LEGITIMIZING FOREIGN CULTURAL PRODUCTS:
THE CASE OF ASIAN FILMS IN THE UNITED STATES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

SOCIOLOGY

MAY 2015

By

Mihyang Ahn

Dissertation Committee:

Patricia G. Steinhoff, Chairperson
Sun-Ki Chai
Yean Ju Lee
Wei Zhang
Ming-Bao Yue

Keywords: Legitimization, foreign cultural products, Opportunity space, Gatekeepers, Asian films
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance of my committee members and support from my friends and family.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Patricia G. Steinhoff, for her excellent guidance, encouragement, and patience from the preliminary to the concluding level. Her guidance helped me a lot in all the time of research and writing of the dissertation. I could not have imagined having a better advisor for my Ph. D study and research.

Besides my advisor, I would like to thank the rest of my dissertation committee, Dr. Sun-Ki Chai, Dr. Yean Ju Lee, Dr. Wei Zhang, and Dr. Ming-Bao Yue, for their support, insightful comments, and thoughtful questions. In particular, my sincere thanks also go to Dr. Seio Nakajima at Waseda University in Japan for leading me to the topic of my dissertation and always giving me his best suggestions.

I also would like to thank my colleagues in the Asia Group of Sociology at UH for their stimulating discussions and all the fun we have had in the last several years. Finally I would like to thank my family: my husband Mooweon Rhee and my charming daughters Yoojin and Jennifer. They were always there cheering me up and continually supporting me during the completion of the dissertation. Specially, my husband Mooweon always stood by me as a friend and a mentor through the whole period.
ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I explore the ways in which foreign cultural products have been legitimized as acceptable products in a country. I examine the history of Asian films theatrically released in the United States as a case which can show some influences on the acceptance of foreign cultural products. In my analysis, there are two main factors in the legitimization of Asian films in the United States: 1) the changing opportunity space, which includes social, economic, and cultural context of American society; 2) and the roles of gatekeepers, which are engaged to increase the accessibility, familiarity, and popularity of Asian films. The case of Asian films highlights the changing acceptance of foreign cultural products in a country and the mechanism involved in the legitimization of foreign cultural products. The history of Asian films may show common features in legitimizing foreign cultural products in a country.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................. iii

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. iv

List of Tables .......................................................................................................................... vi

List of Figures ........................................................................................................................ vii

Chapter 1: Introduction: Legitimizing Foreign Cultural Products ........................................ 1
  Asian Film History in the United States ........................................................................... 2
  Getting Legitimacy: Opportunity Space and Roles of Gatekeepers .............................. 5
  Data and Methods ............................................................................................................. 7

Chapter 2: The Creation of Opportunity Space ..................................................................... 9
  Changing Social Attitudes in United States .................................................................... 9
  Globalization of the Hollywood Film Industry and the Art Film Market in the United States ................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................. 16
  Critical Recognition from Cultural Institutions ............................................................ 25
  Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 34

Chapter 3: Film Distributors as Gatekeepers ....................................................................... 35
  Film Distributors and Their Strategies in the Art Film Market: ................................. 35
    1980s to 2000s ............................................................................................................. 35
    Asian Films and Film Distributors in the Art film Market ........................................... 39
    Case Study: Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films ............................................ 45
    Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 56

Chapter 4: Film Critics as Gatekeepers ............................................................................... 58
  Legitimizing Asian Films through Film Critics’ Activities ............................................. 58
    Critical Attention ......................................................................................................... 60
    Critical Evaluation ....................................................................................................... 64
    Comparison Strategy .................................................................................................... 69
    Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 80

Chapter 5: Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 81

Appendix: Questionnaire for Film Distributors handling Asian Films ............................. 85

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 86
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1. First Asian Film from Each Country Released in U.S. Theatres, 1950 - 2010……..3
Table 2.1. Academy Awards Nominees and Winners for Best Foreign Language Film, 1940s to 2000s……………………………………………………………………27
Table 2.2. Nominees and Winners of the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film, 1950s to 2000s……………………………………………………………………29
Table 2.3. National Board of Review Awards for Top Foreign Films and Best Foreign Language Film, 1920s to 2000s……………………………………………………………………30
Table 2.4. Top Grossing Asian Language Films in the United States, 1980 to 2014…………………………………………………………………………………………………33
Table 3.1. Number of Asian Films released by Top Five Distributors, 1980 to 2009…………45
Table 3.2. Top 10 Asian Language Films distributed by Sony Picture Classics, 1980 to 2014, with Box Office Receipts and Number of Theaters……………………………49
Table 3.3. Distribution and Marketing Strategies for Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon……………………………………………………………………………………………………………50
Table 3.4. Top 10 Asian Language Films distributed by Miramax Films, 1980 to 2014 with Box Office Receipts and Number of Theaters………………………………………………55
Table 4.1. Film Critics Reviewing Asian Films, by Sources, 1980s to 2000s………………59
Table 4.2. Number of Reviews Divided by Total Asian Films, 1980 to 2009………………61
Table 4.3. Number of Reviews Divided by Total Asian Films, by Sources, 1980 to 2009…………………………………………………………………………………………………63
Table 4.4. Percentage of Critics’ Evaluation of Asian Film, by Sources. 1980 to 2009…………………………………………………………………………………………………………67
Table 4.5. Film Comparison Strategies by Region Compared, 1980s to 2000s (%)………………72
Table 4.6. Director Comparison strategies by Country, 1980s to 2000s (%)…………………72
Table 4.7. Most Highly Compared Films in Reviews of Asian Films, 1980s to 2000s…………………………………………………………………………………………………………73
Table 4.8. Most Highly Compared Directors in Reviews of Asian Films, 1980s to 2000s………………76
TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. The Number of Asian Films Released in the U.S. Theaters, 1988 to 2006............3
Figure 2.1. Number of Asian Studies Programs and Centers Counted
by the Founding Year, 1900 to 2010.................................................................13
Figure 3.1. Number of Film Distributors for Asian Films Counted
by the Founding Year..................................................................................40
Figure 3.2. Number of Asian films and Their Film Distributors, 1980s to 2000s............41
Figure 3.3. Number of Asian Films Released by Different Types of Film Distributors,
1980 to 2009..................................................................................................42
Figure 3.4. The Proportion of Distributors for Asian Films, 1980 to 2009....................43
Figure 3.5. The Proportion of Top 11 Distributors for Asian Films, 1980 to 2009...........44
Figure 4.1 Number of Reviews Divided by Total Asian Films, 1980 to 2009................62
Figure 4.2. Percentage of Critics’ Evaluation on Asian films: 1980 to 2009....................66
Figure 4.3 Comparison Strategies employed by American Film Critics,
1980 to 2009 (%)..........................................................................................71
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: LEGITIMIZING FOREIGN CULTURAL PRODUCTS

Existing studies in sociology of culture have called attention to the process of legitimation of cultural products (e.g., DiMaggio 1982; Becker 1984; DeNora 1991; Ardery 1997; Baumann 2001; Scardaville 2009). For example, Baumann (2001, 2007) elaborated three major factors - opportunity space, institutionalization of resources, and legitimating ideology - to explain the legitimation of film as an art form by examining the history of film in the United States. Scardaville (2009) elucidated the mechanisms that enable and constrain both economic and aesthetic legitimacy by using the case of U.S. daytime soap operas, which did not achieve aesthetic legitimacy but obtained economic legitimacy.

While the process of legitimation of domestic cultural products is clearly established, the process of legitimation of foreign cultural products remains largely unexplored. The presence of foreign cultural products in a country is not a new phenomenon anymore, and the globalization of cultural products has increased during the recent decades. Intriguingly, not all foreign cultural products are well-accepted in a country. Some foreign cultural products are widely accepted, whereas other foreign cultural products fail to be accepted, and this can vary within any particular country. How can we account for the success or failure of acceptance of foreign cultural products? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the social process of distribution and reception of foreign cultural products in a specific country.

To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to investigate how foreign cultural products become legitimized as acceptable products. By using the case of Asian films circulated theatrically in the United States, I explore major factors that play critical roles in the process of legitimation of foreign cultural products. The history of Asian films is a fascinating case study for the legitimization of foreign cultural products. Since their introduction in the 1950s, Asian films in the United States have been generally considered either art films that played in a small number of art houses or ethnic films with limited circulation among ethnic audiences. Until the early 1990s, Asian films remained in this limited area, not being accepted widely by mainstream audiences in the United States. Since the late 1990s, Asian films have been transformed from their beginnings as ghetto films for art house or ethnic audiences. While many Asian films still
are not well-accepted in the United States, it is now widely recognized that some Asian films can also appeal to mainstream audiences in the United States (Hunt and Wing-Fai 2008; Zhu and Rosen 2010; Lee 2011). Despite this, little attention has been paid to the legitimation process of Asian films in the United States.

Empirically, this study highlights two major factors that influence the acceptance of Asian films in the United States by examining many different kinds of data. I explore social, economic, and cultural forces that facilitated the change of perceptions of Asian films as well as the roles of gatekeepers that actively engaged in enhancing the acceptance of Asian films. Through this examination, I suggest that the legitimacy of foreign cultural products can be achieved both by a favorable opportunity space carved out by changes in the wider society and by the roles gatekeepers play in the legitimation process.

Asian Film History in the United States

This brief description of Asian film history in the United States will provide a timeline of the introduction of Asian films to the United States. In this study, Asian films are defined as films produced in Asian countries, by Asian filmmakers, primarily for Asian domestic audiences but also for global audiences; Asian countries are confined to East Asia (Japan, China, and Korea) and Southeast Asia (Vietnam and Thailand).

In recent decades, the presence of Asian films in the United States has dramatically increased (see Figure 1.1). This phenomenon is very new, but the initial introduction of Asian films to the United States dates back to the 1950s. Table 1.1 reports the first Asian film from each country, which was released in the U.S. theaters during the period from 1950 to 2010. As indicated in the table, there was a series of Asian films introduced to the United States from different countries across different time periods.
Table 1.1 First Asian Film from Each Country Released in U.S. Theatres, 1950-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>First Year in the US</th>
<th>Film</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s - 1960s</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Akira Kurosawa’s <em>Rashomon</em> (1950)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Wei Lo’s <em>Fists of Fury</em> (1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Ang Lee’s <em>The Wedding Banquet</em> (1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Glenn Goei’s <em>That’s the Way I like It</em> (1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Philippines</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Mel Chionglo’s <em>Burlesk King</em> (1999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Internet Movie Database Pro; Robert Skar (2002).

The first wave of Asian films in the United States began with Japanese films in the 1950s, expanded to Hong Kong in the early 1970s, and then gradually broadened to encompass the rest
of Asia from the late 1980s to 2004. During the 1950s and 1960s, Japanese films exerted an impact on Hollywood and U.S. audiences. The Bruce Lee kung fu films, which were made in Hong Kong in the early 1970s, led the second wave of Asian films in the United States. The commercial success of Hong Kong kung fu films in this period made it possible for Hong Kong martial arts films to be continually released in the United States during the 1970s, as well as leading Hollywood to produce action films with Asian style.

Since the late 1980s, the number of Asian films in the United States has gradually increased with the introduction of the Pan-Chinese films (Chinese, Taiwanese and Singapore films) and Vietnamese films. The award records of some Chinese films such as To Live in major film festivals facilitated the increasing presence of Chinese films in the United States, along with the tremendous growth of several Chinese films in U.S. box office receipts, such as Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.

Since 2000, many Asian countries have actively participated in the global film market, and as a result, more diverse Asian films have circulated in US theaters. Korean films, Philippine films, and Thai films have been introduced to the United States since 2000, and other Asian films including Cambodian films and Mongolian films have circulated in US theaters since 2004. Like other Asian films released in earlier periods, most of the Asian films released in the United States since 2000 were the films that received awards at international film festivals. What is interesting in this period is that Hollywood began to co-produce local language films in China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as well as to remake some films originally made in Asian countries, including Japan, China, and Korea (Xu 2008).

Overall, the presence and popularity of Asian films in the United States increased dramatically around the turn of the 21th century with a much larger number of Asian films, greater diversity in the number of countries where the films were made, and greater impact on the American film industry. Many Asian films released in the United States were awarded or nominated for prizes at prestigious film festivals or film societies. Moreover, some Asian films including films from Hong Kong, China or Taiwan achieved huge commercial success in the United States. As a result, the increased presence and popularity of Asian films have significantly influenced American audiences’ perception of Asian films as well as Hollywood’s production and distribution style.
Getting Legitimacy: Opportunity Space and Roles of Gatekeepers

Based on the findings of previous studies on artistic status and cultural production, I propose a framework for explaining the legitimization of foreign cultural products as acceptable products. Within the findings of previous research, I identify two main factors to explain the public acceptance of foreign cultural products as legitimate products in a receiving country -- an opportunity space and roles of gatekeepers.

The first factor is the opportunity space, defined by important events not only in the whole society but also in a specific area. Previous research on artistic status has recognized the influence of an opportunity space, created by some events outside the art worlds, which could facilitate the attainment of aesthetic legitimacy (Peterson 1972; Levine 1988; DiMaggio 1992; De Nora 1991; Lope 2002; Baumann 2001, 2007). Specially, Baumann (2007) developed the concept of opportunity space by introducing a range of elements which were founded on empirical studies. Some elements of the opportunity space are broad changes in the wider society such as economic change, while other elements are more specific to the art world, such as advances in technology. As in the case of achieving aesthetic legitimacy, the favorable opportunity space, which is created by some events that have already occurred or have been occurring, could help to facilitate the legitimization of foreign cultural products in a particular country.

The second factor is the role of gatekeepers that mediate the relationship between cultural products and audiences. Existing literature on cultural production pointed out the importance of the gatekeeper role that can affect the contents of cultural products or the tastes of audiences (Hirsch 1972; Shrum 1991; Griswold 1992; Crane 1992; Peterson 1994). For example, Griswold (1992) shows the role of English publishers bringing about change in the work of Nigerian novelists, while Shrum (1991) demonstrates the influence of critics’ critical discourse on audience attendance at festivals. Observing the gatekeeper role, Foster, Borgatti, and Jones (2011) present at least three different types of gatekeeper role in cultural industries: as co-producer, as selector, and as tastemaker. The co-producer role is to guide artists and products through the production process, functioning almost as artists themselves by affecting the content of the cultural product; the selector role is to operate as brokers that use search and selection strategies to identify emerging talent; the tastemaker role functions at the end of production process,
evaluating cultural products and promoting some products to audiences. For the legitimization of foreign cultural products, however, one more gatekeeper role should be added to these three types of gatekeepers: the information agent role that devises various strategies to deliver information on cultural products to audiences (Shrum 1991, 1996; Podolny and Hsu 2002; Ahn et al 2012).

Two different types of gatekeepers engage in the process of legitimation of foreign cultural products. The first type of gatekeepers functions as both selectors and co-producers in the cultural industry. Generally, they select some foreign cultural products, bring them into the domestic market, and distribute them by using various strategies, which make foreign cultural products accessible to broader audiences. Sometimes these gatekeepers participate in the production process and thus shape the content of foreign cultural products in order to make them appeal more to mainstream audiences. The second type of gatekeepers operates as both tastemakers and information agents in the cultural industry. As tastemakers, they usually select some among the foreign cultural products offered and then evaluate them or promote specific products to audiences. Since this function significantly affects the value and reputation of foreign cultural products, gatekeepers’ attention is crucial to the survival of foreign cultural products in a receiving country. As information agents, they help improve audiences’ understanding of unfamiliar foreign cultural products by comparing them or their producers to renowned or accepted cultural products or producers. Through this comparison strategy, they familiarize foreign audiences with cultural products, thereby enhancing their acceptance in the receiving country.

For this study, I created a framework by combining the two elements of opportunity space and the roles of gatekeepers, which come from previous studies on artistic status and cultural production respectively. Previously, there was no framework that could be applied widely to cases of the acceptance of foreign cultural products as legitimate products in a receiving country. This framework can explain the process of legitimation not only of foreign language films, but other genres as well.
Data and Methods

To explore the question of how foreign cultural products are legitimized as acceptable cultural products in a receiving country, I gathered data from multiple sources and conducted both historical analysis and content analysis of data. These two methods are employed in this study because historical analysis is generally appropriate for studying long-term change in society or examining social factors that produce a specific outcome, while content analysis is useful for discovering trends in text or identifying the intentions of the communicator (Babbie 2001; Neuman 2004).

Chapter two explores significant historical events that facilitated the acceptance of Asian films in the United States. The focus of this chapter is on changing American society, particularly on changing social attitudes toward Asia or Asians, Hollywood’s increasing interest in Asian films, and the recognition of Asian films by prestigious film award organizations. For this goal, I conducted a historical analysis of data that were gathered from a variety of books, articles, and reports, websites such as the Association for Asian Studies, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Hollywood Foreign Press Association, National Board of Review of Motion Pictures, and online databases such as Box Office Mojo and Internet Movie Database Pro.

The third and fourth chapters examine the roles that gatekeepers played actively in reconstruction of Asian films as acceptable films for an American audience. Chapter three focuses on the role of film distributors handling Asian films in the United States. For this chapter, I also conducted a historical analysis of data that were collected from books and articles, media sources such as The New York Times, Variety, Daily Variety, Daily News, and Advertising Age, websites including Indiwire, and online databases such as Box Office Mojo and Internet Movie Database Pro. In addition, I contacted the top five film distributors for Asian films, and then I visited the offices of the top four film distributors for Asian films in New York in April, 2013, and collected more detailed data through a questionnaire regarding the acquisition, distribution, and marketing strategies of film distributors handling Asian films (see Appendix).

Chapter four focuses on the role of film critics. For this chapter, I combined historical analysis with a systematic content analysis of film reviews of Asian films in order to assess the evaluations of critics as well as to identify critics’ strategies for familiarizing the audience with less-known films. I collected 599 film reviews from the websites of three different mainstream
newspapers representing three different major movie markets: *The New York Times, Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Sun-Times*. The total sample of reviews includes 290 *The New York Times* reviews, 197 *Los Angeles Times* reviews, and 112 *Chicago Sun-Times* reviews during the period from 1980 to 2009. To gather general data on Asian films, I used the online database *Internet Movie Database Pro*.

The following chapters examine empirical data within my framework of opportunity space and gatekeepers, in order to analyze the legitimization of Asian films in the American film market.
CHAPTER TWO

THE CREATION OF OPPORTUNITY SPACE

The creation of a favorable opportunity space becomes a necessary condition for the acceptance of foreign cultural products in the receiving country. In this chapter, I examine the opportunity space for Asian films as foreign cultural products, which facilitated their acceptance in the United States. The opportunity space for Asian films is composed of some important events in American society such as changing social attitudes, the globalization of the Hollywood film industry, and critical recognition from cultural institutions. The first section explores the changes in the attitudes of American elites and public toward Asia or Asians in the United States. The main indicators for the attitude change are the development of Asian studies programs in higher education and the rising social status of Asian Americans. The second section discusses how the globalization of the Hollywood film industry increased the circulation of Asian films in the United States, focusing on the development of Hollywood’s overseas market, its growing interest in Asian markets, and its involvement in the art film market. The third section examines the critical recognition of Asian films from prestigious American cultural institutions and their influence on the American art film market.

Changing Social Attitudes in United States

This section examines changes in the attitude of American elites and public towards Asia or Asians in the United States. Two events are presented here as indicators for attitude change: the development of Asian studies programs in higher education and the rising social status of Asian Americans. Scholarly studies on Asia in higher education in the United States indicate American elites’ interest in Asia. The development of Asian studies programs in higher education shows that American elites’ interest in Asia has increased and knowledge about Asia has been continuously disseminated in the United States. The rise of social status of Asian Americans has significantly affected the shift in the American public image of Asians from negative to positive. This change in social attitudes towards Asia and Asians in the United States
has been one important element underlying the opportunity space for the acceptance of Asian films in the United States.

*The Development of Asian Studies in Higher Education*

America’s interest in Asia started in the nineteenth century. In this period, Asia was viewed as a place for the missionary enterprise as well as new foreign markets for trade. China and Japan dominated American interests in Asia, guiding the direction of Asian studies in the United States. America’s interest in Asia produced some important literature, but it did not lead yet to the establishment of Asian Studies programs in American universities and colleges (Embree 1983; Williams 1998; Yamashita 2000). Only a few big universities offered courses on oriental languages beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. For example, Yale University offered courses on Chinese languages in 1877, and UC Berkeley founded the Department of Oriental Languages in 1896. By 1914, only eight universities had faculty who taught courses on Asia: Yale, Berkeley, Stanford, Harvard, Clark, Columbia, Wisconsin, and Washington (Yamashita 2000: 28-29).

In the 1920s, Asia began to be considered an object of academic inquiry when some private foundations supported Asian projects. The Rockefeller Foundation and the American Council of Learned Societies (hereafter ACLS) were very active in supporting individuals, groups, and institutions interested in studying Asia during the period from 1920s to 1930s. According to Yamashita, the Rockefeller Foundation has supported research or projects on China since the 1920s. Besides this, the foundation in cooperation with ACLS, supported the building of an Asian collection at the Library of Congress, summer language institutes offering Chinese, Japanese, and Russian language courses, and the establishment of scholarly organizations devoted to the study of Asia, including the Institute of Pacific Relations (founded in 1925) (2000:30-31).

World War II had a huge impact on the development of Asian studies, particularly Chinese and Japanese studies, in the United States. For the study of Asia, new programs were created with funding support by the government and foundations, and these programs produced those people who would become Asian specialists after the war. As Williams writes,
Wartime demands for knowledge about the various theatres of the war provided a major stimulus to the development of area studies in general in the U.S. and to the development of Chinese and Japanese studies in particular. Crash programs were instituted during the war to train Americans in both languages and to provide intelligence studies useful for the war efforts. Many of the individuals involved in wartime training and intelligence activities went into the universities and newly established East Asian studies centers that proliferated in the postwar era and became leading figures in East Asian studies. The federal government and foundations began to pump large amounts of money into area studies in general, with China and Japan receiving high priority (1998: 42)

After World War II, Asia finally became part of the university and college curriculum. A growing number of universities and colleges began to hire Asia specialists, as well as offer courses on Asian subjects. Notably, they also increased the number of degree-awarding graduate programs to produce more Asian specialists. As Yamashita shows, In 1946, only 4 major universities in the United States had full-blown Asian studies programs, all focused on China and Japan. By 1951 there were 11 such programs, representing a broader array of regions and countries: 8 concentrating on China and Japan (Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Michigan, University of California at Berkeley, University of Washington, and Yale); 2 directed to Southeast Asia (Cornell and Yale); and 1 devoted to South Asian studies (University of Pennsylvania). In 1973, there were 76 programs – 43 focused on East Asia, 20 on South Asia, and 13 on Southeast Asia (2000: 37).

The growth of Asian studies fields after the war was significantly affected by such factors as the Cold War and external funding. During the Cold War, America had become a super world power, assuming new responsibilities as a world leader as well as a defender of the free world against the Soviet Union. For this double role, America needed to gain deeper and broader knowledge about Asia, including Asian cultures, politics, history, and languages. This need led
American government to work closely with the Asian studies community in the 1950s and 1960s. The federal government and public and private foundations were major funding sources for Asian studies programs in the post-WWII era. The federal programs under the National Defense Education Act (hereafter NDEA) supported language and area training in order to meet the nation’s needs for knowledge about Asia. More public and private foundations provided funding for Asian studies programs, and the amount of funding has increased from various foundations such as Ford, Luce, MacArthur, Mellon, Guggenheim and others. Due to this external funding, Asian studies programs proliferated in the 1950s and 1960s (Embree 1983; Yamashita 2000).

During the 1970s, through the 1980s, and continuing into 1990s, Asian studies programs have expanded further in the United States. Particularly, a number of private colleges, which were more conservative than their public counterparts, expanded their Asian studies programs in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, the study of Asia was firmly established at private colleges across the United States during this period. Interestingly, the expansion of Asian studies programs at private colleges was in part impacted by the dramatic rise of the Asian economies in the 1980s. Japan emerged as a nation with considerable economic power, and the four dragons of Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) demonstrated phenomenal economic success in the 1980s. That is, Asia became a major member of the modern industrialized world and could not be ignored by the college curriculum (Yamashita 2000:42-43). During this period, the study of Asia in higher education was no longer shaped by the perspectives from the Cold War. The development of Asian studies programs was facilitated by generous external funding supported by several new foundations. Specially, new foundations created by wealthy Asian countries played an important role in supporting Asian studies programs while the American government funding had decreased over time. Three important Asian foundations were the Japanese Foundation (founded in 1972), the Chiang Chingkuo Foundation (of Taiwan, founded in 1989), and the Korea Foundation (founded in 1991). These foundations provided the U.S. universities and colleges with financial support for the study of their respective countries.

Figure 2.1 strongly supports the consistent increase in the founding of Asian studies programs in higher education from 1920 to 1990. It also shows that a sharp increase occurred twice, one between 1950 and 1960 and the other between 1970 and 1980. This is consistent with the assertions by Embree (1983) and Yamashita (2000). Since this figure shows the founding
dates of Asian studies programs, the sharp drop after 2000 simply reflects the lack of new programs, but most of the existing programs remain, according to the database of the Association for Asian Studies (https://www.asian-studies.org/programs/bystate.htm). Interestingly, the recent reports by the Japan Foundation (2013) on the development of Japanese Studies, edited by Steinhoff, present a similar pattern of the founding and persistence of Japan-related programs.

Figure 2.1. Number of Asian Studies Programs and Centers Counted by Founding Year, 1900 to 2010

Source: the 2013 list of Asian studies programs and centers provided by the Association for Asian Studies.
Note: N=199

The Rise of Social Status of Asian Americans

Asian immigrants first entered the United States in the nineteenth century. Chinese and Japanese immigrants were two major Asian groups in this period. Most immigrants had a low level of educational attainment and worked at difficult, low paying jobs, providing cheap labor in the U.S. economy. To the majority Americans in this period the Asian image was very negative, and thus most of the Asian immigrants faced multiple obstacles including severe discrimination. As Kitano and Nakaoka note,
Asians were often viewed as an “inferior race,” and discrimination was present on every front. They were not allowed to become citizens and were relegated to the bottom of the political, economic and social structure (2001: 10).

This negative stereotype of Asians by majority Americans finally resulted in the establishment of several anti-Asian laws. For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 to prevent Chinese immigration, and the Gentleman’s agreement was created in 1907-1908 to restrict the immigration of Japanese. Finally the National Origin Act was established in 1924 to prohibit the immigration of all Asians. That is, the foundation of these anti-Asian laws was largely a consequence of majority Americans’ negative social attitudes toward Asians in the United States (Hurh and Kim 1989; Xie and Goyette 2004; Min 2006).

The change of social attitudes toward Asians in the United States began with the outbreak of World War II. Although as the American enemy Japanese were placed in internment camps by the American government during the war, Chinese and Filipinos benefitted from the war as American allies. Thus, the Chinese exclusion Act was abolished in 1943, and Filipinos became eligible for naturalization in 1946. The images of these groups by majority Americans also improved during the war, although soon after the war the image of Chinese became ambivalent due to the establishment of the Peoples’ Republic of China in 1949. Beginning in the 1950s, there were more legal changes that significantly affected the social status of Asians in the United States. For example, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 granted naturalization to Japanese, as Japan became an American ally after the war. The landmark 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolished discrimination in immigration based on national origin, so that more educated, skilled Asian immigrants could enter the United States. This change in the population of Asian immigrants in part contributed to the change of the image of Asians from negative to positive in the United States (Kitano and Nakaoka 2001; Xie and Goyette 2004).

Since the 1960s, social attitudes toward Asians in the United States who were non-US citizens have been dramatically transformed in a positive direction due to the rising status of Asian Americans who were children of Asian immigrants born in the U.S. and thus considered American citizens under American law. Asian Americans have been widely publicized as “model minorities” by the mainstream media in the United States (Shim 1998; Woo 2000; Kawai 2005). This attitude has been largely attributed to the rise of the socioeconomic status of Asian
Americans (Hurh and Kim 1989; Sakamoto and Xie 2000; Kitano and Nakaoka 2001; Xie and Goyette 2004). That is, the socioeconomic success of Asian Americans has changed majority Americans’ attitudes toward not only Asian Americans who were citizens but also Asians in the United States who were not born into US citizenship.

Xie and Goyette (2004)’s report is noteworthy in that it provided the evidence for the rise of socioeconomic status of Asian Americans through their analysis of the 1960-2000 census data. According to the report, the socioeconomic status of Asian Americans was overall comparable with, and in some instances higher than, that of whites. For example, Asian Americans overall had higher rates of high school or college completion than whites and blacks, despite significant variations in education attainment among Asian Americans. Specially, the gaps between different ethnic groups in college completion are very interesting. While 19 percent of Asians had completed college, compared with 12 percent of whites and 4 percent of blacks, in 1960, 53 percent of Asians had a college degree, compared with 30 percent of whites and 15 percent of blacks, in 2000 (p.9). In case of average earnings, Asian men earned about as much as white men between 1959 and 1979, and earned more between 1989 and 1999, whereas Asian women earned more than white women during the whole period. After adjusting for education and work experience, Asian men earned less during the 1959-1999 periods, but Asian women earned more during the same periods. When it comes to occupation, Asian Americans tended to be concentrated in certain occupations that enabled their upward social mobility. Asian Americans’ representation increased prominently in almost all professional jobs. For example, while the percentage of Asians among physicians, dentists, and related occupations increased rapidly from 1.4 percent in 1960 to 13.6 percent in 2000, the percentage of Asians in physical science jobs dramatically jumped from 0.7 percent in 1960 to 15.3 percent in 2000. Also, the percentage of Asians among computer specialists, an occupation that did not exist in the 1960 census classification of occupation, increased from 1.2 percent in 1970 to 13.2 percent in 2000.

In sum, while World War II and a series of legal changes during and after the war in part caused the decrease of negative images of Asians in the United States, the socioeconomic success of Asian Americans since the 1960s significantly transformed the attitudes of the American public toward Asians in the United States from unfavorable into favorable.
Globalization of the Hollywood film industry and the Art Film Market in the United States

This section discusses another key element of the opportunity space for the acceptance of Asian films in the United States - the globalization of the Hollywood film industry. The Hollywood film industry has worked globally from the early part of the twentieth century. However, during the period from the 1980s to the 1990s, Hollywood has entered a new stage of globalization, which is regarded as the globalization of the markets and audiences for Hollywood films in general and the increasing importance of Asian markets in particular. Due to the importance of Asian markets, Hollywood studios became increasingly involved in financing and distributing Asian films, resulting in the growth in the distribution of Asian films in the United States. Hollywood’s attention to Asian films led to the revival of the art film market, and thus contributed to the circulation of more diverse Asian films in the United States.

Hollywood’s Overseas Market in the Global Context and The Importance of Asian Markets

Hollywood’s Overseas Market before the 1980s

Hollywood’s overseas market began to grow in the early twentieth century. After World War I, American films dominated the global film business. This domination was possible because the European film industries were disrupted after the war but the American film industry did not suffer this fate. In addition, the introduction of sound to film-making increased production costs, and thus Hollywood tried to amortize the investment by selling films in the European market (Guback 1969: 8-9). The exports to Europe were very important to Hollywood because “they generated about 65 percent of overseas revenue,” and especially, “By 1925, a third of all foreign revenue came from the United Kingdom alone, where American films captured 95 percent of the market” (Guback 1985: 466). The dominance of Hollywood was reinforced during and after World War II as the European film industries were severely destroyed again but Hollywood continued to make films. Moreover, the American government has continually supported Hollywood’s dominance through various activities against foreign restrictions on Hollywood exports in global markets (Guback 1969, 1985; Wasko 2003).

During the 1950s, the importance of Hollywood’s overseas market grew alongside reduced domestic profits due to anti-monopoly laws and the arrival of television. While the advent of television brought about the decline of theater attendance, the studios’ legal separation
from their theaters, caused by the Paramount decision in 1948, resulted in the cutback of their production along with the disappearance of a secure domestic outlet. The studios began to produce a small number of high-budget films to compete with television as well as to compensate for the cutback in production. Interestingly, the domestic product shortage in this period caused the broader distribution of foreign films from England, France, Sweden, Italy, and Japan. In turn, the distribution of foreign films led to the rise of the art film market in the United States (Donahue 1987: 146; Guback 1985: 477). During the 1950s, Hollywood expanded its overseas market with support from American banks, government, and industry leaders. Further geographic expansion of overseas markets took place during the 1960s and 1970s, and a growing number of American distribution companies worked with foreign-owned theaters and distribution companies. In addition, the use of foreign locations for the production of American films increased, and there were increasing co-production deals between Hollywood and foreign film companies, which include mainly European film companies (Donahue 1985: 147; Guback 1985:480-481; Buck 1992: 119).

Expansion of Hollywood’s Overseas Markets since the 1980s

During the 1980s, Hollywood entered the age of globalization, which included such characteristics as “economic growth in Western Europe, the Pacific Rim, and Latin America, the end of the Cold War, the commercialization of state broadcasting systems, and the development of new distribution technologies” (Balio 1998: 58). To utilize these conditions, Hollywood studios have improved their international operations by becoming part of huge media conglomerates, by forming partnerships with independent producers to fill out their rosters, and by partnering with foreign investors to reduce their motion picture financing burden (Buck 1992; Balio 1998). The growth of Hollywood’s overseas market during the 1980s was to some degree due to “the upgrading of motion picture cinemas, the emancipation of state-controlled broadcasting, the spread of cable and satellite service, and the pent-up demand for entertainment of all types” (1998: 59). In this period, Hollywood’s overseas revenue no longer included theatrical rentals only, but instead, the main components included home video sales and rentals, theatrical rentals, and television. Specially, home video sales and rentals became the largest single source of Hollywood’s overseas revenue (Balio 1998: 60; Buck 1992: 120-121).
In the 1990s, Hollywood’s overseas market became a primary source of Hollywood’s overall revenue, not a secondary source, with the drastic increase of its overseas business. As Balio notes, “the overseas market as a whole had also improved and by 1990 nearly reached parity with the US domestic market” and “by 1994, the overseas market surpassed the domestic in film rentals for the first time” (1998: 60). Also, the overseas market became crucial to Hollywood due to the continuing rise of production and marketing costs of the blockbuster films, which contained such elements as high concepts, big name stars, and visual and special effects. While Hollywood had focused on producing these blockbuster films to increase a profit, the production and marketing costs of these films has dramatically increased from an average of $14 million in 1980 to $102 million by 2003 (Klein 2004: 367). Given this situation, Hollywood increasingly relied on its overseas markets to compensate for the costs.

The growing importance of overseas markets significantly affected the global dimension of Hollywood films, and it also had important implications for the globalization of Hollywood’s film production and use of labor. In terms of the global dimension of its films, Hollywood had tried to increase the global taste of its films to improve profitability. More specifically, Hollywood focused on producing blockbuster films that could travel well internationally, hiring domestic or international movie stars with global appeal, and reducing American cultural specificity (Buck 1992; Klein 2004). This trend has intensified as some Hollywood studios have become part of transnational conglomerates owned by non-Americans since the 1980s. For example, an Australian company, News Corporation, bought 20th Century Fox in 1984 and 1985; and Sony Corporation bought Columbia Pictures Entertainment, which owned two film studios, Columbia Pictures and Tri-Star Pictures, in 1989. In relation to the globalization of production and labor, Hollywood studios were heavily involved in production of films outside the U.S. (termed runaway productions), remakes of films, and co-production deals. While Hollywood studios had increased their runaway productions and remakes of films to keep down labor costs, their co-production deals significantly increased foreign financing for their big-budget films or their financing for local language films (Grainge et al. 2007; Miller et al. 2005).
Asian Markets’ Development and Their Significance to Hollywood

Asian markets were not well recognized by Hollywood until the 1990s. Although American films have dominated in most Asian markets since the 1910s and Japan has been a major overseas market for Hollywood, Asian markets were small and unprofitable for Hollywood. After World War II, the growth of Asian film markets along with Japan’s economic recovery was attractive to Hollywood, but these markets did not generate as much revenue for Hollywood as did European markets. However, this situation began to change during the period from the 1980s to the 1990s.

The so called four dragons of Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore) achieved economic success, and following that, the so called five tigers of Asia (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam) began to emerge as industrial countries. Later, China and India began to rise as global economic centers. The overall economic growth in Asian countries has facilitated the expansion of Asian film markets, so that Hollywood turned to Asian markets to take advantage of their growth. In addition, Asian film markets have expanded further with trade liberalization and modern multiplex theaters in Asia. That is, while trade liberalization has enabled more Hollywood films to play in Asian theaters, the building of modern multiplex theaters has increased the number of locations for Hollywood film exhibition (Klein 2003). As a result, as Klein notes, “in Japan the market share of imported (mostly Hollywood) films increased from 46 percent in 1989 to 68 percent in 2000,” and “in Hong Kong it jumped from 22 percent in 1989 to over 50 percent in 1997” (2004: 363-364). Therefore, Asian markets finally became profitable for Hollywood and generated sizable revenues for Hollywood studios.

Considering the importance of Asian markets, Hollywood has begun to integrate the Asian film industries in two main ways: incorporating Asian labor in Hollywood films; and distributing and financing Asian language films. First, Hollywood studios have recently employed a broad range of Asian talent to enhance the global appeal of their films. As Tom Gray, President and CEO of Los Angeles-based Rim Film Distributors and formerly an executive with such entities as United Artists and Golden Harvest, points out,

“Hollywood has to make a good film with universal characteristics that will appeal to Europeans, Latin Americans, Africans and Asians. What they’re doing now is using the
strengths of Asian talent for the greater, wider audiences. That’s what is significant” (Major 1997:280).

Hollywood’ aggressive use of Asian talent including actors, directors, and other skilled people is a relatively recent trend although Hollywood had a long history of interest in overseas talent, mostly European talent. As Klein writes,

In the 1990s there were more Asians working in Hollywood than ever before, with most of them coming from the world’s third largest film industry in Hong Kong. John Woo’s arrival helped pave the way for other directors (Tsui Hark, Peter Chan, Kirk Wong, Ringo Lam, Ronny Yu, Stanely Tong), actors (Jet Li, Chow Yun-fat, Donnie Yen, Sammo Hung, Michelle Yeoh), and martial arts choreographers (Yuen Wo-ping, Yuen Cheung-yen, Corey Yuen). This flow of talent out of Asia and into Hollywood was unprecedented (2004: 364).

In addition, Hollywood studios were using the labor of Asian writers indirectly by buying the remake rights to highly successful Asian films, especially films from Japan, Hong Kong, and Korea. Hollywood’s incorporation of Asian writers into its system was “making Hollywood leaner, stronger, more efficient, more profitable, and more dominant than ever” (Xu 2008: 197).

Second, Hollywood joined the business of distributing and financing Asian language films when it observed the rapidly growing popularity of Asian films in Asian countries. As Klein notes,

Hollywood today is going into the business of producing and distributing “foreign” movies. This move derives from studio executives’ suspicion that Hollywood films may have reached the limits of their overseas appeal. As evidence, they point to the growing popularity of locally-made films around the world. In 2001, for instance, the top grossing films in South Korea, Hong Kong, and Japan were all domestic productions (2003:3).

Since the mid-1990s, Hollywood had moved into the distribution of non-US films, and Asian films were newly integrated into that distribution system. For example, Disney’s Buena
Vista distributed a Japanese anime film *Spirited Away* in the USA as well as a South Korean horror film *Phone* (2002) in South Korea and Japan (Klein 2004: 371). Warner Bros. Pictures distributed Zhang Yimou’s *House of Flying Daggers* in Japan, while Twentieth Century Fox distributed Zhang Yimou’s *Hero* in seven Asian markets (Groves 2004).

Hollywood has also pursued the business of financing foreign language films. According to Klein, “Following their move into local-language television production, a number of studio—including Columbia, Warner Brothers, Disney/Buena Vista, Miramax and Universal—have created special overseas divisions or entered into partnerships to co-produce local language films in Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Brazil, Argentina, India, South Korea, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan” (2004: 372). Some local language films were aimed at an international market, whereas most of them targeted local audiences. The production of foreign language films provided the Hollywood studios with some benefits by enabling them to exploit production subsidies and tax breaks offered by local governments and to avoid local import restrictions and screen quotas, and besides, it added the political benefit of evading charges of cultural imperialism (Klein 2003; 2004). Asia became an emerging center for local language film production when Sony Corporation, which is a Japanese corporation and owns Sony Pictures Entertainment as part of Hollywood, made the biggest investment in Asia. As Klein notes,

In 1998, Sony created Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, a Hong Kong-based subsidiary of its Hollywood studio. This division has since produced a number of Chinese films, including Zhang Yimou’s *Not One Less* (1999) and *The Road Home* (1999), He Ping’s *Warriors of Heaven and Earth* (2003), and Feng Xiang’s *Big Shot’s Funeral* (2001) and *Cell Phone* (2003). It has also made Hong Kong films, including Tsui Hark’s *Time and Tide* (2000), Corey Yuen’s *So Close* (2002), and Stephen Chow’s *Kung Fu Hustle* (forthcoming), and a Taiwanese film, *Double Vision* (2002), directed by Chen Kuo-fu” (2004: 372-373).

Interestingly, some Asian films that obtained commercial successes in the U.S., such as *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Kung Fu Hustle, and Fearless*, were co-produced and/or distributed by Hollywood studios. Given this fact, Hollywood’s involvement in the production
and distribution of Asian films certainly made a considerable contribution to the circulation of Asian films in the United States.

The Revival of the Art Film Market in the United States

The Art Film Market in the United States before the 1990s

The art film market in the United States flourished during the 1950s and 1960s. A variety of foreign films, by such famous directors as Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni, Francois Truffaut, and Akira Kurosawa, were at the center of the art film market in this period. Specially, many European films were released in many art theaters in the United States. The number of art theaters that regularly played foreign films increased around 100 in 1950 to close to 700 by the 1960s. Small independent distributors usually handled foreign film distribution in the United States, but Hollywood studios had begun to engage in foreign film distribution when Brigitte Bardot’s And God Created... Woman broke box–office records in 1956 (Balio 1998: 63).

However, the art film market shrunk after the late 1960s with Hollywood studios’ loss of interest in foreign films. According to Ogan (1990), there were several reasons for the shrunken art film market. First, because Hollywood films began to be more sexually open. With the disbanding of movie censorship, one attraction of foreign films, which was their explicit treatment of sex, disappeared. Second, with the loss of the art theaters, foreign films had to rely on a New York opening and subsequent showings at theaters in other big cities. Third, American distributors did not want to pay more to prepare a film for U. S. release. Fourth, the quality of the American films had risen during the 1970s, whereas the quality of European films had declined over time. Fifth, some politicians showed a strong objection to foreign films on political grounds. As a result, Hollywood studios reduced their investment in overseas production and closed their art film subsidiaries. The art film market had become a niche market served mainly by small, independent distributors until the early 1980s.

The art film market changed again during the 1980s. First of all, independent American films, which were included in the art market, newly emerged in the late 1970s. With the growth of home video and cable TV, the number of companies handling foreign films and independent American films had actually increased. Interestingly, Hollywood studios such as Universal, Fox,
and United Artists launched their own classics divisions to handle foreign films and independent American films, although these divisions did not survive a long time. Orion Classics, the art film subsidiary of mini-major Orion Pictures, played a leading role in handling foreign art films in the U.S. art market in this period. Focusing on many European films (e.g., Gabriel Axel’s *Babette’s Feast*) and some Japanese films (e.g., Akira Kurosawa’s *Ran*), Orion Classics dominated the foreign film market until the early 1990s when its parent company declared bankruptcy. In addition to Orion Classics, Miramax Films, Fine Line Features, and Samuel Goldwyn Co. also played an active role in distributing foreign art films in this period. However, the art film market in the 1980s was not sizable enough to sustain a large number of art film distributors (Balio 1998, 2010; McDonald 2009; Tzioumakis 2004: 222-245).

**The Revival of the Art Film Market Since the 1990s**

In the 1990s, the art film market expanded further with the re-entry of Hollywood studios. The main reason Hollywood studios re-entered the art film market was that they saw the profit potential of foreign films and new independent American films. Since high production and marketing costs were reducing their profits, the studios began to consider the art film market a new profit source (McDonald 2009). In addition, the vitality of three companies, Miramax Films, Fine Line Features, and Samuel Goldwyn Co., in the art film market convinced Hollywood studios to re-enter the art film market (Balio 1998:66-70).

Hollywood studios entered the art film market by launching a new classic division or by acquiring the leading independent art film distributors. For example, in 1992, Sony Pictures Classics was founded by Sony Pictures Entertainment, as its acquisition-oriented distributor of foreign art films, and in the same year, Gramercy Pictures was launched by Universal Pictures as a joint venture with European company PolyGram. In 1993, Disney entered the art film market by lining up with Merchant-Ivory and Miramax Films, two of the most successful art film companies in the U.S. Turner Broadcasting Company, which was acquired by Time Warner in 1996, also entered the art film market with its acquisition of New Line Cinema and Castle Rock Entertainment in the same year. In 1994, Fox Searchlight was launched as an independent arm of Twentieth Century Fox, while in 1998 Paramount Classics was founded as the special film division of Paramount Pictures. In 1999, Screen Germs was formed as a second classics division.
of Sony Pictures Entertainment, and United Artists Films, previously known as United Artists, became a classics division of MGM, which was later acquired by Sony. This trend continued in the 2000s as more classics divisions such as Focus Features (Universal), Warner Independent Pictures (Time Warner), and Picturehouse (Time Warner) were founded in 2002, 2003, and 2005, respectively (Tzioumakis 2006:261-262). While most of these divisions handled independent American films and British films, Miramax Films (Disney) and Sony Pictures Classics (Sony) were deeply involved in the distribution of foreign-language films. Small independent film distributors were still active in foreign language film distribution, but Miramax and Sony Picture Classics had become the most powerful distributors of foreign language films in the art film market since the 1990s (McDonald 2009: 357).

Benefiting from the Hollywood’s continuing involvement, the art film market had flourished with foreign language films, and these films enjoyed much broader releases in American theaters. In particular, the commercial success of European films and Asian films during the period from the 1990s to the 2000s contributed to the increased popularity of foreign language films in the American art film market. A large portion of the industrial infrastructure and the resources of the American film industry, which were used to support American low-budget filmmaking, began to support European and Asian films in order to fully exploit those imported films in the United States (Tzioumakis 2006:282-283). As Tzioumakis states,

… the late 1990s and early 2000s saw a number of non-American films breaking box office records in the United States: *Life is beautiful* (Benigni, 1999; $57.5 million), *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Ang Lee, 2000; $ 128 million), *Amélie* (Jeunet, 2001; $ 33 million), *Hero* (Yimou Zhang, 2004; $ 53.6 million), *Kung Fu Hustle* (Chow, 2004; $ 18 million) and *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Salles, 2004; $ 18 million). The success of the above films and of hundreds of others that have grossed less than $10 million has made European and Asian cinema in particular another significant commercial alternative to mainstream Hollywood, in a way that the art-house cinema of the 1960s and 1970s never was (2006: 282-283).

It is notable that these successful foreign language films were distributed theatrically by major subsidiaries including Miramax Films (e.g., *Life is beautiful, Amélie, and Hero*), Sony
Classics Pictures (e.g., *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and *Kung Fu Hustle*), and Focus Features (*The Motorcycle Diaries*), whereas less successful foreign films such as *Y Tu mamá También* (Cuarón, 2001; $13.6 million) were handled by small independent distributors (e.g., IFC Films). Interestingly, Hollywood studios’ increased interest in Asian films since the 1990s resulted in the introduction of more diverse Asian films including Pan–Chinese films (Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese films) and Korean films in the art film market. The introduction of more diverse Asian films was a new phenomenon in the American art film market, even though Japanese films had released in the United States since the 1950s.

**Critical Recognition from Cultural Institutions**

This section discusses the critical recognition of Asian films from cultural institutions in the United States and how this interacted with the American art film market. Here, film awards are presented as an indicator of critical recognition from cultural institutions, not only because the awards are often regarded as the acknowledgment of cinematic creativity and achievement (Simonton 2004), but also because the awards are considered to be linked to marketable forms in the film market (McDonald 2009). Such critical recognitions of Asian films in the United States has facilitated Asian films’ penetration into the American art film market and furthermore, the prestige of Asian films coming from the awards contributed to successful box office revenues by generating broader American audience interest.

*Asian Films and Three Prestigious Film Awards in the United States*

In the United States, there are several prestigious film awards to honor films. For example, the oldest prestigious film award is the Academy Awards, and its first ceremony was held in May, 1929. The National Board of Review Awards was first given in 1929, the New York Film Critics Circle Awards in 1935, the Golden Globe Awards in 1944, the Directors Guild Awards in 1948, the National Society of Film Critics Awards in 1966, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association Award in 1975, the Independent Spirit Awards in 1986, and the Critics’ Choice Awards in 1995. According to Simonton (2004), many film awards were created as systematic alternatives to the Academy Awards, which were often related to secret “political maneuverings, advertising campaigns, and other arbitrary events” (164).
To examine Asian films’ records at the awards ceremonies, I chose three prestigious film awards—the Academy Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, and the National Board of Review Awards—for several reasons. First, all three awards have existed for at least a quarter of a century; second, the Best Foreign Language Film Award is one of their awards categories; third, nominees and winners of all three awards received national coverage in the print media and/or national television; and fourth, all three awards have a jury composed of peers, experts, or consumers. Therefore, being nominees or winners of these three prestigious awards can be a good indicator that Asian films are gaining much recognition on a national scale.

The Academy Awards is an annual awards ceremony, which is overseen by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (hereafter Academy), to honor individual or collective achievements in the U.S. film industry. The Academy Awards is classified as peer selected because the jury mainly consists of industry professionals working on film projects (e.g., as director, actor, producer). Academy membership is obtained by invitation of the Board of Governors, and it is based on significant achievements in the field of motion pictures. The membership is divided into different branches, and each branch represents a different discipline in film production. For most award categories, members from each of the branches vote for the nominees only in their corresponding categories (e.g., only directors vote for directors). However, in the Foreign Language Film category, nominees are selected by the Academy’s Foreign Language Film Award Committee, which is made up of members from all branches. The winner is selected by members who have viewed all five films nominated for the award. The nominees are announced in mid-January, and the winner is announced during an award ceremony.

The Academy gave the first special award to honor a foreign language film in 1947, and since then, the organization has continually awarded the best foreign language films by naming the award differently at different times such as Special Foreign Language Film Award (1948-1949), Honorary Foreign Language Film Award (1950-1955). As shown in Table 2.1, the Best Foreign Language Film Award has been given mainly to European films even if the percentage of European nominees has continually decreased since the 1950s and the percentage of European winners has been steadily reduced since the 1940s, except the 1990s. Compared to European
films, Asian films have not been honored as extensively by the Academy, but Asian nominees and winners have certainly signaled the artistic merit of Asian films.

In Table 2.1, Asian films were more recognized in four time periods: the 1950s, 1960s, 1990s, and 2000s. For example, there were three winners in the 1950s, five nominees in the 1960s, six nominees in the 1990s, and four nominees and two winners in the 2000s. Interestingly, all of the Asian nominees and winners in the 1950s and 1960s were Japanese films, but in the 1990s and 2000s, Asian nominees and winners became more diverse in their nationalities, including films from Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Given the fact that the total number of Asian nominees from the 1990s to the 2000s (10) is the same as that of Asian nominees from the 1950s to 1980s (10), the data indicate that the Academy has recently increased their appreciation of the quality of Asian films.

Table 2.1. Academy Awards Nominees and Winners for Best Foreign Language Film\(^a\), 1940s to 2000s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Asian Films(^b)</th>
<th>European Films(^c)</th>
<th>Others(^d)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of Nominees (%)</td>
<td>No. of Winners (%)</td>
<td>No. of Nominees (%)</td>
<td>No. of Winners (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5(100.00)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>1(3.45)</td>
<td>3(10.34)</td>
<td>18(62.07)</td>
<td>6(20.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>5(8.33)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>37(61.67)</td>
<td>8(13.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>2(3.33)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>37(61.67)</td>
<td>8(13.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>2(3.33)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>36(60.00)</td>
<td>8(13.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>6(10.17)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>30(50.85)</td>
<td>9(15.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>4(6.67)</td>
<td>2(3.33)</td>
<td>28(46.67)</td>
<td>5(8.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20(6.01)</td>
<td>5(1.50)</td>
<td>186(55.86)</td>
<td>49(14.71)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Note:  
\(^a\) The Academy Awards for Best Foreign Language Film here includes Special Award, Special Foreign Language Film Award, and Honorary Foreign Language Film Awards. 
\(^b\) The category of Asian films includes East Asian films and Southeast Asian films. 
\(^c\) The category of European films includes both West and East European films. 
\(^d\) The category of Others includes films from countries other than Asia and Europe. 
\(^e\) “-“ means that the number is not available.
Second, the Golden Globe Awards is presented by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which is originally called the Hollywood Foreign Correspondents Association founded in 1943 by foreign journalists. The Golden Globe Awards is considered to be expert selected because the jury mainly consists of film experts. The Hollywood Foreign Press Association has about 90 members based in Southern California, who are foreign journalists representing 55 countries. Membership is by vote of the Association. Members attend more than 300 interviews and lots of movie and television screenings throughout each year. After that, they vote for nominations and winners by using a mail ballot. Generally, nominations are announced in December, and winners are announced at the Golden Globe Awards ceremony in January.

The Hollywood Foreign Press Association has given the Golden Globe award for foreign language films since the 1950s, and the award has been called by different names at different times including Foreign Film-English Language award or Foreign Film-Foreign Language award or Samuel Goldwyn International Award. As shown in Table 2.2, nominees and winners of the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Film were dominated by European films during the period from 1950s to 2000s, despite the fact that since the 1980s the percentage of European nominees has started to decrease and since the 1960s the percentage of European winners has continued to decrease. Compared to the European counterparts, the percentage of Asian nominees or winners was very low, but in certain time periods the percentage of Asian nominees has increased. For example, between the 1950s and 1970s, the percentage of Asian nominees has decreased from 7.84 to 1.15, but between the 1980s and the 1990s, there was a big jump from 3.28 to 9.84 and in the 2000s, the percentage of Asian nominees is 9.68. The data shows that the overall records of Asian nominees in the Golden Globe foreign film category has improved during the period from the 1990s to 2000s, indicating that Asian films are slightly more recognized in later periods.
Table 2.2. Nominees and Winners of the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film, 1950s to 2000s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Asian Films (^b)</th>
<th>European Films (^c)</th>
<th>Others (^d)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of N. (%)</td>
<td>No. of W. (%)</td>
<td>No. of N. (%)</td>
<td>No. of W. (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>4(7.84)</td>
<td>4(7.84)</td>
<td>19(37.25)</td>
<td>18(35.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>5(4.39)</td>
<td>1(0.88)</td>
<td>73(64.04)</td>
<td>20(17.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>1(1.15)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>60(68.97)</td>
<td>12(13.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>2(3.28)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>39(63.93)</td>
<td>8(13.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>6(9.84)</td>
<td>1(1.64)</td>
<td>35(57.38)</td>
<td>8(13.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>6(9.68)</td>
<td>1(1.61)</td>
<td>28(45.16)</td>
<td>5(8.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24(5.50)</td>
<td>7(1.61)</td>
<td>254(58.26)</td>
<td>71(16.28)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hollywood Foreign Press Association

Note: a The Golden Globe Awards for Best Foreign Language Film includes Foreign Film-English Language award, Foreign Film-Foreign Language award, and Samuel Goldwyn International Award.

b The category of Asian films includes East Asian films and Southeast Asian films.

c The category of European films includes both West and East European films.

d The category of Others includes films from countries other than Asia and Europe.

Third, the National Board of Review Awards is annually given by The National Board of Review, which is established in 1909 in New York, to support domestic and foreign films as both art and entertainment. This organization is a “salon-styled, film-appreciation society” (O’Neil 2003: 809) made up of a select group of knowledgeable film enthusiasts, educators, professionals, filmmakers, and students. In this regard, the National Board of Review Awards is classified as consumer selected because the jury is mainly composed of consumers. Members generally view over 250 films each year, and then they vote for award winners in major categories at the year’s end. Winners are usually announced in early December and the award ceremony is held at the beginning of February.

As shown in Table 2.3, the National Board of Review has honored foreign films since the 1920s with the awards such as Top Foreign Films, which mostly functioned as nominees for Best Foreign Film, and Best Foreign Film. Most of the winners in two categories were European films during the period from the 1920s to 2000s although since the 1980s the percentage of European winners in two categories has gradually decreased. Interestingly, Asian films have
been more recognized since the 1980s. For example, in the Top Films categories, the total number of Asian winners since the 1980s (17) is more than three times compared to that of Asian winners in the previous periods (4). In the Best Film category, the number of Asian winners peaks at 4 in the 1990s. In short, Asian films were much less honored than European films in the foreign-language film category. However, Asian films in the Top Foreign Films category have been increasingly selected since the 1980s, and Asian films in the Best Foreign Film category have been most selected in the 1990s.

Table 2.3. National Board of Review Awards for Top Foreign Films and Best Foreign Language Film*, 1920s to 2000s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Asian Films&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>European Films&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Others&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of Top Foreign Films&lt;sup&gt;*(%)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No. of Best Foreign Film&lt;sup&gt;*(%)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No. of Top Foreign Films&lt;sup&gt;*(%)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>No. of Best Foreign Film&lt;sup&gt;*(%)&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3(60.00)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s</td>
<td>1(1.22)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>55(67.07)</td>
<td>7(8.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940s</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2(100.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s</td>
<td>2(3.13)</td>
<td>1(1.56)</td>
<td>48(75.00)</td>
<td>8(12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>1(1.67)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>44(73.33)</td>
<td>8(13.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>0(0.00)</td>
<td>49(80.33)</td>
<td>10(16.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>5(8.33)</td>
<td>1(1.67)</td>
<td>38(63.33)</td>
<td>8(13.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>8(13.11)</td>
<td>4(6.56)</td>
<td>34(55.74)</td>
<td>6(9.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>4(6.67)</td>
<td>1(1.67)</td>
<td>28(46.67)</td>
<td>5(8.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21(4.84)</td>
<td>7(1.54)</td>
<td>299(65.71)</td>
<td>54(11.87)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: a The National Board of Review issues winners for Top Foreign Films, instead if nominees for Best Foreign Film, but its function is almost similar to that of the nominees category at other Awards.
b The category of Asian films includes East Asian films and Southeast Asian films.
c The category of European films includes both West and East European films.
d The category of Others includes films from countries other than Asia and Europe.
e Since 2006, The National Board of Review has used the name Top Five Films, instead of the name Top Foreign Films.
f “-” means that the number is not available. The Best Foreign Film Award was not presented in the 1920s, and the Top Foreign Films Award was not given in the 1940s.
In sum, Asian films have been consistently honored by three prestigious film awards institutions in the United States although the number of Asian nominees or winners has been much lower than that of European nominees or winners or those from countries other than Europe and Asia. Prior to the 1990s all Asian nominees or winners were Japanese films, whereas since the 1990s, more diverse Asian films have been nominated or have won the awards at all three major film awards institutions. Furthermore, the performance of Asian films showed gradual increases in the 1990s and 2000s, suggesting that the status of Asian films in the United States has increased more recently.

Market Value of Film Awards

Critical recognition is enormously important for the distribution of foreign-language films. According to McDonald (2009), the art film market, which handles foreign-language films, is ruled by “the economics of ticket sales” as well as equally by” the economy of prestige” (p.359). Thus, as tangible forms of prestige, film nominations and awards are “valuable resources which can be deployed in marketing media to generate audience interest and maybe ticket sales” (360). Now it is common practice for distributors of foreign-language films to emphasize nominations and awards through posters, trailers and other media. For little-known foreign-language films, nominations and awards translated into valuable chances to pick up American distributors, which were in a better position to access the American market, gain attention from American mainstream media or publications, and finally generate American audience interest.

Until the 1990s, American distributors did not pay much attention to Asian films compared to European films. A few independent American distributors usually picked up Asian nominees and winners in the foreign-language categories of the three prestigious awards institutions. However, since the 1990s, much larger American distributors, such as the Samuel Goldwyn Company (mini-major), Miramax Films (Disney’s subsidiary), and later Sony Pictures Classics (Sony’s classics division), have actively joined the foreign-language film market to handle Asian films. Especially, Miramax Films and Sony Pictures Classics handled more successful Asian films. For example, Sony Pictures Classics’ release of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000) both won the Academy Award for best foreign-language film and
achieved box office success ($128 million). Similarly, Miramax Films’ release of *Hero* (Zhang Yimou, 2004) had an Academy nomination and also obtained box office success ($53.7 million). Although there was not a conclusive causal connection between nominations or awards and success at the box office, Sony Classics Pictures and Miramax Films received both the artistic and market values of nominations or awards and thus achieved the largest amount of box office revenues.

Table 2.4 provides a list of the top twenty Asian language films in the United States from 1980 to 2014. This data show some noteworthy points about the relationships among film nominations and awards, film distributors, and box office success. First of all, most of the top grossing Asian language films were nominees or winners from the Academy Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, or the National Board of Review Awards. This confirms that the prestige of Asian films was not independent of their box office revenues. Next, the most successful Asian language films (ranked from #1 to #7) were all martial art films, where language is less important than action, and most of them were Pan-Chinese films from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. For example, the highest grossing film, *Crouching tiger Hidden Dragon*, was a winner at the Academy Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, and the National Board of Review Awards, and the second highest grossing film, *Hero*, was a nominee at the Academy Awards and Golden Globe Awards. This shows that nominations or awards have played a significant role in boosting box office revenues of Asian films.
Table 2.4. Top Grossing Asian Language Films in the United States, 1980 to 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Gross</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Awards for Best Foreign Language Film</th>
<th>US distributor</th>
<th>release date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Iron Monkey</td>
<td>$14,694,904</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Miramax Films</td>
<td>10/12/2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Wedding Banquet</td>
<td>$6,933,459</td>
<td>Taiwan/ USA</td>
<td>Nominee (Academy; Golden Globe)</td>
<td>Samuel Goldwyn Company</td>
<td>8/6/1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Farewell My Concubine</td>
<td>$5,216,888</td>
<td>China/ Hong Kong</td>
<td>Winner (Golden Globe; National Board of Review), Nominee (Academy)</td>
<td>Miramax Films</td>
<td>10/15/1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Lust, Caution</td>
<td>$4,604,982</td>
<td>Taiwan/ USA/ Hong Kong</td>
<td>Nominee (Golden Globe; National Board of Review)</td>
<td>Sony Pictures Classics</td>
<td>9/28/2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Kagemusha</td>
<td>$4,000,000</td>
<td>Japan/ USA</td>
<td>Nominee (Academy; Golden Globe; National Board of Review)</td>
<td>Twentieth Century Fox Film</td>
<td>10/10/1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. In the Mood for Love</td>
<td>$2,738,980</td>
<td>Hong Kong/ France</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>USA Films</td>
<td>2/2/2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Raise the Red Lantern</td>
<td>$2,603,061</td>
<td>China/ Hong Kong/ Taiwan</td>
<td>Nominee (Academy; national Board of Review)</td>
<td>Orion Classics</td>
<td>3/13/1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring</td>
<td>$2,380,788</td>
<td>South Korea/ Germany</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Sony Pictures Classics</td>
<td>4/2/2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Box Office Mojo and IMDb Pro

Note: Asian language films in this table are the films that were not dubbed into English.
Conclusion

The opportunity space for Asian films, which consisted of three major elements, helped to enhance the acceptance of Asian films in the United States. The first element of the opportunity space is the positive change of social attitudes toward Asia and Asians in the United States. While American elites’ interest in Asia has increased through the development of Asian studies programs in higher education, American public’s attitudes to Asians in the United States have positively changed with the rise of social status of Asian Americans in the United States. This change could contribute to the better perception of Asian films in the United States. The second element was the globalization of Hollywood and the revival of the art film market in the United States. Hollywood studios recognized the importance of Asian markets in the age of globalization, and thus, they began to incorporate Asian labor in their films as well as became involved in financing and distributing Asian films. Besides, their growing interest in Asian films directly influenced the revival of the art film market, which helped the increase of Asian films in the United States. The third element was the critical recognition of Asian films from prestigious cultural institutions in the United States. Although the numbers are small, Asian films have been consistently honored by the Academy Awards, the Golden Globe Awards, and the National Board of Review Awards. This critical recognition has played a significant role in validating the quality of Asian films, in enhancing the accessibility of Asian films to American audiences, and moreover, in achieving increases in their box office revenues. Therefore, the favorable opportunity space for Asian films contributed to increasing the positive image of Asian films, the accessibility of Asian films to the American market, and the reputation and acceptance of Asian films in the United States.
CHAPTER 3

FILM DISTRIBUTORS AS GATEKEEPERS

Distributors are important gatekeepers that get involved in selecting and distributing cultural products in the cultural industries. In the case of foreign cultural products, the role of distributors is much more important because these products are less known to the domestic audience and thus it is crucial to build word-of-mouth for them. That is, the acceptance of foreign cultural products in another country could be considerably affected by the role distributors played in the cultural industries. In the film industry, distributors engage in acquiring films (completed ones or scripts) and distributing them by using their own marketing strategies. Given the fact that the success of a film relies significantly on how it is distributed and marketed by a film distributor (Greenwald and Landry 2009: 84), the acceptance of a foreign-language film in a country depends to a great degree on the efforts of a film distributor in a film market. In this chapter, I examine the acquisition, distribution, and marketing strategies of American film distributors that have actively participated in the reception of Asian films in the U.S. art market during the period from 1980s to 2000s. I first describe the brief history of film distributors and their strategies in the U.S. art film market during this period and then examine the process more closely with case studies of two major distributors that used different strategies.

Film Distributors and Their Strategies in the Art Film Market: 1980s to 2000s

Film Distributors in the Art Film Market

Until the early 1980s, independent film distributors, which were not affiliated with major studios, were the main players in the American art film market. They mainly handled foreign language films, especially European films, English-language imports, and Independent American films that emerged starting in the late 1970s. However, the art film market structure began to
change in the early 1980s when three majors, Universal, 20th Century Fox, and United Artists, formed their own classics divisions to handle art films. Since the early 1990s, every major film company has had a subsidiary that acted as an independent production and distribution entity. They did this either by creating a new classics division or by acquiring the leading independent film distributor: Disney’s Miramax Films, Sony’s Sony Pictures Classics, Warner Bros.’ New Line Cinema, Universal’s Gramercy Pictures, 20th Century Fox’s Fox Searchlight, and so on. Since the 1990s, the art film market has no longer been dominated by small independent film distributors, and the major’s subsidiaries have become leading players in the American art film market.

Like the independent distributors, the major subsidiaries have released smaller, filmmaker-driven films, using low-budget distribution and marketing strategies. However, armed with the financial resources from their studio parents, these subsidiaries increasingly tended to purchase and produce a range of films that were more expensive and had more stars than ever before. Moreover, hoping for films with crossover appeal, these companies tended to increase their distribution and marketing budgets in order to access a broader range of audiences (Weinraub 1996; Perren 2012: 151-160). Thus, the blooming of the majors’ subsidiaries had a huge impact on the art film business in both positive and negative ways. The positive side for the art film business is that mainstream audiences became more accepting of diverse films including art films, and thus a larger number of theaters are playing them (Berney 2006). The negative side is that much more intensive competition has occurred in the art film market over time, whereby some subsidiaries have upped the ante for their acquisition, distribution, and marketing of art films. As a result, profit margins have diminished and the risks have been greater, while the costs of acquisition, distribution, and marketing have increased (Weinraub 1996, 1997; Roman and Carver 1998).
Film Distributors’ Acquisition, Distribution, and Marketing Strategies

Independent film distributors usually acquired art films at lower cost in the film festival circuit. As Greene (1994) wrote, “it used to be that acquisitions execs would gather at film festivals, watch unsold movies together, then bid on the ones that fit into their distribution plans.” However, the independent acquisition business began to change in the early 1990s. No longer were acquisition executives waiting for major film festivals such as Cannes or Toronto to screen art movies at the same time as all the other independent distributors, then bidding for the ones they wanted. Instead, they have spent a great deal of time chasing films at the script stage, and then they have tried to bid on films earlier even when they began shooting (Thompson 1993; Greene 1994; Lerman 1995). To improve their position in the acquisition process, film distributors often tried to foster relationships with filmmakers. As Fine Line President Mark Ordesky said, “People are trying to build families. It’s business-wise to have a steady flow of opportunity from filmmakers that you think are great” (as cited in Harris and Dunkley 2001). The change of acquisition business was closely related to the acquisition styles of the majors’ subsidiaries with deep pockets (Setlowe 1994). Especially, Miramax Films’ approach to acquisitions, of getting involved at an earlier stage and often paying greater costs, had a huge impact on the acquisition business of all the independent film distributors. “The reason for this change is simple. It’s Miramax,” said James Shamus, co-proxy of Good Machine Prods., “We can attribute it to what Harvey and Bob have done. They have taken the ceiling off the top of the business” (as cited in Greene 1994). As a result, since the 1990s the acquisition business has become competitive and getting riskier for small independent distributors without the benefit of an affiliated studio’s deep pocket.

Independent film distributors have generally used low-cost distribution and marketing strategies for art films, which involved film festival exposure, a smaller number of theaters, a strong emphasis on publicity, and limited advertising expenditures for a limited target audience (Lernman 1995; McDonald 2009:354). For example, in an e-mail message Paul Bain who had worked for Palm Pictures, told me about the company’s general distribution and marketing strategies: “We use festivals to let press see the film and hope to get good quotes to use on posters and in trailers. We usually do a very small theatrical run (usually just in NYC & LA) and
use that to get more press and raise some attention” (personal correspondence, December 19, 2011). However, this landscape has changed with the involvement of the majors’ subsidiaries in the art film business, especially since the 1990s. Like independent distributors, the majors’ subsidiaries have tried to keep down the costs of distribution and marketing, but these companies have increasingly employed wide releases and other marketing strategies (e.g., television advertising) associated with the majors (Brodie 1995; Tzioumakis 2006: 264-265). Due to these strategies, the majors’ subsidiaries often dominated box office in the art film market, but they have also contributed to escalating marketing costs for art films over time.

In case of foreign-language films, small independent distributors employed distribution and marketing strategies similar to those for English-language art films. According to Marich (2009), distributors gave foreign-language films platform releases – where films opened with a limited number of theaters, primarily in New York and Los Angeles, hoping for favorable reviews, media buzz, and audience word of mouth, and then gradually expanding over months based on a film’s performance (Wasko 2003: 108; Greenwald and Landry 2009: 96). As to advertising, distributors usually utilize daily newspapers, weekly print publications, and the internet. Specially, the internet is considered to be an inexpensive and crucial venue for publicizing films. The trailer is one of the key advertising materials, yet with a challenge for foreign-language films due to language. Thus, distributors tend to emphasize music and mood, rather than to show dialog or subtitles, and generally include English narration in trailers. Distributors also often conduct ethnic marketing for foreign-language films. For example, distributors buy local media, including English-language media and/or ethnic media, for advertising campaign since ethnic audiences are clustered geographically. The publicity for foreign-language films is on a small scale compared to English-language art films, due to a much smaller budget. Since the mainstream media usually pay less attention to foreign-language films, distributors hope that a publicity campaign at least generates “opening this week” items in print media. Unexpectedly, some foreign-language films achieved huge publicity with star appearances on television, such as the Spanish-language film *Y Tu Mamá También*. The film festival exposure is viewed as a popular and effective marketing tool for foreign-language films, because the films can get free publicity from the media coverage a film festival generates. Some foreign-language films participate in Oscar campaigning for the Oscar for Best Foreign
Language award, which is the most prestigious award to influence the US art film market. For the Oscar award, distributors use a variety of strategies to promote their films including targeted advertising, special screenings, or sending video cassettes/DVDs to the voters. Recently, the majors’ subsidiaries, especially Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films, have been very active in promoting their films during the Oscar season.

Asian Films and Film Distributors in the Art Film Market

This section investigates the acquisition, distribution and marketing strategies of American film distributors that have handled Asian films in the U.S. art market during the period from the 1980s to the 2000s. For this objective, I collected a variety of information on Asian films and film distributors for Asian films from the Internet Movie Database Pro (IMDb Pro) and Box Office Mojo: Asian films’ titles, directors, countries, distributors, production dates, release dates into the United States, and premiere places. From the data, I identified 334 Asian films and 124 film distributors over the period from 1980 to 2009. For more information about the top five film distributors for Asian films and their acquisition, distribution, and marketing strategies, I referred to major newspapers such as The New York Times and trade papers such as Variety over the same period, using LexisNexis. However, these data were not sufficient to provide the whole picture of the film distributors’ strategies for Asian films due to the media’s selection bias, which mainly focused on big distributors’ strategies. To collect richer data, I went to New York to visit the offices of top five film distributors for Asian films in April, 2013. Before leaving for New York, I have tried to contact these companies by email and regular mail, but only two companies responded to me. One of the two companies gave me some answers to the questionnaire I had prepared regarding their acquisition, distribution, and marketing strategies for Asian films. In New York, I visited four companies (because one company’s New York office was already closed), but only one company provided me with some information about its strategies for Asian films. Through the emails and visits I obtained information on three companies’ acquisition, distribution, and marketing strategies for Asian films.
Film Distributors handling Asian Films

As shown in Figure 3.1, most film distributors that handled Asian films were established during the period from the 1980s to the early 2000s (76.97%), and the number reached a peak in the 2000-2004 period.

Fig. 3.1. Number of Film Distributors for Asian Films Counted by the Founding Year

![Graph showing the number of film distributors over the years from 1910-1914 to 2005-2009.](image)

Sources: Various websites; Meek (2009); Tzioumakis (2006)

Note: N=124; I show only the founding years of film distributors for Asian films here because 1) the public data on the death date of all film distributors is unavailable and 2) the found year can show at least a dynamics trend of film distributors, if limited, during all these periods.

Figure 3.2 shows that the number of Asian films released in the United States has dramatically increased since the early 1990s, and reached its highest point in the early 2000s. The number of Asian films, however, has decreased since 2005 due to the decline of the number of film distributors handling Asian films, which was resulted from the bad economic times in the United States during the period from 2005 to 2009. Overall, this data shows that the great majority of Asian films have been released in the United States in the 1990s and 2000s (84.43%).

Fig. 3.2. Number of Asian Films and Their Film Distributors, 1980s to 2000s
Sources: IMDb Pro and Box Office Mojo for collecting information about Asian films
Note: The number of Asian films is 334, but the distributors of five Asian films were unknown.
The number of film distributors handling Asian films is 124.

Figure 3.3 shows the number of Asian films released by different types of film distributors over the period, 1980 to 2009. As shown in this figure, independent film distributors released most Asian films in the United States even after the majors and their subsidiaries became involved. What is interesting is that the number of Asian films did not decrease in the late 2000s despite the fact that the number of independent film distributors drastically dropped due to the economic downturn in the United States (Bodey 2008; Dargis 2009) during this period.

The number of Asian films released by subsidiaries of majors increased during the 1990s, peaking in the early 2000s. However, the number of Asian films released by major’s subsidiaries then decreased sharply in the late 2000s, although the number of independent film distributors handling Asian films did not decline in this period. In addition, the direct distribution of Asian films by majors (not subsidiaries) occurred a bit more in the 2000-2004 period compared to other periods. Together, these patterns demonstrate that the majors’ interest in the distribution of Asian films increased during the period from 1990s to the early 2000s but decreased in the late 2000s.
Fig. 3.3. Number of Asian Films Released by Different Types of Film Distributors, 1980 to 2009

Sources: IMDb Pro and Box Office Mojo

Note: The number of Asian films is 334; the number of film distributors for Asian films is 124.

Figure 3.4 shows the proportion of top distributors vis-à-vis other distributors that handled Asian films over the period from 1980 to 2009. According to this figure, while the top 11 distributors have theatrically released 43.41% of total Asian films, other 113 film distributor have handled 56.59% of total Asian films. The top 11 film distributors include Sony Pictures Classics, Miramax Films, New Yorker Films, Kino International, Palm Pictures, Samuel Goldwyn Films, Strand Releasing, Tartan Films, Cowboy Pictures, Tidepoint, and Streamline Pictures.
Figure 3.5 reports the proportion of each of the top-11 distributors handling Asian films during the period from 1980 to 2009. The top five distributors, which include Sony Pictures Classics, Miramax Films, New Yorker Films, Kino International, and Palm Pictures, have handled two thirds of Asian films that were dealt with by the 11 film distributors, and the other six distributors have handled the remaining third. Together, Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films, which were the majors’ subsidiaries, have handled one third of all Asian films released by the top five distributors.
Table 3.1 shows that the top five distributors have operated at different times. According to the table, Sony Pictures Classics and Palm Pictures have released the highest number of Asian films in the 2000-2004 period, Kino International in the 2000s, Miramax Films in the 1995-1999 period, and New Yorker Films in the 1985-1989 period. Among the top five distributors, Sony Pictures Classics, Miramax Films, and New Yorker Films were major players in releasing Asian films in the United States during the period from the 1980s to 2000s. While New Yorker Films was more active in an earlier period, Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films played more in later periods. In addition, the data shows that most film distributors, except for New Yorker Films, have released more Asian films in later periods.
Table 3.1. Number of Asian Films released by Top Five Distributors, 1980 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sony Picture Classics (1992-present)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miramax Films (1979-2010)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Yorker Films (1965-2009; re-open in 2010)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kino International (1977-2009; Kino Lorber since 2009)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palm Pictures (1998-present)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: IMDb Pro and Box Office Mojo

In sum, most of the film distributors handling Asian films were founded from 1980s to the early 2000s, and thus lots of Asian films have been released in the United States during the period from the 1990s to the early 2000s. While independent film distributors have released a large portion of Asian films, the majors’ involvement in the distribution of Asian films has increased since the 1990s. The top 11 film distributors have theatrically released 43.41% of Asian films over the period, 1980 to 2009, and among them, five film distributors including Sony Picture Classics, Miramax Films, New Yorker Films, Kino International and Palm Pictures were very active. In addition, three distributors including New Yorker Films, Sony Pictures Classics, and Miramax Films have more released Asian films than others did during the whole period.

Case Study: Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films

Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films have actively handled Asian films in the United States from the 1990s to 2000s. These two distributors similarly had deep-pocketed parents, but they were quite distinctive in their business strategies. Despite pursuing different
business strategies, these two distributors significantly contributed to the increase of the acceptance of Asian films by mainstream American audiences. This section examines the acquisition, distribution and marketing strategies for Asian films conducted by Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films.

*Sony Pictures Classics and Asian Films*

Sony Pictures Classics was established in 1992 as the specialty film arm of Sony Pictures Entertainment, which was owned by the Japan-based Sony Corporation but part of the Hollywood film industry, by hiring Michael Barker, Tom Bernard, and Marcia Bloom who had run Orion Pictures’ classics division. Operating autonomously from its parent studio and with a small number of committed employees, Sony Pictures Classics has become “the leader in the North American market for upscale foreign-language titles, mixing in with English-language indies, documentaries, and animation” (Rooney 2004).

Sony Pictures Classics is dedicated to a more traditional art cinema model, pursuing very conservative business practices. Michael Barker, co-president of Sony Picture Classics, said the company’s philosophy is that “other companies look for home runs; we just go for singles and doubles” (as cited in Miller, 2008). When it comes to its acquisition and release strategy, Sony Picture Classics has adhered to relatively low-cost acquisitions and limited, platform-style release strategies. The company has mainly acquired completed films at film festivals or film markets. However, when the market became competitive, the company got involved in buying films at script stage as well as beefing up its participation in co-productions. The company also forged closer relationships with filmmakers (Hernandez 1999; Rooney 2004). As Michael Barker said, “Filmmakers are key for us ---they always have been, they always will be. It’s like a crap shoot when you make a lot of these decisions, but if you have faith in the director---and you’re right in your selection of the script and the director---you’re that much further ahead as far as things working out” (as cited in Lyons, 2007).

Sony Picture Classics’ marketing strategies are also characterized as low-cost strategies, relying on the nature and popularity of a film. Like other independent film distributors, Sony Pictures Classics has no pre-planned, standard marketing strategies for specialty films. As Sony Pictures Classics co-president Tom Bernard said,
We’re a specialized company, so that means customizing a movie’s marketing. It’s very different from the studio path, which is to design a budget, designated a number of screens to hit every week and to spend a certain amount of money according to a special formula. We try to figure out what a movie needs and then keep our ear to the ground to see how it moves (Diorio 2001: 9).

In the unpredictable art film market, Sony Pictures Classics has consistently kept its marketing formula to “never spend more on advertising than you can make” (Kaufman 2006).

Sony Pictures Classics’ acquisition of Asian films began with Zhang Yimou’s *The Story of Qiu Ju*, which was released in 1993. Since 2000, Sony Pictures Classics has acquired and released more diverse Asian films, including Pan-Chinese films (Zhang Yimou’s *House of Flying Daggers* and Stephen Chow’s *Kung Fu Hustle*), Japanese films (Takeshi Kitano’s *Brother*), Korean films (Kim Ki-duk’s *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, and Spring*), a Vietnamese film (Tran Hung Anh’s *Vertical Ray of the Sun*), and a Thai film (Chatrichalerm Yukol’s *The Legend of Suriyothai*). The company has generally acquired Asian films both on the festival circuit and at some film markets (complete ones or scripts), and also has participated in co-productions in Asia. Especially, Columbia Pictures Film Production Asia, which was established by Sony in 1998, has supported Sony Picture Classics’ co-production and distribution of some Chinese and Hong Kong films. The company has employed a platform-style release strategy and pursued publicity-oriented marketing strategies for Asian films. In an email correspondence, Tom Prassis who was a SPC Senior Vice President of Sales, said, “We employ the same distribution and marketing tools [which are used by independent film distributors, including limited, platform-style release, screenings, the print ads, and so on] on every film we release, and depending on the grossing potential, sometimes with greater breadth,” and “[the difference is] only that in some markets we target theatres that draw an Asian audience and some of our marketing is specifically directed to this audience” (personal correspondence, April 9, 2013).

Table 3.2 presents the top 10 Asian language films distributed by Sony Picture Classics during the period from 1980 to 2014, with box office receipts and the number of theaters. In this table, I separately show the lifetime box office receipts and the opening box office receipts as
well as the number of theaters in which the film was shown both initially and overall. As shown in this table, most of the Asian language films on the list are Pan-Chinese films including Chinese, Hong Kong and Taiwanese films, indicating that these films are more popular than other foreign-language films in the United States. Interestingly, the most successful Asian language films are all martial art action films, where language is less important than action on the screen, including the top four: Ang Lee’s Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Stephen Chow’s Kung Fu Hustle, and Zhang Yimou’s House of Flying Daggers and Curse of the Golden Flowers. In particular, Ang Lee’s Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, which was the highest grossing foreign-language film in American film history, has greatly impacted the way distributors choose Asian films. These four films had a wider release than any other foreign-language films, breaking out of the art house ghetto. In short, the success of these four films has as much to do with the film genre as with Sony Pictures Classics’ cautious approach to distribution and marketing for them.
Table 3.2  Top 10 Asian Language Films\textsuperscript{a} distributed by Sony Picture Classics, 1980 to 2014, with Box Office Receipts and Number of Theaters (Only overseas-produced features counted. Re-issues excluded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Film Title</th>
<th>Lifetime Gross</th>
<th>Opening Gross\textsuperscript{b}</th>
<th>Release Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Box office receipts</td>
<td>No. of Theaters</td>
<td>Box office receipts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>extit{Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon}</td>
<td>$128,078,872</td>
<td>2,027</td>
<td>$663,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>extit{Kung Fu Hustle}</td>
<td>$17,108,591</td>
<td>2,503</td>
<td>$269,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>extit{House of Flying Daggers}</td>
<td>$11,050,094</td>
<td>1,189</td>
<td>$397,472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>extit{Curse of the Golden Flowers\textsuperscript{b}}</td>
<td>$6,566,773</td>
<td>1,234</td>
<td>$478,771</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>extit{Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring}</td>
<td>$2,380,788</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>$42,561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>extit{Shanghai Triad}</td>
<td>$2,086,101</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>$209,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>extit{The Story of Qiu Ju}</td>
<td>$1,890,247</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>$25,785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2046</td>
<td>$1,444,588</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>$113,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>extit{The Road Home}</td>
<td>$1,280,490</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>$40,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>extit{The Emperor and the Assassin}</td>
<td>$1,267,239</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>$47,295</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a} Source: www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=foreign.htm
\textsuperscript{b} Note: a. Films that were dubbed into English are excluded from the list because “foreign language films list” in the database Box Office Mojo does not include them.
\textsuperscript{b} b. Opening Gross usually means the opening three-day weekend record.
\textsuperscript{c} c. \textit{Curse of the Golden Flower} is included by the author because it is not listed in Box Office Mojo.

Here, Ang Lee’s \textit{Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon}, which set a box office record for foreign-language films, is a good example to show Sony Pictures Classics’ recent acquisition style and shrewd, broad-based distribution and marketing strategies. Sony Pictures Classics acquired \textit{Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon} at its script stage and became a partner much earlier with the filmmaker (Koehler 2001). As shown in Table 3.3, Sony Pictures Classics conducted extensive distribution and marketing campaigns for \textit{Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon}, including platform release, screenings, internet marketing, media coverage, Oscar campaigns, and advertising.
Table 3.3. Distribution and Marketing Strategies for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Release Strategy | A limited release to a wide release (platform release)  
Dec. 8, 2000: opening in New York (16 theaters)  
Dec. 15, 2000: Los Angeles added (31 theaters)  
Dec. 22, 2000: top 25 cities (143 theaters)  
Jan. 12, 2001: change to wide release (693 theaters)  
Up to Feb. 13, 2001: pre-Oscar nomination period (1,204 theaters)  
Feb. 13-March 25: post-nomination period (2,027 theaters) [winning four Oscar awards on March 25, 2001] |
| Screenings       | A test screening; press screenings; Special screenings for a number of targeted audiences                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Internet Campaign | Creating websites for the film (Cable Jump and the official site); using chat rooms; devising an E-mail postcard; distributing an action-heavy trailer to 400 Web sites.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Media Coverage   | Magazines from Elle to Time Out and Entertainment Weekly; “The Tonight Show,” “Charlie Rose,” “The Today Show” and other programs (appearances by actress Michelle Yeoh).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Oscar Campaigns  | Screenings for Academy voters, DVD mailings, campaigns in trade newspapers.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Advertising      | Two versions of theatrical trailers (one for the art-house crowd & another for the action audience); buying Manhattan Cable time                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

Source: *Variety* (May 14-20, 2001); *Variety* (Dec. 6-12, 2004); *Daily News* (2000, 2001); *Advertising Age* (2001); Box Office Mojo at [http://www.boxofficemojo.com](http://www.boxofficemojo.com)

*Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* opened in 16 theaters for the first 3 days, and then gradually expanded to a wide release strategy with 697 theater showings. The film finally reached its peak record of 2027 theater showings nationwide during the Oscar presentations in March 2001 (box office Mojo). Sony Pictures Classics used an extensive publicity campaign, including a series of screenings, internet buzz, and media coverage (Roberts 2001; Beale 200, 2001; Pappas 2001). Hoping to generate strong word-of-mouth, Sony Pictures Classics set up a series of screenings, including a test screening, press screenings, and special screenings for targeted audiences including the art-house crowd, the young, females, action lovers and mainstream moviegoers. For internet buzz, Sony Pictures Classics created two websites for the film, Cable Jump (cablejump.com) and the official site (crouchingtiger.com), used chat rooms to hype the film, and devised an E-mail postcard to highlight the movie’s *Matrix*-like aspects. In addition, the company distributed an action-heavy trailer to 400 Web sites, including *Ain’t-It-Cool-News* (a movie-buff site). For media coverage, Sony Pictures Classics supported director
Ang Lee and two stars Michelle Yeoh & Chow Yun-Fat to have press interviews and public appearances whenever possible. As a result, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* received major coverage from magazines from Elle to Time Out and Entertainment Weekly, and a TV blitz was also created with Michelle Yeoh’s appearances on “the Tonight Show,” “Charlie Rose,” “The Today Show,” and other programs.

Since the film was chosen as Taiwan’s nominee for the Academy awards, Sony Pictures Classics provided the Oscar with campaigns for the film, including screenings for the Academy voters, DVD mailings, and marketing campaigns such as ad campaigns in the trade papers, aiming at movie professionals (Rushfield 2004). For advertising, Sony Pictures Classics created two versions of theatrical trailers for the art-house crowds and action audience, and bought Manhattan Cable time to draw large audiences instead of making huge TV ad buys (Roberts 2001; Pappas 2001). In sum, Sony Pictures Classics conducted a broad range of distribution and marketing strategies for *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, and as a result, the company’s broad-based strategies enabled the film to successfully reach mainstream American audiences.

*Miramax Films and Asian Films*

Miramax Films was formed as an independent distributor in 1979 by Harvey and Bob Weinstein. Starting in 1989, the company has attracted attention from the press and industry following some critical and commercial hits including Jim Sheridan’s *My Left Foot* (1989), Steven Sonderbergh’s *sex, lies and videotape* (1989), and Giuseppe Tornatore’s *Cinema Paradiso* (1990). In 1992, Miramax Films formed a new subsidiary, Dimension Pictures, to branch out into the genre market (Balio 1998: 66-67). In 1993, Miramax Films became a subsidiary of Walt Disney, and since then, the company has expanded its specialty film business from acquisition to in-house production, branched out further into publishing and radio, and continued to increase its staff size. Indeed, Miramax Films emerged as “the most high-profile and well-respected brand name for a wide range of niche films”(Perren 2013: 14). Among the company’s most high-profile and profitable films were *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Il Postino* (1995), *Scream* (1996), *Good Will Hunting* (1997), *Life is Beautiful* (1998), *Shakespeare in Love* (1999), and *Hero* (2002). In 2005, Harvey and Bob Weinstein had a breakup with Disney, and they
established a new company, the Weinstein Company. Miramax Films without the Weinstein brothers remained as a subsidiary of Disney until 2010 when the company finally closed.

Here, I mainly focus on the acquisition, distribution, and marketing strategies of Miramax Films as it was run by Harvey and Bob Weinstein during the period from 1979 to 2005. Miramax Films has been known as an aggressive player in deal making and marketing in the art film business. As Arnold Rifkin, senior vice president of the talent agency William Morris, said, “Miramax has always been aggressive to the point where you either yield or change your address and phone number, and I think the injection of Disney has only enhanced this tenacity” (Frook 1994: 8). Miramax Films was notorious for buying everything in sight and then keeping the films sitting on its shelves for months or years. Especially, during the Disney era, Miramax Films had a huge influence on the marketplace by buying films earlier and paying more. As Greene (1994) wrote in *Daily Variety,*

> Perhaps the sale that most changed the marketplace was Miramax's preemptive purchase of the Holly Hunter starrer "The Piano."... Ever since, Miramax, which was acquired by Walt Disney Co. in May 1993, has been the most aggressive independent movie buyer in the business. The company regularly jumps in earlier on projects than its competitors and it often pays more for films than others will.

Furthermore, the company has expanded its art film business into in-house productions. Miramax Films usually gave films a platform release, but during the 2000s the company favored wide release to multiplexes for action-oriented films including Chinese martial art films or Hong Kong action films.

Miramax Films’ distribution and marketing strategies were generally publicity-driven, word of mouth-focused, and labor intensive, similar to those of other independent distributors. A unique of feature of Miramax Films’ strategies was that it wanted its films to appeal to mainstream American audiences, and thus the company employed its own specific strategies accordingly. According to Balio (1998: 66-67), first of all, Miramax Films tried to generate free publicity by picking up an award-winning film and then taking advantage of media coverage to distribute the film later. After acquisition, the company has sometimes retooled a film to
improve its accessibility to audiences. This somewhat controversial practice has been mostly applied to foreign-language films, and it resulted in not only the success of some foreign-language films, but also lots of complaints from Asian film fans. To increase public attention to a new release, Miramax Films often challenged the rating assigned by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA). Miramax Films also used other marketing strategies, including exploiting an unusual plot twist in a film, opening a film in Spanish-language theaters, or tapping Mexican Airlines, Mexican restaurants and radio station. Furthermore, with Disney’s support, Miramax Films could ensure a wider distribution and marketing of a film, depending on its popularity.

Miramax Films made its initial efforts to distribute Asian films during the 1990s. The success of Chen Kaige’s *Farewell My Concubine* in 1993, which grossed $5.2 million in the United States, was a big driver, and the strong support by director Quentin Tarantino who is a close friend to Harvey Weinstein, co-president of Miramax Films, as well as a huge fan of Hong Kong films, was a powerful pusher. Miramax Films, at first, did not rely on the action film genre, but the success of *Rumble in the Bronx* (distributed by New Line Cinema) in 1996 motivated the company to transfer its support to more commercial Hong Kong action films, including mostly Jackie Chan’s films. Moreover, the success of *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (distributed by Sony Pictures Classics) in 2000 enabled the company to enhance its efforts to acquire and distribute more Asian films with crossover appeal (Dombrowski 2008). Like Sony Pictures Classics, Miramax Films acquired Asian films at film festivals or film markets and also expanded into co-financing and co-producing Asian films such as Chinese language films. In addition, the company involved purchasing the rights to some of Asian older hits starring hottest action talent, especially Hong Kong action films. Miramax Films generally used a platform release for Asian films, but it preferred wide release for action-oriented Asian films such as Hong Kong action films or Chinese martial art films during the 2000s.

Miramax Films was notorious for ‘Americanized’ release of Asian films, which included cutting, rescoring, retitling, dubbing, re-editing of its acquired films, to make them more accessible to American audiences. For example, *Farewell My Concubine* was released in 1993 with 14 minutes of cuts, which were made by the director following Miramax Films’ request (Tyler 1993), while *Shaolin Soccer* was released nearly three years after its Hong Kong release,
with half an hour of cutting, retitling, rescoring, and re-editing for general American audiences (Snyder 2004; Mitchell 2004). The company’s Americanized release strategy brought the successes of some Asian films as well as caused the protest by U.S. based Asian movie fans (Kan 2002). Since the massive success of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 2000, Miramax Films has begun to distribute Asian films with subtitles rather than with dubbed dialogue.

Table 3.4 presents the top 10 Asian language Films distributed by Miramax Films during the period from 1980 to 2014, with box office receipts and the number of theaters. Similar to Table 3.3, this table shows the lifetime box office receipts, the opening box office receipts, and the number of theaters in which the film was shown both initially and overall. What is interesting, as shown in table 3.3, is the two top grossing films, *Hero* and *Iron Monkey*, were martial arts action films with a wide release, which was considered to be driven by majors’ release strategy. It suggests that the success of *Hero* and *Iron Monkey* came as much from the types of film Miramax Films chose as the company’s savvy distribution and marketing strategies.

*Iron Monkey* was released nationwide in 2001, using an advertising campaign that covered up the fact that it was an 8-year-old action classic. In cooperation with director Yuen Woo Ping, Miramax Films updated the film before its wide release with a slightly shorter running time, new music, and new English subtitles. The director said about the updated film, “I think fans will find that the few changes to the original are all for the better” (as cited in Hayes, 2001). After the update, Miramax Films released the film widely with a “presented by Quentin Tarantino” credit. The film opened in 1225 theaters for the first three days, and then expanded to 1235 theaters for one week, which was its peak record of theater showings, before the distributor gradually reduced the number of its theater showings (box office mojo). As a result, *Iron Monkey* grossed $14.7 million and became the thirteenth highest-grossing foreign-language film in the United States.
Table 3.4  Top 10 Asian Language Films\textsuperscript{a} distributed by Miramax Films, 1980 to 2014, 
with Box Office Receipts and Number of Theaters 
(Only overseas-produced features counted. Re-issues excluded.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Film Title</th>
<th>Lifetime Gross</th>
<th>Opening Gross</th>
<th>Release Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Box Office Receipts</td>
<td>No. of Theaters</td>
<td>Box Office Receipts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>$53,710,019</td>
<td>2,175</td>
<td>$18,004,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Iron Monkey</td>
<td>$14,694,904</td>
<td>1,235</td>
<td>$6,014,653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shall We Dance?</td>
<td>$9,499,091</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Farewell My Concubine</td>
<td>$5,216,888</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>$69,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ju Dou</td>
<td>$1,986,433</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>$10,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Picture Bride\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>$1,118,163</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>$61,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Temptress Moon</td>
<td>$1,100,788</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>$66,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Blind Swordsman: Zatoichi</td>
<td>$862,894</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>$61,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Chungking Express\textsuperscript{c}</td>
<td>$600,200</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>$32,779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Shaolin Soccer</td>
<td>$489,600</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>$39,167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Box Office Mojo at [www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=foreign.htm](http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=foreign.htm)

Note:

a. Films that were dubbed into English are excluded from the list because “foreign language films list” in the database Box Office Mojo does not include them. For example, although some English dubbed films distributed by Miramax Films were popular (e.g., Supercop with $16.3 million and The Legend of Drunken Master with 11.6 million), they were not included in the Mojo list.

b. Picture Bride is included by the author because it is not listed in Box Office Mojo.

c. Chungking Express was distributed by Rolling Thunder Pictures, which operated as a specialty label of Miramax Films, and thus, I included it in this list.

\textbf{Hero} entered American theaters in wide release in 2004 after Miramax Films had shelved it for a year and half in the United States. Following Miramax’s advice, director Zhang Yimou cut twenty minutes to make it accessible to American audiences. “America is a big market, and I wanted to succeed, so I agreed,” director Zhang said (as cited in Smith, 2004). However, Miramax Films held back the release of \textbf{Hero} until 2004 because the company did not want to compete against Jackie Chan’s \textit{The Medallion} released in 2003. Thus, the company could not take advantage of its 2003 Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign-Language Film, which is held on March, 2003, because the film was released in the US on August, 2004. Then the company incorporated \textbf{Hero} into the promotional campaign for director Quentin Tarantino’s \textit{Kill Bill} series, hoping to use director Quentin Tarantino’s credibility among his followers. For example, the company ran trailers for \textbf{Hero} on the DVD of \textit{Kill Bill: Vol.1} (2003) and in theaters with \textit{Kill Bill: Vol.2} (2004) with a “Quentin Tarantino Presents” label (Smith 2004;
Dombrowski 2008). In addition, the company marketed the film as a genre film and capitalized on the star power of Jet Li (Mohr 2005). *Hero* finally opened in 2031 theaters of the United States for the first three days, and it was the highest American debut for a live-action Asian film. In the following week, the film expanded to 2092 theaters, and in the fourth week it was showing in 2175 theaters. After that, the scale of release was gradually reduced (box office mojo). After its opening with wide release, *Hero* grossed $53.6 million in the United States, which was the second-highest-grossing foreign-language film in U.S. history.

To sum up, the strategies of acquisition or distribution/marketing for Asian films by Sony Pictures Classic and Miramax Films seem to be similar in some ways, but quite different in other ways. These two distributors commonly acquired Asian films at film festivals or film market as well as participated in co-production or co-financing of Asian films. However, while Sony Pictures Classics adhered to low-cost acquisition, Miramax Films often bought films earlier and paid more for films than others did. Sony Pictures Classics usually employed a platform-style release strategy and pursued low-cost marketing strategies for Asian films, depending on their performance. Like Sony Picture Classics, Miramax Films generally preferred a platform release and low-cost marketing strategies for Asian films; however, unlike Sony Pictures Classics, it favored wide release for action-oriented Asian films during the 2000s, and also pursued Americanized release of Asian films, that is, retooling of films in order to improve their appeal to American audiences.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined the ways in which film distributors have engaged in the acceptance of Asian films in the United States, focusing on their acquisition, distribution and marketing strategies, during the period from 1980s to 2000s. Most of the Asian films have been introduced to the United States during the period from the 1990s to the early 2000s because the film distributors handling Asian films have been mostly established from the 1980s to the early 2000s. While independent film distributors were major players in releasing Asian films during the whole period, major subsidiaries have been increasingly involved in handling Asian films since the 1990s. Specially, two major subsidiaries, Sony Pictures Classics and Miramax Films were key players in handling Asian films during the period from the 1990s to 2000s. The two
companies have employed diverse strategies to enhance the acceptance of Asian films in the United States. They first became more involved at an early stage in the filmmaking process by acquiring Asian films at script stage and participating in co-productions or co-financing of Asian films. Next, their distribution and marketing strategies, especially Sony Pictures Classics’ a wider release and broad-based marketing strategies and Miramax Films’ “Americanized” release and a wide release strategy, made Asian films more accessible to mainstream American audiences. In this regard, the acquisition, distribution, and marketing strategies of Sony Picture Classics and Miramax Films since the 1990s distinctively contributed to the increase of American mainstream audiences’ acceptance of Asian films.
CONVENTIONALLY, CRITICS ARE VIEWED AS CULTURAL AUTHORITIES IN THAT THEY PRODUCE A SOCIALLY ACCEPTED ARTISTIC VALUE (BOURDIEU 1980), AND THUS, RECOGNITION FROM CRITICS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE ACCEPTANCE OF CULTURAL PRODUCTS BY AUDIENCES IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. THE INFLUENCE OF CRITICS IS MUCH MORE CRITICAL TO FOREIGN CULTURAL PRODUCTS THAN DOMESTIC CULTURAL PRODUCTS. SINCE FOREIGN CULTURAL PRODUCTS BELONG IN UNFAMILIAR CATEGORIES, AUDIENCES OFTEN RELY ON THE EXPERTISE OF CRITICS IN THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF FOREIGN CULTURAL PRODUCTS. IN CASE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILMS, FILM CRITICS ACT AS GATEKEEPERS WHO PARTICIPATE IN SELECTING, EVALUATING, OR SOMETIMES PROMOTING FILMS DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, AS WELL AS IN FACILITATING THE FAMILIARITY OF FILMS BY USING COMPARISON STRATEGIES. THROUGH THIS GATEKEEPER ROLE, CRITICS EXERT SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILMS. IN THIS CHAPTER, I EXAMINE HOW AMERICAN FILM CRITICS AFFECTED THE ACCEPTANCE OF ASIAN FILMS AS LEGITIMATE FILMS IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE PERIOD FROM THE 1980S TO THE 2000S. USING FILM REVIEWS OF ASIAN FILMS, I MAINLY FOCUS ON THREE ACTIVITIES OF AMERICAN FILM CRITICS: (1) CRITICAL ATTENTION, (2) CRITICAL EVALUATION, AND (3) COMPARISON STRATEGIES.

**Legitimizing Asian Films through Film Critics’ Activities**

Film reviews are an important data source that provides evidence for the legitimization of films by critics. Through a content analysis combined with a historical analysis of film reviews, I show how American film critics contribute to the reputation of Asian films that are foreign cultural products unfamiliar to American audiences. For this analysis I used 599 film reviews of Asian films from three different mainstream newspapers, *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Chicago Sun-Times*. These three newspapers were selected because: (1) they are major U.S. daily newspapers with a large circulation; (2) they published a large portion of Asian films reviews during the period under study; and (3) they represent three major urban areas of the United States.
All reviews were gathered through each corporate website (http://www.nytimes.com/; http://articles.latimes.com/; http://chicago.suntimes.com/).

The total number of reviews studied includes 290 The New York Times reviews, 197 Los Angeles Times reviews, and 112 Chicago Sun-Times reviews during the period from 1980 to 2009. At the Chicago Sun-Times, one critic-Roger Ebert- handled the great majority of reviews on Asian films during the period, but the situation was quite different at the New York Times or the Los Angeles Times. At the New York Times or the Los Angeles Times, a group of critics reviewed Asian films, although the number of critics at the New York Times is much bigger than that of critics at the Chicago Sun-Times. Besides, some critics reviewed more Asian films than others. For example, at the New York Times, Vincent Canby in the 1980s, Stephen Holden in the 1990s, and A. O. Scott in the 2000s were the most prolific critics who reviewed Asian films. While the number of critics at the New York Times has increased steadily over time, the number of critics at the Los Angeles Times increased in the 2000s. The composition of critics at these two newspaper companies showed the tendency of incorporating more women and people of color in the 2000s.

Table 4.1. Film Critics Reviewing Asian Films, by Sources, 1980s to 2000s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New York Times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Vincent Canby, Janet Maslin, Water Goodman, Richard F. Shepard, Caryn James</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Stephen Holden, Janet Maslin, Lawrence Van Gelder, Vincent Canby, Caryn James, Anita Gates, Eric Harrison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>A.O. Scott, Elvis Mitchell, Stephen Holden, Manohla Dargis, Jeannette Catsoulis, Dave Kehr, Nathan Lee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: The names in bold are critics who reviewed at least more than four Asian films.

a. Manohla Dargis is the co-chief film critic for the New York Times, where she stared in 2004. She was formerly a film critic for the Los Angeles Times.

I also used 362 Asian films collected from the Internet Movie Database Pro (thereafter IMDb Pro), which is an online database of films. The sample includes some cases that were re-released or opened in different years in different areas. The research period (1980 to 2009) was chosen because the number of Asian films in the U.S. theaters began to increase with the introduction of Pan-Chinese films to the U.S. in the late 1980s, and these three decades including the end date of 2009 allow sufficient time to show critics’ influences on Asian films. For general information on Asian films, I use IMDb Pro, which lists general film information, reviews, audience comments about films, and information for business professionals. The Asian films on which I focus in this chapter are films from East Asian countries (Japan, Korea, and China, including Hong Kong and Taiwan) and Southeast Asian countries (Thailand and Vietnam).

Critical Attention

Critics’ attention to certain cultural products is an important component of social recognition. Existing literature shows that the number of reviews is strongly related to audience size in the performing arts (Shrum 1991) and box office performance (Ravid 1999). In this section, I examine critical attention by critics to Asian films, as measured by the number of film reviews that an Asian film receives. Critics’ attention to Asian films plays an important role in building up the reputation of Asian films that are not familiar to American audiences.

Table 4.2 shows the analysis of the number of reviews per film over the period, 1980 to 2009, as well as Spearman rank order correlation coefficients (or Spearman’s Rhos) and their significance levels. Spearman’s rho is a measure of the linear relationship between two variables (here the relationships between period and number of reviews), and calculating Spearman’s rho
provides a measure of relationship that ranges from -1 to 1. The first column of table 4.2 reports the total number of reviews on Asian films by year. There is a statistically significant tendency for the number of reviews to increase over time (rho= .94), which supports the view that American film critics gave more attention to Asian films in more recent periods.

Table 4.2. Number of Reviews Divided by Total Asian Films, 1980 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Reviews of Asian Films</th>
<th>Total Number of Asian Films</th>
<th>Number of Reviews Divided by Total Number of Films</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1989</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1999</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2009</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rho .94** .94** .75*  

* p < .05  ** p < .01   (one-tailed tests) 

Note: the total number of reviews on Asian films is 599; the total number of Asian films is 362. Some Asian films were re-released or open at different year in different areas. Thus, the total number of Asian films includes all these cases.

The second column of Table 4.2 shows the total number of Asian films by year. Similar to the case of reviews, the number of Asian films has increased over time. Spearman’s rho for the number of Asian films and year (.94) is significant at the .01 level, demonstrating that the total number of Asian films has a strong tendency to increase over time.

Is the increase of the number of reviews a result of change in the number of Asian films? One may suspect that more reviews are provided because more Asian films are theatrically circulated in the United States. However, the third column of Table 4.2 shows that it is not the case. Between 1980 and 1989, the ratio does not exceed 1.40. Between 1990 and 1994, the ratio rises to 1.63 and between 2000 and 2004, it is 1.80. Thus, there is a gradual increase in the number of reviews relative to the number of films over the period. Spearman rho for year and ratio (.75) is significant at the .05 level, indicating that in those periods when the total number of
reviews and the total number of Asian films were at their highest, there are relatively more reviews. That is, in later periods, American film critics substantially increased their attention to Asian films released in the United States. Figure 4.1 shows the overall tendency of critics’ attention to Asian films over the period, 1980 to 2009.

Figure 4.1  Number of Reviews Divided by Total Asian Films, 1980 to 2009

Therefore, the data do not support the speculation that the increase in the number of reviews occurs due to the increase in the number of Asian films released in the United States. Instead, the data suggest that the increase in the number of reviews is indeed a reflection of the increase of American film critics’ attention to Asian films over the period, the 1980s to the early 2000s. The decline of critics’ attention to Asian films in the late 2000s mainly resulted from the decrease in the total number of Asian films released at US theaters along with the sharp decrease in the number of film distributors handling Asian films due to the U.S. economic crisis in this period, as shown in Chapter Three.
Table 4.3 provides the ratio of reviews to the total number of Asian films across the three newspapers. In this table, *the New York Times* reviews clearly show an increasing tendency of critics’ attention over time. The ratio of *the New York Times* reviews is .47 in the 1980-1984 period and peaks at .92 in the final 2005-2009 period. Spearman’s rho for the correlation between year and ratio (.83) is significant at the .05 level. *Chicago Sun-Times* reviews display a statistically significant tendency to increase (rho=.77 at the .05 level), although the tendency is weaker than the tendency *the New York Times* reviews show. Beginning at .11 in the 1980-1984 period, the ratio peaks at .49 in the 1995-1999 period, and then decreases somewhat in the last two periods. That is, proportionally, there is a sharp increase of critic’s attention in the late 1990s. *Los Angeles Times* reviews demonstrate a decreasing tendency (rho=-.29), which is not statistically significant, although there is an increase in early 1990s and again in early 2000s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>Los Angeles Times</th>
<th>Chicago Sun-Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1989</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1999</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2009</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rho       .83*       -.29       .77*  

*Note: the number of New York Times reviews is 290; the number of Los Angeles Times is 197; the number of Chicago Sun–Times is 112.

*p < .05   **p < .01   (one-tailed tests)*

Therefore, these results show that the overall pattern (dotted line) illustrated in Figure 4.1 is influenced mainly by the increase in *the New York Times* critics’ attention to Asian films.
Critical Evaluation

Critical evaluation by critics often exerts a significant influence over the public’s decision making on the consumption of films. Previous research has shown that positive evaluation is positively related with box office performance (e.g., Sochy 1994; Litman and Ahn 1998; Basuroy et al 2003) and positive or mixed evaluation increases audience interest more significantly than negative evaluation (Wyatt and Badger 1984, 1990). In this regard, American film critics’ evaluation of Asian films plays a critical role in stabilizing the status of Asian films in the United States. That is, when American film critics’ evaluation of Asian films is positive or mixed, this increases the interest of American audiences, thereby leading to the increase of acceptance of Asian films in the United States.

Critics’ evaluation of Asian films is classified into three categories: positive, negative, and mixed. Positive evaluation includes all positive commentary and clear endorsement by reviewers without negative comments. For example, Kevin Thomas (1994), in his Los Angeles Times review, compliments the Chinese film To Live, directed by Zhang Yimou, for its outstanding achievement:

"To Live," which has been gloriously photographed by Lu Ye, is a remarkable accomplishment, spanning many years with both vibrant passion and absolute conviction. It is the most straightforward of all of Zhang's films, and its simplicity of style serves perfectly its great themes, which are timeless and universal.

Negative evaluation includes all negative commentary and clear disapproval by reviewers without positive comments. For example, in his Chicago Sun-Times review, Roger Ebert (1999) shows his strong dislike of the Japanese animation film Pokemon The First Movie because the film does not help enrich a young viewer’s life:

I can't recommend the film or work up much enthusiasm for it because there is no level at which it enriches a young viewer, by encouraging thinking or observation. It's just a sound-and-light show, linked to the marketing push for Pokemon in general.
Mixed evaluation includes both positive and negative commentary, and reviewers do not show their endorsement or disapproval. For example, A. O. Scott (2004) gives both positive and negative commentary on the Korea film *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring*, directed by Kim Ki Duk, in his *New York Times* review:

For all its hushed, philosophical mood, Mr. Kim's film... has moments of intense, theatrical feeling. To illustrate the ideals of harmony and peace, a certain amount of discord and dissonance must be endured. The music sometimes tests the limits of such endurance; it sounds better suited to accompany the sinking of the Titanic than the progress of the monk's creaky rowboat. But the story, effortlessly joining the cycle of the seasons to the larger rhythms of the life cycle, has a beguiling perfection.

Figure 4.2 shows the changes in critics’ evaluation of Asian films over the period, 1980 to 2009. Critics’ positive and mixed evaluations are much higher than negative evaluation during the whole period. Positive evaluation increased until it reached a peak at 60.00% in the 1990-1994 period and since then it has decreased. Mixed evaluation started at a peak of 59.09% in the 1980-1984 period, and then it has decreased until it reached the lowest point of 36.92% in the 1990-1994 period. After that, it has increased until the 2000-2004 period. Positive and mixed evaluations have stabilized between 40% and 50% in the last three time periods. Negative evaluation is not common in Asian film reviews, reaching a high of 11.89% in the 2005-2009 period.
Therefore, the data show that American film critics have considered Asian films to be a cultural product with good quality which deserved their positive evaluation as well as a cultural form that allows critics to evaluate multiple aspects of Asian films and thus show their mixed evaluation.

Table 4.4 presents the comparison of critics’ evaluations across the three different newspapers. The data show that similar patterns appear in all three newspapers. For each newspaper, positive and mixed evaluations are much higher than negative evaluation.
Table 4.4. Percentage of Critics’ Evaluation of Asian Film, by Sources: 1980 to 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>New York Times</th>
<th>Los Angeles Times</th>
<th>Chicago Sun-Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1984</td>
<td>22.22</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>77.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1989</td>
<td>37.04</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>51.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1994</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>53.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-1999</td>
<td>42.86</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>53.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>53.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2009</td>
<td>40.74</td>
<td>13.58</td>
<td>45.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>38.97</td>
<td>10.69</td>
<td>50.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N=599: New York Times reviews (290), Los Angeles Times reviews (197), Chicago Sun-Times reviews (112)

What is different is that while New York Times critics give more mixed evaluation (average=50.34%) than positive evaluation (38.97%), Los Angeles Times’ critics give more positive evaluation (59.39%) than mixed evaluation (33.50%). Chicago Sun-Times’ critics give almost the same percentage of positive and mixed evaluations (the difference is 2.68%). Therefore, the data shows that the overall results are not driven by certain patterns in only one of the newspapers.

When it comes to the content of critical evaluation, the data show that American film critics evaluate mostly the overall quality of Asian films or the quality of some elements (e.g., images, story, scenes, characters, and so on) of Asian films. For example, Janet Maslin (1993) positively evaluates the overall quality of Tran Anh Hung’s film The Scent of the Green Papaya in her New York Times review: "The Scent of the Green Papaya" is Tran Anh Hung's tranquilly beautiful film about a lost Vietnam, a peaceful, orderly place not yet touched by wartime.” In his Chicago Sun-Times review, Roger Ebert (2005) evaluates some elements of Hayao Miyazaki’s film Howl’s Moving Castle in a mixed way:

While the movie contains delights and inventions without pause and has undeniable charm, while it is always wonderful to watch, while it has the Miyazaki visual wonderment, it's a disappointment, compared to his recent work…. A parade of weird characters comes onstage to do their turns, but the underlying plot grows murky and, amazingly for a Miyazaki film, we grow impatient at spectacle without meaning.
In many cases, critics’ positive evaluations come from their evaluation of the overall quality of Asian films, and critics’ mixed evaluations appear when they evaluate the quality of some elements of Asian films.

In addition, some other points are noteworthy. First, American critics’ evaluation of Asian directors appears most often in the 2000s and their evaluation is mostly positive and occasionally negative. In the 2000s, American audiences might become more familiar with Asian films and thus they may want to know different things about Asian films. Responding to the audience’s growing sophistication, American critics may want to say more about Asian directors’ talent or style, which can significantly influence film-making. For example, Manohla Dargis (2005) expresses a positive evaluation of Chinese director Jia Zhangke’s talent in his *New York Times* review of *The World*: “Mr. Jia has a terrific eye and an almost sculptural sense of film space (especially in close quarters), and he brings texture and density to even the most nondescript rooms.”

Second, critics’ positive evaluation of the quality of performances by Asian actors or actresses appears most often in the 1980s. For example, Vincent Canby (1987) gives his compliment on the performances of both an actress and an actor in his *New York Times* review of the Japanese film *The Funeral*, directed by Juzo Itami: “Miss Miyamoto and Mr. Yamazaki are again splendid, in roles that have absolutely nothing to do with their performances in "Tampopo" and "A Taxing Woman."” Since then, critics’ positive evaluation of the quality of performances has decreased. Given the fact that critics’ negative evaluation of the quality of performances by Asian actors or actresses appear often in the 2000s, they might become more critical of the performances by Asian actors or actresses in that period.

Third, American film critics’ compliments on the visual beauty or visual power of Asian films appear most often in the 1990s when many Chinese films were introduced to the United States. Specially, American film critics compliment mostly the visual style of Chinese films directed by Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. For example, Janet Maslin (1992) gives her positive commentaries on the film *Raise the Red Lantern*, directed by Zhang Yimou, in her *New York Times* review.
"Raise the Red Lantern," based on a novel called "Wives and Concubines" by Su Tong, is as visually striking as it is dramatically effective. Mr. Zhang makes evocative use of clear, simple colors, from the lanterns themselves to the blue of the house's rooftops at twilight. And he captures a detailed visual sense of the rituals governing Songlian's new life.

Comparison Strategy

Comparison strategy, which is employed by critics in their reviews, is a critical tool for enhancing the familiarity of cultural products or creators by showing the similarities and differences between the components in the foreign film and in domestic ones with which the audience might be more familiar. Previous research shows that comparison strategy plays a role in facilitating American audiences’ understanding of Asian films that are not familiar to them (Ahn et al 2010) or even promoting the careers of playwrights who were not fully accepted into the theatrical field (Levo 1993). This section examines the way in which comparison strategies employed by American film critics has helped to familiarize Asian films or Asian film directors directly or indirectly during the period from 1980 to 2009. Generally American film critics compare the similarities and differences between Asian films or Asian directors and the films or directors that are already accepted by or well-known to American audiences. Through this comparison strategy, they can facilitate the understanding of Asian films or Asian directors, thereby contributing to the acceptance of Asian films by American audiences.

In this section, comparison strategies are classified into three categories, depending on the comparison counterparts: Film Comparison (comparing to other films), Director Comparison (comparing to other directors), and Other Comparison (comparing to counterparts other than films or directors). Each comparison is further broken down to European comparison (comparing to European counterparts), US comparison (comparing to US counterparts), Asian comparison (comparing to Asian counterparts), and Other comparison (comparing to counterparts other than European, US and Asian counterparts).

Film Comparison refers to comparison of an Asian film under review to other films. For example, A. O. Scott (2002) compares Lan Yu, a Hong Kong film directed by Stanley Kwan, to In the Mood for Love, another Hong Kong film directed by Wong Kar Wai, in his review to
characterize the film: “‘Lan Yu’ is like a less dizzily gorgeous companion to Mr. Wong’s ‘In the Mood for Love’- very much a Hong Kong movie despite its mainland setting.” Sometimes, critics present comparison of different films directed by the same director. For instance, in her review of *To Live* directed by Zhang Yimou, Caryn James (1994) compares the film to Zhang Yimou’s other films, *Red Sorghum, Ju Dou, Raise the Red Lantern*, and *The Story of Qiu Ju*.

In its emphasis on individuals, “To Live” has less in common with Mr. Zhang’s earlier, less dramatic films, “Red Sorghum” and “Ju Dou,” than with his recent ones… “Raise the Red Lantern” and… “The Story of Qiu Ju.”

Director Comparison refers to comparison between an Asian film director under review and other directors. For example, Manohla Dargis (2007), in his *New York Times* review of *The Host*, a Korean film directed by Bong Joon-ho, mentioned US director Steven Spielberg to characterize the filmmaking style of director Bong:

But, much like Steven Spielberg (an unmistakable influence), he makes all those old tricks feel new. That’s especially true during the monster’s first attack, when Mr. Bong instills an initial sense of calm and then of rapidly escalating panic through his masterful orchestration of the various tempos created by the actors (walking, then running), the monster (swimming, then galloping), the camera (tracking, then racing) and the edits (slow, slow, fast!).

Figure 4.3 presents different comparison strategies employed by American film critics over the period, 1980 to 2009. As shown in Total comparison, which refers to at least one example of comparison in critics’ reviews regardless of its type, American film critics employ comparison strategies quite commonly in their reviews of Asian films. The percentage of Total comparison starts at 50% in the 1980-1985 period, and since then it remains stabilized between almost 60% and 70% in each period. Film comparison comprises a much larger portion than Director comparison or Other comparison. The percent of Film comparison is always more than
45% in each period, indicating that critics prefer film comparison to other comparisons in order to enhance the understanding of Asian films.

Figure 4.3 Comparison Strategies employed by American Film Critics, 1980 to 2009 (%)

Director comparison is not common in reviews of Asian films, peaking at 16.33% in the 1985-1989 period. Other comparisons are a little higher than Director comparisons, but much lower than Film comparisons, reaching a high of 26.53% in the 1985-1989 period.

Table 4.5 and 4.6 report Film comparison and Director comparison strategies by region compared across three periods: 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. As shown in Table 4.5, Asian comparison is the highest one of all the comparisons in each period, which is always more than 36%. This suggests that American film critics perceive Asian films under review as having some cultural characteristics that require comparison with other Asian films although the percentage of such comparisons has decreased slightly over time. In contrast, comparison with US films has steadily increased over time, reaching a peak of 33.80% in the 2000s. This suggests that recent Asian films theatrically released in the United States are much more like films with Hollywood
style, which facilitates the increase of US comparisons. European comparison is less common in reviews of Asian films, reaching a high of 16.76% in the 1990s.

Table. 4.5. Film Comparison Strategies by Region Compared, 1980s to 2000s (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Asian Comparison</th>
<th>US Comparison</th>
<th>European Comparison</th>
<th>Other Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>39.44</td>
<td>18.31</td>
<td>14.08</td>
<td>4.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>39.31</td>
<td>22.54</td>
<td>16.76</td>
<td>8.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>36.06</td>
<td>33.80</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>4.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N= 599.

In Table 4.6, although the percentage of director comparisons is small, the data show that comparisons to US and European directors was more common than comparison to Asian directors during the 1980s, when presumably the American audience was not familiar with Asian directors. In the 1990s director comparisons of all types were very infrequent, but in the 2000s, comparisons with Asian and American directors increased and reached basically the same level, while comparisons to European and other directors was low. This suggests that by the 2000s, critics felt that American audiences were sufficiently familiar with Asian directors to recognize their styles and could use them for comparison.

Table. 4.6 Director Comparison Strategies by Country, 1980s to 2000s (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Asian Comparison</th>
<th>US Comparison</th>
<th>European Comparison</th>
<th>Other Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N= 599.

In sum, American film critics generally prefer Film comparison strategy to other comparison strategies over the period, 1980s to 2000s. In particular, they are more likely to compare Asian
films under review with other Asian films, while they tend to draw slightly more comparisons with US directors than other directors on average to compare with Asian directors under review. Along with these comparison patterns, American film critics tend to compare Asian films or Asian directors under review with other films or directors that are already accepted by or well-known to audiences in the United States. By pointing out the similarities or differences between them, American film critics attempt to enhance the understanding of Asian films or Asian directors under review, so that they familiarize American audiences with Asian films or directors directly or indirectly. Tables 4.7 and 4.8 provide the evidence for American film critics’ strategy to enhance the familiarity of Asian films or directors under review.

Table 4.7 presents the list of the most highly compared films in critics’ reviews of Asian films over the period, 1980s to 2000s. The most highly compared films on this list are to some degree influenced by the different patterns of introduction of Asian films to the United States at different time periods. Column 1 shows that the most highly compared films in the 1980s were all Japanese films including Seven Samurai, Cruel Story of Youth, and Tampopo. Since most Asian films introduced to the United States in the 1980s were Japanese films, American film critics tended to compare Japanese films under review to Japanese counterparts that were created by renowned Japanese directors who were winners or nominees at prestigious film festivals or film societies. Specially, Seven Samurai is considered to be one of the greatest and most influential Japanese films, with two nominations at the Academy Awards in 1957, and Tampopo won the National Board Review Award in the Top Foreign Films category in 1987.

Table 4.7. Most Highly Compared Films in Reviews of Asian Films, 1980s to 2000s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
<th>2000s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Seven Samurai (1954) (Akira Kurawa)</td>
<td>6 Farewell, My Concubine (1993) (Chen Kaige)</td>
<td>6 Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2 other films</td>
<td>3 Red Sorghum (1987) (Zhang Yimou)</td>
<td>4 House of Flying Daggers (Zhang Yimou)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Ju Dou (1990)</td>
<td>4 Wong Kar Wai’s films</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Column 2 shows that the most highly compared films in the 1990s are mostly Chinese films and some other films from Hong Kong, Australia, and the United States. Since the late 1980s Pan-Chinese films (Chinese, Hong Kong, and Taiwanese films) have been introduced to the United States, and thus the number and diversity of Asian films released in the U.S. gradually increased in the 1990s. This change also affected the number and diversity of comparison counterparts in this period, and as an example, Japanese films under review were compared to more diverse comparison counterparts, unlike in the 1980s. However, Chinese films were compared to Chinese counterparts, mostly directed by Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige. As shown in Column 2, the most highly compared Chinese films are Chen Kaige’s *Farewell, My Concubine* and Zhang’s films, including *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, and *Raise the Red Lantern*. These Chinese films were well-recognized internationally, with some awards or nominations at major film festivals. For example, Chen Kaige’s *Farewell, My Concubine* won Palme d’Or (top prize) at the 1993 Cannes Film Festival and was nominated for two Academy Awards in 1994. Zhang Yimou’s *Red Sorghum* won Golden Berlin Bear (top prize) at the 1988 Berlin International Film Festival, and his *Raise the Red Lantern* won Silver Lion (second prize) and was nominated for Golden Lion (top prize) at the 1991 Venice Film Festival and Best Foreign Language Film at the 1992 Academy Awards. Other highly compared films were well-known films, with some awards or nominations at major film festivals or film societies. For example, Baz Luhrmann’s *Strictly Ballroom* won an award at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival and a

Column 3 shows that the most highly compared films in the 2000s are diverse Asian films including Chinese films, Hong Kong films, a Taiwanese film, a Japanese film and a Korean film, as well as US films and European films. Many Asian countries have actively participated in the global film market in the 2000s, and thus the number and diversity of Asian films in the United States has dramatically increased with the release of Korean films, Thai films, and Philippine films in the United States. There is also a sharp increase of the number and diversity of comparison counterparts in this period. Most of the Asian counterparts are renowned films, with awards or nominations at prestigious film festivals or film societies. Ang Lee’s *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Taiwan) is considered one of the greatest and most influential foreign language films in the United States, with its awards success as well as commercial success. The film won four Academy Awards including Best Foreign Language Film and six Academy nominations in 2001, and it is the highest grossing foreign language film ($128 million) in American film history. Like their Asian counterparts, the US or European counterparts were well-known films, which won some awards or nominees at major film festivals or film societies. For example, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* is often cited as a classic film, with two Academy nominations and one nomination of Directors Guild of America Award in 1959. It was selected for preservation in the Library of Congress’ national Film Registry in 1989 and as one of American Film Institute’s 100 Great Movies of all time in 1998 and 2007. Vittorio De Sica’s *The Bicycle Thief* is considered one of the masterpieces of Italian neorealism, with an Academy Honorary Award and Best Foreign Film of the Golden Globe Awards in 1950.

Table 4.8 presents the list of the most highly compared directors in American film critics’ reviews of Asian films over the period, 1980s to 2000s. Unlike the most highly compared films, the most highly compared directors do not seem to be influenced as much by the introduction patterns of Asian films at different time periods. The most highly compared directors in this table are renowned or established directors who won or were nominated for prizes at major film festivals or film societies or sometimes achieved huge commercial success in the United States.
Table 4.8. Most Highly Compared Directors in Reviews of Asian Films, 1980s to 2000s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
<th>2000s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Steven Spielberg</td>
<td>3 Yasujiro Ozu</td>
<td>4 Wong Kar-Wai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Zhang Yimou</td>
<td>4 John Woo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 2 other directors</td>
<td>2 Jean-Luc Godard</td>
<td>3 Zhang Yimou</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 2 other directors</td>
<td>3 Alfred Hitchcock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Takeshi Kitano</td>
<td>2 Yasujiro Ozu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Hayao Miyazaki</td>
<td>2 Takeshi Kitano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Chen Kaige</td>
<td>2 Hayao Miyazaki</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Quentin Tarantino</td>
<td>2 Chen Kaige</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Robert Flaherty</td>
<td>2 Quentin Tarantino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Steven Spielberg</td>
<td>2 Robert Flaherty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Jean-Luc Godard</td>
<td>2 Michelangelo Antonioni</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt; 2 other directors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N= 599 reviews

Column 1 shows that Steven Spielberg was the most highly compared director employed by American film critics in the 1980s. He was one of the most popular and influential filmmakers in this period. He received numerous nominations at major film festivals or film society, including Best Director at the Golden Globe Awards in 1976, Best Picture at the Academy Awards and Best Director at the Golden Globe Awards in 1983 and 1986. Specially, his two films such as *Jaws* (1975), and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) achieved box office records. In their reviews, American critics invoked Steven Spielberg to compare his techniques or style with Asian directors’ one(s). For example, Ricahrd F. Shepard (1989) mentioned director Steven Spielberg to explain director Tsui Hark’s techniques in his *New York Times* review of the film *Pecking Opera Blues*.

When "Peking Opera Blues" was seen at a screening last summer at the Hong Kong Film Festival at the Asia Society, some observers likened the techniques of the director, Tsui Hark, to those of Steven Spielberg. They include fast action, lots of color and portentous music.
Colum 2 shows that the most highly compared directors in the 1990s are Yasujiro Ozu, Zhang Yimou, and Jean-Luc Godard. Yasujiro Ozu is well-known for his technical style and innovation in his films’ narrative structure. His film *Tokyo Story* won Sutherland Trophy (top prize) at the British Film Institute Awards in 1958, and the film *The End of Summer* was nominated for Golden Berlin Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 1961. Jean-Luc Godard is very renowned for his radical approach to film conventions in Hollywood and French cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. His films won or were nominated for prizes at prestigious film festivals or film societies, including Palme d’Or nomination at the Cannes Film Festival, Silver Berlin Bear and Golden Berlin Bear prizes at the Berlin Film Festival, and Golden Lion prize at the Venice Film Festival. Specially, Jean-Luc Godard has inspired many US directors including Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, and Jim Jarmusch. Zhang Yimou is a worldwide, well-recognized director, with two Best Foreign Film nominations at the Academy Awards, Silver Lion and Golden Lion prizes at the Venice Film Festival, Grand Prize of the Jury at the Cannes Film Festival, and Golden Bear prize at the Berlin international Film Festival.

American critics mentioned Yasujiro Ozu, Jean-Luc Godard or Zhang Yimou in their reviews to characterize other Asian directors’ style, focusing on the similarity or difference between those directors. For example, Roger Ebert (1997) compared Yasuhiro Ozu to Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-Eda in his *Chicago Sun-Times* review of the film *Maborosi* for a similarity of their visual style.

In more obvious homage, Kore-Eda uses a technique that Ozu himself borrowed from Japanese poetry: the "pillow shot," inspired by "pillow words," which are words that do not lead out of or into the rest of the poem but provide a resting place -- a pause or punctuation. Kore-Eda frequently cuts away from the action to simply look for a moment at something: a street, a doorway, a shop front, a view.

Janet Maslin (1995) mentioned Zhang Yimou to show the difference between his style and Japanese director Kayo Hatta’s style in her *New York Times* review of the film *Picture Bride*. 
Unlike Zhang Yimou, the Chinese director who has depicted sheltered, long-suffering Asian heroines with such insight and emotion, Ms. Hatta rarely penetrates the surface of her story. According to production notes, "Hardship, Struggle and Unexpected Joy" became the film makers' words to describe their project as they tried to raise $1 million to make the film ("Picture Bride" looks remarkably lovely considering that budget). Those words accurately describe the finished product, which holds few surprises but has a pleasing warmth and sincerity.

Column 3 shows that the most highly compared directors in the 2000s are diverse Asian directors including Japanese directors, Chinese directors, and Hong Kong directors, and some other directors from the United States and Europe. Most of the compared directors are very renowned, with some awards or nominations at major film festivals. For example, Wong Kar Wai is an internationally recognized director who won numerous awards including Best Director Award at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival. Alfred Hitchcock is one of the most influential directors in modern cinema who was a multiple nominee and winner of lots of prestigious awards including being a five time nominee for the Best Director prize at the Academy Awards. Michelangelo Antonioni is best known for his three films L’Avventura (1960), La Notte (1961), and Eclipse (1962), and he received numerous awards and nominations at major film festivals, including Palme d’Or (top prize) at the 1966 Cannes Film Festival, Golden Lion (top prize) at the 1964 Venice Film Festival, and an honorary Academy Award in 1995. The fact that Antonioni’s most famous films were produced in the 1960s but he won an honorary Academy Award in 1995, suggests that it was only after his late honors from the Academy Awards that he became a viable director for comparison with Asian films under review.

In their reviews, American critics mentioned Wong Kar-Wai, Alfred Hitchcock or Michelangelo Antonioni to highlight the characteristics of Asian directors’ filmmaking or cinematic style. For example, A.O. Scott (2002) compared Wong Kar-Wai to Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan to show their similar visual style in his New York Times review of the film Lan Yu:
Mr. Kwan's approach is lyrical and oblique, and his visual style, sensual and a bit claustrophobic, has affinities with that of his countryman and near-contemporary Wong Kar-Wai. "Lan Yu" is like a less dizzily gorgeous companion to Mr. Wong's "In the Mood for Love" -- very much a Hong Kong movie despite its mainland setting.

Manohla Dargis (2008), in his New York Times review, mentioned Michelangelo Antonioni to highlight the similarity of cinematic style between Antonioni and Chinese director Jia Zhang-ke who directed the film Still Life.

Antonioni’s influence on Mr. Jia is pronounced, evident in the younger filmmaker’s manipulation of real time and the ways he expresses his ideas with images rather than through dialogue and narrative. The drifting, rootless men and women in many of his movies, and the wide-open, nominally empty landscapes through which they on occasion wander, further underscore the resemblances between the filmmakers.

To sum up, the most highly compared films in critics’ reviews of Asian films are mostly renowned Asian films with awards or nominations at prestigious film festivals or film societies, which were seriously impacted by the different introduction patterns of Asian films to the United States. Similarly, the most highly compared directors are well-known or established directors who won or were nominated for prizes at major film festivals or film societies. What is different is that director counterparts were not much related to the different introduction patterns of Asian films to the United States. Therefore, the comparison strategy employed by American film critics in their reviews of Asian films contributes to enhancing the acceptability of Asian films by associating unfamiliar Asian films to familiar and legitimate films in the United States and only later begins to make director comparisons, which imply a more sophisticated understanding of film.
Conclusion

This chapter examined how American film critics contributed to enhancing the acceptance of Asian films in the United States during the period from 1980s to 2000s. The first finding is that American critics’ attention to Asian films has increased over time, and specially, they have given more attention to Asian films in more recent time periods. The increase of critics’ attention to Asian films over time contributes to building up the visibility and reputation of Asian films in the United States. The second finding is that American film critics’ evaluation of Asian films is consistently positive or mixed regardless of the time period. This finding suggests that Asian films released in the United States have obtained strong recognition from American film critics, so that this recognition positively affects the acceptance of Asian films by American audiences. The third finding is that American film critics familiarized Asian films by comparing Asian films or directors to established or well-known films or directors in the United States. This effort by American critics for the increase of familiarity of Asian films results in making Asian films more acceptable in the United States. Therefore, the increase of critics’ attention, their positive or mixed evaluation, and their comparison strategies contributes to increasing the visibility, reputation, and familiarity of Asian films, thereby making them legitimate in the United States.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study explored how Asian films in the United State have been accepted as legitimate products in the United States. I found that Asian films in the United States have been legitimized as acceptable products by the reciprocal influences between some favorable events for Asian films brought about by changes in American society and the efforts of different types of gatekeepers in the American film industry. Specially, in the 1990s and the 2000s the major factors described above created the momentum necessary for a key turning point in perceptions of Asian films in the United States.

Consistent with the research on artistic legitimacy, I found that the favorable opportunity space played an important role in facilitating the legitimization of foreign cultural products in a receiving country. That is, the favorable opportunity space, which is shaped by some events in a wider society, increased the positive perceptions of Asian films, the accessibility of Asian films to the American film market, and the reputation of Asian films. More specifically, while social attitudes toward Asia and Asians have positively changed over time in the United States, the globalization of Hollywood directly enabled Asian films to access the American film market, and the recognition from major awards organizations enhanced the prestige of Asian films in the United States. As such, the favorable social, economic, and cultural forces have helped to promote the view that Asian films are legitimate foreign products in the United States.

In support of and also moving beyond the literature on cultural production, I found that gatekeepers exerted significant influence in shaping the content of foreign cultural products and thus improving the accessibility to broader audiences as well as enhancing both the reputation of foreign cultural products and audiences’ understanding of them. Film distributors that acted as gatekeepers in the American film market have actively promoted Asian films by employing a variety of release or marketing strategies or by getting involved in the film making process. Film critics as gatekeepers that influenced audiences powerfully through their reviews have increased the value, reputation, and familiarity of Asian films by giving more attention or positive
evaluation to Asian films or by using a comparison strategy. That is, the acceptance of Asian films by American audiences has been enhanced by the roles that different types of gatekeepers played in the American film industry.

What is important is that the two major factors have mutually reinforced the legitimation of Asian films. The creation of more opportunity space not only encouraged a view of Asian films as acceptable cultural products but also allowed efforts to popularize and legitimize Asian films to be successful. While the positive change of social attitudes toward Asia and Asians helped to improve the images of Asian films, the wins and nominations from prestigious film awards organizations enhanced to some degree the reputation of Asian films in the United States. Besides, Hollywood studios’ interest in Asian markets in the 1990s has led them to finance and distribute Asian films so that the circulation and popularity of Asian films has increased in the United States. Moreover, in the film distribution process, Hollywood major subsidiaries played a significant role in increasing the acceptance of Asian films by using some distinctive acquisition, distribution and marketing strategies. While the number, reputation, and popularity of Asian films has continuously increased in the United States due to favorable opportunities and the role of distributors, film critics added legitimacy to Asian films by increasing their attention, giving them a positive or mixed evaluation, and using their comparison strategies. Therefore, the legitimacy of Asian films as acceptable cultural products has increased through the interaction of opportunities and the active roles of distributors and critics.

**Contributions and Future Research**

The findings of the study, I believe, provide significant contributions to sociology of culture in three ways. First, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first study that examines how foreign cultural products become legitimized as acceptable cultural products in a country. Previous research on legitimacy of cultural products mainly focused on domestic cultural products, while not paying attention to the acceptance of imported foreign cultural products. This study extends previous work on legitimacy of cultural products by attempting to demonstrate the legitimation process of foreign cultural products in another country. Second, this study suggests a new understanding of the recognition process of cultural products that are circulated globally as necessarily being different from that of cultural products that circulate
domestically. In examining the legitimization of foreign cultural products, this study identified two significant factors which engaged in the legitimization process, the favorable social, economic, and cultural context and the gatekeeper role. It also showed how these two factors work in legitimizing foreign cultural products. In this regard, the study provides some important insights into the process of legitimation of global cultural products in different local markets. Third, this study suggests that the legitimacy of cultural products that circulate globally is more vulnerable to the roles of gatekeepers played in the legitimation process. As shown in this study, by mediating the relationship between foreign cultural products and local audiences, some gatekeepers can manage the appeal of foreign cultural products to local audiences and other gatekeepers can shape the perceptions of foreign cultural products by local audiences. In these ways, gatekeepers can exert a huge influence on the increased or decreased legitimacy of global cultural products in different local areas. A proper understanding of the roles of gatekeepers can help to figure out the degree of legitimation of global cultural products in different local areas.

However, this study contains some limitations which should be overcome by future research. First, our findings are based on Asian films as only one foreign cultural product in the United States. It may be interesting to compare: (1) the legitimation of Asian films with European counterparts; and (2) the legitimation of Asian films with other cultural products such as games, food, and cartoons. This line of research will help identify the similarities and differences of legitimation within the same genre or different genres of foreign cultural products and thus elucidate more clearly the mechanisms of legitimation of different types of foreign cultural products. Second, future studies are needed to extend my theoretical framework to understand better the legitimation of foreign cultural products in a global world. The specific framework I used and the definitions involved may exclude or obscure other factors which can also significantly affect the acceptance of Asian films in the United States. For example, the definition of opportunity space in the framework needs to be expanded beyond national boundaries in order to understand more clearly the legitimization of foreign products in a different country. In relation to elements of the opportunity space, future studies may consider the supply side of foreign cultural products or changing political relations between the countries involved. Next, this study did not pay much attention to audience response to Asian films. While audience reception is an important source of legitimization of
cultural products, the specific framework I used has been limited to elites and professionals as sources of legitimization of Asian films. Thus, future research needs to examine audience reception as a source of legitimization of foreign cultural products.
Appendix

Questionnaire for Film Distributors handling Asian Films

1. How many Asian films does your company acquire in a year? Has your company increased [or decreased] the acquisition of Asian films over time?

2. What is your company’s acquisition strategy for Asia films?

   - Specifically, does your company usually pick up Asian films on the festival circuit or at some film markets or both? Or does your company have other ways to acquire Asian films (e.g., co-production or investments)?

3. Were there any important changes in the acquisition strategy for Asian films during the period from 1980 to 2009? If so, what are they? What causes the changes?

4. What is your company’s “theatrical” distribution strategy for Asian films? How is the theatrical distribution strategy for Asian films different from the theatrical strategy for US films or other foreign films?

5. What kinds of marketing strategies does your company “usually” employ when theatrically distributing Asian films?

   - For example, in case of Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon, Sony Pictures Classics seems to employ a variety of marketing strategies for this film including screenings, advertisements, the print barrage, TV onslaught, controlled release, and so on. Is this case very exceptional for Asian films?

6. Were there any important changes in the distribution strategy for Asian films during the period from 1980 to 2009? If so, what are they? What causes the changes?

7. Does your company have any new future plans related to the acquisition and distribution of Asian films? If so, what are the main differences between old ones and new ones?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


*Box Office Mojo* [http://www.boxofficemojo.com](http://www.boxofficemojo.com)


*Chicago Sun-Times* [http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/]


Groves, Don. “English Gets Upstaged.” Variety, October 25, p. 11.


*Internet Movie Database* Pro (https://pro-labs.imdb.com)


Los Angeles Times Archives (http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/latimes/advancedsearch.html)


The Internet Movie Database Pro (http://pro.imdb.com)


