	5.78%	28.50%	65.72%
1991	63,777,162	544,256,718	1,182,943,791
	3.56%	30.39%	66.05%
1992	36,570,610	1,021,612,714	1,119,588,712
	1.68%	46.91%	51.41%
1993	103,144,502	720,195,626	1,662,816,250
	4.15%	28.97%	66.88%
1994	84,534,960	402,385,540	1,758,113,514
	3.77%	17.92%	78.31%
1995	31,033,280	354,748,913	1,998,256,130
	1.30%	14.92%	83.82%
1996	39,583,272	188,115,562	2,489,516,301
	1.46%	6.92%	91.62%
1997	25,401,536	151,035,720	2,680,958,444
	0.89%	5.29%	93.83%
1998	12,367,760	87,735,171	2,725,643,021
	0.44%	3.10%	96.46%
1999	11,676,805	72,415,775	2,438,320,845
	0.46%	2.87%	96.67%

Table 2: Number and percentage for Taiwanese-produced and imported titles in the 1990s

Year	Taiwanese Films	Hong Kong Films	Mainland China Films	Foreign Films	Total
1990	81 (15.9%)	167 (32.9%)	0	260 (51.2%)	508 (100%)
1991	33 (6.5%)	183 (36.1%)	0	291 (57.4%)	507 (100%)
1992	40 (7.5%)	200 (37.3%)	0	296 (55.2%)	536 (100%)
1993	26 (5.9%)	195 (43.9%)	0	223 (50.2%)	444 (100%)
1994	29 (7.7%)	139 (36.7%)	0	211 (55.6%)	379 (100%)
1995	28 (6.6%)	136 (31.9%)	0	263 (61.5%)	427 (100%)
1996	18 (5.0%)	92 (25.3%)	0	253 (69.7%)	363 (100%)
1997	29 (7.4%)	97 (24.9%)	5 (1.3%)	259 (66.3%)	390 (100%)
1998	23 (5.0%)	98 (21.9%)	1 (0.2%)	322 (72.9%)	454 (100%)
1999	16 (3.4%)	121 (25.6%)	8 (1.7%)	327 (69.3%)	472 (100%)

Despite the credibility of the historical and current box office statistics system as discussed above, in this chapter, data collected from industrial publications, Taiwanese national institutes, and their publications are presented to demonstrate the composition and development of Taiwanese film marketing in the past three decades.

As Table 3 indicates, the situation did not turn around until 2008, the year *Cape No. 7* (2008) was released. The contribution of Taiwanese films made up 12.09% of the total box office income, and foreign films accounted for 80.93%, the first time this number had dropped under 90% in a decade. The Taiwanese film market has been dominated by foreign films, and both Taiwanese and Hong Kong-produced films have become products with very little market power.

Table 3: Number, box office income (NT\$), and income percentage for Taiwanese-produced and imported titles from 2000 to 2010

Year	Taiwanese Films	Hong Kong and Mainland China Films	Foreign Films
2000	17	58	212
	32,199,080	26,084,320	2,469,485,895
	1.28%	1.03%	97.69%
2001	13	45	172
	3,696,865	90,926,750	2,134,341,395
	0.17%	4.08%	95.75%
2002	16	25	207
	52,662,182	31,436,925	1,876,909,632
	2.24%	1.33%	93.43%
2003	18	31	192
	6,024,055	125,883,471	1,876,909,632
	0.3%	6.27%	93.43%
2004	25	31	234
	29,062,110	90,131,295	2,456,416,731
	1.13%	3.50%	95.37%
2005	25	27	274
	42,469,745	103,289,960	2,526,747,432
	1.59%	3.86%	94.55%
2006	19	30	277
	43,392,928	99,174,172	2,535,874,266
	1.62%	3.70%	94.68%
2007	22	19	309
	198,782,192	52,358,146	2,443,944,598
	7.38%	1.94%	90.68%
2008	29	29	320
	305,426,019	176,309,022	2,044,379,745
	12.09%	6.98%	80.93%
	31	32	316

2009	58,008,573	61,524,259	2,602,163,644
	2.13%	2.26%	95.61%
2010	38	38	352
	225,582,606	164,647,888	2,696,736,145
	7.31%	5.33%	87.36%

By 2010, there were four Hollywood subsidiaries or joint ventures located in Taiwan: Buena Vista International,¹⁹ Warner Bros., United International Pictures (UIP),²⁰ and Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation.²¹ To inspect the data focusing on the market influence of the Hollywood film distribution companies in detail, Table 4 lists the market share of the major Hollywood studios in the Taiwanese film market from 2006 to 2010. In these five years, films distributed by these Hollywood subsidiaries constituted an average of 70% of total theatrical revenue in Taiwan. For example, in 2007, the 76 films distributed by Hollywood distribution companies' subsidiaries made up 75% of the total box office in Taipei city, which was NT\$2.08 billion.²² The other 25% of the box office was constituted by the 272 titles released by other distributors.²³ A similar situation occurred in 2008, when the major American distributors released 63 films that were responsible for 61% of the Taipei box office.²⁴ Other distributors released 303 films, accounting for the other 38% of the total box office revenue. From these statistics, it shows that the film market in Taiwan has a high concentration ratio on the major

¹⁹ The company's branch in Taiwan also issues films from Sony Pictures Entertainment.

²⁰ UIP, a joint venture between Paramount Pictures Corporation and Universal Studios. After a series of company restructuring around 2007, in 2010, UIP directly distributed films in 19 countries/areas, including Taiwan, due to a reduction in its international operations. It also has agreements with local distribution companies in another 43 countries/areas. However, the market shares of Paramount Pictures Corp. and Universal Studios were calculated separately in the reports published by the Bureau of Audiovisual and Music Industry Development of the Ministry of Culture.

²¹ Kang, Luo, and Xie, "台湾电影发行商能力建构途径与美商合作关系之研究."

²² Approximately equivalent to US\$70.57 million.

²³ Ruizhu He, "2008 台湾电影票房总览 [Review of Box Office of 2008 Taiwan Films]," in *2009 Taiwan Cinema Yearbook*, (Taipei: Taiwan Film Institute, 2009), 100–108.

²⁴ Ibid.

Hollywood distributors.²⁵ With fewer distribution titles, these distributors gain most of the box office income in Taiwan.

Table 4: Market share (%) of Hollywood subsidiaries in Taiwan from 2006 to 2010

Distributor	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Buena Vista	31.40	35.57	29.05	25.62	19.46
Paramount	7.78	16.41	11.21	14.78	8.93
Twentieth Century Fox Film	15.80	-	8.08	14.32	17.23
Universal Studios	7.42	-	11.52	3.37	3.35
Warner Bros.	10.99	23.30	10.17	10.05	20.08
Total	73.39	75.28	70.03	68.14	69.05

As argued earlier in this chapter, the film distribution practice is an interactive industrial activity that connects the production industry, marketing business, theatre industry, and other related areas. Thus, in many cases, only categorising box office revenue based on whether a film is distributed by an American distributor or a local one could oversimplify this dynamic industrial system. There are Taiwanese films that are distributed by Hollywood subsidiaries in Taiwan, and some Taiwanese companies buy the copyright directly from Hollywood studios and distribute the film in Taiwan. For instance, within the sixty-three films released by American distributors in 2008, there were not only Hollywood films but also Chinese-language films.²⁶ Another example would be the three Chinese-language films in the top ten box office hits in Taipei City,²⁷ *Cape No. 7* (2008), *Red Cliff* (*Chi Bi*, dir. John

²⁵ Shih-kai Huang, “九零年代台湾电影映演市场分析：产业集中度的观点 [A Study on the Concentration Ratio of Taiwan’s Film Market in the 1990s],” *Communication & Management Research* 7, no.2 (2003): 157–74.

²⁶ According to the GIO, all films that use Chinese languages, including films produced in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, are classified as Chinese-language films. Due to the lack of statistics that focus only on Taiwanese films, in this chapter, some statistics on Chinese-language films are used to fill these gaps and provide a general picture of the Taiwanese film industry.

²⁷ He, “2008 台湾电影票房总览.”

Woo, 2008), and *CJ7* (*Zhangjiang Qihao*, dir. Stephen Chow, 2008), the first two of which were co-distributed by local Taiwanese film distributors and major Hollywood studios.²⁸ The latter was distributed by Buena Vista. The other films in the top ten were distributed solely by Hollywood subsidiaries in Taiwan.²⁹ On the other hand, local distribution companies occasionally distribute foreign-language films. For example, in 2007, *The Golden Compass* (dir. Chris Weitz) was distributed by LS Film in Taiwan.³⁰ Keeping in mind this dynamic of the distribution industry in Taiwan, this chapter focuses mainly on one case, namely Taiwanese-produced films distributed by Hollywood subsidiaries in Taiwan. By doing so, the research aims to answer one question: what role did Warner Bros. as the distributor play in distribution of *Monga*?

Table 5: Top 10 grossing Taiwanese films

	Title	Distributor	Box Office in Greater Taipei Area (NT\$)
1	<i>Cape No. 7</i>	Buena Vista	230,691,882
2	<i>Seediq Bale: The Sun Flag</i>	Vie Vision Pictures	198,600,035
3	<i>You Are the Apple of My Eye</i>	Twentieth Century Fox Film	181,604,478
4	<i>Our Times</i>	Hualien Media International	158,731,830
5	<i>Seediq Bale: The Rainbow Bridge</i>	Vie Vision Pictures	135,792,420
6	<i>David Loman</i>	Warner Bros.	122,455,190

²⁸ *Cape No. 7* was distributed by a local distribution company, ARS Film Production, and Buena Vista, and the two distributors of *Red Cliff* are CMC Movie Corporation and Twentieth Century Fox. The CMC Movie Corporation also invested in the production of *Red Cliff*.

²⁹ Including *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (dir. Rob Cohen, 2008), *The Dark Knight* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2008), *Iron Man* (dir. Jon Favreau, 2008), *Hancock* (dir. Peter Berg, 2008), *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 2008), *Wanted* (dir. Timur Bekmambetov, 2008), and the James Bond film, *Quantum of Solace* (dir. Marc Forster, 2008).

³⁰ A local Taiwanese company that was involved in the business of chain cinema management, TV production, advertising, film distribution, and other film industry sectors.

7	<i>Monga</i>	Warner Bros.	117,007,196
8	<i>Kano</i>	Vie Vision Pictures	118,070,040
9	<i>Din Tao: Leader of the Parade</i>	Twentieth Century Fox Film	106,200,840
10	<i>Zone Pro Site</i>	Activator Marketing Warner Bros.	104,092,061

It is seemingly mistaken to assume that Hollywood distributors are more competitive when distributing a locally produced film, considering the top 10 grossing Taiwanese films. As illustrated in Table 5, Hollywood and local distributors practically share the spots in the top 10 grossing Taiwanese film chart. However, bearing in mind that every year, there are only one to three Taiwanese films distributed by Hollywood distributors,³¹ this reflects the fact that a local production has a higher chance of achieving box-office triumph by being distributed by a major Hollywood studio. Compared to Taiwanese local distribution companies, the Hollywood studios have two advantages in Taiwanese film market, namely promising contractual agreements with local exhibitors and priority in selecting a release schedule, which I examine closely in the next section using the example of *Monga* and the Warner Bros. subsidiary in Taiwan.

Warner Bros. and Distributing Monga

As Scott argues in his book, major Hollywood distribution companies expand their territory not only by building global film distribution networks but also by vertically integrating with other industry sectors.³² Warner Bros. entered the Taiwanese film market through the exhibition sector. In 1998, Warner Village Cinemas, a joint venture between Warner Bros. and Village Roadshow

³¹ Weiwei Chen, “电影发行报道之一：台湾电影市场被美商绑架了吗？ [Film Distribution Report: Part One: Is Taiwan Film Market Kidnapped by Hollywood Distributors?] *Punchline*, October 18, 2016, <https://punchline.asia/archives/33640>.

³² Scott, *On Hollywood*.

Entertainment Group, was established in Taiwan.³³ In 2003, Warner Bros. established a branch office of Warner Bros. Home Entertainment in Taiwan, becoming the first of the largest eight American distribution companies to open a regular chain in Taiwan selling home theatre systems. According to Taiwan Cinema,³⁴ except for one film, *Super Citizen Ko* (*Chaoji Da Guomin*, dir. Wan Ren, 1995), distributed by Warner Bros. in the 1990s, the subsidiary did not distribute any Taiwanese films either locally or globally again until 2008, when it distributed *Orz Boyz* (2008), which was also the first attempt of Li Lie, producer of *Monga*, as a feature film producer.

As a branch of a Hollywood distribution company, when distributing a Hollywood film in Taiwan, the role that these subsidiaries play is to carry out the decisions of their parent companies. Thus, the branches have only a few opportunities to be involved in film production decision-making, and their commercial activities are limited by their parent companies' decisions.³⁵

Moreover, because the marketing materials are generated by the parent companies, the casts of Hollywood films are based mainly in the United States, and the reputations of Hollywood films are usually out in the public before they are released in Taiwan, the subsidiaries can distribute Hollywood films without creating original marketing plans or investing a fair amount of time and energy. Because of advantageous contractual agreements with the local exhibitors, the subsidiaries also have a positive percentage when splitting the box-office revenue.³⁶

³³ In October 2004, a sub-company of Orange Sky Golden Harvest Entertainment bought 40% of the equity and became the largest shareholder. Now, the chain cinemas are operated by four companies, including Orange Sky Golden Harvest Entertainment, CMC Magnetics, and other parties, and the name of the chain was changed to VIESHOW Cinemas.

³⁴ A website that was operated by the Bureau of Audiovisual and Music Industry Development of the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan. See more: Taiwan Cinema, “美商华纳兄弟(远东)股份有限公司台湾分公司 [Warner Bros. (F.E.) Inc. Taiwan Branch (U.S.A.)], accessed March 6, 2021, <https://taiwancinema.bamid.gov.tw/Company/CompanyContent/?ContentUrl=34360>.

³⁵ Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience*, 92.

³⁶ According to Chen and *Bie da wo*, when screening a Hollywood film, the theatre only takes 30%–40% of the premiere week, and the percentage for the theatre then goes up 5% each week. However, when screening a locally produced film, the theatre will take half of the box-office income for the first week, and the ratio also goes up 5% every week. See Chen, “电影

However, this is not the case when a Hollywood subsidiary decides to distribute a locally produced film such as *Monga*. The subsidiaries then have control over what is distributed, how it is distributed, and when it is distributed when cooperating with local production companies. It is a widely held view in the film industry that the timing of the release date is vital for a film's box-office revenue.³⁷ Because Hollywood distributors can provide more than enough titles for the local theatres and can also decide the release dates in advance, it is beneficial for these theatres to cooperate with the distributors in terms of securing their business.³⁸ In contrast, there are very few local Taiwanese titles being produced each year, and the number of titles varies from year to year, as shown in Table 3. Moreover, when it comes to Taiwanese companies, some production companies and distributors fail to schedule release dates in advance, which leaves the theatres less time to arrange screens and sabotages the possibilities of creating successful publicity campaigns.³⁹ Under these circumstances, the theatres in Taiwan prioritise Hollywood distributors' requirements for film scheduling.

In the case of *Monga*, producer Li Lie had a personal conversation with the general manager of Warner Bros. (Taiwan), Shi Weiming, in February 2009. After indicating her intention to work with Niu Chengze on *Monga*, Li received an offer from Shi for the film to be scheduled for release during the spring festival period if they could finish the postproduction and deliver the final product on time.⁴⁰ In the United States and other Western countries, the summer season and Christmas are the two important times for film releases. However, in Taiwan, the seasonality is slightly different, and the

发行报道之一”; *Bie da wo*, “拆账不公变混账——揭开台湾票房的黑箱之谜 [The Unfair Splitting: Revealing the dark side of Taiwan Cinema Box Office],” *Punchline*, September 18, 2015, <https://punchline.asia/archives/15413>.

³⁷ Nolwen Mingant, Cecilia Tirtaine, and Joël Augros, *Film Marketing into the Twenty-First Century*.

³⁸ Chen, “电影发行报道之一.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Li, interview by author.

spring festival season is an important time for film releases.⁴¹ There is normally a six-day holiday during this period of time in Taiwan, which makes it a profitable period to release a film. This timing was also appealing to Niu and Li because there had been no Taiwanese films released during the spring festival period for twenty years until *Monga* was released in 2010.⁴² Chen Hongyuan, an experienced film marketing manager, film producer, and journalist, argued in an interview that the release date of *Monga* was the most important factor that led to its success.⁴³ By giving *Monga* the spring festival release date, Warner Bros. gave this local production a chance and also filled its schedule in the quiet period for distributing Hollywood blockbusters, namely between Christmas and the summer peak. And because of the box office success of *Monga* in 2010, the Taiwanese film industry adopted this release pattern and the Spring Festival release has become a regular release scheduling for potential Taiwanese films each year.

The Hollywood subsidiaries have advantages not only in selecting release dates but also in deciding which titles to distribute. According to Wang Shi, the head of Activator Marketing Company, by scheduling the release, Hollywood distributors can receive 12%–15% of the box-office income after splitting with the theatres.⁴⁴ Despite the high remuneration of the Hollywood subsidiaries, local Taiwanese production companies are still willing to pay the bill in exchange for larger releasing scale and better release dates. Thus, the Hollywood subsidiaries are in the better position when they negotiate with local production companies.

Warner Bros. choice of *Monga* was not a coincidence. As mentioned in the last chapter, at the time, there was a lack of locally produced, big-budget commercial films in the Taiwanese film market. A gangster genre film like

⁴¹ The spring festival date varies every year according to the lunar calendar. However, it is normally between mid-January and mid-February.

⁴² Li, interview by author.

⁴³ Chen, “电影发行报道之一.”

⁴⁴ As mentioned earlier, the theatres normally get 50% of the box-office income in Taiwan. The rest is split by the production company, the marketing company, and the Hollywood distributors. See Chen, “电影发行报道之一.”

Monga could potentially attract the attention of the local Taiwanese audience. Moreover, Shi pointed out in the conversation with Li that he agreed with the choice of the actor Ma Rulong to play Geta in the film due to his positive influence on the Southern Taiwan film market.⁴⁵ Furthermore, even though most of the crew were new to the film industry or new to the roles they played in the project, for example, Niu as a director, Li as a producer, and Ruan Jingtian and Zhao Youting as actors in a film, they had accumulated good reputations from their former careers.

Besides the promising release date during the spring festival period, another factor that benefited *Monga* from its distribution agreement with Warner Bros. was the large release scale. To target different groups of audiences, different distribution strategies were used in different cases.⁴⁶ A saturation release – a large number of screens with an immense television campaign – is normally used when releasing a big budget film. In the case of *Monga*, according to Yin Huiwen, the executive producer and head of the marketing and promotion company Key Stone Corporation, the plan was originally to have around 80 to 90 screens. However, a couple of days before the premiere, Yin and her team were informed by Warner Bros. that there were going to be over 120 screens in the Taipei area,⁴⁷ which was the largest release scale to date for a Taiwan-produced film.⁴⁸ The wider the publicity, the higher the possibility of box-office success. By having a release scale like a Hollywood film during the spring festival holiday season,⁴⁹ *Monga* had the opportunity to reach a significant amount of audience at the local market.

In summary, *Monga* was produced and released in a transitional period in the Taiwanese film industry. The branch companies of the major

⁴⁵ Li, interview by author.

⁴⁶ Mingant, Tirtaine, and Augros, *Film Marketing into the Twenty-First Century*.

⁴⁷ Until 2011, there were around 200 screens in the Taipei area. See “2011 年台湾电影总结：翻滚吧！台湾电影 (3) [2011 Taiwan Cinema Summary: Jump! Taiwan Cinema: Part 3],” *Sina Entertainment*, December 27, 2011, http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2011-12-27/16323518639_3.shtml; Yin, interview by author.

⁴⁸ Yuyan Wang, “《艋舺》导演钮承泽专访 [Exclusive Interview with Niu Chengze, the Director of *Monga*],” *Funscreen*, January 29, 2010, http://www.funscreen.com.tw/headline.asp?H_No=285.

⁴⁹ Yin, interview by author.

Hollywood distributors, including Buena Vista, Twentieth Century Fox, and Warner Bros., had built solid distribution networks and become more competitive than local distribution companies. However, the barrier between the major Hollywood studios and the local Taiwanese productions started to blur when local film productions began to cooperate with these branches. In this cooperation, Taiwanese films benefited from the resources and connections of the major Hollywood studios. In the case of *Monga*, Warner Bros. secured a release date in the most promising period of the year before the movie was even produced. Showing the film on over 120 screens in the first week of its release provided a foundation for the film to break the box office record for Taiwanese film, earning NT\$100 million in only six days.⁵⁰

Promoting Monga

Film marketing practice, according to Kuhn and Westwell, can be summarised as ‘the use of publicity to raise awareness of a film in order to stimulate demand’.⁵¹ In the late 2000s, the film industry in Taiwan was turning from its worst decline back to a revival. Meanwhile, digital media, including social media and blogs, were gaining popularity among young people and started to penetrate into people’s everyday lives. *Monga* was distributed and promoted during this period, and the transitional media landscape also influenced the promotion strategy for the film. In this section, I attempt to examine how *Monga*, a Taiwanese blockbuster, was promoted and what the marketing strategy reveals about Taiwanese film market.

Film marketing has become a crucial element in the whole film industry chain and has recently attracted attention from academia. Justin Wyatt, in his influential book *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*, illustrates how the ‘high concept’ has been applied to film in the aesthetic dimension, including narrative with a catchy phrase and production

⁵⁰ Approximately equivalent to US\$3.39 million.

⁵¹ Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

design.⁵² As a former market research analyst and a media scholar, he argues that the method of market research tends to benefit high concepts due to the uncomplicated text process. Jonathan Gray moves his focus from the text to the ‘paratext’, which is the material surrounding the text, including trailers, spoilers, TV spots, merchandising, and the like.⁵³ In Gray’s argument, to study paratext is to study how meaning is created. Moreover, paratextual study leads to the understanding of ‘how a text creates meaning for its consumers’ and ‘how a text creates meaning in popular culture and society more generally’.⁵⁴ Thus, to analysis the marketing of *Monga*, this study seeks to examine the paratext created around the case study, thus deepening the understanding of what and how meaning has been created around this Taiwanese blockbuster.

Film marketing is a crucial industrial stage for a film that sometimes begins even before the production of the film. The genre, casting, and story line can all be parts of the marketing strategy for a film project, which can be revisited and revised through the whole production procedure until the end of the marketing campaign.⁵⁵ Because of the significant influence marketing has on a film’s box office, the budget for film marketing has risen dramatically in the past decades. For example, Hollywood today pours more and more capital into film marketing.⁵⁶ In 2014, a medium-size film would cost US\$40 million for marketing.⁵⁷ Critics say that the tendency to spend more money on marketing is not applaudable but is in fact worrisome for the industry.⁵⁸

⁵² Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

⁵³ Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Philip Drake, “Distribution and Marketing in Contemporary Hollywood,” in *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*, ed. Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2008), 63–82.

⁵⁶ Paul McDonald and Janet Wasko, eds., *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (Hoboken: Blackwell, 2008).

⁵⁷ Pamela McClintock, “\$200 Million and Rising: Hollywood Struggles With Soaring Marketing Costs,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 31, 2014, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/200-million-rising-hollywood-struggles-721818>.

⁵⁸ McDonald and Wasko, *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry*.

However, this is not the case in the Taiwanese film industry. As Li Yamei, a Taiwanese film scholar and expert on film distribution and marketing, states, compared to film production in Korea and mainland China, filmmakers in Taiwan face a lack of money.⁵⁹ This circumstance directly causes a struggle in terms of marketing budgets. According to Li, on average, filmmakers in Taiwan dedicate no more than 10% of their budgets to marketing and promotion.⁶⁰ In the case of *Monga*, a project with a NT\$70 million production budget, there was a NT\$10 million budget assigned for marketing,⁶¹ 12.5% of the total cost, which can be considered an ambitious budget management decision.⁶²

According to Mingant, Tirtantine, and Augros, the key players in film marketing are the distribution companies, small companies that carry out the plans, film talents including the director, the producer, and the stars, the state, and the spectators.⁶³ The marketing team on *Monga* consisted of staff from three companies: Key Stone Corp., the in-house marketing team from Warner Bros., and Kwan Kwan Marketing Corp. (Kwan Kwan). Key Stone was the first team to come on board during the developmental production stage with a team of eight staff members.⁶⁴ The marketing team was expanded when the in-house marketing team from Warner Bros. joined in with its proficiency in marketing and promoting Hollywood films in Taiwan. Kwan Kwan came on board around the premiere screening of *Monga* and mainly took charge of organising events, including official press conferences and premiere screening events. A digital marketing team led by Cai Weicheng was also established by the order of the director, Niu Chengze.

Nevertheless, in this section, the research on marketing for *Monga* focuses mainly on one key player, the small local companies that carry out the marketing plans, in this case represented by Key Stone and the digital marketing team led by Cai Weicheng. The choice of research focus of this

⁵⁹ Valkyria, “电影营销人谈国片瓶颈.”

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Li, interview by author.

⁶² Valkyria, “电影营销人谈国片瓶颈.”

⁶³ Mingant, Tirtaine, and Augros, *Film Marketing into the Twenty-First Century*.

⁶⁴ Yin, interview by author.

section was made based on the consideration that these two parties in the marketing team participated longer in marketing *Monga* compared to the other two teams, and the marketing campaigns carried out by these two parties reveal the uniqueness of film marketing in a certain context, which is film marketing in Taiwan in the transition era with a hybrid model where traditional methods and digital marketing were both applied.

According to Drake, film marketing activities can be generally categorised into four sections: ‘(1) product marketing, advertising, and promotion; (2) market research; (3) publicity; and (4) ancillaries and merchandising’.⁶⁵ However, in the case study of the promotion for *Monga*, the marketing activities included very little on either market research or ancillaries and merchandising. Due to the lack of access to the publicity material for this historical case study that was released a decade ago, this section mainly focuses on the first section listed above: product marketing, advertising, and promotion. By closely investigating the budget distribution, marketing strategy, and marketing materials, this section will answer the question of how a locally produced blockbuster was promoted in Taiwan.

Even though they cooperated to promote *Monga* and worked according to the same marketing campaign timetable designed by Key Stone, the two teams, led separately by Yin and Cai, were financed differently. Cai was directly hired by the production company and formed his digital marketing team with two other crew members, and this is why the digital marketing budget was not included in the total NT\$10 million⁶⁶ for marketing. Yin Huiwen, as the leader of Key Stone and the former agent of Niu, also led the marketing team that promoted Niu’s first feature film, *What on Earth Have I Done Wrong?! (2007)*.⁶⁷ Because of this successful collaboration and personal trust, Yin’s company was hired by Niu to promote *Monga*. Yin had a budget of NT\$10 million for marketing, which was spent on television advertisements, outdoor advertisements, and premiere and media conference organising, which are analysed in detail below.

⁶⁵ Drake, “Distribution and Marketing in Contemporary Hollywood.”

⁶⁶ Approximately equivalent to US\$350,674.

⁶⁷ Yin, interview by author.

First, television advertisement has been a significant part of film promotion. Experts in Hollywood claim that even though digital spending has speedily increased, the expenditures on television still account for over 70% of marketing budgets.⁶⁸ A similar situation exists in Taiwan. Wang Shi, a well-known Taiwanese film marketing expert, asserts that in the age of digital media, the television campaign still costs half of the total marketing budget.⁶⁹

Monga was produced and released in the early 2010s, when social media, including Facebook and Instagram, were not yet prevalent in Taiwan.⁷⁰ According to Yin, the television campaign accounted for 45% of the NT\$10 million marketing budget. The forms of television advertisement for *Monga* included trailers that were edited into different lengths, ranging from five seconds to one minute.⁷¹ The length of the ads on television depended on the slot, and closer to the release date, the ads were shorter. The longer versions of the trailer were designed to attract the audience by focusing on the action genre and the appearances of the actors. In contrast, the later shorter clips functioned as reminders. Clint Culpepper, the head of Sony Screen Gems, uses a metaphor to stress the important of a TV trailer, saying, ‘you can have the most terrific movie in the world, and if you can’t convey that fact in fifteen- and thirty-second TV ads, it’s like having bad speakers on a great stereo’.⁷² By cutting the official trailer, which was two minutes and forty-four seconds,⁷³ into shorter clips to fit the TV ad slots, the marketing team intended to tell the potential audience what to expect in the cinema and to direct the audience’s excitement and/or apprehension.

⁶⁸ James Rainey, “The Perils of Promotion: Pricey TV Campaigns, Fear of Change Shackles Movie Spending,” *Variety*, March 8, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/film/features/movie-marketing-advertising-tv-campaigns-1201724468/>.

⁶⁹ Yuning Zeng, “小众也能翻盘，网络时代的电影行销 [Niche Can Win, Film Distribution and Marketing in the Digital Era],” *Watchinese*, May 08, 2017, <https://www.watchinese.com/gb/node/23124>.

⁷⁰ Yin, interview by author.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Tad Friend, “The Cobra: Inside a Movie Marketer’s Playbook,” *The New Yorker*, January 12, 2009, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/01/19/the-cobra>.

⁷³ MONGA, “电影《艋舺/MONGA》正式预告片 Official Trailer (English Subtitles),” *YouTube*, February 2010. Video, 2:44, <https://youtu.be/ztSLNCNCmM0>.

The edited short versions of *Monga*'s TV trailer are no longer available to be examined for this research. However, a textual analysis of the full version can present a sense of this key promotional material. The 2 minutes 43 seconds trailer consists of mainly five sections. The opening starts with three short clips matching with three drum beats showing the colourful, flourishing night market in Monga. Using the voice over from the character Monk, it introduces Monga's history in a brief. And it slides into the presentation of Taiwanese gangsters with their everyday life scene at Geta's home, where the character White Monkey (Cai Changxian) tells Mosquito that this is Taiwanese gangster life, grass root and full of energy.

The second section, from 00:37 to 01:27, the trailer focuses on the theme of brotherhood. Clips of the Princes Gang Dancing in the disco, laughing in their hideout, training on the mountain and fighting together are edited together, presenting the good old time of the youth and friendship, setting the nostalgic mood with the melodic, light hearted and smoothing sounds track *Brotherhood*, which creates the striking contrast to the next section.

The theme of the third section is entering the world of adults. Starting with the scene and audio of a gun shooting into the camera, the tension is created through the fast pace editing, viewing of the clips of some key tight moments in the film edited together without a fully presented context to build suspense.

And the tension grows through the fourth section. The whole section is without voice over or any conversation. Pounding drum beats matching violent conflicts between characters and gangs. The drum beats continue and the main character and the staff are introduced. This section ends with the scene of the hundreds of people fighting in a market in the Monga area. This last scene begins with the Princes Gang in the centre with a medium and by zooming out, it ends with the view of the whole crowd fighting.

In the last 10 seconds of the trailer, the director's name alone is shown, which is also the only filmmaker's name displayed in the trailer, followed by the Title of the film, *Monga*. While the title is shown, there is a raspy male voice vocally presenting the title with Taiwanese dialect. In the trailer, the key

messages – the brotherhood, the gangster genre and the Taiwanese-ness of the film – are delivered. Also, the two main actors, Zhao Youting and Ruan Jingtian, highlighted their high percentage of exposure and often used close up and clean single shots.



Figure 4: Outdoor advertisement of Monga in Ximending Area

(<https://blog.xuite.net/rzr1688/twblog/133048558>)

Second, some filmmakers argue that in the case of a blockbuster, outdoor advertisements can be effective compared to the case of a niche film.⁷⁴ Billboards are now considered an old-school method that functions as a reminder of marketing films in Hollywood compared to social media and other forms of digital marketing strategies.⁷⁵ The budget for billboard ads is roughly around 1% of a film's total marketing budget.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Robert Marich, "Billboards in L.A.: Old-School Method Still Gets Results in Busy City," *Variety*, March 8, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/film/features/billboards-los-angeles-movie-tv-ads-1201724617/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

However, in the case of *Monga*, 30% of the total marketing budget went to billboards and other forms of outdoor advertisement.⁷⁷ An example of one of the outdoor advertisements is the billboard set in Ximending District in Taipei (Figure 4), an area labelled ‘the heart of young people shopping in Taipei’.⁷⁸ Also known as the ‘theatre street’ since the 1930s, today, there are around twenty cinemas in this area. The billboard, which was designed to cover the archway on the street, included the release date on the pillars on both sides so it was visible to pedestrians walking on either side of the road.

The poster of the film is designed to fit the archway billboard. The main image on the top centred the two leading actors, Zhao Youting and Ruan Jingtian, with the other main actors’ image presented in a smaller size behind the two leading actors. Moreover, the style of the poster is in line with the visual style of the film and the trailer that the dark background of the poster sets off the bustling and illuminated night market and the colourful and vintage flowery shirts. Though the title on the main poster on the billboard has a relatively bigger font size, the red colour blends into the flamboyant elements. What is more noticeable on the poster is the release date, located on the bottom of the poster with distinguishable shiny yellow colour. The two identical posters on the pillars supplement the main poster with a clearer read of the title *Monga* and identifies the main location of the film with the silhouette of the Longshan Temple. As Gray stresses, the second people pass an advertisement, the textual meaning starts to be generated in their minds.⁷⁹ Placing a billboard in this neighbourhood gave it the chance to attract the attention of young people on the street and have a direct impact on people’s film choice when entering a nearby cinema.

The third section of the marketing spending was on events, including the premiere and official media conference. *Monga*, as mentioned before, aside from being the title of the film, is also the name of an area in Taipei where the story takes place. Thus, to coincide with the cinematic atmosphere,

⁷⁷ Yin, interview by author.

⁷⁸ “About - Ximending,” *Xinmending*, accessed November 22, 2018, http://www.ximending.tw/about.html#.W_b7tjj7S0s.

⁷⁹ Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.

the premiere was arranged in the Monga area. The event took place from 15:00 to 19:00 on 4 February 2010 on Section 2, Wuchang Street. To decorate the surrounding area into a filmic set and set up the red carpet for the premiere, the marketing team blocked Wuchang Street beginning the night before.

In sum, aiming to create a Taiwanese local blockbuster, the marketing team of *Monga* was given NT\$10 million. Bearing in mind that in 2010, the average total production budget for a Taiwanese film was NT\$13.77 million, it is safe to claim that the marketing budget for *Monga* was tremendous.⁸⁰ After investigating this budget allocation, the following section aims to analyse the key marketing focuses in the promotion campaign for *Monga*.

As previously mentioned, even though there were various parties participating in the promotion of *Monga*, the marketing strategy formulated by Yin and her team was followed by all parties, including the digital marketing team. Because of accessibility issues, there are limitations in collecting research material on Taiwanese local newspapers, magazines, and television advertisements from 2009–2010. Therefore, the principal material used to research the marketing of *Monga* is the official blog⁸¹ that the digital marketing team set up to promote *Monga*.⁸²

This being said, it is crucial to be aware that film marketing is a series of practices carried out collectively to publicise a film. However, marketing material being disseminated through different platforms in different formats can be, to a certain extent, inconsistent in order to attract audiences with

⁸⁰ 2011 影视产业趋势研究调查报告——电视及电影产业 [2010 Film and Television Industry Trend Research Report], (Taipei: Government Information Office, 2011).

⁸¹ Mongathemovie, 电影《艋舺》官方部落格 [Official Blog of Monga], accessed November 23, 2018, <http://mongathemovie.pixnet.net/blog>.

⁸² During the interview with Yin Huiwen at her office in Taipei, Taiwan, she presented two file folders filled with newspaper clippings about *Monga*. However, the folders have not been digitised to be accessed. Moreover, access to material is limited due to the lack of digital versions and lack of access to the digital archive of local newspapers and magazines. For example, an attempt was made to access the digital archive of *United Daily News*, one of the largest newspapers in Taiwan. However, according to staff in email correspondence, each requested news article would cost US\$200, which made it impossible to access this material for this research.

different demands and expectations. Focusing on the posts on the official blog may not represent the full picture of promotional material for *Monga*, but it still offers opportunities to examine the possibilities and limitations of the new digital film marketing method.

The official blog of *Monga* was established on Pixnet, one of the largest online Taiwanese social networks, on which users can store pictures and create blogs. Before Facebook and Instagram became widespread in Taiwan, creating a blog on Pixnet offered the opportunity to reach the potential audience through digital media. There are six subsections of the blog: latest news, introduction to the film, the director, behind-the-scenes, film critics, visiting the Monga area, and downloading. The blog that was set up to promote *Monga* was not only a media platform for the marketing team to inform the users and potential audience but also a space for conversations between the film crew or marketing professionals and the users through commenting and Q&A. By examining the articles posted on the blog, both original and reposted from print media, as well as the structure of the blog, this section identifies two main focuses in *Monga*'s marketing campaign, namely the director and the actors, and discusses how these main marketing points were implemented in the marketing material.

First, Niu Chengze as the director as well as the film auteur was highlighted in the marketing focus above the rest of the above-the-line filmmakers. As discussed in the last chapter, Niu played multiple roles in this production, including investor, director, scriptwriter, editor, and actor. In addition, according to Yin, he was highly involved in defining the marketing strategy, designing posters, and editing trailers.⁸³ In the interview with Yin, she described *Monga* as Niu's film instead of a collective creation and said that one of the promotion goals was branding Niu. This ambition was also carried out in digital marketing.

On the official blog of *Monga*, one subsection, titled 'The Exclusive Director Area' and consisting of thirty-seven posts in total, includes four posts of behind-the-scenes video clips, two writing pieces by Niu, one repost of

⁸³ Yin, interview by author.

Niu's exclusive interview with the *China Times*, one of the four largest newspapers in Taiwan, one post that clarifies a media rumour from Niu's point of view, and a series consisting of twenty-nine posts, 'Director's Comments on Film Stills'. The subsection was updated less frequently when the film was still in its postproduction phase. Six posts, four behind-the-scenes clips, and Niu's two writing pieces were posted during the period from 11 November 2009 to 15 January 2010, before the film was released in the cinema. However, starting on 30 January 2010, a week before the premiere, the subsection was updated daily with the 'Director's Comments on Film Stills' series until 28 February 2010. The thirty-seven posts as a whole, focusing on Niu's expression and personal experiences, constructed the role of Niu as the film auteur.

Although the posts contain a variety of forms, from comments on film stills to video clips, from articles to personal interviews, the content of these posts focuses more on Niu's personal experiences and sentimental feelings instead of the film's plot or objective commentaries. As the scriptwriter and the director of the film, Niu stressed in the writing pieces and the narratives on the video clips that he wanted to represent the 1980s as a glorious but conflicting period when 'martial law was banned after thirty-eight years, Mainlanders' gangs were rising, weapons were overflowing in the city, [and] the traditional ethics were collapsing'.⁸⁴ Moreover, Niu expressed his ambition that *Monga* would be, to some extent, a summary, a review, and an introspection of his absurd youth.⁸⁵ To present nostalgic sentiments of the good old days to the blog readers and potential film audience, Niu told personal stories in the blog posts about joining a gang when he was seventeen years old and dancing in the club alone with 1980s music and expressed his emotion towards his past friends and the brotherhood he once had. These narratives drew a connection between Niu's personal experiences and the

⁸⁴ Mongathemovie, "豆导谈 《艋舺》 制作缘起 [Niu Talks About the Production Origin of *Monga*]," *Official Blog of Monga*, Pixnet, November 11, 2009, <http://mongathemovie.pixnet.net/blog/post/1987181>.

⁸⁵ Mongathemovie, "《艋舺》 开拍前夕的豆导独白 [Niu's Words Before the Shooting Start]," *Official Blog of Monga*, Pixnet, November 13, 2009, <http://mongathemovie.pixnet.net/blog/post/2175757>.

story line of the film, which also built up the image of Niu as the author of the film.

Second, the actors, specifically Zhao Youting and Ruan Jingtian, were the other main highlights in the marketing material. The producer Li Lie stated during her personal interview that during casting, they ‘did not consider who could contribute to the box office. Because at that time, no actor or actress in Taiwan could say they are a box office guarantee’.⁸⁶ Li also stressed the reason for selecting these two young actors was because they fit the characters’ design. However, in Taiwan, it is common for famous singers and TV drama actors and actresses to be selected to play roles in films in order to attract publicity through the reputations gathered from their previous careers.⁸⁷ As Drake stresses, the casting of the principal actors significantly influences the marketing practices and strategies. Both leading actors in *Monga*, Ruan Jingtian and Zhao Youting, started their careers in the television drama industry, often being cast in romantic idol dramas whose target audiences are the youth group. By highlighting their behind-the-scenes materials through the blog, the marketing tries to attract Ruan’s and Zhao’s fans and could also inspire interest from the general television audience in *Monga*. This strategy was adopted by the digital marketing team of *Monga* and was also applied in the traditional marketing campaign. According to Yin, in the marketing plan she designed for *Monga*, she specifically prioritised young people among different target audience groups.⁸⁸ Yin’s team published promotional materials in magazines that are popular among this target group and expected young people to create word-of-mouth effects.

In this section, the study focuses on the promotion stage of *Monga*, specifically on the distribution of the marketing budget and the marketing material on its official marketing blog. By doing so, it seeks to demonstrate that in the marketing campaign for *Monga*, the strategy was set to approach a wide range of audience by investing heavily in TV advertisements, outdoor

⁸⁶ Li, interview by author.

⁸⁷ Wu, “《艋舺》，行銷了“谁”的艋舺？”

⁸⁸ Yin, interview by author.

advertisements, and setting up an official blog to communicate with the potential audience, especially young people, online.

Conclusion

Taiwanese blockbuster is an approach for the Taiwanese filmmakers to access the market in the globalised film market that is dominated by Hollywood films. This chapter focused on the distribution and promotion stage of *Monga*. Distribution is not only the process that links the production and the exhibition of a film but also a powerful stage in the filmmaking process. While the Taiwanese film industry has been developing in the past two decades and in the distribution area, some local Taiwanese distribution and marketing companies like Activator Marketing and Good Day Films expand their business and contribute to the local film industry. However, as this chapter presented, the Hollywood major studios subsidiaries in Taiwan are still the main force in this business section.

Compared to the Hollywood sub branches, the local distribution companies do not have clear advantages sometimes. But it is a different story when it comes to film marketing. A lack of marketing budget has been the main cause of poor marketing of some Taiwanese films. In *Monga*'s case, the NT\$ 10 million budget allows the film to reach the potential audience through TV trailers, billboard posters and high profile premiere events. More importantly, in the 2010s when digital marketing started to take an increasingly significant role in film marketing, the Pixnet official blog of *Monga* broadened the scale of film publicity with a relatively low cost compared to the traditional marketing method stated earlier.

In the last chapter on the production of *Monga*, I argue that though the word *blockbuster* may have been adopted and adjusted in the Taiwanese social and cultural context, the goal of a Taiwanese blockbuster remains the same as those from Hollywood, which is to reach bigness and exceptionality. This chapter has reaffirmed this argument by extending the focus from the production stage to the distribution and promotion stages. Given the specific conditions of Taiwanese film marketing in the early 2000s, when the local film industries were relatively substandard compared to the major Hollywood

subsidiaries and the market was dominated by Hollywood titles, locally produced Taiwanese blockbusters, including *Monga*, attempt to combine the strength of knowledge of local marketing specialists and the resources of the Hollywood subsidiaries to reach the largest possible marketing campaigns and release scales.

Chapter 5. Reception of *Monga*: A Total History Perspective on the Consumption of a Taiwanese Blockbuster

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, the research has analytically presented how *Monga* was produced, distributed, and promoted in Taiwan as a local blockbuster with a story of Taiwanese gangsters, a crew mainly formed by Taiwanese filmmakers, a mostly Taiwanese cast, and marketing strategies that highlighted the Taiwanese nationality of the film. In this chapter, following the procedure of the film production and reception cycle, the focus shifts from the industrial side to the reception side of *Monga*. In other words, in this chapter, I analyse how *Monga* was read by audiences, what discourses that are raised in the industry were echoed throughout its reception, what discussions arose in the reception that differ from the industrial perspective, and how the meaning of the film has changed in the past decade since its release. To answer these questions, the research takes the approach of a total history of film reception, proposed by Barbara Klinger in her outstanding article ‘Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies’.¹ Here the audience means not only the people who watched the film in the cinema and in other formats but also a wide range of viewers including film critics, journalists, film researchers, and so on.

Scholars have exhaustively argued that film reception studies should go beyond textual analysis, which is influenced by the structuralism theories of language,² to the contextual level, which demonstrates the social and cultural circumstances under which certain cinematic meanings are produced.³ However, Klinger moves a step beyond contextual analysis by suggesting a

¹ Klinger, “Film History Terminable and Interminable,” 107–28.

² David Morley, “Unanswered Questions in Audience Research,” *The Communication Review* 9 (2006): 101–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420600663286>.

³ Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

total history point of view. She points out that only examining a single extrafilmic field of context 'is obviously not enough to exhaustively portray the elements involved in a film's social circulation', since this can only provide an understanding of the discourse of the film from a partial view.⁴ Moreover, she argues that a tendency of the existing literature on contextual analysis of reception studies is that a film and its meaning are discussed within a certain period, normally the time of the film's origin. This perspective, which gives the text a stationary meaning, fails to see that cinematic meaning can differ through changing social and historical situations in time. To overcome these drawbacks, Klinger offers the framework of a total history of reception studies, which can be categorised into synchronic and diachronic reception.⁵ Klinger acknowledges in her article that this total history concept is an idealistic goal for scholars to pursue rather than 'an achievable reality', due to the impossibility of achieving totality in historical research. However, Klinger stresses that this unattainability should not be a setback for researchers but should instead urge scholars to go 'beyond established frontiers, broadening the scope of their enterprise, and continually refining their historical methods and perspectives'.⁶

According to Chen and Wang, the existing literature on Taiwanese film, including research that has been conducted by scholars from Taiwan, mainland China, and other countries, mainly focuses on certain areas, namely Taiwanese film history, historical and cultural criticism, and aesthetic criticism.⁷ These tendencies to text-based approaches have led film reception studies to be a relatively undeveloped area in Taiwanese film studies. However, there are a few studies that have put audiences under their research scope while going beyond the textual approaches listed above. Ya-Feng Mon specifically examines the relationship between the film industry and its audience and how the former exploits the latter's freedom or personality by

⁴ Klinger, "Film History Terminable and Interminable," 109.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Chen and Wang, "The Approach to the Taiwan Films in the Perspective of Multi-Factors," 86–95.

having the capital power.⁸ Mon approaches the audience, their film experiences, and the sensory aspects of film by conducting focus groups and using a biopolitical framework. Other scholars have focused on the reception of Taiwanese films outside Taiwan.⁹ For example, Tang and Fujimaki's research compares the reception of *Kano* (dir. Ma Zhixiang, 2014) through film text and critical reviews both in Taiwan and in Japan.¹⁰

This chapter contributes to the existing discussion on reception of Taiwanese film by expanding the scope of audience reception by adopting the total history point of view when analysing the reception of *Monga*. In other words, instead of focusing on a particular type of reception in a fixed historical and social situation, the research aims to reach as much of the total history of the reception of *Monga* as possible. To do this, I begin the discussion with the reception at the synchronic moment, when *Monga* was released in February 2010, then move to a diachronic perspective from the present in the latter half of the chapter. Besides chronology, there is another structural dimension of this chapter: the compartmentalisation of research materials. The first four sections, focusing on review journalism, media references, online audience reception, and cross-cultural reception respectively, are from the synchronic perspective, which allows me to investigate how the film text was read by the audience, what discourse was raised through the reception, and what the conflicts among different audiences were. The last section, which is diachronic, addresses media references and academic criticism of *Monga* through the past decade since its release, leading to a diverse reading of the film and its reception in a changing historical and social context.

⁸ Ya-Feng Mon, *Film Production and Consumption in Contemporary Taiwan: Cinema as a Sensory Circuit* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

⁹ Cecillia Mello, "Taiwan Cinema across the Globe: A Brazilian Perspective," in *Taiwan Cinema: International Reception and Social Change*, ed. Kuei-Fen Chiu, Gary Rawnsley, and Ming-Yeh T. Rawnsley, Media (London: Routledge, 2017), 11-24.

¹⁰ Shih-Che Tang and Mitsuhiro Fujimaki, "The Unredeemed Nations: The Taiwanese Film *KANO* and Its Trans-Border Reception," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 19 (2018): 21-39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2018.1422350>.

Before going into the analysis, it is necessary to clarify that in this chapter, the main focus is on the reception of *Monga* within Taiwan, except in the section on the cross-cultural reception of the film. The reason for placing film reception in Taiwan at the centre of this chapter is that the film was oriented to a local audience and was predominantly exhibited in Taiwan. *Monga* was released in other countries and areas, including Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and New Zealand, on a relatively small scale.¹¹ Therefore, expanding the scale of the geography of the reception in the cross-cultural section is meant to investigate how and whether the cinematic meaning of the film was discussed similarly or differently in the foreign press.

Film Criticism

Before the spread of the internet, review journalism, in other words reviews that were produced by professional critics and published in print media or broadcast on radio or television, had a great impact on what the public discussed about a film and how.¹² As Verboord puts it, ‘media critics leave their mark by developing...a discourse that resonates in the wider cultural field’.¹³ However, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the internet has become a major mode for information seeking, websites and blogs that concentrate on film reviews have also blossomed.¹⁴ This new cultural production system has led to an institutional crisis in the profession of film criticism.¹⁵ However, it has also expanded the scale of critical film reviews, which includes not only traditional professional publication (including comments and talks on radio and television) but also reviews published on the

¹¹ “Monga,” *Box Office Mojo*, accessed January 30, 2019, https://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/intl/?page=&id=_fMONGA01.

¹² Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery, *Film History: Theory and Practice*, 1st ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993).

¹³ Marc Verboord, “The Impact of Peer-Produced Criticism on Cultural Evaluation: A Multilevel Analysis of Discourse Employment in Online and Offline Film Reviews,” *New Media & Society* 16 (2014): 923, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813495164>.

¹⁴ Jerry Roberts, *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2010).

¹⁵ Huw Walmsley-Evans, *Film Criticism as a Cultural Institution* (London: Routledge, 2018).

internet by both online film journalists and scholars. Thus, in this section, by examining thirteen reviews of *Monga* published on mainstream print media websites and blogs,¹⁶ I argue that three key themes are dominant in this criticism, namely *Monga* as a Taiwanese film, *Monga* as a gangster film, and the discourse around the director.

As mentioned in the introduction, since the tremendous success of *Cape No. 7* (2008),¹⁷ the notion of the revival of Taiwanese cinema has been constantly repeated by professionals in the industry and in review journalism. In the critical reviews of *Monga*, *Cape No. 7* was also repeatedly referenced and compared with *Monga*. For example, Xiao Ye, a well-known writer, scriptwriter, and film critic since the Taiwan New Cinema movement in the 1980s, started his review with a very cheery beginning:

Released in the summer of 2008, *Cape No. 7* breaks the record by achieving 500 million New Taiwan Dollars with unexplainable reasons. This grounds the lively and ambitious atmosphere starting to take place in the whole Taiwanese film industry. However, the release of *Monga* in early 2010 officially announces the entering of the promising days of Taiwan cinema.¹⁸

Wen Tianxiang, a famous film critic in Taiwan, also excitedly wrote as follows:

¹⁶ Five out of these thirteen reviews were originally published in newspapers or magazines. However, because this project is UK-based and had limited access to the printed versions, these reviews were retrieved from the internet through reposts on the official promotional blog of *Monga* or reposts by film critics on their own personal blogs.

¹⁷ Jingyi Wang, Yujing Fan and Yingyu Chen, “海角七号动人台湾味 票房纪录 10 年打不破 [Touching Taiwaneseess in Cape No. 7 Keeps the Box Office Record for Ten Years],” *Central News Agency*, August 22, 2018, <http://www.cna.com.tw/project/20180822-cape-no7/index.html>.

¹⁸ Xiao Ye, “《艋舺》干杯 [Monga Cheers],” *United Daily News*, April 28, 2010, <https://www.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=5005674>.

As a local commercial production with a clear goal in mind, director Niu's *Monga* can be called successful, which is a passionate and fervent interpretation of male romance.¹⁹

Besides these emotional expressions in critical reviews, there were also rational voices about the Taiwanese film industry and commercial film. Li Yamei stresses that following the Hollywood commercial film producing model, *Monga*, with its limited resources, achieved a box office similar to a Hollywood action blockbuster.²⁰ *Monga* had found its own way to involve the mainstream audience. However, Li also expresses the concerns of the Taiwanese film industry over how to establish the film industry under the influence of Hollywood and globalisation and how to foster talent in Taiwan, including specialists in film promotion, film law, and film project management.²¹ The three reviews above put *Monga* in the context of Taiwanese films to evaluate the achievements of the film and express opinions on general Taiwanese film industry development.

The second theme among the review journalism puts *Monga* in the context of the gangster film. On the official poster for *Monga*, the promotion slogan, which is also a line in the film script, is 'I'm in this not for the gangster. I am in this for the friendship, for the brotherhood'. The message of the gangster film genre was clearly received by the reviewers. In their criticism, the film was compared to other Taiwanese gangster films, including *Comes the Black Dog* (*Heigou Laile*, dir. Yin Qi, 2004), *Rebels of the Neon God* (*Qingshaonian Nezha*, dir. Tsai Ming-liang, 1992), and *The Best of Times* (*Meili Shiguang*, dir. Zhang Zuoji, 2001).²² *Jin ju li* claims that in the context

¹⁹ Tianxiang Wen, "艋舺 激情奔放的男性演义[Monga, A Passionate Male Romance]," *United Daily News*, February 2010, <https://mongathemovie.pixnet.net/blog/post/4597504>.

²⁰ Yamei Li, "从《艋舺》看台湾电影的下一步 [From Monga Considering the Next Step of Taiwan Cinema]," *Mingpao Weekly*, March, 2010.

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Jin ju li*, "电影 《艋舺》 [Film Monga]," *Jin ju li's Film Note* (blog), Pixnet, February 12, 2010, <http://jimulder.pixnet.net/blog/post/24861807-%E9%9B%BB%E5%BD%B1-%E3%80%8A%E8%89%8B%E8%88%BA%E3%80%8B>.

of Taiwanese gangster films, these earlier films failed to attract audiences because of their art house film characteristics.²³ Following this argument, *Jin ju li* continues in his review:

Monga is different (from other Taiwanese gangster films)... Famous stars were hired for the cast. Attention has been paid to the details. From the cinematic atmosphere, art design, action direction, acting, editing style to the soundtrack, it has reached a higher level compared to other Taiwanese films.²⁴

The comparison in the quote indicates that gangster genre films in the context of Taiwanese cinema were not always equal to commercial films that appealed to the mainstream tastes of general audiences. Thus, *Monga* was praised not only for its gangster genre but also for its accessibility for a wider audience.

Another dimension in which to evaluate *Monga* as a gangster film is by connecting it with other gangster films in world cinema and indicating the unique characteristics of *Monga*, that is to say its Taiwanese-ness.

The lack of a mature studio system in the Taiwanese film industry causes difficulties when filmmakers are searching for funding. Thus, the production of genre films is also limited. *Monga* breaks this barrier. Of course, it is not necessary (and could not yet be) to compare to the splendid Italian gangster epic, *The Godfather* series, nor needed to juxtapose with gangster films from Hong Kong. What *Monga* presents is vigorousness, ferventness, a kind of simpleness that belongs to the Taiwanese people like a seafood stir fry in the Monga area, full of local grassroots touches.²⁵

The third aspect brought up in the critical reviews is the director, Niu Chengze. Beginning his career in the film industry by acting in several

²³ *Jin ju li*, “电影 《艋舺》.”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Xi guan jie*, “《艋舺》情非得已之生存之道 [Monga The Meaning of Survival],” *Official Blog of Monga*, Pixnet, February 8, 2010, <http://mongathemovie.pixnet.net/blog/post/4610663>.

symbolic titles of Taiwan New Cinema, Niu's role as both the director and an actor in *Monga* led to nostalgic references to that movement, which often included descriptive writing of Niu's past experiences and the sentiment of the glorious days of Taiwanese cinema in the 1980s. An example of this kind would be Xiao Ye's review:

Compared to other directors from the same or younger generations, Niu has a very distinct experience, which is being the protagonist in *Growing Up*, a film sharing a similar reputation as *Time Story* and *The Sandwich Man*.... Twenty-eight years later, the forty-four-year-old Niu Chengze finished his second feature film, *Monga*. Compared to the group of directors in 1982 who earned their reputations in their thirties, Niu is ten years late.²⁶

Moreover, as argued in the previous chapter, branding Niu as the film's auteur was part of the marketing campaign. The same concept was also communicated through critical reviews. Among the above-the-line individuals associated with the film, Niu was often designated as the owner, the author, and the creator of the film and the reason for its success in the reviews. For example,

It is rare to have such a vivid character in Taiwanese film. It shows the favour of Niu Chengze for the character.²⁷

Monga not only is a successful model of promoting Taiwanese film but also shows a director's conflicting character, sentimental but vigorous.²⁸

As seen here, the critics directly connected the personality of Niu to the nature of the film by singling him out among the cast and crew. In the

²⁶ Ye, “《艋舺》干杯。”

²⁷ Weizu Lan, “钮承泽艋舺：潇洒精算 [Niu Chengze Monga: Charismatic and Precise],” *Lan Se Dian Ying Meng* (blog), MT Blog, February 15, 2010, <http://4bluestones.biz/mtblog/2010/02/post-1848.html>.

²⁸ Yuru Lin, “钮承泽的故事——《艋舺》 [The Story of Niu Chengze – Monga],” *Funscreen*, February 12, 2010, http://www.funscreen.com.tw/review.asp?RV_id=455.

history of Taiwanese cinema, this tendency can be associated with the auteur studies rooted in Taiwanese film narratives.

So far, this section seeks to present one aspect of the reception of *Monga*, critical reviews that appeared immediately after the film's release, by noting three themes that were emphasised in the reviews. The box office success of *Monga* was instantly acknowledged by film critics. The choice of genre, the Taiwanese character attached to the film, and the hope of the revival of the Taiwanese film industry all sparked cheerfulness among the film critics. To present this argument through a clear structure, these aspects are compartmentalised in three themes as discussed above. However, as the examples above indicate, evaluating *Monga* as a Taiwanese film or a gangster film or referring to the director are intertwined and indivisible. Moreover, even though the present Taiwanese film industry is still strongly influenced by the Taiwan New Cinema movement, both practically and aesthetically, the concern over the development of the industry is serious and paramount. In the next section, the investigation moves to audience reception posted in online forums to illustrate the mass audience perspective on the total reception history of *Monga*.

Online Audience Reception

Following the chronology of the reception of *Monga*, this section intends to present the total history of the reception from another aspect, audience reception, specifically online audience reviews. It is important to point out that the online audience is a certain type of viewer who has access to the internet and is motivated to leave reviews instead of merely browsing online.²⁹ Thus, it is unlikely that the online audience truly represents the general audience. However, acknowledging this drawback, peer-generated reviews online can still reveal not only the discourses raised on a particular film but also the reviewing culture in the digital era. Thus, this section aims to present what the

²⁹ Inger-Lise K. Bore, "Reviewing Romcom: (100) IMDb Users and (500) Days of Summer," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 8 (2011): 44–164.

responses from the Taiwanese general audience were towards *Monga* as well as what they say about this emerging film review culture.

There are a few online facilities that can be accessed in Taiwan for film reviewing. Yahoo! Kimo³⁰ was chosen for this study under the following considerations. First, the subsite of Yahoo! Kimo, Yahoo! Kimo Movies,³¹ was widely used in Taiwan for exploring film news and reviews in the period when *Monga* was released.³² As Figure 5 indicates, besides providing information on a specific film, it also includes charts of domestic and international box office ranking, cinema ticket booking, and news related to film and cinema in general. Second, when *Monga* was released in 2010, social media like Facebook and Instagram were not prevalent in Taiwan.³³ Website portals like Yahoo were the main sources of information. Third, examining the review posts on Yahoo! Kimo in the format of a forum rather than reviews posted on individual blogs provides the opportunity to observe communications between the users.

³⁰ Yahoo! Kimo, a Taiwanese web portal, was established after the Taiwanese site was acquired by Yahoo in February 2001.

³¹ "Home Page," *Yahoo Movies*, February 1, 2019, <https://movies.yahoo.com.tw/index.html>.

³² Yin, interview by author.

³³ Ibid.

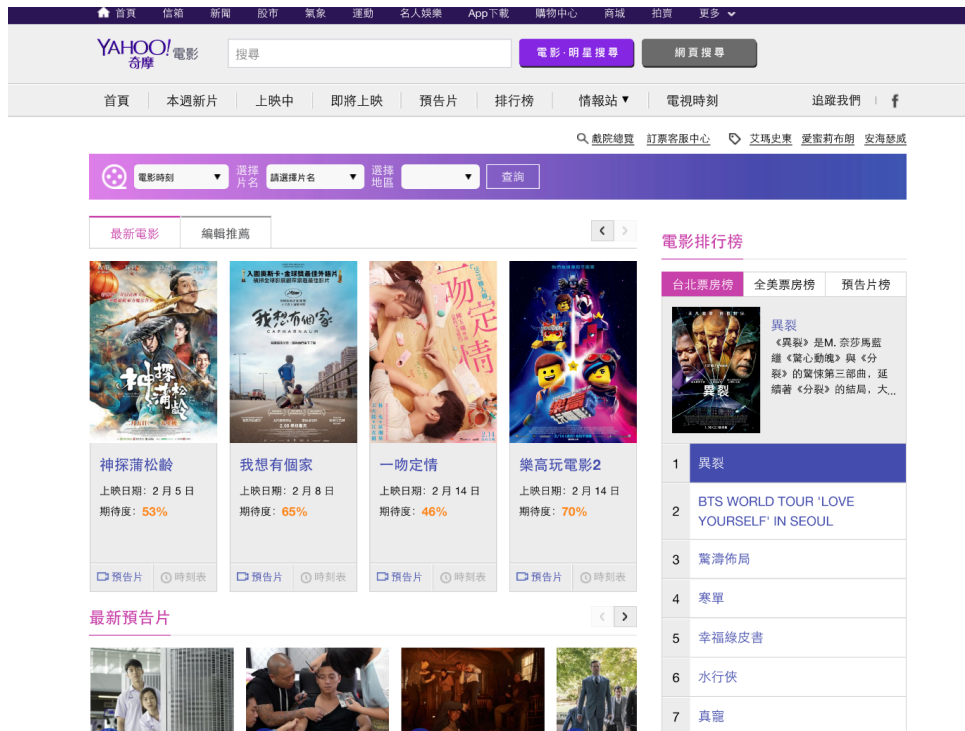


Figure 5: Screenshot of Yahoo! Kimo Movies

When this research was conducted,³⁴ there were 12,330 ratings of *Monga* with an average score of 4.1 out of 5 and 2,291 short reviews. Compared to other Taiwanese films released between 2008 and 2010, such as *Orz Boyz* (2008), *Hear Me* (*Tingshuo*, dir. Zheng Fenfen, 2009), *Au Revoir Taipei* (*Yiye Taipei*, dir. Arvin Chen, 2010), and the box office legend *Cape No. 7* (2008), which have 128, 350, 276, and 1,823 short reviews on Yahoo! Kimo Movie respectively, *Monga* received the highest number of audience reviews. The number of reviews may not be sufficient to prove the popularity of a film, but it does reveal the extensive attention *Monga* attracted in Taiwan. By focusing on these 2,291 reviews, this research aims to analyse how *Monga* was read by the audience.

Before investigating these reviews, it is important to specify some obstacles encountered in this research. First, in contrast to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Yahoo! Kimo Movies does not provide basic demographic information on reviewers, such as the user's gender, country, or age. Registration is required before posting reviews on the forum, but only an

³⁴ January 2019.

email address is needed. Second, for an unknown reason, probably associated with a website revision in early 2015, it seems that 2,290 out of the 2,291 reviews were posted on 4 February 2015 between 01:44 and 01:47. The same issue occurs with reviews of all films released before early February 2015. However, these defects do not invalidate the data, which still allows me to analyse one aspect of the reception: the discourse raised around audience reception.

Reading through these reviews, there is a clear tone that comes out strongly: that *Monga* is a Taiwanese film. Though there are discussions about Niu as the director, the film's marketing, and the usage of Taiwanese language in the film among other subjects, these were all discussed within the subtext of *Monga* as a Taiwanese film.

Before unpacking the analysis on the online reviews in detail, there are some interesting general features of the reviews worth mentioning. First, as Iger-Lise Kalviknes Bore claims, some user-generated reviews adopt the writing style of a professional review as a strategy for gaining 'a sense of authority'.³⁵ However, this is not the case on the Yahoo! Kimo review forum. Unlike reviews by professional film critics, which usually have a catchy opening line followed by a short summary of the plot and introduction to the main cast and crew before moving on to a critical discussion, the online reviews were written in an informal manner. For example, punctuation marks and grammar were used irregularly, and the writing has an oral language tone. Sentences were formed very loosely without signposting language or clear paragraphing.

Second, in contrast to the mild positive average rating of 4.1, the attitudes appearing in the reviews are extremely emotional. A majority of the reviews showed either fondness and support or distaste and loathing. The following reviews from users who gave the film 1/5 and 5/5 ratings, respectively, are prime examples:

Boring! Only using the popularity of the celebrities. The storyline is really horrible! No wonder the box office of national film always falls

³⁵ Bore, "Reviewing Romcom," 149.

behind compared to foreign films. Even China! (Taiwanese film) Cannot Winning! What is *Monga*? Even more boring than *The Treasure Hunter*!! First on the top 10 awful national film³⁶

Didn't expect it to be so good Oh my god feel so energized after watching Whether is the scriptwriter the director the music composer the art design the actors all fabulous When I was back home I keep searching for the behind-the-scene It is really a diligent film Very authentic rural atmosphere (haha) Except going to watch it because of being supportive for national cinema A well-plotted storyline great acting of the cast is also the reason to go watch it!! Please hurry go watch *Monga*³⁷

Though very unlike in their viewpoints towards the film, both these reviews have emotional narrative tones with colloquial style. Reading between the lines, both reviews addressed and evaluated *Monga* as a Taiwanese film.

The third feature of the reviews is that users on the forum very often referenced other users' reviews when they wrote their own comments. For example,

Really can't understand those who said it's horrible...do they really understand what does this film is trying to say?? The most ridiculous thing is...some people said it's the top of the top 10 awful national film...I guess those guys have never watched *The Treasure Hunter*

Some users directly mentioned other reviewers' usernames in their commentary:

³⁶ *The Treasure Hunter* (Ci Ling, dir. Zhu Yanping, 2009).

³⁷ In contrast to English, there is no space between Chinese words or characters. The review, originally posted in Traditional Chinese, has no punctuation marks between sentences, so I purposely omit them in the translation. Capital letters are used to signal the beginning of each sentence.

May I ask xxx does it have to have some certain meaning for people listening to the song of Air Supply in the 80s? Or are you trying to say that gangster cannot listen to English songs? Are you trying to nitpick?

In contrast to the professional film critics who belong to the higher level of the cultural evaluation pyramid,³⁸ online review culture has shifted this hierarchy. The communication among users, including both actively responding to others and passively reading other's comments, not only allows the audience, as reviewers, to express their opinions but also creates possibilities for them to exchange and debate different opinions and shift the discourse around the film.

The analysis of the *Monga* reviews has so far focused on the features that were shared among the online reviews and different from the traditional critical reception writing. The following section, by investigating the content of the reviews further, presents four aspects that were repeatedly raised and debated in the online audience reviews.

I really believe that national cinema should be supported! Especially a film like this that is an authentic portrait of Taiwan.... There is a little national film like this~ Who hasn't watched it yet hurry up!!!

How can a film be evaluated as a good film? Even Hollywood produces a lot of lousy titles~... Being a Taiwanese should support Taiwanese films!! It is really close to our everyday reality, isn't Taiwan a country that is full of loyalty and faithfulness!!

National film is a national film, which still cannot shine on the big screen. Compared to the *Young and Dangerous* series from Hong Kong, the Hong Kong film are much better than this one

These three examples of reviews all put *Monga* in the context of Taiwanese cinema, which is the first aspect that was discussed extensively. *Monga* as a film made in Taiwan by Taiwanese filmmakers was not only a

³⁸ Verboord, "The Impact of Peer-Produced Criticism on Cultural Evaluation."

marketing point during the promotion stages and a highlight in the media coverage about the film but was also something that imprinted in the audience's minds. Audiences considered buying tickets to see *Monga* to be an act of support for the national film industry. Moreover, the notion of support for Taiwanese films was sometimes directly linked to patriotism, as illustrated in the second review above. These supportive and sympathetic sentiments, which Niu underlined should not be required by the industry from the audience to achieve a better box office revenue,³⁹ were still widely shared among the reviewers. Being a national film or using *Monga*'s campaign slogan of 'made in Taiwan' proved it could be an appealing selling point by arousing consumers' sentiment. However, this kind of discourse did not consider Taiwanese films individually but rather as a genre, like romcoms or crime stories, which shares a similar set of stylistic criteria. This could lead to losing the potential audience who strongly hold a negative stereotype of Taiwanese films.

The intense notion of national film also leads to the comparison between Taiwanese films and foreign films, which is the second aspect that appears clearly in the reviews: evaluating Taiwanese films through different criteria. One expression repeated in the reviews was that

Considering it's a national film, it is not that bad.

Films made in Hollywood and extensively released in the Taiwanese film market not only allowed the studios to gain capital benefits but also trained the audience's taste to their narrative style. As one reviewer expressed,

Maybe I am really used to the Hollywood blockbusters...so I feel disappointed when I watch this kind of low budget national film...but then I thought about it... consider it is a national film...it is a good film...but still can be improved

³⁹ MONGA, “《艋舺》花絮：导演说，拍电影就是应该要这样 [Monga Behind-the-Scene: Director Said, Film Should Be Made in This Way...],” December 11, 2009, video, 2:29, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wu1Nuvn7sU8>.

However, some reviews argued that considering the film industry's scale and abilities in Taiwan and in Hollywood, comparing a Taiwanese production like *Monga* to Hollywood blockbusters was unfair and disproportionate.

Another discussion that was raised in the reviews frequently was on the Taiwanese dialect and Taiwanese cultural elements in the film. In contrast to the audience in mainland China, who consistently stressed that the Taiwanese dialect in *Monga* added some Taiwan-ness to the film (analysed more in detail in chapter 7), the local audience in Taiwan held a contradictory attitude:

First it's necessary to celebrate the improvement of the national film. National film is getting better and better. I root for it!! But all the main characters' Taiwanese in the film is really stiff...only the Taiwanese swear words comes out very natural

After watching *Monga*, I feel it is a misfit that a couple of Mainlander kids pretend to be local islander gangsters. A lot of lines and conversation are not even a little bit close to the traditional islander's brotherhood.

The fourth aspect of the discussion is the educational function of films. *Monga* was rated PG-15, which means viewing was not permitted for people under fifteen years old. However, the debate about profanity in the film and the gangster genre was very lively. Reviewers spoke out against the number of swear words in the script, arguing that the use of profanity was unnecessary and abundant and encouraged its use among the youth audience. They also argued that presenting the romantic friendship and brotherhood of local gangsters established a negative example for children and teenagers. Against this argument, other reviewers defended *Monga* from two perspectives:

The film *Monga*, intelligent people focus on the result, they will know (joining the gangster) is not the right way. Unwise people focus on the procedure, will have to step in this way... Parents should company the

kids to watch, and educate them It could be seen as a very educational film

This is Taiwanese culture, which no other country has. Gangsters are like this, old society is like this, betel nut, cigarette and swear words. Without these, it cannot be called a gangster anymore.

As exemplified above, on one hand, reviewers argued that the gangster story could still be educational for young people, depending on how the film was read. On the other hand, reviewers pointed out that films are not textbooks and are not supposed to be educational. Rather the profanity in *Monga* helped to build the verisimilitude of the gangsters in the Monga area in the 1980s.

In sum, the notion of *Monga* as a Taiwanese film was acknowledged by the local audience not only through the film textual reading, including comments on the backdrop, the dialect usage, and the script, but also in relation to the practice of cinema going, which has been connected to patriotism. In the next section, the research shifts focus to another perspective on the total history of reception, cross-cultural reception, which adds a new spectrum to the picture of how one film, *Monga*, can be read under different social and cultural circumstances.

Cross-Cultural Reception

In contrast to the positive reception of *Monga* in Taiwan, the film received mixed reviews in overseas media. As presented early in the chapter, *Monga* was considered a magnificent success among film critics in Taiwan, which reinforced the idea of the revival of the Taiwanese film industry. The writing of the Taiwanese criticism revealed both a passionate and a sentimental tone. However, comparing the reviews written by Taiwanese and foreign critics, it seems that *Monga* was read merely as a recent Taiwanese film by the latter. Moreover, because of Niu's personal experience during the Taiwan New Cinema period, his experience as well as the movement were written about extensively in the local critical reviews, but these points were not mentioned in foreign reviews. This section analyses some of the key features shared by

seven foreign critical reviews that were collected for this research. By examining cross-cultural reviews of *Monga*, the research aims to discern the similarities and differences when the film was read in other cultures.

First, *Monga* as a Taiwanese film was clearly indicated in the reviews not only because the film was produced in Taiwan but also due to the backdrop of the story, the local dialect usage in the film, and the Taiwanese 1980s nostalgia atmosphere presented through scenes:

Monga is a dynamic and powerfully impressive Taiwanese gangster film set against the stunning backdrop of Taipei of the 1980s.⁴⁰

Monga is uniquely Taiwanese and you'd enjoy the movie more if you understand Hokkien and Min Nan. With nostalgic backdrops, impressive camerawork and music score...*Monga* is a highly recommended watch.⁴¹

However, unlike the Taiwanese critics who put *Monga* in line with *Cape No. 7* (2008) to emphasise that the tremendous success of these two films heralded the Taiwanese film industry's revival, none of the reviewers in these cross-cultural examples mentioned any other Taiwanese film as a comparable context. Only the critic from *Variety* mentioned its box office triumph in the domestic market:

It's the kind of larger-drawn movie that Taiwan should be attempting if the island's industry is ever to get back on its feet again. Niu's gamble looks to be repaid – at least locally – with *Monga* strong-arming a brawny \$1.6 million in its first week since bowing Feb. 5.⁴²

⁴⁰ Mark Adams, "Monga," *Screen Daily*, March 23, 2010, <https://www.screendaily.com/monga/5011980.article>.

⁴¹ Tommy Ang, "Monga," *Cinema Online*, April 4, 2010, <http://www.cinema.com.my/movies/details.aspx?search=2010.6482.monga.12121>.

⁴² Derek Elley, "Monga," *Variety*, February 13, 2010, <https://variety.com/2010/film/markets-festivals/monga-1117942167/>.

The reviewers are also more dispassionate and collected than the Taiwanese critics. This indifferent tone, which is the second feature shared among the foreign reviews, is illustrated in the following criticisms:

It's in this half, where the relationships and dramatic strands should take on an epic scale, that the screenplay by Tseng Li-ting and Niu isn't really up to the job.... Most damagingly, there's little sense of real physical threat here – and certainly nothing on a par with that in some of Johnnie To's movies and most South Korean gangster yarns.⁴³

Director Doze Niu has given such an epic feel to this 140-minute feature that, although the script (by Niu and Tseng Li-ting) rarely achieves the emotional depth warranted by its grandiose treatment, the overall effect is an engrossing film whose energy and scope are the very definition of a blockbuster.⁴⁴

As indicated in the two examples above, the script was singled out and criticised by the reviewers. However, the cinematography and editing were highly praised in the reviews:

Right from the beginning, director Doze Niu injects a lively exuberance into the film, aided by Taiwan-based American cinematographer Jake Pollock's (*Yang Yang, The Message*) brilliant lensing and some snappy editing by Niu, co-scripter Tseng Li-ting and Lin Yung-yi.⁴⁵

What holds *Monga* together is the superb widescreen lensing by Taiwan-based American d.p. Jake Pollock (*Yang Yang, The Message*), whose saturated colors bring a vividness to both the day- and nighttime backstreet scenes that the screen play only fitfully matches.⁴⁶

⁴³ Elley, "Monga."

⁴⁴ Paul Fonoroff, "Monga," *South China Morning Post*, April 15, 2010, <https://www.scmp.com/article/711404/monga>.

⁴⁵ Gabriel Chong, "Monga." *MovieXclusive*, accessed February 25, 2019, <http://www.movieexclusive.com/review/monga/monga.html>.

⁴⁶ Elley, "Monga."

The 20-minute, pre-title sequence dexterously introduces the principles and displays the technical prowess of Niu and cinematographer Jake Pollock, culminating in an impressive crane shot wherein scores of colourfully dressed punks clash like rival colonies of variegated ants.⁴⁷

As these reviews demonstrate, with a collected tone, a relatively outsider point of view, but without any sentimental touch, the foreign critics seemed to have a specific focus on the film itself instead of placing it in the larger context of Taiwanese film history or the film industry.

Through the examples above, it is clear that, though the film was glorified by domestic critics in Taiwan, the international critics seemed to have a more distanced view. Even though the Taiwanese nostalgia sense, the gangster genre, and Niu's role were acknowledged, both the further geographic distance and the less personal sentimental connections led the reviewers to a more objective point of view.

So far, this chapter has exhaustively examined various aspects of the reception of *Monga* within the synchronic areas, including critical reception and audience reception of *Monga* within Taiwan and cross-cultural reception outside Taiwan. As Klinger stresses, the interpretation of the filmic meaning cannot be completed by only exploring it through the social and cultural condition of its origin.⁴⁸ Thus, the next section expands the scale of the reception of *Monga* from the synchronic moments to the diachronic areas to further investigate the cultural reception of the film.

Diachronic Media Reception of Monga

As suggested by Klinger, diachronic film reception, like synchronic reception, contains various dimensions, including re-watching and re-reading through retrospectives, re-evaluating by review media, and screening on television and video-on-demand digital platforms and the like. In the case of *Monga*, ten years have passed since its initial release. A decade may not be enough to see a dramatic transformation of social and historical conditions, which could lead

⁴⁷ Fonoroff, "Monga."

⁴⁸ Klinger, "Film History Terminable and Interminable."

to a different interpretation of the cinematic meaning. However, a diachronic film reception analysis still provides an opportunity for this research to investigate how the film has been received not only cinematically but also culturally in the past decade. Thus, this section intends to analyse how *Monga* has been culturally received domestically in Taiwan through research materials collected from the online versions of the three major daily printed newspapers in Taiwan, *Apple Daily*, *China Times*, and *United Daily News*, and other digital platforms. To do this, the discussion on the diachronic media reception of *Monga* is conducted in three parts, namely celebrity-related media coverage, filmic media references, and community journalism references.

Since the release of *Monga* in 2010, many people from the cast and the crew have expanded their reputations and become well-known not only in Taiwan but also in mainland China and Hong Kong, especially the director Niu and the two main actors, Ruan Jingtian and Zhao Youting. From the celebrities' real-life events, for example becoming engaged,⁴⁹ family members opening businesses,⁵⁰ to their commercial events,⁵¹ in the narratives of the media, participating in *Monga* became a label for the celebrities that indicated a remarkable achievement in their careers.

However, another type of celebrity news media coverage that referenced *Monga* is related to the director, Niu, specifically the two times that he has been charged by the local police. The first time was due to Niu illegally entering a Chinese combatant ship with cinematographer Cao Yu for location scouting in 2014. The second time was because Niu was being investigated for sexually assaulting an actress who participated in his film *Pao Ma* during the

⁴⁹ “蔡昌宪套牢空姐女友 短 10 公分契合就好 [Cai Changxian Tie Down the Stewards Girlfriend, 10 cm Shorter in Height, Yet It's A Good Match],” *Apple Daily*, March 25, 2018, <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/appledaily/article/entertainment/20180325/37967974/>.

⁵⁰ “[租金吓人] 男性凤小岳妻汉堡新店 327 万年租金 [[Shocking Rent] Male Star Rhydian Vaughan's Wife New Burger Shop 327 Million Yearly Rent],” *Apple Daily*, August 8, 2018, <https://tw.appledaily.com/new/realtime/20180808/1406785/>.

⁵¹ Sun Man, “赵又廷任 BOSS 大中华区代言 这身会显得比例超好 [Zhao Youting Becoming the Advertising Endorser of BOSS in Greater China Area, The Total Grey Outfit Shows the Amazing Body Ratio],” *UND Style*, January 16, 2019, <https://style.udn.com/style/story/8065/3596818>.

film's prime production period.⁵² In the reports on the sexual assault case, Niu's early career was also referenced, including directing *Monga*:

The success of *Monga* also started the period of Niu being a 'controversial famous director'. He was accused of raising funds from local gangsters [for financing the film production of *Monga*], which was forced to be clarified that the local gangsters only supported the film by providing walk-ons but not money.⁵³

Thus, in celebrity-related media coverage, *Monga* was still read as a success in Taiwanese film history and was referenced in news reports to add some glamour to the celebrities. However, the negative news about celebrities has led to a re-reading or re-inspection of the film and its production.

The second category of news that references *Monga* is filmic media coverage, including film criticism, promotional news, and industrial reports. A very specific case of this kind is media coverage of the Taiwanese gangster film *Gatao* (*Jiao Tou*, dir. Li Yunjie, 2015) and its sequel *Gatao 2: The New Leading Rising* (*Jiao Tou 2: Wangzhe Zai Qi*, dir. Yan Zhengguo, 2018). In one article that discusses gangster films and the motion picture content rating system in Taiwan, the writer declared that

Gatao is listed in the Restricted Level because 'the film describes gangsters' group fights using knives, murders... [and it] may cause imitation. Thus it is rated as Restricted. Compared to the New Year's celebration season film *Monga*, the action scenes in *Monga* are much

⁵² As a result of Niu's scandal, the crew of *Pao Ma* was dismissed. See "剧组确定解散! 钮承泽退出演艺圈后路曝光! [The Film Crew Dismissed Confirmed! Niu Chengze's Life After the Entertainment Business Exposed]," *Yahoo! News*, December 12, 2018, <https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E5%8A%87%E7%B5%84%E7%A2%BA%E5%AE%9A%E8%A7%A3%E6%95%A3-%E9%88%95%E6%89%BF%E6%BE%A4%E9%80%80%E5%87%BA%E6%BC%94%E8%97%9D%E5%9C%88%E5%BE%8C%E8%B7%AF%E9%A6%96%E5%BA%A6%E6%9B%9D%E5%85%89-074100892.html>.

⁵³ Yongzhi Su, "钮承泽争议不断 《军中乐园》大陆摄影上军舰曾触法 [Niu Chengze Arouses Constant Controversy, Had Broken the Law by Entering Warship during Filming Paradise in Service]," *UND News*, May 12, 2018, <https://stars.udn.com/star/story/10090/3520500>.

more violent, though it was rated as Parental Guidance Suggested Level.⁵⁴

In a film criticism of *Gatao* (2015), the two films were compared more thoroughly:

Everyone with a discerning eye can see that there are so many similarities between *Gatao* and *Monga*: five young protagonists, two local gataos, external forces starting to influence the local power... The only difference is the core value of these two films.⁵⁵

Moreover, in one television news report on *Gatao 2* (2018), an edited film clip of *Monga* was directly used next to one from *Gatao 2* (2018), as illustrated in Figure 6 below. While comparing the two films visually, the voice-over of the news report stressed that

Aside from emphasising the gangster action genre, the absolute realistic style, substantial spectacle, [*Gatao 2*] has more gangster and violent conflicts than the national film *Monga*. *Gatao 2* can be called the Taiwanese film with the greatest momentum in recent years, which obviously surpasses *Monga*.⁵⁶

These examples indicate that *Monga* has been recognised as a benchmark for Taiwanese blockbusters as well as gangster genre films in both the filmic text area and production scale.

The last category of media that referenced *Monga* that is analysed here is community news. Of seven news reports collected for research in this category, aside from one about a fire disaster that happened in one of the

⁵⁴ Xi Guan Jie, “《角头》警世反踩卫道底线！限制级真 X！ [The Cautionary in *Gatao* Crosses the Moral Boundary, The Restricted Level Is Really X!],” *UND Opinion*, July 8, 2015, <https://opinion.udn.com/opinion/story/6087/1042482>.

⁵⁵ Quentin Tu, “《角头》《艋舺》的赝品 [*Gatao* - The Counterfeit of *Monga*],” *Quentin 1012* (blog), Pixnet, February 2, 2018, <http://quentin1012.pixnet.net/blog/post/346393132>.

⁵⁶ EBC News CH51 “[角头 2] 黑衣部队声势浩大 场面气势赢 [艋舺] [*Gatao 2* Black Suit Army in Strength and Impetus, The Momentum Wins Against *Monga*],” April 4, 2017, video, 1:49, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFn6zbxw8Gs>.

shooting locations for *Monga*,⁵⁷ the rest were about local crime news. In this category, the news articles both referenced *Monga* in the news content and used the film title in the article title in the context of ‘like the film *Monga*’⁵⁸ or ‘a replication of *Monga*’.⁵⁹ Moreover, as Figures 7 and 8 illustrate, *Monga* was referenced not only textually but also visually by inserting screenshots, posters, or film clips in the community crime news articles.

⁵⁷ Binru Liu, Yunfeng Lu, and Yahua Cai, “火神来犯！《艋舺》青山宫遭殃 [The Fire God Come to Attack! Monga Qingshen Temple in Disaster],” *Apple Daily*, November 20, 2013, <https://tw.appledaily.com/local/20131120/SNPO27PFNZTAP7HEMDAI3BHUP4/>.

⁵⁸ Mingjun Xie, “宛如电影《艋舺》华西街械门枪击主谋陈明杰、谢宗宪落网 [Alike The Film Monga, Huaxi Street Gun Murderer Chen Mingjie and Xie Zongxian Arrested],” *China Times*, October 9, 2018, <https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20181009003973-260402>.

⁵⁹ Apple Daily, “《艋舺》翻版 争 10 亿地盘 黑帮火拼.”



Figure 6: Comparison between *Gatao 2* (left) and *Monga* (right) on EBC News⁶⁰

掌握200家情色店

警調查童耀君與手下張十方（十九歲，大學生）等六人從事暴力討債，近年還深入校園，吸收高中生、大學生近百人。北市刑大昨逮捕童耀君等六人，依違反《組織犯罪條例》、恐嚇取財等罪嫌移送法辦。

據了解，萬華地區的大小阿公店、清茶館約有兩百家，大部分掌握在本地角頭華西街幫與頭北層等幫派份子手上，兩方除搶掠經營投資店家外，還藉由提供酒水、紙巾、水果及收取保護費等方式從中牟利，租估每家店單月獲利近二十萬元，加上賭場、商家保護費，每年近十億元的商機。



張與成隔四海幫海和堂堂主童耀君（右）希達地盤門戶，昨被逮捕，陳建輝攝

多次街頭傳戰

但阿公店商號長年遭華西街幫本土角頭把持，其他幫派幾乎打不進其勢力範圍。警方指出，月期，童男向竹聯幫地堂大哥「阿忠」宣稱有管道引進年輕越南妹，兩幫可合作打破壟斷。華西街幫獲悉消息後，為了鞏固既有勢力，多次與童男鬥毆，月期不慎誤傷竹聯幫堂陳姓堂主，陳堂主傳聞「我丟盡竹聯幫的臉」給各幫眾，引發一連串的街頭混戰。

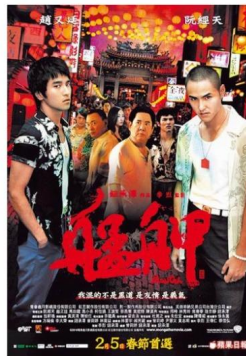


Figure 7: Referencing *Monga* with film posters in crime news⁶¹

⁶⁰ EBS News CH51, “[角头 2].”

⁶¹ “《猛男》翻版 爭 10 億地盤 黑幫火拼 [A Replication of Monga Fighting for 1 Billion Valued Territory Gangster Put up a Fight],” *Apple Daily*, November 9, 2012, <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/appledaily/article/headline/20121109/34630719/>.

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雙毒品交易結怨

彰化縣刑大日前獲報高健弘（四十二歲）、陳宏霖（四十二歲）涉嫌販毒，前天逮捕兩人並在陳男的車廂發現陳男（三十九歲）被大塑膠袋包裹纏繞，只露出頭部，陳男全身是傷，臉也被打得像豬頭。

陳男說陳男要載他去山上活埋，但未說原因，陳、高則供稱因陳男小舅子花五千元向陳男買手機但錢被吞掉，陳男才叫人綁走陳男，只是要教訓他。警方懷疑雙方可能因毒品交易結怨。中國醫藥大學附設醫院眼科主任韓實佑說，眼睛若被三秒膠黏住，可先用生理食鹽水沖洗，盡快就醫，不要用力扳開或揉搓眼睛，以免引發角膜炎，造成視力模糊甚至失明。



陳宏霖（圖）涉嫌與高健弘打劫凌虐陳男被逮，即遭拘捕



電影《艋舺》中有三秒膠封七孔的殘忍情節，翻攝網路

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[蘋果日報 台灣](#)

Figure 8: Screenshot of *Monga* inserted in crime news article⁶²

⁶² “《艋舺》翻版 男遭 3 秒貼眼見險活埋 [A Replication of Monga Man Suffered 3-Second Glue and Nearly Buried Alive],” *Apple Daily*, July 21, 2017, <http://www.appledaily.com.tw/appledaily/article/headline/20170721/37722071/>.

In summary, this section has explored the diachronic area of the reception of *Monga* by examining media references to *Monga* since its original release. A decade later, in the Taiwanese film industry, it is still categorised as a Taiwanese blockbuster and considered a benchmark for Taiwanese commercial genre film-related reports. Aside from its achievements, the gangster story and film plot have become a common meme among general newspaper readers, leading to the title being referenced in community crime news articles. Titles like ‘A Replication of *Monga*’ already indicate a crime story without going into the details in the Taiwanese social context.

Conclusion

This chapter, following the production and distribution perspective of *Monga*, has shifted the focus to the reception side. Aiming at presenting the total history of reception of the film, the research has examined both synchronic and diachronic areas of the reception to present not only how the film was read in the time and space of its original release but also its changing cinematic meaning in the diachronic moment. Because of Niu’s career, the reception of *Monga* from the media and professional critics builds the connections between *Monga* and Taiwan New Cinema. Niu and Li’s reputation boosted the reputation of *Monga* and attracted a lot of attention. However, a decade has passed since the film was released. Now the dynamic between the film and the filmmakers has changed. Especially since the #Me Too movement around the world since 2017, in Taiwan there is also urge from the public to gain awareness of sexual abuse. Because of the unenviable public reputation of Niu, due to his sexual assault case, the film is mostly mentioned in the recent media when reporting Niu’s case and charges.

As Klinger stresses in her outstanding research and I emphasised at the beginning of the chapter, the concept of a total history is idealistic but not realistic. This research illustrates that the unrealistic goal of total history exists at both the philosophical and practical levels; put differently, research material matters. Focusing on the case of *Monga*, a film that was released a decade ago in Taiwan, collecting valid research material has been the greatest challenge

aside from the investigation of the material. With limited archives and inadequate access, as a researcher, a question that I have asked myself is whether the materials collected are typical and representative enough to convey the real overall picture. Unfortunately, it is difficult to have a confident as well as positive answer to this question. However, this is also why a total history approach to reception studies is necessary. By investigating the filmic meaning in the changing social, cultural, and historical circumstances through various categories of compartmentalised materials, the different areas of reception not only supplement others but also illustrate contradictions in the picture as a whole.

Chapter 6. Informal Distribution of *Monga* in Mainland China: Media Platforms and Digital Circulation

To answer the key research question of what *Monga*'s popularity reveals about film production, distribution, promotion and reception in Taiwan, in Greater China, and for film industries and cultures overall, the study has thus far investigated the business plan created by Niu and Li, the support and function of Hollywood distributor Warner Bros., and the strategic marketing campaign. The last chapter presented a total history of audience reception of *Monga*, both synchronic and diachronic, mainly focused on the audience in Taiwan. However, *Monga* also gained success and popularity beyond the borders of Taiwan. Though *Monga* was not officially released in mainland China, through various forms of informal distribution, the film was consumed by the audience there. Media coverage of *Monga* was also published on the most influential internet portals in mainland China including Sina, Sohu, Tencent, and so on.¹

Thus in this chapter, I examine the informal distribution of *Monga* in mainland China through Douban, a Chinese media platform where users can rate films and write comments and reviews. There are two aims for doing this. The first is to investigate how audiences in mainland China read *Monga*, a Taiwanese-made blockbuster, and how media platforms and digital developments have facilitated and changed traditional film distribution and consumption. Second, this chapter functions as a prelude to the next chapter, which illustrates how the success of *Monga* assisted Niu in his next project, a coproduction between Taiwan and mainland Chinese, *Love (Ai)*, (2012).

¹ Gong Lei, "热血导演钮承泽 用肾上腺素飚出个《艋舺》 [Hot-Blooded Director Niu Chengze Made *Monga* with Adrenaline]," *Sohu Entertainment*, March 21, 2010, <https://yule.sohu.com/20100321/n270981222.shtml>; "图文: 电影《艋舺》记者会-柯佳嬿演妓女 [Image and Text: Press Conference of *Monga*- Ke Jiayan Plays a Prostitute]," *Sina Entertainment*, January 29, 2010, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/p/2010-01-29/13142860850.shtml>; "钮承泽荐片--《艋舺》: 台湾电影跟以前不同了 [Niu Chengze Recommends Films - *Monga*: Taiwanese Film Different From Before]," *Tencent Entertainment*, April 20, 2010, <https://ent.qq.com/a/20100420/000567.htm>.

In this chapter, I argue that informal distribution has changed the way films are distributed, and the role of audiences in the distribution process has shifted from passive viewers to active distributors. In the case of *Monga*, although it was not released in mainland cinemas, informal distribution benefited the director and the main actors, who gained their reputations among mainland audiences, thus building the market foundation for Niu and the leading actors to boost their careers in mainland China with more opportunities.

Informal Distribution in Mainland China

Distribution is the practice between production and consumption in the film industry. It can determine which movies are watched by audiences and how. In general, there is not enough attention given to the distribution sector compared to production and audience consumption. In the existing literature on film distribution, a generous number of studies have focused on Hollywood from the economic perspective.² Earlier in chapter 4, this thesis examined the support of a Hollywood distributor for *Monga* in its Taiwanese theatrical release. In this section, the analysis concentrates on the informal sector of distribution of *Monga*, particularly in mainland China.

The word *informal*, as in *informal economy* or *informal distribution*, has been given various definitions in different studies. In this project, I borrow the definition of Roman Lobato, in which *informal* implies ‘activities occurring outside beyond the view of state’.³ Informal distribution can be peer-to-peer file sharing, illegal downloading, online streaming, and other activities.⁴

Turning the focus to mainland China, after 1949 and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, the government constructed a national film

² See Drake, “Distribution and Marketing in Contemporary Hollywood,” 63–82; Allen J. Scott, “Hollywood and the World: The Geography of Motion-Picture Distribution and Marketing,” *Review of International Political Economy* 11 (2004): 33–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0969229042000179758>; Wasko, *How Hollywood Works*.

³ Ramon Lobato, “Introduction,” in *The Informal Media Economy*, ed. Julian Thomas and Ramon Lobato (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 7.

⁴ Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age*.

system intentionally in 1950 and refused to import and release any American movies.⁵ Even after the open-door policies were enacted in 1978, the policies and ideologies around cultural production, including films, did not dramatically change. However, the State Council released a new series of regulations before acceptance into the WTO in February 2002, which greatly influenced production, distribution, and importation in the film industry.⁶ Today's mainland Chinese film industry is dominated by five distribution companies: China Film Group Corporation, Huaxia Film Distribution Company, Bona Film Group Limited, Stellar Mega Films Limited, and Beijing Enlight Media Corporation Limited. The first two companies are the only distribution companies that have the authority to import films from overseas.

As Wang Shujen addresses, the WTO accession together with the establishment of a free market economy has not only benefited the legitimate film industry but has also caused the informal distribution sector in mainland China to flourish.⁷ Due to the development of internet technology, informal distribution has expanded its territory from pirated VCDs and DVDs to digital formats. In this new type of informal distribution, ordinary people play the role of distributors by sharing files online, promoting films on social media, and so on. Following the categories given by Lobato,⁸ I briefly introduce the three main informal digital distribution methods in mainland China, namely linking sites, video-hosting sites, and cyberlockers.

Linking sites operate as an index for users that can lead them to other online streaming or download links. This kind of website normally does not save files on its own servers. In mainland China, bttiantang.org and piaohua.com are two of the largest linking sites. At the bottom of these websites' home pages, both declare that the websites only share information collected from the internet, so they do not take legal responsibility for the copyright of the content. A subcategory of linking sites is fan-sub websites,

⁵ Wang, *Framing Piracy*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.

such as ZiMuZu.tv.⁹ Subtitle translators voluntarily work for these websites with the aim of allowing more people to have access to and understand foreign cultural products, including films, TV dramas, and documentaries.¹⁰ Currently, the legal status of linking sites in mainland China is very uncertain. Some have been shut down by the government in the past two decades. However, some have survived for many years.

The second type of informal distribution is video-hosting sites. Similar to YouTube,¹¹ Youku, Tudou,¹² Iqiyi,¹³ Tencent,¹⁴ and Leshi¹⁵ are five of the most popular video-hosting sites in China, which let users upload content on their platforms. For years, film production and distribution companies have tried to take down user-uploaded content with these video-hosting sites. However, in recent years, these video-hosting sites have cooperated with the industry for legal online film distribution.¹⁶ Moreover, due to the digitalising transformation of the film and television industry and changing audience viewing habits, online video-sharing companies, including Iqiyi, Tencent, and others, have developed their own in-house production teams and have produced film and television content for exclusive distribution on their websites.

⁹ <http://www.zmz2017.com/>

¹⁰ This subtitle group started to take commercial contracts after gaining its reputation. For instance, one of the online streaming websites, Sohu TV, bought the copyright of the American TV comedy *The Big Bang Theory* and hired this subtitle group to translate the English subtitles. The subtitle group thus transformed from a voluntary fan community to a commercial group, and Sohu TV benefited from capturing a larger audience.

¹¹ Because of the Great Firewall of China, many websites, including YouTube, Google, and Facebook, are blocked in mainland China using various techniques.

¹² Youku (<http://www.youku.com/>) and Tudou (<http://www.tudou.com/>) used to be the largest user-generated content video-sharing platforms in China. With the initial aim of saving costs and being more competitive against others, these two leading companies merged into one, Youku Tudou Inc., in August 2012 (Gao, 2012).

¹³ Iqiyi (<http://www.iqiyi.com/>)

¹⁴ Tencent (<https://v.qq.com/>)

¹⁵ Leshi (<http://www.le.com/>) has become the largest copyright content library in China.

¹⁶ Elaine J. Zhao and Michael Keane, "Between Formal and Informal: The Shakeout in China's Online Video Industry," *Media, Culture & Society* 35 (2013): 724–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713491301>.

Cyberlockers are another main path for informal film distribution in mainland China, where Baidu Yun and 360 Disc were sites of this kind. As a form of digital storage, users can upload and store videos and documents in personal accounts for their own personal records, but cyberlocker websites can also generate links to files for sharing. After a time of prosperity around 2010, a series of government actions since the early 2010s aiming to clean up internet content caused the decline of cyberlockers in China. Files that contained pirated or adult content have been taken down from these websites.

Besides the low cost, or even no cost, there are other practical reasons for users to seek informal access to films.¹⁷ First, due to the censorship and the film quota system in mainland China, there is a lack of legal access to the majority of films, especially foreign films. Second, the gap between the movie release date in the cinema and release online can be months or even years. Third, the content on legal online video platforms is not diverse or sufficient enough to meet the demands of the audience. For instance, platforms like Leshi and Tengxun have limited film collections. Users need to buy memberships from different platforms to have access to the films they want to watch. These inconveniences lead audiences to seek access in informal ways.

Thus, for decades, formal and informal distribution has been both an economic battlefield for distributors and an area in which distributors, relevant government departments, internet companies, and audiences participate and interact with one another cooperatively as well as conflictually. The landscape of distribution is dynamic since the forces from various sides of the battle keep changing, in which ‘these shadow economies are increasingly central to the political economy of cinema in the digital age’.¹⁸ In this section, I have reviewed the film distribution environment and presented the three main categories of informal distribution in mainland China. In the following section, I examine three aspects of the media platform Douban: key features of Douban as a media platform, how Douban Movie facilitates informal film distribution, and the dynamic of users on Douban Movie.

¹⁷ Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.

¹⁸ Ibid., 109.

Douban: A Formal and Informal Distribution Media Platform

Launched in 2005, Douban is one of the most popular online forums in China. According to Zhang et al., by the end of September 2013, Douban had 79 million registered users, 200 million unique monthly visitors,¹⁹ more than 16.7 million book entries, and 320 film reviews.²⁰

Surfing through Douban reveals some distinct characteristics worth noting. First, Douban was originally a social media platform based on interests in books, movies, or music. One attractive function of Douban is that after users mark books or movies or music as read, watched, or listened to or indicate that they want to read, watch, or listen, the website gives suggestions of other cultural products that might be of interest to the user. For instance, if a user marks that they watched the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (dir. Chris Columbus, 2001), the website may suggest other movies from the Harry Potter series or other fantasy movies like *The Hobbit* (dir. Peter Jackson, 2012–2014). The suggestions are based on the algorithm ‘people who watch this also like...’. This function is the work of the strong internet engineering team of Douban, which constitutes two-third of the company.²¹

Second, in contrast to Facebook or Renren,²² Douban is an anonymous social media platform that does not require users to register with their real name. Users can freely change their online nicknames every thirty days. However, this social connection is not weakened by its anonymous features. Users socialise and communicate with one another based on similar tastes or interests. As a result of these dynamic means of interaction between users and

¹⁹ On Douban, it is not compulsory to register to have access to the contents. Anyone can access all web pages for books and films and the homepages of other users. However, to leave a comment or mark a book as read or a film as watched, registration or login is required.

²⁰ Hongming Zhang et al., “The Research on Network Community Participation Behavior Based on Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology: Taking Douban Website as an Example,” *Chinese Journal of Journalism & Communication* 37 (2015): 59–73.

²¹ “豆瓣创始人阿北：让产品说明自己 [The Founder of Douban: Let the Product Explain Itself],” *Yicai*, June 13, 2012, <https://www.yicai.com/news/1811229.html>.

²² Renren (<http://www.renren.com/>) is a famous social network among Chinese young people since 2003, especially after Facebook was blocked by the Chinese government. The website has functions and design similar to Facebook, and it requires users to register with their real names.

the strength of sharing similar tastes in cultural products, some users of Douban have also connected their online social scales to offline social groups.

Moreover, under the main website, Douban.com, there are sub domains for different sections, including Douban Movie, Douban Books, Douban Music, and so on. Each section works independently, but they are also intertwined together. For instance, after opening the main page for a movie on Douban Movie, the website might provide a link to the original soundtrack on Douban FM, which is a product of Douban where users can listen to music online.

Since the main concentration of this chapter is the consumption and informal distribution of the film *Monga* on Douban, the following examination highlights the subpage Douban Movie. After constant updates over the past decades, Douban Movie today includes several sub-sections. The first is My Movie, which shows films that users have marked as watched or want to watch and other relative activity history. On Film News & Tickets, users can find information about movies that are showing or will show in the cinema based on their location, and there are links for buying the cinema tickets online. Another popular section of Douban Movie is Choose a Film, where users are provided with film suggestions. Users can choose to see suggestions based on personal interest or what is trending at the time. Other sections include a TV section for checking the recent trending TV series, Chart for viewing the charts and box office in the past week, Tags for the most commonly used tags to mark movies, and Review, where users can find the most popular movie reviews.

Aside from the different sections of Douban Movie, there is also an entry for each movie. Similar to the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), the page lists the cast, the average rating, trailers, stills, and online cinema ticket access. Apart from the online ticket selling links, the other parts mentioned above can be edited by both website administrators and users, though the text or pictures edited by users need approval of the administrator. Moreover, there are vast amounts of user-generated content, including 140-word short

comments, long reviews, and a discussion area,²³ which are the major textual resources for this chapter.

Using film reviews on Douban as research material for this section provides access to both synchronic and diachronic reviews, because the time period for posting film reviews on Douban can vary from shortly after the movie release to the present. Thus, by using reviews of *Monga* on Douban, the investigation can not only examine the informal distribution of *Monga* but also add another perspective to the total history of film reception studied in the last chapter.

As Vesnić-Alujević and Murru state, there are two classic views of audiences.²⁴ One is from the cultural studies perspective, which considers audiences as active participants. The other is from a political, economic perspective that tends to see audiences as exploited labourers. In reality, the situation is more complicated than simply categorising into one perspective or another. The boundary between audience and author is increasingly blurred. While user-generated content platforms blossom, some scholars applaud the opportunities these platforms bring to participatory culture,²⁵ but others hold a more sceptical point of view.²⁶ Matikainen states that the three major motivations for content generation are developing a digital ideology and identity, expressing oneself, and joining a community online.²⁷ User-generated content has grown from the participatory culture, since audiences have been participating more than ever before.²⁸ In the digital era, the audience presents

²³ The long review and discussion areas have similar functions. In the long review section, readers can also leave comments and start discussions with the writer of the review or other readers.

²⁴ Lucia Vesnić-Alujević and Maria F. Murru, "Digital Audiences' Disempowerment: Participation or Free Labour," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 13 (2016): 422–30.

²⁵ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

²⁶ José van Dijck, "Users like You? Theorizing Agency in User-Generated Content," *Media, Culture & Society* 31 (2009): 41–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443708098245>.

²⁷ Janne Matikainen, "Motivations for Content Generation in Social Media," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 12 (2015): 41–58.

²⁸ Sonia Livingstone, "The Participation Paradigm in Audience Research," *The Communication Review* 16 (2013): 21–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2013.757174>.

their opinions and feedback online, which benefits film producers in promoting their films without investing in advertisement. As Yecies et al. claim, user-generated content on mobile applications and other digital platforms plays an important role in making commercial profits for movies.²⁹

Additionally, as a user-generated content platform, besides showing the audiences' taste in films, Douban also provides a view of contemporary society. As a traditional concept, word of mouth is 'communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, a product or a service'.³⁰ However, through the development of social media and the internet, electronic word of mouth plays a key role in strengthening traditional word of mouth.³¹

On Douban, when users write reviews for a film, their identity changes from a member of an audience to a critic or, put another way, an author. As mentioned in chapter 5, the online film reviewing culture has altered the authority and position of professional film critics in the reviewing hierarchy. In the case of Douban, some users have switched their identity from online reviewer to professional film critic. For example, one user, whose username, *Mu wei er*, has remained constant, started his film critic career on Douban as an online independent film critic. His reviews and comments can be found on most of the popular film pages on Douban. In total, he has posted more than 1,000 film reviews on the platform. Later, his career expanded, and now he regularly publishes film reviews in newspapers and also has two books published in 2015 and 2016.³² *Mu wei er* is not the only critic who started their career on Douban. Many active users are called *hongren* (红人), meaning

²⁹ Brian Yecies et al., "The Douban Online Social Media Barometer and the Chinese Reception of Korean Popular Culture Flows," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 13 (2016): 114–38.

³⁰ Johan Arndt, "Role of Product-Related Conversations in the Diffusion of a New Product," *Journal of Marketing Research* 4 (1967): 291, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3149462>.

³¹ Allan J. Kimmel and Philip J. Kitchen, "Word of Mouth and Social Media," *Journal of Marketing Communications* 20 (2014): 2–4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2013.865868>.

³² One of the books, *Not Present* (2015), published by Sichuan People's Publishing House, is a collection of over seventy film reviews. Another book is *Independent Day: Life Extended Three Times by Films* (2016).

‘online celebrity’, by others. This group of *hongren* has gained their reputations online and seen benefits for their careers in reality.

Douban is not only a media platform for online audience reception studies but also a legal media platform with a grey area for informal film distribution. Unauthorised peer-to-peer file sharing networks mushroomed in China in the early 2000s.³³ They have become a crucial means of access to an endless range of films. As in most Asian countries, the absence of intellectual property laws and the lack of their implementation are the two main reasons for the growing informal market.³⁴ The online streaming websites and download links that users share on Douban are from various platforms, including RapidShare, Baidu Cloud, 360 Cloud, Xuanfeng Download, and others.³⁵

Due to the lack of regulation, file and link sharing on Douban happens in public. Some users become popular on the forum because of their resourcefulness in terms of link searching and file sharing. Like professional distributors, this group of people who can gain access to films also influences what other people can watch. Put differently, the users who share links for downloading and online streaming function as the distributors in the online viewing community. In the peer-to-peer file sharing network on Douban, members do not contribute equally. Especially in the digital environment, to find some films or resources that have not already been circulated widely on the internet requires some technical skills. A small group of the members of these sharing networks normally contribute more than the others. Not everyone in the network acts as both a consumer and a distributor at the same time.³⁶ Thus, among the small group of people who share files and download links, there are divergences as well.

³³ Weixiao Wei, “Filtering Mandate: A Cure for Peer-to-Peer File-Sharing Copyright Infringement in China?,” *Queen Mary Journal of Intellectual Property* 2 (2012): 182–94, <https://doi.org/10.4337/qmjip.2012.02.05>.

³⁴ Zhao and Keane, “Between Formal and Informal.”

³⁵ RapidShare was an online file hosting website founded in 2002 and shut down in 2012. Baidu Cloud, 360 Cloud, and Xuanfeng Download are all cloud services founded in mainland China.

³⁶ Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age*.

The first class of people, who consider themselves or are considered the ‘masters of resources’, commonly post the resources on the platform in the first place. They are quicker than the others, and they can find files that have never been circulated on the Douban platform before. For example, a group of people who founded the Douban 2.0 subtitle interest group started to download movies of Czechoslovak New Wave from other foreign online communities, for instance Karagarga and Surrealmoviez. Another example of these masters is the user called *xiedudianying* (褻渎电影). In contrast to the former group whose interests are in art house or classic movies that are not well-known, he posts download links for recently released movies, on some occasions ones that are still showing in the cinema.

The second class of users are those who share second-hand download links. They collect links from the internet, reorganise them, then upload or update the expired links on Douban or Weibo. An absorbing phenomenon is that the first class of people who post the resource on Douban for the first time later accuse others who repost their links. They consider themselves to have the ‘copyright’ to the downloaded resource.

Besides the informal distribution that Douban is involved in, the website has also developed business with formal film distribution in the past years. For example, Douban has built cooperation with some cinemas and video hosting sites, such as Youku and Iqiyi, listing available resources from these on-demand online streaming websites with legal copyright. For movies that are screening in the cinema, users can find direct links to purchase tickets on Douban with special discounts. This is a very convenient and economical choice for Douban users.

These changes in the past years are directly related to improving internet regulations and the development of the digitalisation of the film production and distribution industry in mainland China. The transformation of the online video platforms was forced by the constant governmental internet clean-up operations and stringent internet laws and regulations and by the digitalising media landscape in general.

Informal Distribution of Monga on Douban

Thus far, this study has analysed Douban and Douban Movie's features as media platforms for informal film distribution. In this section, I focus on the informal distribution of *Monga* on Douban. By doing this, this section seeks to answer the question of how *Monga* was consumed by audiences from mainland China through informal distribution.

The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television established the Applicable Measures for Enhancing the Administration of the Film Cooperation between the Two Sides of the Taiwan Strait, which declares that the number of Taiwanese films imported into mainland China is not limited by the film import quota and are instead treated as domestic films.³⁷ This regulation has led to more Taiwanese films being released in mainland China. However, Taiwanese films had a prolonged absence in mainland China in the late twentieth century. The first Taiwanese film publicly screened in mainland China after 1949 was *Papa, Can You Hear Me Sing* (*Da Cuo Che*, dir. Yu Kanqing, 1983), which was shown in Fujian, Xia Men, and other areas in China in 1984. Although from the 1980s to 2010, aside from coproduction films between Taiwan and the mainland, there were not many Taiwanese-produced films released in mainland China, mainland audiences were not unfamiliar with Taiwanese films. For example, famous Taiwanese directors in the Taiwan New Cinema movement, including Edward Yang and Hou Hsiao-hsien, were adored by art house film lovers in mainland China. Moreover, although Taiwanese film imports were restricted, Taiwanese TV dramas have been very popular and widely consumed in mainland China since the 1980s. Thus, although the number of Taiwanese films consumed by mainland audiences through official channels might have been limited, Taiwanese popular culture, including TV series, celebrities, and music, was not alien to them.

³⁷ Aigong Zhang, Xiaohong Li, and Wenyan Zhang, eds., *华语电影新世代: 地平线/症候群: 第20届中国电影学博士论坛文选* [New Era of Chinese Films: Horizon/Symptom Complex] (Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing houses, 2015).

When distribution companies consider whether a film is worth being distributed in mainland China, there are two criteria, namely high marketing potential and compliance with censorship. In an interview, Niu pointed out that in exchange for releasing *Monga* in mainland China, he would be willing to re-edit the movie to meet the film censorship regulations.³⁸ He also pleaded with the audience to wait and watch the movie in the cinema. According to news reports from Beijing News, Niu and the staff from Huayi Brothers Media Corporation held negotiations about distributing *Monga* in mainland China.³⁹ However, the movie was not officially released in mainland cinemas. Nevertheless, it placed in the top ten Chinese films of 2010 in *China Daily*, which claimed that Niu gave new life to the gangster movie genre.⁴⁰

Even though *Monga* was not shown in the cinema, it was eagerly downloaded and watched by audiences in mainland China. On the entry page for *Monga* on Douban Movie when this research was conducted, over 191,000 users had rated the movie, which did not include people who marked the movie as watched without leaving a rating for it.⁴¹ The average rating of this film was 7.7/10. Out of these 191,000 users, more than 51,000 left short comments. Moreover, by January 2017, there were 1,432 long reviews posted on the website.⁴² In addition to the short comments and long reviews, there is another function on Douban Movie, the discussion area. This is a section that is very similar to a bulletin board system, where users can ask questions about the movie, share online access, or download access to the movie. Considering that the users who left reviews on Douban are normally the people who have watched *Monga*, here in the chapter I address them as the audience.

³⁸ Lin Yang, “谋求大陆上映《艋舺》 自愿删节 [Willing to Re-Edit *Monga* to Seek for Releasing in Mainland], *Beijing News*, March 3, 2010, <http://www.bjnews.com.cn/ent/2010/03/03/13419.html>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Raymond Zhou, “Movies for Keeps,” *China Daily*, December 28, 2010, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-12/28/content_11762716.htm.

⁴¹ The link to the page for *Monga* is https://www.douban.com/link2/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fmovie.douban.com%2Fsubject%2F3737102%2F&query=monga&cat_id=1002&type=search&pos=1 (Access: 07 February 2017).

⁴² The number of long reviews fluctuates. The reason could be that the administrators take down the articles, the writers themselves delete their posts, and so on.

In this section, I analyse the first fifty long reviews and the responses below them.⁴³ Focusing on the long reviews first, the top fifty comprise various perspectives on movie reviews and personal stories or experiences. In the movie reviews, *Monga* has been analysed and compared in three ways: as a Taiwanese film, as a gangster film, and as a teen film.

The fact that the director, Niu Chengze, played Xiaobi in *Growing Up* (1982) aroused discussion about the Taiwan New Cinema movement in the long reviews. As examined in chapter 4, during the promotion stage, ‘made in Taiwan’ was used as a marketing point in Taiwan. It is undeniable that most of the reviews in mainland China also clearly underscore that *Monga* is a Taiwanese film. The first noticeable point discussed in the reviews is the Taiwanese Minnan dialect used in the film. Taiwanese Minnan is very close to the Minnan (or Southern Min) that is spoken in certain parts of mainland China, including Fujian, Guangdong, and other areas. Audiences from mainland China who do not speak this dialect have very little chance of understanding it. However, the use of Taiwanese Minnan in the film not only adds preciseness to the story line but also boosts the Taiwanese characteristics for the mainland audience.

Besides noting the Minnan dialect, the reviews also compared *Monga* to *Cape No. 7* (2008), *A Brighter Summer Day* (1991), *A Borrowed Life* (1994), and other Taiwanese films to mark their differences and similarities since these Taiwanese films have a similar motif. For example, user KAWAI in her review talks about the same metaphor, the missing father, used in various films.⁴⁴ She claims that in *Monga*, the loneliness and sadness of

⁴³ The reason for choosing the first fifty reviews is that their ranking is based on how many people read the review, how many people rated the review as useful, and how many people responded or commented below the review. The review ranking in first place has 2,500 useful clicks and 403 responses in the discussion area. However, the review ranking fiftieth on the list has only eight useful clicks and two replies below the post. Since the analysis is not only about the contents of the long reviews but also the discussion and responses from other users, this section only addresses the first fifty long reviews. However, these fifty long reviews were not written by fifty different users; for example, four of these fifty reviews were posted by *Mu wei er*, and only one of these four was originally written for Douban. The other three pieces were first published in newspapers and then posted on Douban.

⁴⁴ KAWAI, “混血儿的残酷青春 [The Brutal Youth of a Mix-Blood],” *Douban Movie*, February 16, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/2995503/>.

Mosquito when he thinks about his father, who went to Japan and never returned, is a metaphor for the isolated situation of Taiwan after the Japan colonial era. The use of the father-son relationship metaphor for the connection between Japan and Taiwan was also used in *A Borrowed Life* (1994) and *A City of Sadness* (1989).

Another Taiwanese characteristic noted by the reviewers is *Monga*'s retro setting of Taiwan in the 1980s. As *Nuan yan xiang mo* wrote, this flourishing age in Taiwan is gone forever, and even the predominance of Monga, which was the busiest part of the city during the Qing dynasty, has been replaced by other areas.⁴⁵ User Xiaoban noticed the retro style from another perspective.⁴⁶ The reviewer mentioned that because the story is autobiographical, the posters set up in the scenes, the music played in the background, and the way people talk in the film precisely present Taiwan as it was in the 1980s.

As a gangster film, *Monga* has been compared to *The Godfather* series (1972–1990) and Hong Kong gangster films, such as the *Young and Dangerous* series (1996–2000) in the 1990s.⁴⁷ User opinions on the gangster elements in the film are relatively mixed. Some reviewers think because of the action segments and story lines, *Monga* reveals the passion and the spirit of the gangster movie.⁴⁸ However, other reviews stress that compared to *The Godfather* or *Young and Dangerous*, the characteristics of the five male actors in *Monga* are not masculine enough.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Nuan yan xiang mo*, “万华故事 [Story of Wanhua],” *Douban Movie*, February 7, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/2982679/>.

⁴⁶ *Xiao ban*, “义气是三小啦，我只看到爱情没看到义气 [Brotherhood Is Meaningless I Only See Love],” *Douban Movie*, February 18, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/2998338/>.

⁴⁷ See *Bai bang ni*, “艋舺，血气方刚 [Monga, Full of Youthful Vigour],” *Douban Movie*, April 17, 2020, <https://movie.douban.com/review/3174109/>; *Long dong qiang*, “情非得已的黑道篇 [The Gangster Version of “Qing Fei De Yi”],” *Douban Movie*, February 16, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/2996219/>.

⁴⁸ *Long dong qiang*, “情非得已的黑道篇.”

⁴⁹ *Pitao tu*, “所谓的“宝岛古惑仔”，是不是太娘了？ [So Called Taiwanese Young and Dangerous, Is It Not Too Girlish?],” *Douban Movie*, February 16, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/2995482/>.

Viewed as a youth film, *Monga* stimulated users to write about their personal stories and experiences in the reviews and comments. In this category, most of the comments express positive sentiments towards the film. User *Rong shi san* wrote that this movie reminded her of a childhood classmate who acted like a gangster when they were in high school.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that audiences notice the characteristics of Taiwan, the cultural, historical, and linguistic closeness between Taiwan and mainland China enhance the positive reception of this film among mainland audiences.

Besides the Taiwanese characteristics and the gangster and youth genre elements, there is another perspective that is often raised in the reviews of *Monga*. The five main male characters attracted a great deal of attention not only for their acting but also because their brotherhood relationship is sometimes interpreted as same-sex love. *Yaoi*, a term from Japanese manga, is a genre of fictional media product that focuses on romantic or sexual relationships between male characters, typically aimed at a female audience. This fandom culture has been a large online subculture phenomenon in Taiwan and mainland China. In the reviews that interpret a *yaoi* plot in *Monga*, a thrilling tone is used to present how excited viewers were to watch this group of good-looking male actors showing affection with each other on the screen. This group of reviews attracted many members of the audience to join the discussion and show their agreement. For example, to satisfy this type of audience, in the TV entertainment show *Kangsi Coming*, the actors kissed each other in front of the camera.⁵¹ The reviews explain the whole story line of the movie as focusing on the romantic love between these five boys.⁵² In summary, this group of reviews claims that rather than brotherhood and

⁵⁰ *Rong shi san*, “我想起曾经有个差点成为我男朋友的人 [It Reminds Me Someone Nearly Become My Boyfriend],” *Douban Movie*, February 18, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/2998160/>.

⁵¹ Kangyong Cai and Xidi Xu, “明星那年的疯狂岁月 [The Crazy Year of the Stars],” *Kangsi Coming*, CTi Variety, Taipei, January 20, 2010.

⁵² See *Huang qing jiao*, “我们有理由相信这个世界上所有的黑道组织都是基佬大本营。 [We Have the Reason to Believe That All the Gangster Groups Are Gay Communities],” *Douban Movie*, February 25, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/3014349/>; *Yao yao*, “嘿 嘿，硬把生猛青春黑道片拗成生猛青涩断臂情 [LOL Gangster Movie Becomes Gay],” *Douban Movie*, February 14, 2010, <https://movie.douban.com/review/2993733/>.

friendship, the relationship among Mosquito, Monk, and Dragon is a love triangle. Review writers of this kind find evidence in the movie to prove their love triangle assumption, from the story lines to the acting details.

As I started to argue in this chapter, the more than 1,400 reviews of *Monga* on Douban not only reveal how the film was consumed by the audience in mainland China but also provide a perspective on how informal film distribution functions on media platforms in the digital area. As Lobato argued, most film theories and film critics focus on the text, and these theories seek to find better ways to deconstruct and decode the text.⁵³ However, less attention has been given to the ‘upstream’, in other words the distribution, which often determines ‘who gets to see which films, under what circumstances and where’.⁵⁴ Studies related to film distribution always consider marketing or the industry instead of critical political economy or theoretical concerns. These distribution studies also focus solely on traditional distribution, ‘professional distribution’,⁵⁵ or ‘formal distribution’.⁵⁶

In the digital age, audiences have much more diverse means of access to cultural products, including films, in both legal and illegal ways. The boundary between legal and illegal has also been blurred in the new media circumstances.⁵⁷ On the internet, there are both peer-to-peer sharing networks and use of legal platforms in informal ways.⁵⁸

In some reviews and comments about *Monga* on Douban, users shared online streaming or download links. Some users shared the information that a high-quality version of the full movie could be downloaded through Xunlei.⁵⁹ Some indicated that they were willing to pay for a ticket to watch this film at the cinema. The discussion area also mentions that, since the theme of the film

⁵³ Ramon Lobato, “Subcinema: Theorizing Marginal Film Distribution,” *LIMINA: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies* 13 (2007): 113–20.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 113.

⁵⁵ Crisp, *Film Distribution in the Digital Age*.

⁵⁶ Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.

⁵⁷ Zhao and Keane, “Between Formal and Informal.”

⁵⁸ Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema*.

⁵⁹ Xunlei is a Chinese multinational technology company and service provider. The main products of this company are Xunlei Download Manager and peer-to-peer software.

is about a group of gangsters, it was impossible for it to pass the censorship of the General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television.

According to Zhao and Keane, the internet-based companies that provide online video services or entertainment have started cooperating with other internet-based companies, content providers, and even traditional media channels.⁶⁰ In the case of Douban, the website provides links to some online streaming video service websites like Tudou and Youku or other internet service providers like Sohu. For example, on the Douban webpage for *Monga*, there are links to two online video platforms: Tencent Video and Iqiyi.⁶¹ By December 2020, the film had been watched 68.75 million times on Tencent Video.⁶²

Youku and Tudou used to be the largest user-generated content video sharing platforms in mainland China. These two leading companies merged into Youku Tudou Inc. in August 2012.⁶³ Douban has built alliances with Youku Tudou and other video service platforms like Iqiyi, Migu, and Tencent. Even though Douban is not directly linked to film distribution in either a formal or informal way, it provides a very important conjunction between the films and how they can be read by audiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined Douban as a mainland Chinese media platform that provided access for audiences in mainland China to *Monga* in the form of informal distribution via file sharing, download links, online streaming links,

⁶⁰ Zhao and Keane, "Between Formal and Informal."

⁶¹ "艋舺 MonGa," *Tencent Video*, accessed December 15, 2020, video, 2:20:46, <https://v.qq.com/x/cover/fo33hig48kwc3cq.html?ptag=douban.movie>; "艋舺 [Monga]," *Iqiyi Movie*, accessed December 15, 2020, video, 2:20:44, https://www.iqiyi.com/v_19rr7r4tjk.html?vfm=m_331_dbdy&fv=4904d94982104144a1548dd9040df241.

⁶² Because the internet spreads over the geographic limit, it is difficult to say that all the viewers who watched the film on Tencent and Iqiyi are based in mainland China. However, because the online version of this film is provided only with Mandarin and Chinese subtitles and the online video providers block users with IP addresses outside mainland China, in my opinion, it is safe to say that most of the viewers are based in mainland China.

⁶³ Yuan Gao, "Youku, Tudou Announce Completion of Merger," *China Daily USA*, August 24, 2012, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2012-08/24/content_15704439.htm.

and other formats. By doing this, I aim to present that though *Monga* was not officially released in mainland China, the film as well as the director and the main actors still gained success and built their reputations. In other words, the success and the popularity of *Monga* went beyond the borders of Taiwan and not only in the form of capital. The chapter also sought to present the changing landscape of digital media platforms, including social media and online video websites. In the past decades, due to the development of regulations and the drive towards digitalisation in everyday life in mainland China, the role of media platforms is also changing.

The reputational success of *Monga* gained in mainland China benefited the next project of its director, Niu Chengze. The next chapter focuses on *Love (Ai, 2012)*, a coproduction project between one of the largest players in the Chinese film industry, Huayi Brothers, and Niu's Honto Production, directed by Niu after the success of *Monga*.

Chapter 7. Film Coproduction between Taiwan and Mainland China: A Case Study of *Love* (2012)

In the preceding chapters, this study has analysed *Monga* from the perspectives of production, distribution, promotion, and reception to answer the research question of how *Monga*'s success and popularity were achieved through different film industrial stages. The last chapter discussed the expansion of *Monga*'s popularity in mainland China through informal distribution on the media platform Douban. This chapter, functioning as a sequel to the preceding work, follows the aftermath of the success that *Monga* achieved to explore how it benefited its director's next project as a filmmaker. *Love*, the film directed by Niu Chengze after the triumph of *Monga*, was coproduced by Huayi Brothers Media Corporation in mainland China and Niu's Honto Production. By examining this coproduction project, I argue that the booming and expanding film industry and market in mainland China and its cultural, linguistic, and geographic proximity led to entering the mainland film market offer more opportunities for Taiwanese filmmakers to boost their careers and find more sizeable investments.

Love, invested in equally by Huayi and Honto,¹ is a romance that takes place in two cities, Taipei and Beijing, with three subplots of eight intertwined characters. It features an ensemble cast, including the well-known actress Zhao Wei from mainland China, Shu Qi, an internationally famous Taiwanese-Hong Kong actress, and Zhao Youting and Ruan Jingtian, whose roles in *Monga* built their reputations. Released a day before Valentine's Day, 13 February 2012, this romantic coproduction gained both reputational and commercial success across the strait.

In the existing literature on film coproduction with mainland China, the collaborations between China and Hong Kong, the United States, and other East Asian countries have been explored the most. Some academics, including Chua Beng-Huat, argue that Chinese-Hong Kong film coproduction could be a

¹ Yimei Huang, "跨越海峡——《爱 love》的魅力-专访钮承泽导演 [Across the Strait, The Magic of Love - Exclusive Interview with Director Niu Chengze]," *Funscreen*, March 16, 2012, http://www.funscreen.com.tw/headline.asp?H_No=398.

win-win situation. The cooperation relieves the Hong Kong side from financial pressure by bringing in financial resources from mainland China, grants them access to the mainland film market, and bypasses some official obstacles.² On the China side, it expands the aesthetic elements available in mainland Chinese pop culture production.³ Chan and Fung support this position using the examples of two coproduction works, *Hero* (*Ying Xiong*, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2002) and *The Drive of Life* (*Sui Yue Feng Yun*, dir. Liang Jiashu, 2007).⁴ However, other scholars argue that the cultural identity of Hong Kong could be diminished and lose its appeal to the international audience due to the productions' need to serve the aesthetic values of a wider range of audience on the mainland.⁵

Collaborations between China and the United States on film production are widely interpreted as China seeking international success together with the development of soft power and Hollywood hunting for the world's largest film market and bypassing inconvenient official barriers, including film quotas. Peng reviews the coproduction history between China and Hollywood with a specific focus on the difficulties and the phenomenon of 'fake coproduction'.⁶ Aynne Kokas, in her important book *Hollywood Made in China*, aims to explore the Chinese-U.S. cultural relationship through film collaboration as a means of branded media co-ventures.⁷ Pointing out that the collaboration between China and Hollywood involves not only above-the-line and below-the-line film workers but also politicians and manufacturers,

² Beng Huat Chua, *Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Joseph M. Chan and Anthony Y.-H. Fung, "Structural Hybridization in Film and Television Production in Hong Kong," *Visual Anthropology* 24 (2011): 77–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08949468.2011.526513>.

⁵ Michael Curtin, "Chan Is Missing: Hong Kong Creatives in China's Orbit," *Media Fields Journal*, February 28, 2011, <http://mediafieldsjournal.org/chan-is-missing/2011/2/28/chan-is-missing-hong-kong-creatives-in-chinas-orbit.html>; Weiyong Peng, "China, Film Coproduction and Soft Power Competition," Doctoral Dissertation, Queensland University of Technology, 2015.

⁶ Weiyong Peng, "Sino-US Film Coproduction: A Global Media Primer," *Global Media and China* 1 (2016): 295–311, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436416683959>.

⁷ Aynne Kokas, *Hollywood Made in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

she stresses its importance for understanding media production as well as how the world functions on a fundamental level.⁸

This chapter investigates the collaborative project *Love* to analyse how coproduction between Taiwan and mainland China operates and how, in this specific case, Niu's successful project *Monga* functioned as a stepping-stone for him to reach a more sizeable market and boost his career. Since the Taiwanese film industry was examined in chapter 2, this chapter begins by addressing the background of the Chinese film industry and film coproduction in mainland China. The study then briefly reviews the history of cross-strait film coproduction. By examining these factors, the research aims to outline the achievability and necessity of coproduction between mainland China and Taiwan. Finally, the chapter analyses how cross-strait coproduction is executed and the incentives and challenges involved through the case study *Love*. By doing this, I argue that with its geo-cultural proximity, the Taiwanese film industry has a natural advantage in collaborating with the Chinese film industry and would benefit from this alliance from the perspectives of financial consideration and a transfer of knowledge from the mainland film industry.

The Chinese Film Industry and Coproduction with China

This section examines the rapid growth of the Chinese film industry to provide a background for analysing film coproduction in China, specifically the case study *Love*. Because *Love* was released in 2012, to have a better understanding of the industrial and social background during its release period, the research focuses mainly on the Chinese film industry from the late 1990s to 2012.

The years 1993 and 2003 can be seen as two significant moments in the reformation of the Chinese film industry. The Opinion on Deepening of the Reform of Film Industry Mechanisms (关于当前深化电影行业机制改革的若干意见), published by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television in January 1993, symbolises the beginning of the marketisation of the Chinese film industry. It called for the decentralisation of the control of

⁸ Kokas, *Hollywood Made in China*, 155.

purchasing and distribution of domestic films from the only organisation, the state-controlled China Film Group, to other film production companies at the provincial or municipal level.⁹ Supplemented by the Notice on Further Deepening the Reform of the Film Industry Mechanisms (关于进一步深化电影行业机制改革的通知), released in August 1994, the new regulations stimulated competition between distribution companies, which also led to the initiation and vitalisation of the cinema circuit in China.¹⁰

Since China joined the WTO in 2001, the country has been forced to gradually open its markets, including the film market, which led to increasing pressure from Hollywood on the mainland local film market. To address this competition from Hollywood as well as to prime the central government's intentions in developing the cultural industry, in 2003, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television issued three regulations in succession: the Interim Provisions on the Access Qualifications for Film Production, Distribution, and Screening, the Provisions on the Administration of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Production of Films, and the Interim Provisions on Film Script Registration and Film Review. These regulations provide opportunities for private companies to join film productions and allow private capital investment in the film industry. Moreover, they authorize coproduction between state-owned production companies and foreign companies.¹¹

As Figure 9 indicates, the scale of feature film production in China expanded dramatically in the early 2000s. In 2012, there were 745 feature films produced in China, which was close to the top two largest film

⁹ “中国电影发行改革的回顾与展望 [The Retrospect and Prospect on the Reformation of Chinese Film Distribution],” 中国电影发行放映协会 [China Film Distribution and Screening Association], December 31, 2009, <http://www.chinafilm.org.cn/Item/Show.asp?m=1&d=6433>.

¹⁰ Jianhong Yu and Qi Zhang, “从北影到中影 – 看中国电影制片 30 年 [From Beijing Film Studio to China Film Group Corporation: A Retrospect of 30 Year's China Film Production],” *Film Art* (2008): 5–11.

¹¹ Michael Keane, “Introduction,” in *Willing Collaborators: Foreign Partners in Chinese Media*, ed. Michael Keane, Brian Yecies, and Terry Flew (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

production countries, India and the United States.¹² Moreover, the domestic box office revenue in China also increased after 2003, as illustrated in Figure 10, especially in 2010, when the domestic box office increased 63.9% over the previous year and reached RMB 10 billion.¹³ The increases in the domestic box office income in 2011 and 2012 were 28.9% and 30% respectively.

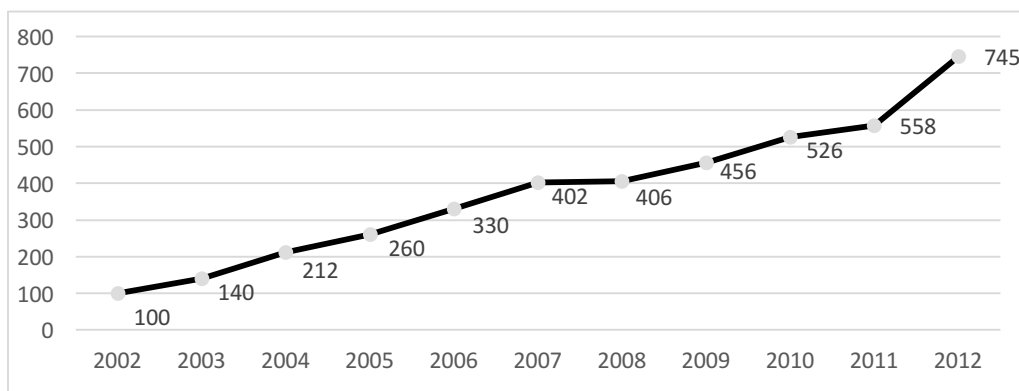


Figure 9: Annual feature film production volume, 2002–2012

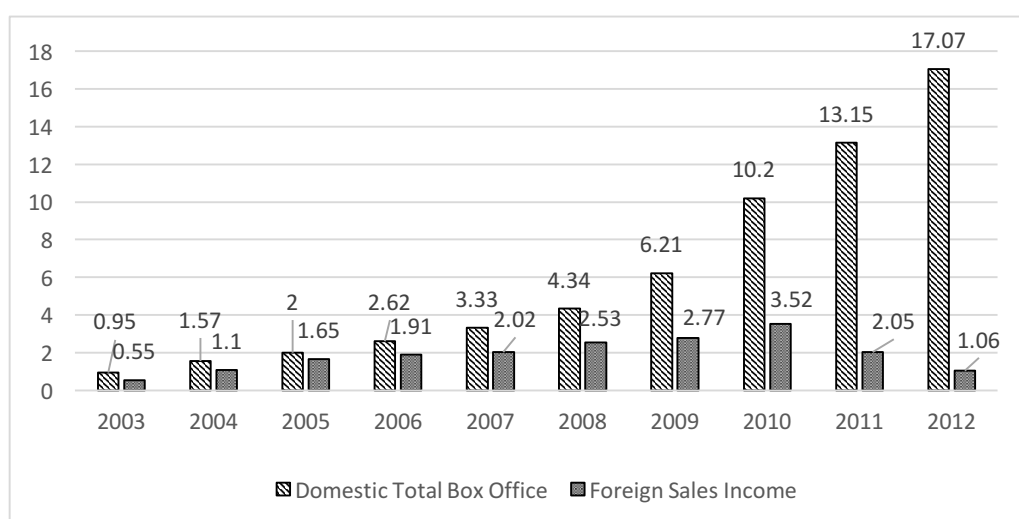


Figure 10: Chinese film industry income, 2003–2012 (billion RMB)

Besides the rapidly increasing state of film production, the industry of film exhibition has also developed since 2002, as illustrated in Figure 11. In 2012, the total number of screens increased 41% compared to the year before,

¹² Hong Yin and Yiyi Yin, “2012 年中国电影产业备忘 [The Memorandum of China’s Film Industry in 2012],” *Contemporary Cinema* (2013): 5–19.

¹³ Hong Yin and Wen Cheng, “2010 年中国电影产业备忘 [The Memorandum of China’s Film Industry in 2010],” *Film Art* (2011): 5–15.

reaching over 10,000. This increasing rate means that in 2012, there were an average of 10.5 new screens put into operation each day. Moreover, the main cinema circuits had almost accomplished the digitalisation of film screening.¹⁴

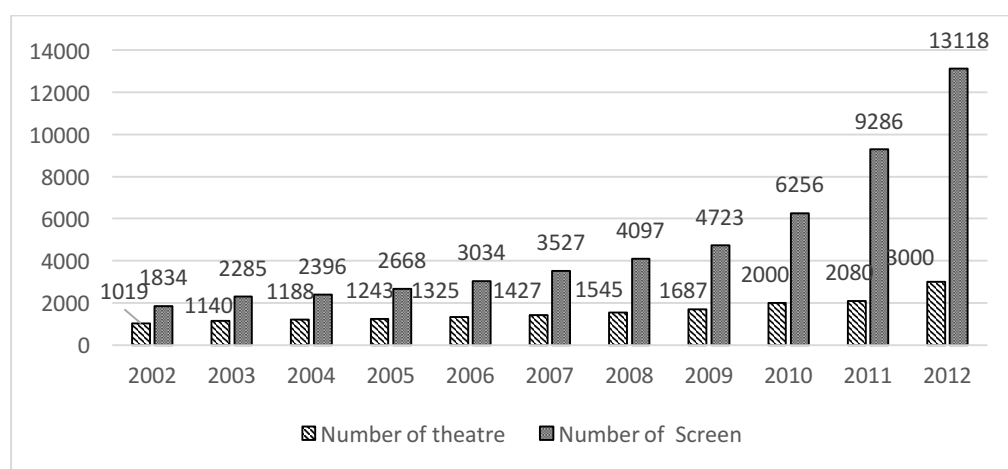


Figure 11: The growth trend of theatres and number of screens, 2002–2012

Regarding the Chinese film distribution sector in this period, though the regulations published in 2003 allowed private companies to participate and thus stimulate market competition mechanisms, the largest segment of the profit was still held by state-owned distribution companies like China Film Group and Huaxia Film Distribution, which together controlled 63.04% and 61.75% of the market in 2011 and 2012 respectively.¹⁵ The rest of the market was shared by private companies like Enlight Picture, Bona Film, Huayi Brothers, and Le Vision Pictures.¹⁶

In addition to the growth of the production, distribution, and exhibition sectors, the Chinese film industry, according to Yin, entered the capital age in 2007.¹⁷ The main source of investments in films changed from the government to private equity, the stock market, venture capital, and industry groups. These diverse sources of investment for film production, both from governmental funds and private capital, boosted the film market in terms of box office

¹⁴ Yin and Yin, “2012 年中国电影产业备忘.”

¹⁵ Entgroup, “China Film Industry Report 2011-2012 (in Brief)”;

 Entgroup, ‘China Film Industry Report 2012-2013 (in Brief).’

¹⁶ Entgroup, “China Film Industry Report 2011-2012 (in Brief)”;

 Entgroup, ‘China Film Industry Report 2012-2013 (in Brief).’

¹⁷ Hong Yin and Qingsheng Zhan, “2007 年中国电影产业备忘 [The Memorandum of China’s Film Industry in 2007],” *Film Art* (2008): 13–21.

income, film-related infrastructure, and audience size and revitalised the film industry as a whole.

Underlying the prosperity of the booming film market in China, there were still some challenges and difficulties. First, the pressure from Hollywood on the Chinese film industry was fiercer than ever before. In 2012, a further agreement between the Chinese and U.S. governments, the Sino-U.S. Memorandum of Understanding, regarding film imports was signed, in which China agreed to add an extra fourteen 3D or IMAX titles to the original twenty imported film quota.¹⁸ The revenue share for foreign production companies was also raised from 13% to 25% for a total of thirty-four revenue-sharing imported films.¹⁹ This increase in the number of imported titles both contributed to the growth of domestic box office income in China and pushed the domestic Chinese film industry to accelerate its technical development in order to compete.

Second, behind the increasing domestic box office, as Figure 12 indicates, the market share of domestic films decreased from 2007 to 2012, dropping below 50%.²⁰ Though there were fewer imported films than domestic films, the contribution of imported films was more significant to the Chinese domestic box office revenue.

¹⁸ Mary Hennock, "Boost for Hollywood Studios as China Agrees to Ease Quota on US Films," *The Guardian*, February 20, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/20/china-eases-import-quota-hollywood-films>.

¹⁹ Revenue sharing is one model for film imports in China. Another model for imported foreign films in China is the flat-fee deal. Both models are explained in detail later in the chapter.

²⁰ Here, domestic films include films produced domestically, joint productions, and flat-fee imported films. Details related to coproductions or joint productions are analysed in the next section.



Figure 12: Market share of domestic and imported films (%)

Third, films produced in mainland China lacked international success (see Figure 10). Though the domestic box office revenue skyrocketed between 2003 and 2012, foreign sales contributed relatively little to the total revenue. In 2012, the domestic box office income was sixteen times foreign revenue.

On one side, the Chinese film industry needed to deepen its marketisation to create a more dynamic and sustainable industry. As part of cultural production, films and their related industry have become an important medium for the Chinese government's outward cultural policy intentions.²¹ On the other side, foreign production companies are passionate about the promising Chinese domestic market and unhappy about either flat-fee imported deals or the revenue-sharing model, in which the foreign production companies get 23% of the box office income, which is much lower than the 45% for domestic films. In these circumstances, the joining of forces between Chinese and foreign parties on film production is both inevitable and profitable from each side's perspective.

Thus far, this section has examined the status of the Chinese film industry, including both its successes and its challenges. The following section focuses on film coproduction in China, including a brief review of its coproduction history, discussion of related film policies and regulations, and an outline of the experiences from Chinese-Hong Kong and Chinese-U.S. collaborations. In doing so, I aim to provide the background for the case study in the context of how coproducing with mainland China is a strategic model

²¹ Michael Keane, Brian Yecies, and Terry Flew, eds., *Willing Collaborators: Foreign Partners in Chinese Media* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

and a way forward for Taiwanese filmmakers and film companies seeking larger investments and a greater scale of audience.

Before going into detail about film coproduction in China, it is worth clarifying what film coproduction means in the Chinese context. According to the official classification published in the Provisions on the Administration of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Production of Films, cooperative film production consists of three models: joint production, assisted production, and commissioned production.²² Joint production, also known as treaty coproduction or *hepai* in Mandarin, refers to collaborations in which Chinese and foreign parties make joint investments, are involved in production jointly, and share the benefits and the risks jointly. The films produced following this model are considered domestic films in both countries. Though the criteria have been modified through the years, the baseline for classifying a film as a joint production is the participation of Chinese parties through the production, distribution, and profit- or risk-sharing process. In most cases, these films are produced under formal agreements between China and other countries, such as the treaties between China and France or Australia. However, in some cases, for example with the United States, there is no signed treaty between the two states. If the filmic products meet the qualifications of the Chinese joint production regulations and are classified as domestic films, they are exempt from the import quotas.²³

The second model of cooperative film production is assisted production, *xiepai pian*, in which the foreign party provides the funds and key creative staff and the Chinese party assists the production by providing equipment, material venues, and labour. The risks and losses are undertaken by the foreign party. The third type of coproduction is commissioned production, which means ‘the foreign party invests funds and commissions the Chinese party to undertake production on its behalf’.²⁴

²² “中外合作摄制电影片管理规定 [the Provisions on the Administration of Chinese-Foreign Cooperative Production of Films],” *China Film Administration*, June 06, 2004, <http://www.chinafilm.gov.cn/chinafilm/contents/159/794.shtml>.

²³ Kokas, *Hollywood Made in China*.

²⁴ “Rules for the Administration of Sino-Foreign Cooperative Film Production,” *Chinese Law & Government* 37 (2004): 96–104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094609.2004.11036412>.

Since the marketisation of the Chinese film industry in the early 1990s, related provisions have been released to regulate as well as assist coproduction between Chinese and foreign parties. First, in July 1991, the Administration of Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Film Production was released by the Ministry of Broadcasting, Film and Television, which functions as a basic guideline for parties involved in the cooperation projects. Afterwards, regulations like Rules of the Constitution of Creators in Domestic Feature Film and Coproduced Film and Temporary Rules of Management About Film Base were implemented.²⁵

Since China joined the WTO in 2001, policies and regulations related to film coproduction have been modified or introduced to fit the new environment. For example, the Interim Provisions on the Access of Operational Qualifications for Movie Production Distribution and Screening and Administration of Sino-Foreign Cooperation in Film Production were implemented in 2003, which allow private companies to participate in coproduction projects and also give them more flexibility in shaping coproduction projects by loosening the regulations on the proportion of Chinese actors and creative staff required. At this point, the Chinese film coproduction system consisted of two groups: the state-owned establishment, represented by China Film Group Corporation and Shanghai Film Group Corporation, and the private production companies, represented by Shanghai Paradise Corporation, Huayi Brothers, Taihe Entertainment, and Beijing New Picture.²⁶

Moreover, in 2004, Advice for the Promotion of the Film industry and the Interim Provisions on the Access of Film Company Business were issued, the former clearly expressing the right of private companies to produce and distribute films as an important sector of the film industry, and the latter giving permission for foreign companies to produce, distribute, and cast

²⁵ Shuang Xu, “曲折中的跋涉：中美影视合拍实践探究（1978–2000）” [Moving Forward in the Tortuous: A Study on the Practice of Sino-US Film Coproduction],” *Movie Review* (2019): 7–12.

²⁶ Fan Wang, “中外合拍片与中国电影全球化战略 [On Co-Production and the Strategy of China Film Globalization],” *Contemporary Cinema* (2012).

Chinese domestic films. According to Wang, there are two models that exist in film coproduction between Chinese and foreign parties, namely the foreign-dominated model and the domestic-dominated model.²⁷ From 2001 to 2003, coproduction projects were executed following both models equally. However, from 2004 to 2009, more and more film coproduction projects tended to be led by domestic organisations, the storylines were close to the daily life of the audience in mainland China, and the leading characters were cast with actors who are well-known in the Chinese mainland. This lowered the risk of box office revenue in mainland China. Examples of coproduction films of this kind are *Big Shot's Funeral* (*Da Wan*, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2001), *Kekexili: Mountain Patrol* (*Kekexili*, dir. Lu Chuan, 2004), and *Kung Fu Hustle* (*Gong Fu*, dir. Stephen Chow, 2004).

In 2003, the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement, an arrangement that broadened the economic partnership between mainland China and Hong Kong, was signed. Under this agreement, 'Chinese-language motion pictures produced in Hong Kong after being vetted and approved by the relevant Mainland authority may be...distributed in Mainland by distributors possessing "Operation Licence for Film Distribution", without any restriction on import quotas'.²⁸ Moreover, the agreement states that 'motion pictures jointly produced by Hong Kong and the Mainland are treated as

²⁷ The foreign-dominated model is normally initiated by the foreign party, which also undertakes the majority of the investment and hires staff, including the scriptwriter and the director. All story lines are related to China, but performers are hired from different Chinese-speaking regions or overseas for business considerations. Normally, the Chinese party is in charge of the distribution in mainland China, and the foreign party is responsible for distribution in the overseas market. Revenues are separated according to the distribution region. And the domestic-dominated model is initiated by the Chinese party, which is a joint force of state-owned organizations and privately financed companies. The projects are invested in by both the Chinese and foreign parties. The scriptwriters and the directors are Chinese nationals, and the plots are related to daily life and the social environment in mainland China. Concerning film distribution, the Chinese party participates in global joint revenue, seeking a larger marketing share. See Wang, "中外合拍片与中国电影全球化战略."

²⁸ "Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA)," Trade and Industry Department of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, accessed November 25, 2019, https://www.tid.gov.hk/english/cepa/tradeservices/av_tv_dramas_lib.html.

Mainland motion pictures for the purpose of distribution in the Mainland'.²⁹ Changing the identity of the films from Hong Kong films to domestic films in mainland Chinese means an increasing box office revenue share and bypasses the import tax and other distribution barriers for Hong Kong films.

Film Coproduction between Mainland China and Taiwan

In June 2010, the Cross-Straits Economic Co-operation Framework Agreement (ECFA) was signed by Taiwan and mainland China. Similar to the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement between Hong Kong and mainland China, the ECFA removes the film import quota for films produced in Taiwan. Moreover, coproduction films between Taiwan and the mainland are considered domestic films in mainland China. This section focuses mainly on the status and the mechanisms of film coproduction between mainland China and Taiwan through the case study *Love*.

As discussed in chapter 2, after the end of the 1990s, the Taiwanese film industry went through a challenging period when the number of titles produced each year was as low as ten and 90% of the film market in Taiwan was occupied by Hollywood. Because of this downturn, the number of film coproduction projects between Taiwan and mainland China was limited between 2000 and 2012.³⁰ Compared to 293 coproduction films between mainland China and Hong Kong between 2002 and 2012, there were only 50 film coproduction projects between the mainland and Taiwan.³¹ Especially during the period from 2002 to 2006, the Taiwanese parties mainly participated in coproduction projects through capital investment rather than being involved in the creative process, for example, the award-winning *Beijing Bicycle* (*Shiqi Sui De Danche*, dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, 2004) and the mainstream film *The Knot* (*Yun Shui Yao*, dir. Yin Li, 2006). However, after

²⁹ Trade and Industry Department of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, "Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA)."

³⁰ Qingsheng Zhan, "产业化十年中国电影合拍片发展备忘 2002-2012 [The Memorandum of China Co-Production Film from 2002 to 2012]," *Contemporary Cinema* (2013): 39-47.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

the implementation of the ECFA in June 2011, coproduction films increased immediately, from an average of four to five titles per year from 2007 to 2010 to seven in 2011 and fourteen in 2012.³²

This increase in the number of film coproductions and the ECFA between Taiwan and mainland China have been met with both acclaim and dissent. On one side, critics and film practitioners speak highly of the opportunities that the ECFA provides for Taiwanese filmmakers to gain access to and learn the mechanisms of the Chinese mainland film market rather than relying on government funding and turning a blind eye to audience tastes.³³ On the other side, critics are concerned that Taiwanese films will lose their cultural characteristics in order to pass the mainland's censorship and appeal to the mainland audience's tastes.³⁴ However, in this chapter, through the analysis of the case study *Love*, I argue that joint productions, to a certain degree, contribute to the development of the Taiwanese film industry by breaking the barriers of meagre capital, inadequate distribution channels, and confined genres as well as providing more opportunities for both above-the-line and below-the-line film workers without sacrificing the cultural identity of Taiwanese films. In other words, in contrast to the film industries in Japan and Korea, where there are larger local audiences and the industry can 'rely on the nationalisation of cultural sensibilities to survive', it is a necessary step forward for Taiwanese filmmakers to jointly produce films with other areas or countries to strengthen the film industry in Taiwan.³⁵

Though there is cultural proximity between Taiwan and mainland China as well as a language advantage for Taiwanese films, the success of

³² Ibid., 44.

³³ Xiaonao Chen, "王牌监制谈两岸合作：大势所趋，李安也不留在台湾 [Top Producers on Cross-Strait Coproduction: The Irresistible Trend, Ang Lee Also Left Taiwan]," *Tencent Entertainment*, January 29, 2017, <https://ent.qq.com/a/20170129/004402.htm>.

³⁴ Yizhang Lin and Zi Pu, "导演林靖杰：政府鼓励两岸合拍，台湾电影人才被掏空 [Director Lin Jingjie: The Government Encourage the Cross-Strait Coproduction, Taiwan will Lose All the Talents]," *Liberty Times Net*, May 29, 2015, <https://news.ltn.com.tw/news/life/breakingnews/1332617>.

³⁵ Mirana M. Szeto and Yun-Chung Chen, "Mainlandization or Sinophone Translocality? Challenges for Hong Kong SAR New Wave Cinema," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* 6 (2012): 115–34, https://doi.org/10.1386/jcc.6.2.115_1.

Taiwanese films in the mainland film market is not always assured. Films like *Cape No. 7* (2008), *Hear Me* (*Ting Shuo*, dir. Zheng Fenfen, 2009), and *Warriors of the Rainbow: Seediq Bale* (*Sai De Ke Ba Lai*, dir. Wei Desheng, 2011) that achieved gratifying box office revenue in Taiwan were not up to expectations when imported to the mainland.³⁶ The reason for the dissatisfactory box office is that because of video pirating and delayed screening schedules, many people had already watched these films through online streaming or pirated DVDs. For example, *Hear Me* (2009) was screened in mainland cinemas six years after its release in Taiwan.³⁷ More importantly, the low box office is due to the different film viewing preferences between audiences in Taiwan and in mainland China, including preferences on film genre, theme, or cultural identity. For example, *Seediq Bale* (2011) tells the story of the Wushe Incident in 1930 in central Taiwan, which resonates with the growing trend of localised narrative in Taiwan. However, audiences in the Chinese mainland may not react the same way due to their unfamiliarity with this history. Thus, to achieve box office revenue success across the strait, choosing the right story for a coproduction film plays an important role.

In an interview, Niu Chengze mentioned that his intention to collaborate with mainland Chinese film companies had emerged long before his collaboration with Huayi Brothers.³⁸ For *Monga*, Niu tried to negotiate the possibility of coproducing with mainland companies. However, due to the gangster theme of the film, he was advised to add a story line about police in the script to pass censorship. He rejected this idea, and consequently, no deal was made. From the experience Niu gained through these communications, *Love*, from the starting point of its creation, was designed to be a story that would be attractive for audiences from both Taiwan and mainland China. The

³⁶ Chenxing Huang and Li Li, “商业性不足台湾味太浓 《海角七号》神话终结 [Not Commercial Enough and Too Taiwanese, Cape No 7’s Box Office Legend Breaks],” *Sina Entertainment*, February 19, 2009, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2009-02-19/13532382408.shtml>.

³⁷ “两岸卖座电影为什么互相“水土不服”？ [Why Successful Films From Both Sides Of The Strait Can Not Be Acclimatized On The Other Side],” *BuzzOrange*, December 4, 2015, <https://buzzorange.com/2015/12/04/taiwan-movie-problems/>.

³⁸ Yimei Huang, “专访钮承泽导演 [Exclusive Interview with Director Niu Chengze],” *Funscreen*, March 16, 2012, http://www.funscreen.com.tw/headline.asp?H_No=398.

multiple protagonists in the film tell interwoven stories that happen in two cities, Taipei and Beijing, and the cast was formed by actors and actresses who are well-known to the audience across the strait. Portraying the lives of people in the metropolis was also intended to make the story appealing for audiences in both regions and overcome the geographic barrier. Niu explained that with today's developing communication technologies, the cultural distance between people living in Taipei and Beijing is less than between those in Beijing and some rural area in the Chinese mainland.³⁹

As mentioned earlier, through a series of reformations in the film industry, private companies in China have not only been encouraged to join film productions but have also been permitted to independently participate in coproductions with foreign parties. In 2012, the private companies had become the driving force in the mainland mainstream film market for creating new box office records and exploring new film production models.⁴⁰

Huayi Brothers, the mainland party in the production of *Love*, is one of the largest private companies in the media industry in China. Established by two brothers, Wang Zhongjun and Wang Zhonglei, in 2004, Huayi Brothers was one of the first companies to put film into market-oriented production, which not only invests in and produces films but also operates its own film studios, talent agencies, record labels, and movie theatres. Moreover, in October 2009, the company was listed on the ChiNext of the Shenzhen Stock Exchange. In 2010, with the success of *If You Are the One* (*Fei Cheng Wu Rao*, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2008), *Aftershock* (*Tangshan Da Dizhen*, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2010), *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame* (*Di Renjie Zhi Tong Tian Digu*, dir. Tsui Hark, 2010), and other films, the rapidly expanding corporation contributed RMB 1.7 billion⁴¹ of the total RMB 10.2 billion⁴² total domestic box office revenue in China.⁴³ In 2011, the largest

³⁹ Huang, “专访钮承泽导演.”

⁴⁰ Yin and Yin, “2012 年中国电影产业备忘.”

⁴¹ Approximately equivalent to US\$260 million.

⁴² Approximately equivalent to US\$1.56 billion.

⁴³ “华谊兄弟公布 2011 “H 计划” 10 部新片继续开拓华语电影 [Huayi Brothers Launch Its 2011 “H Plan”, 10 New Titles Will Continue Open Up Chinese Language Cinema],” *H*.

internet company in China, Tencent, paid US\$69 billion for 4.6% of Huayi Brothers Media's stake.⁴⁴

In February 2011, Huayi Brothers launched its H Plan for 2011, which included ten films directed by eleven directors, including Hong Kong directors Feng Delun and Peng Haoxiao and Taiwanese directors Niu Chengze and Lin Shuyu. The selection ranged over different film genres, from action to fantasy, from historical period costume drama to contemporary romance, which reveals the ambition of Huayi Brothers to provide for different needs of the audience and strengthen its leading position in the Chinese film industry. According to Wang Zhonglei, the president of Huayi Brothers, 'H plan is not only a film list of the year, but also a new wave of Chinese cinema, an official action of Huayi Brothers to create a diversified future of Chinese produced films'.⁴⁵

As a coproduction between Niu's Honto Productions and Huayi Brothers, *Love* was equally invested in by both parties, and its global copyright is also owned by both parties. However, the two sides did not participate in the creative side of the film production equally. Aside from one of the leading actresses, Zhao Wei, who comes from mainland China, most of the leading actors were from Taiwan. The creative staff were also formed by filmmakers from Taiwan. For example, the internationally famous cinematographer Mark Lee Ping Bin, scriptwriter Zeng Liting, editor Lin Yongyi, music composer Chen Jianqi, and art director Hung Meiqing are all Taiwanese. In this aspect, the coproduction of *Love* created a new collaborative model for film coproduction outside the five pre-existing models,⁴⁶ which are equally invested in by mainland and foreign companies

Brothers, February 14, 2011,

<https://www.huayimedia.com/a/xinwenzhongxin/gongsidongtai/2016/0901/8.html>.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Landreth, "China's Internet Titan Tencent Invests \$69 Million in Film Studio Huayi Brothers," *The Hollywood Reporter*, accessed December 2, 2019, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/chinas-internet-titan-tencent-invests-187285>.

⁴⁵ H. Brothers, "华谊兄弟公布 2011 "H 计划"."

⁴⁶ The five pre-existing coproduction models are (1) primarily invested in and produced by mainland China, and foreign parties partially or do not participate in the creation; (2) primarily invested in and with partial or no creative participation by the mainland, and primarily produced by foreign parties; (3) primarily invested in by foreign parties but mainly

but primarily created overseas. How a coproduction project is funded or created arguably depends on the choice of genre and theme, the size of the investment scale, the location of the main market, and the primary audience. The equal investments in *Love* from both sides can be read as aiming for audiences from both sides of the strait. In addition, reading through the box office revenue data, the film was commercially successful in both Taiwan and mainland China. On the first day of its release in mainland China, 14 February 2012, *Love* received a record-breaking RMB 40 million in box office income,⁴⁷ twice the total of the other two romance films, *Romancing in the Thin Air* (*Gao Ha Ba Zhi Lian 2*, dir. Jonnie To, 2012) and *I Do* (*Wo Yuan Yi*, dir. Zhou Sun, 2012), which were screened on the same night.⁴⁸ In total, the film has achieved NT\$650 million⁴⁹ in mainland China and NT\$160 million⁵⁰ in Taiwan. Though its box office in Taiwan did not triumph over *Monga*'s NT\$260 million, the total box office from both sides of the strait was more than three times *Monga*'s.

The distribution of the film was carried out by Huayi Brothers in mainland China and by Warner Bros. in Taiwan. The promotion and marketing strategies were planned by Huayi Brothers, but actions were executed separately across the strait to fit the different social and cultural situations. The marketing campaign in Taiwan was implemented by Key Stone, the company that promoted *Monga*. The experience of conducting the marketing campaign for *Monga* gave this local marketing agency more insight into how to execute promotions for large-scale productions. According to Yin, the leader of Key Stone, due to the success of *Monga*, more businesses were

created and produced by mainland China; (4) primarily invested in and created by foreign companies, with partial investment and participation in creation by the mainland; and (5) large scale hybrid production. See also Zhan, “产业化十年中国电影合拍片发展备忘 2002–2012.”

⁴⁷ Approximately equivalent to US\$6.12 million.

⁴⁸ Bin Hu, “情人节单日票房 1.3 亿《LOVE》领跑爱情片 [Total Box Office of the Valentine's Day Reach 130 Million, Love Triumph Other Romance FILM],” *Sohu Entertainment*, February 15, 2012, <http://yule.sohu.com/20120215/n334820513.shtml>.

⁴⁹ Approximately equivalent to US\$23.09 million.

⁵⁰ Approximately equivalent to US\$5.68 million.

willing to cooperate and participate in promoting *Love*. Methods used to promote *Love* included collaborating with the convenience store Family Mart in Taiwan by setting up small billboards and posters on the shelves, gaining permission from the Taipei city government to set up billboards in the Ximending commercial area, and other traditional media marketing methods.⁵¹

As with the marketing for *Monga*, digital marketing was included in the plan. Though the two films were produced only two years apart from each other, the digital media landscape had changed a great deal in this period of time. In Taiwan, Facebook had replaced Pixnet, a bulletin board system, as the primary marketing battleground.⁵² Moreover, to promote *Love* in mainland China, the promotion team set up an official account on Weibo, which is a Chinese equivalent of Twitter, to spread their marketing material and reach out to the widest potential audience. In 2012, Weibo had become the largest microblogging service in mainland China, with over 300 million registered users.⁵³ This digital platform, as social media, may not be the best place to practice free speech, but it has become a low-cost and efficient marketing method in the media industry. The account was created on 22 November 2011, three months before *Love*'s release date.

In the thousands of microblogs posted on Weibo, it seems that one of the most important strategies to promote a film is to make use of the impact of celebrities. For example, as the screenshot below shows, when the teaser poster for *Love* was launched, the official account posted links to the accounts of the eight leading actors on Weibo. This post was shared 2,737 times and had 219 comments.⁵⁴ These numbers may not seem impressive, but they do not reflect the post's actual audience or readers. The 2,737 times share means the followers of those 2,737 accounts also saw this post on their homepages when they logged in. Moreover, within the 2,737 accounts that shared this post, there are official fan groups of the leading actors or actresses in the film,

⁵¹ Yin, interview by author.

⁵² Weicheng Cai, interview by author, September 27, 2017.

⁵³ Duncan Hewitt, "Has Weibo Really Changed China?," *BBC News*, August 1, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18887804>.

⁵⁴ These data were collected during the time of research in November 2019. They may differ from when the microblog was originally posted in December 2011.

which means the post was directed to fans who were the target audience of the film. Thus, by using Weibo as a marketing tool, the large market was broken into smaller segments, and the marketing materials were targeted to the potential audience.



Figure 13: Screenshot of *Love* official account on Weibo

Moreover, with eight celebrated actors and actresses on site, a short behind-the-scenes video on each protagonist was uploaded to Youku, a Chinese online video and streaming service platform, and the clips were advertised through Weibo to meet the needs of their fans and potential audience, which is a similar strategy as was used to promote *Monga*, as analysed in chapter 4. However, compared to posting the behind-the-scenes materials on the official website, posting on Weibo allowed for a wider range of readers and viewers by the snowballing effect of message spreading. In addition, all the leading performers in *Love* had personal accounts on Weibo, and some had millions of followers. For example, Zhao Wei, who plays Jin Xiaoye in the film, has around 85 million followers, and Peng Yuyan, who plays Akai, has 32 million followers.⁵⁵ The interaction between the official marketing account of *Love* and the celebrities' accounts created the possibility of direct communication between the stars and their fans, which led to more effective and efficient film marketing.

⁵⁵ These data were collected during the time of research in November 2019. They may differ from the data in December 2011.

The release of *Love* was followed by positive reviews from both sides of the strait from media critics, audience word of mouth, and academic critics. In the media, including media reports and film critics published both in traditional media and digital media, the overwhelming cheering of its box office achievement was prominent.⁵⁶ Though the academic reception mentioned *Love* mainly as a successful example of film coproduction between Taiwan and the mainland,⁵⁷ the coproduction character was not the main focus for the general audience. Rather, the romance genre and the flowery shots of Taipei city, in other words, the Taiwanese touches, were the most appealing features of the film. For example, the film critic *Mu wei er* directly titled his film criticism piece ‘Romance Film Made in Taiwan.’⁵⁸

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the aftereffects of *Monga* by analysing the film Niu directed and invested in next, *Love*. From the brief examination of the contemporary film industry in mainland China and the social and economic environment for film coproductions in mainland China, the study aims to present an overall background of film coproduction between Taiwan and the mainland. By focusing on this successful collaboration between Niu’s Honto Productions and Huayi Brothers, the chapter also argues that coproduction

⁵⁶ “《Love》票房两岸称霸 观众赞豆瓣舒淇“天生一对” [Love Leading the Box Office on Both Sides of the Strait, Audience Thumb Up for The Pair Played by Niu Chengze and Shu Qi],” *Mtime*, February 16, 2012, <http://news.mtime.com/2012/02/16/1481984.html>; TG, “《Love》两岸票房双双破亿 爱火蔓延北美欧洲 [Love Box Office Breaks 100 Million on Both Sides of the Strait, the Popularity of Love Spread over North America and Europe],” *Sina Entertainment*, February 21, 2012, <http://ent.sina.com.cn/m/c/2012-02-21/10403560097.shtml>. See also “《爱》急迫《阵头》票房破千万 彭于晏饥饿三十不忘爱》 [Love over 10 Million Box Office Revenue, Chasing Din Tao in the Box Office Record, Peng Yuyan Starved for 30 Hours Still Promote Love],” *ETtoday*, February 12, 2012, <https://star.ettoday.net/news/24485>.

⁵⁷ Jiayao Ling and Zhang Wei, eds, *艺术学新视界：第十届全国艺术学学会年会文集* [The New View of Art] (Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Publishing, 2015); Yin and Yin, “2012 年中国电影产业备忘”; Chengyi Zhao, “A Political and Economic Analysis of Current Cross-Strait Film Co-Production,” *Prospect & Exploration* 12 (2014): 74–99.

⁵⁸ *Mu wei er*, “台湾制造的爱情片 [Romance Film Made in Taiwan],” *Douban Movie*, February 15, 2012, <https://movie.douban.com/review/5306107/>.

with mainland film companies is a necessary step and would be beneficial for Taiwanese filmmakers to approach a larger film market and operate projects in a sizeable industry scale. It does not mean that collaborating with mainland China is the only way for the Taiwanese film industry to expand or that all coproductions are financially successful.

However, in the case of *Love*, due to *Monga*'s success and popularity both financially and reputationally in Taiwan and in mainland China, the ability of Niu as a director and the promising capacity of the Taiwanese film industry and film market was recognised by mainland film investors. In other words, the success of *Monga* made the coproduction project *Love* possible. From the beginning of scriptwriting, Niu designed *Love* as an urban romantic film that would appeal to audiences from both sides of the strait. Furthermore, given the broadened experience of dealing with a blockbuster through *Monga*, the marketing campaign of *Love* in Taiwan also levelled up to a larger scale.

Thus, this chapter concludes that the success and popularity that *Monga* achieved went beyond both its Taiwanese geographic border and its time period. Moreover, *Monga*'s success facilitated Niu's career as a Taiwanese filmmaker and allowed him to attract a sizable investment in mainland China in order to reach a wider range of film audiences.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the reasons behind the success and popularity of the Taiwanese blockbuster *Monga*. It fills the gap left by other film scholars in providing an industrial perspective on Taiwanese national cinema and in going beyond the focus on the achievement of Taiwanese art house cinema.

Focusing on one film industry stage in each chapter, the study has answered the research question from the perspectives of film production, distribution, promotion, and reception. The study concludes that the project *Monga* utilised a novel business plan involving remarkable insights into the film industry from the key people, governmental funding, the support of Hollywood distributor Warner Brothers, a strategic marketing campaign, and informal distribution that spread the popularity over the border of Taiwan into mainland China. At the same time, the success and popularity that *Monga* achieved in Taiwan and in mainland China functioned as a stepping-stone for the director and investor Niu Chengze as a Taiwanese filmmaker to attract more sizeable investments and to break into the booming film market in mainland China, which aided Niu's next project, *Love*, a coproduction between Huayi Brother and Niu's Honto Production.

Looking back from 2020, it is clear that the success and popularity of *Monga* inspired the industry with a new release model for Taiwanese films, namely Chinese New Year films. The number of Chinese New Year Taiwanese films increased from one in 2010 to six in 2012, which included comedy *Flying Dragon, Dancing Phoenix* (*Long Fei Feng Wu*, dir. Wang Yulin, 2012), Taiwanese blockbuster and mainland China-Taiwan coproduction *Black & White Episode 1: The Dawn of Assault* (*Pizi Yingxiong Shoubu Qu: Quanmian Kaizhan*, dir. Cai Yuexun, 2012), and romantic comedy *The Soul of Bread* (*Ai De Mianbao Hun*, dir. Gao Bingquan and Lin Qunyang, 2012). Also, the top 2 Taiwanese film box office are *Gatao 2: Rise of the King* (2018) and *Back to the Good Times* (*Huajia Daren Zhuan Nanhai*, dir. Qu Youning, 2018), both were released during spring festival season. This film release model may not always guarantee a box office miracle, for example, *The Soul of Bread* (2012) has only NT\$ 20 million box office

revenue with a NT\$ 30 million budget.¹ But the success of *Monga* indicated the possibility for Taiwanese films to join the competition in the commercial film market during the Chinese New Year festival release period and achieve both financial and reputational success.

In this thesis, I argue that the well-designed business plan provides a foundation for *Monga* to achieve its success and the popularity. However, it would be a mistake to overlook the social and industrial background of the film. The success of *Monga* and *Love* revealed a contradiction in contemporary Taiwanese filmmaking, namely the tension between global and local forces. On one side, while filmmaking and the film market have entered an age of globalism, transnationalism, and trans-regionalism, there is ‘a strong vested interest in nation-building and the maintenance of a strong sense of national identity relevant both internally and externally to the national’.² On the other side, due to limited resources and market size and the economic and political pressures of globalisation, there is a trend toward involving resources from larger markets to survive the competition.

The success and the popularity of *Monga* and *Love* undoubtedly benefited from shifting film policies and relevant regulations, which also reveals how government regulations seek to balance the tensions between global and local forces. As mentioned in chapter 3, since 2002, the Taiwanese government has implemented plans, including the Film Industry Development Plan and the Film Industry Revitalization Plan, to boost the Taiwanese film industry from various aspects, including film production, distribution, marketing, and education. At the municipal level, the establishment of film commissions, such as the Taipei Film Commission, directly subsidised the financial and practical aspects of productions. In mainland China, as discussed in chapter 7, the loosening of the strict definition of national cinema created a more stimulating industrial environment for coproduction, which allowed the Taiwanese film industry to strengthen itself with resources from more competitive film markets.

¹ Approximately equivalent to US\$721,000 and US\$ 1.1 million.

² Hjort, Mette, and Duncan J. Petrie, “Introduction,” 15.

The success of *Cape No. 7* (2008) is believed that it shows the potential of Taiwanese film market and the popularity of *Monga* is stated that it proves the ability of Taiwanese blockbuster production. The revival of Taiwanese film industry was expected by the industry, the critics and audience. The recovery of the film industry in Taiwan in the past decade is undeniable. Compared to the early 2000s, when there were less than 10 Taiwanese titles released every year, the quantity of released Taiwanese films have increased since 2010. The amount of new release Taiwanese title from 2017 to 2019 are 48, 46 and 57 respectively. And the yearly box office revenue of Taiwanese films account for 6 to 7% of the total box office. However, since 2015, the growth of Taiwanese film market for local film is at a standstill. The dramatic box revenue of *Cape No. 7* (2008) and *Monga* have rarely been surpassed.

The dominant position of Hollywood subsidiaries in film distribution in Taiwan has not been challenged. Since acquisition of 21st Century Fox by Disney in 2019, Disney has been the biggest player in film distribution world widely, including in Taiwan. In 2019, there were 11 films distributed by Disney in Taiwan, which constitutes of 29.24% of total box office revenue in Taiwan.

From the initial research interest at the beginning of this four-year research period, which was on how *Monga*, a Taiwanese film that was never released in cinemas in mainland China, attracted rapt attention on Chinese social media and how the audience in mainland China read this Taiwanese film, the project was set to focus on a single case study, *Monga*. Rather than focusing on a trend or the changing environment of a film industry over a relatively long period of time, this thesis focuses on a very specific time in the shifting industrial setting and anatomised one Taiwanese blockbuster. Thus, my research contributes to the existing academic discussion in three ways.

First, by focusing on one case study and analysing it through various industrial stages, namely film production, distribution, marketing, and reception, this research contributes to the area of Taiwanese film studies from the industry perspective. Film is a form of art as well as an industrial product. What kind of film are being made and what type of film gains popularity are not only influenced by the artistic decision made by filmmakers but also the

development level of the industry. As mentioned in chapter 1, because of the traditional approach of textual analysis and auteur studies, the industry perspective has been a void in the existing literature on Taiwanese film. This research investigates the project of *Monga* from its preparation stage, through the production stage, to the reception stage and how its' success influenced the director's next project. In other words, rather than examine a cross-section of the industry by focusing on one stage, my thesis analyses a longitudinal section of the Taiwanese film industry by anatomising one film, *Monga*. By presenting the industry cycle of film production in Taiwan through one single case study, the research demonstrates the environment of the Taiwanese film industry. Moreover, it reveals the connectedness of various film industrial stages. The success and the popularity of *Monga* were not the result of one single action or the few people involved in the project. Rather, they were made possible by the consistent delivery of a feasible business plan at the right time by the right people for the right audience.

Second, this thesis expands the academic discussion on Taiwanese national cinema in two ways, by embracing industrial factors in cinematic textual analysis-dominated Taiwanese film studies and breaking the trend of art house cinema research by focusing on commercial Taiwanese cinema. The discussion on the concept of national cinema and the boundaries of national cinema as a research paradigm is never ending. Higson stresses the significance of including the consumption perspective in researching national cinema, but Crofts lists eight factors that research on national cinema should engage with in order to explore all dimensions of national cinema. This thesis examines Taiwanese national cinema through the aspects of production, distribution, promotion, audience, and discourse using one case study. Moreover, the analysis of the Taiwanese blockbuster *Monga* has been put into the context of globalisation and transnationalism. I argue in the thesis that in the circumstance in which Hollywood holds the dominant position in the global market and in the local Taiwanese market, the concept and the practice of national cinema could prevent the local film industry and market from being completely globalised. I also argue that appealing to the taste of a

general audience and producing a commercial blockbuster is a new type of response from Taiwanese filmmakers to the globalising film market.

Third, my thesis contributes to the existing academic work in film studies in terms of its methodological approach. Thus far in the existing literature in the area of film studies, there are small monographs on individual films from the BFI Film Classics and a book series on the New Hong Kong Cinema published by Hong Kong University Press. An anthology, *Global Chinese Cinema: The Culture and Politics of Hera*, is devoted to an individual film. In other words, there are limited book-length studies devoted to individual films. I believe this thesis is the first English-language study devoted to a single Taiwanese film. As pointed out in the chapter 1, since the Taiwan New Cinema movement was recognised in the international film circuit, there have been research works focuses on single film auteurs, including *Edward Yang* by John Anderson, James Udden's work on Hou Hsiao-hsien, *No Man An Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien*, and an anthology published in 2017, *Taiwan Cinema: International Reception and Social Changes*, on recent developments in Taiwanese cinema, focusing on the filmmaker Wei Desheng.³ However, there has not been a book-length study on an individual Taiwanese film, making this research the first. This brings me back to the question raised at the beginning of this research: why *Monga*?

Besides the reasons that have been detailed throughout the thesis, such as the feasible business plan designed by Niu and Li, the involvement of governmental funding and a Hollywood distributor in the project, and being branded as a Taiwanese blockbuster, I believe that *Monga* is a watershed moment in Taiwanese film history and deserves an exhaustive examination. As argued before, *Monga* set a new production and releasing model in the Taiwanese film market, and since its success at the box office, more Taiwanese filmmakers and film companies have followed *Monga*'s model to produce and release films during the Chinese New Year releasing period.

³ Anderson, *Edward Yang*; Udden. *No Man an Island*; Chiu, Rawnsley, and Rawnsley, eds. *Taiwan Cinema*.

Furthermore, at the micro level, in the existing literature on Taiwanese film studies, cinematic text and individual auteurs have been thoroughly researched. At the macro level, the cultural industry and governmental funding have also been examined by scholars in the field of Taiwanese film studies. However, my research combines these two perspectives. To put it differently, at a micro level, the thesis focuses on the practices behind an individual film with rich details and deepened understanding. At the macro level, through the analysis of the reasons behind the success and popularity of *Monga* in terms of its production, distribution, promotion, and consumption, my research also offers an overall viewpoint of how the Taiwanese film industry functioned as a comprehensive and dynamic system in the 2010s, responding to the changing global film market environment and domestic cultural and social changes.

The above addresses the methodological contribution of this thesis from a structural level. The following addresses the methodological contribution at a practice level. To answer the research question of how the success and popularity of *Monga* were achieved and to anatomise this Taiwanese blockbuster, the thesis is structured to devote one chapter to each industrial stage. To deepen the understanding of each stage of the multidimensional production of a blockbuster, each chapter adopted a different research method. In the chapters on production, distribution, marketing, and informal distribution of *Monga* in mainland China, I used the ‘cultural-industrial method’ adopted by John Caldwell, which includes interviews with filmmakers and textual and contextual analysis of filmic text, media reports, publications, and media platform content. In the chapter on the consumption of *Monga*, I adopted a total history approach that not only consists of both synchronic and diachronic perspectives but also includes multiple types of reception, namely review journalism, film criticism, online audience reviews, and so on. This mixed research method was used to explore the case study from diverse perspectives, and it also reveals the complexity of the film industry and the multidimensional characteristics of a blockbuster.

With these significant contributions to the field of Taiwanese film studies, this research also comes with limitation. The first limitation results

from the style of the individual case study in the thesis. Though I have constantly stressed and proved the significance of *Monga* to the Taiwanese film industry, whether the success and popularity of *Monga* can be repeated by another project is questionable. Through the analysis of the case study, the thesis reviewed the environment of film production, distribution, marketing, and consumption in Taiwan in 2010. However, it can only illustrate a corner of the iceberg, the whole picture of the film industry in Taiwan. To achieve that, I believe, requires the collective work of generations of scholars to present as close as possible the total history and view of Taiwanese cinema.

The second limitation is the limited access to research materials. As Caldwell mentioned, it has been a constant challenge for film scholars to access research materials and use a mixed method, and the cultural-industrial approach is one option to get around the barrier of this limitation by mixing research methods and compensating for the disadvantages of any single method. *Monga* was released in 2010, which was a transitional era between traditional and digital modes in the media industry. One difficulty I came across many times throughout the research period was the shortage of digitalised research material, including media articles, broadcast video clips related to *Monga*, marketing materials, and so on. Another difficulty was getting in touch with people, including the filmmakers and the actors. For example, attempts were made to interview the director, Niu Chengze, the general manager of Warner Bros. Taiwan branch, Shi Weiming, and the actor Ruan Jingtian, but these interview requests were rejected either explicitly or in silence.

This thesis has thoroughly answered the research question, but there are other questions raised during my research that I could not answer. I would therefore like to suggest a few areas for future research.

First, when I began this research in 2016, the Taiwanese film industry seemed to have been having a boom period since 2008. Not only were there more box office successes but the production environment had also been more friendly to locally produced Taiwanese films. In general, the number of Taiwanese films produced has increased since late 2008. However, since 2016, the introduction of each year's *Taiwan Cinema Yearbook* stresses that

the performance of Taiwanese films in that year was not cheerful. What are the reasons behind these ups and downs in the contemporary Taiwanese film industry? What has caused the industry to have another downturn?

Second, as stressed by Taiwanese filmmakers like Li Lie and the government strategy plans, it is very important to strengthen film education and train film talent in Taiwan. During the research for this thesis, I noticed the tendency for both above-the-line filmmakers and actors to leave Taiwan and switch their focus to working in mainland China, but below-the-line film practitioners are also taking more and more projects on the mainland. As the assistant director of *Monga*, Guan Weijing, expressed in his personal interview, there are more film and television projects in mainland China, so there are more opportunities for him to build his career as a filmmaker there. These words caught my attention and left me wondering: What are the working conditions for Taiwanese filmmakers to work in other areas? What influences do the regulations and political relationship between Taiwan and mainland China have on individual film practitioners?

Last but not least, the communication among Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China and other Chinese language film production area, including film coproduction, talent education, festival appearance and so on, should be further researched. Especially since the incident at Golden Horse Awards in 2008, when Taiwanese director Fu Yu's acceptance speech was interpreted as a Taiwanese independence speech and China Film Administration boycotted all mainland Chinese filmmakers and related staff to participate in the Golden Horse Awards, how the film industry has been influenced by politics? And what is the development among these Chinese film language area cooperation?

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