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## The effectiveness of Chinese films in international communication in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative

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**Abstract.** The relevance of this study lies in the growing importance of cultural exchange and soft power projection through film, especially within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This article aims to explore the international dissemination of Chinese cinema, focusing on how cultural narratives are adapted and received in global markets. The study is significant in demonstrating the strategies used by Chinese filmmakers and government bodies to enhance cultural visibility and influence abroad, using “The Wandering Earth” and “Ne Zha” as key examples. The theoretical contribution of the research is the integration of cultural globalization theories with soft power and transnational cinema studies, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding film as a tool of international communication. Practically, the article offers insights for policymakers, filmmakers, and distributors seeking to improve the global reach of non-Western media content. Methodologically, the study employs comparative case analysis, discourse analysis, and secondary data from industry reports and audience reception studies. The findings suggest that while Chinese films have made notable progress in global visibility, challenges remain in localization, narrative accessibility, and audience engagement across diverse cultural contexts. The study’s broader significance lies in its potential to inform future strategies for internationalizing national cinema industries, particularly in emerging markets.

**Keywords:** Belt and Road, International Communication, Cross-Cultural Communication, Media Convergence.

### Introduction

In the era of globalization and within the framework of the One Belt, One Road Initiative (BRI) project, cinema is becoming increasingly important as an instrument of cultural exchange and diplomacy. The distribution of Chinese film products abroad is an important factor in

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strengthening the country's cultural influence and strengthening mutual understanding between peoples. At the same time, entering the international arena, Chinese films face serious difficulties related to differences in cultural norms, aesthetic ideals, and perceptions of viewers from other countries. Today, the film industry as a whole is an important means of cultural diplomacy and the formation of a positive image of the state. China, with one of the largest cinematographers in the world, actively uses cinema to create a favorable image of its country abroad. This trend has become particularly relevant after the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, which aims to promote both economic and cultural cooperation. However, despite the rapid growth in production and the success of Chinese films in the domestic market, their international promotion and acceptance still pose a challenge. Most of the studies on the entry of Chinese films into the global market address issues of distribution, cultural adaptation, or content processing. At the same time, relatively few papers comprehensively analyze international communication approaches specifically in the context of the BRI initiative. This work aims to address this shortcoming by studying the global communication practices of Chinese cinema and proposing strategies that are culturally sensitive and effective on a global scale. The results obtained not only enrich the theory of transnational communication but also open practical opportunities for expanding the global influence of Chinese cinema. In this context, the analysis of Chinese academic theories is especially valuable, allowing for a deeper understanding of the specifics and limitations of national cinema on a global scale. Thus, Hao J. points to structural barriers to distribution caused by the underdevelopment of international distribution channels and insufficient branding [1]. Zhou Y. introduces the concept of "three gaps" in the sphere of understanding, perception, and discursive influence, which make it difficult for China to have a full-fledged cultural dialogue with the world community [2]. Wu W. [3] and Mingfen H. [4] emphasize the difficulties of translation and cultural adaptation, which complicate the transmission of the meanings of Chinese culture to foreign viewers. These approaches serve as an important theoretical basis for the study of global communication strategies of Chinese cinema. In recent years, Chinese cinema has been actively expanding its presence in the international arena, becoming not only a significant cultural product but also an instrument of "soft power". This process is becoming particularly important within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at developing infrastructural, economic, and cultural cooperation. In this regard, cinema acts as a link between cultures, contributing to the formation of a positive image of China and strengthening humanitarian ties. Kazakhstan, as China's key partner in Central Asia and a member of the BRI, is an important platform for promoting Chinese films. Through film festivals (Eurasia International Film Festival, Silk Road Film Festival), joint film projects, and academic initiatives, China is strengthening its cultural influence in the region. The analysis of this process makes it possible to identify patterns and features of the international distribution of Chinese films in the context of cultural diversity.

The existing scientific works devoted to the global spread of Chinese cinema, despite their growing number, remain fragmented. Researchers often focus on individual aspects, such as the political foundations and strategies of cultural diplomacy, translation difficulties, audience perception, or analysis of specific case studies. However, there is no single analytical framework capable of integrating these different areas. The present study aims to eliminate this shortcoming by synthesizing communication theory, cultural analysis, and empirical evidence.

## **Literature review**

There are three main periods in the history of the study of international communication of Chinese cinema:

The first period (1990s - early 2010s) was characterized by the weak presence of Chinese films on the world stage and their dependence on the dominance of Hollywood. Scientists, including Qi Zhiyong, noted structural obstacles: insufficient orientation to international markets, limited marketing strategies, and the strong influence of internal ideological frameworks that reduced the global competitiveness of Chinese cinema.

The second period (since 2013): associated with the launch of the One Belt, One Road Initiative, which led to a shift in research interest in cinema as a tool of cultural diplomacy and "soft power". The focus turned to the role of cinema in promoting national narratives and shaping China's favorable international image.

The third period (2020s): marked by three main areas of research: overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers, using new distribution channels through digital platforms, as well as developing narrative strategies that harmoniously combine national identity with universal attractiveness [5].

Chinese scientists have made significant contributions to the study of intercultural communication. Hao J. identified structural barriers such as the underdevelopment of distribution networks and branding. Zhou Y. developed the concept of "three gaps", covering the spheres of understanding, perception, and discursive power. Wu W. and Mingfen H. focused on the problems of translation, noting that literal tracing papers can reduce the effectiveness of cultural communication. These approaches harmoniously complement Western theories, making it possible to combine local and global perspectives. Researchers from Central Asia have also made important contributions [6].

Satybaldin A. emphasized the role of cultural projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in shaping a positive image of China in the region [7]. Ergalieva G. noted that the quality of translation and adaptation of cultural codes is a key success factor in promoting films [8]. Baymukanova D. highlighted the importance of films participating in international festivals to strengthen the country's image [9]. Suleimenova, in turn, stressed the need for an integrated approach to cinema as an instrument of international communication, considering cultural, economic and diplomatic aspects [10]. The totality of these studies demonstrates that the promotion of films within the BRI requires careful consideration of both cultural and organizational factors.

These studies create an interdisciplinary framework for this work, combining film studies, cultural communication, translation theory, and global media distribution. This approach allows for a comprehensive review of the complex issues and strategies related to the international promotion of Chinese films within the BRI.

The evolution of approaches to the study of Chinese cinema can be traced from the early 1990s, when researchers focused on the limited presence of Chinese films in world arenas, to the present day, when cultural "soft power" and global distribution have become China's strategic goals. Understanding this historical context is necessary to understand the dynamics of international communication of Chinese cinema and identify promising areas of research.

The Belt and Road Initiative, launched in 2013, has become a turning point in China's cultural diplomacy, enhancing the role of cinema in shaping the country's positive international image. The policy documents, the "Guidelines ...", emphasize that the film industry should promote cultural exports and disseminate narratives reflecting Chinese values and development model [11]. The central element of this strategy was the desire to "tell the story of China well" to reduce the communication gap with a global audience.

However, despite the increased attention to political aspects, many Chinese films face difficulties in achieving international recognition. Scholars such as Zhou Y. analyze this problem through the lens of cultural disparity, highlighting the "three main gaps" between Chinese cinematic plots and the expectations of a foreign audience: ideological, behavioral, and aesthetic [2]. These discrepancies are due to differences in value systems, storytelling traditions, and cinematic languages. For example, themes of collective self-sacrifice or national rebirth, which may be deeply understandable to the Chinese audience, may be perceived by foreign viewers as overly didactic or culturally unusual.

Theories of intercultural communication are particularly useful for analyzing cultural differences affecting the perception of cinema. Hall's concept of high- and low-context cultures is key: Chinese films saturated with symbolism, subtle innuendos, and implicit social norms are typical of high-context communication [6]. The Western audience, accustomed to straightforwardness and open dialogue, prefers low-context styles. This mismatch in communication can reduce the accessibility and emotional impact of Chinese cinema abroad. Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions complements this picture by revealing fundamental differences in worldviews. Chinese culture, focused on collectivism, long-term perspective and harmony, differs from Western cultures, where individualism, self-affirmation and the desire to avoid uncertainty prevail [12]. These values shape not only the plots, but also the characters of the characters, eliciting a different response from viewers from different cultures. Film critics, such as David Bordwell, emphasize that the classic Hollywood narrative, built on a clear cause-and-effect relationship and purposeful characters, is more understandable to a wide audience [13]. At the same time, Chinese films that use more episodic or allegorical structures to express emotional depth and philosophical ideas may not meet the expectations of an international audience accustomed to Western narrative models.

In this context, the theory of neoformalism offers a valuable tool for analysis. Having emerged from the formalist aesthetics of the 20th century, neoformalism focuses on the study of the form and methods of storytelling in cinema. Special attention is paid to the film's structure and artistic techniques. Neoformalism highlights elements such as plot construction, cinematography, editing, and the use of visual codes. Due to dynamic shooting, active camera movement, precise transitions between frames, thoughtful composition of scenes and symbolically significant props, neoformalism creates a unique aesthetic experience that affects the viewer's perception [14]. Understanding these formal aspects helps to analyze how Chinese films convey meaning and how these methods can contribute to or hinder their international acceptance.

The language and translation also pose a major obstacle to the widespread distribution of Chinese films around the world. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativity, language influences our worldview and is inextricably linked to the cultural context [15].

When translating Chinese dialogues, especially idioms, metaphors, and culturally determined expressions, meaning and subtle nuances are often lost in other languages.

Researchers such as Wu W. [3] and Mingfen H. [4] have criticized the prevalence of literal translations of subtitles. Such translations often do not convey intonation, emotional depth, or cultural overtones, which reduces audience engagement. This problem goes beyond simple language translation and includes what Roman Jakobson called “intersemiotic translation” – the transfer of meanings through various sign systems. In cinema, this means adapting the visual and narrative codes inherent in one culture in such a way that they are understandable in another. If this process is performed poorly, it can lead to a misinterpretation or a superficial understanding of the film's intent.

The expansion of digital platforms has provided unprecedented opportunities for Chinese cinema to reach a global audience. Streaming services, including Netflix, Amazon Prime, Tencent Video and iQiyi, effectively overcome geographical constraints, ensuring simultaneous worldwide distribution of Chinese films and significantly reducing time to market [16]. These platforms use advanced recommendation algorithms to attract a target audience interested in Asian culture, and they also actively use social media and targeted advertising to expand their reach. Wang Ning notes that the proliferation of streaming media has helped to increase the recognition of Chinese films and TV series, which in turn has accelerated the growth of their international influence and global awareness of Chinese culture [17]. In the context of globalization and media convergence, leading streaming services have become the main channels for introducing Chinese cinema to the world. Major players such as Netflix, with their extensive international subscription base, are actively cooperating with Chinese film and television projects, giving them access to the markets of Southeast Asia, North America, Europe, Oceania and Africa. Chinese platforms such as iQiyi, Tencent Video, Youku, and Mango TV are also launching their international versions in an effort to expand their global reach.

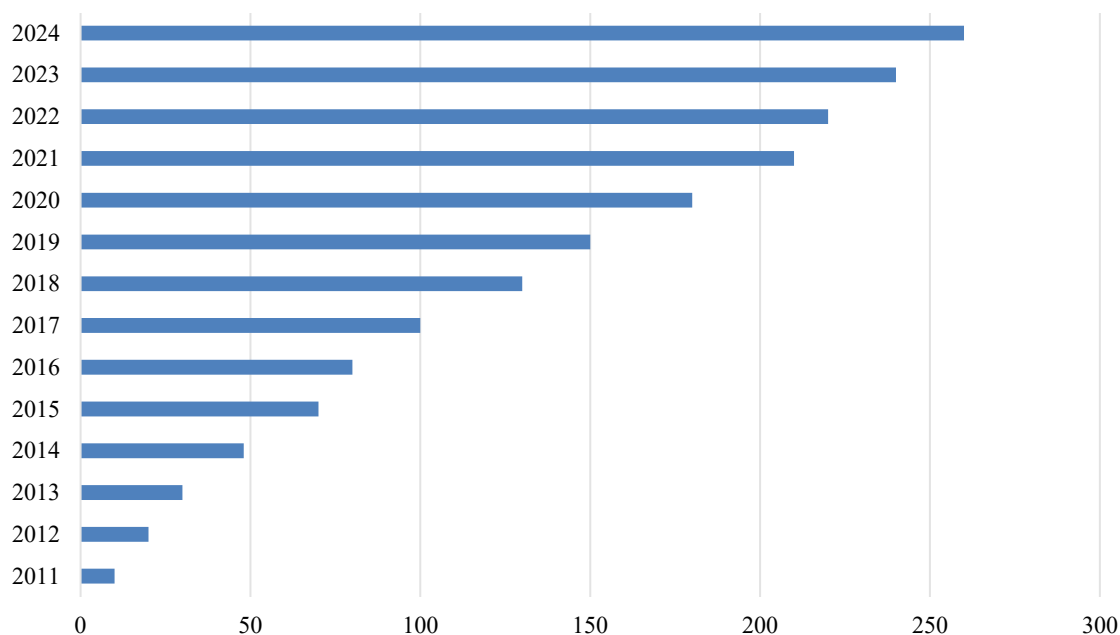


Chart 1 Netflix Subscriber Statistics Source: Demand Age - Netflix Subscriber Statistics )

Streaming platforms have opened up new horizons for Chinese cinema, allowing it to transcend national borders and resonate with audiences around the world. The example of the film “Dead Pigs”, available on Netflix since 2019, demonstrates how an international audience has had the opportunity to experience modern Chinese society from a new perspective. This has led to increased interest in Chinese reality TV shows and social issues in China. Streaming technologies are modernizing distribution channels, making Chinese films and TV series a more effective tool for demonstrating cultural identity on the world stage, which in turn improves China's cultural reputation and international image. Although the volume of scientific papers devoted to the global expansion of Chinese cinema is growing, they remain fragmented. Research often focuses on individual aspects: political foundations, international strategies, translation issues, audience perception, or specific examples. There is a lack of a single analytical framework that would combine these elements for a comprehensive understanding of how Chinese films are created, translated, promoted and perceived in various cultural contexts.

The present study seeks to bridge this gap by combining communication theory with cultural analysis and empirical evidence. This approach will help to form a more holistic view of the international distribution of Chinese cinema, especially in the context of the One Belt, One Road Initiative. Thus, the modern scientific discourse in the field of international communication of Chinese cinema synthesizes Western and Chinese approaches, offering a comprehensive look at the problems and opportunities of global promotion.

## Materials and methods

Our research is based on a combination of theoretical understanding and practical analysis, using an interdisciplinary and multi-pronged approach. The theoretical framework is based on the theory of intercultural communication [6], which helps to understand how linguistic, value and aesthetic differences affect the perception of Chinese cinema in the countries of the Belt and Road Initiative. We also draw on Chinese scientific concepts such as structural barriers [1] and “three gaps” [2], as well as research in translation and cultural adaptation [3] [4].

Additionally, we apply a new formalism to film studies, focusing on innovation in storytelling, visual structure, and reflection of collectivist values. This approach considers cinema as a complex system (artistic, industrial and cultural), which allows analyzing Chinese films in a global context not only in terms of their artistic features, but also their market and cultural positioning.

The practical part of the study includes the following methods: Content analysis of domestic and foreign publications, official documents and media materials dedicated to the international promotion of Chinese cinema.

A case study of two landmark films - the historical drama “Farewell, My Concubine” (1993) and the science fiction blockbuster “Wandering Earth” (2019), representing different stages and strategies of international communication.

Comparative analysis to identify the perception of Chinese films in various cultural and regional contexts. Special attention is paid to the factors of successful promotion: pre-sale marketing, the choice of distribution channels and the adaptation of content to cultural

characteristics. This comprehensive approach makes it possible to identify both effective practices for the international distribution of Chinese cinema, as well as existing problems related to cultural barriers, translation, distribution, and positioning. In general, our research provides a systematic understanding of cinema as an instrument of international communication and contributes to the development of more effective strategies for its dissemination in conditions of cultural diversity.

## **Discussion and results**

In recent decades, Chinese cinema has been actively entering the international arena, becoming an important tool of cultural diplomacy and China's "soft power". The development of the domestic film industry and the targeted promotion of films abroad are part of the state's strategy to create a positive image of the country and strengthen its cultural influence on a global scale.

One of the main obstacles to the international perception of Chinese films is the difference in cultural codes. As X emphasizes. According to Triandis [18], successful communication directly depends on the value orientations of society, and discrepancies in cultural models make it difficult to understand the artistic intent. The Chinese cultural tradition, rooted in Confucianism, collectivism, and deep historical memory, often contrasts with Western values, where individualism and linear storytelling prevail [19]. A striking example is the film "Farewell, My Concubine" (1993), which, despite international recognition, received different interpretations in different countries. In China, it was perceived as a tragedy of personal fate, closely intertwined with national history. Western critics have focused on the themes of gender identity and political repression. Such discrepancies emphasize the need for cultural mediation in the distribution of Chinese cinema abroad [6].

The transmission of cultural features in films is also a major challenge for international communication. According to the researchers Yang M. and Zhao Y. [19], inadequate adaptation of subtitles leads to a loss of semantic nuances, which weakens the emotional impact of films on a foreign audience. An analysis of audience ratings in China and the West has shown that differences in perception of the same works are often due to the quality of translation. Modern approaches to translation involve the use of combined strategies that make it possible to preserve cultural identity and, at the same time, create intertextual connections that are understandable to a foreign viewer. This is especially important for films based on national myths and historical narratives, such as "The Wandering Earth" (2019).

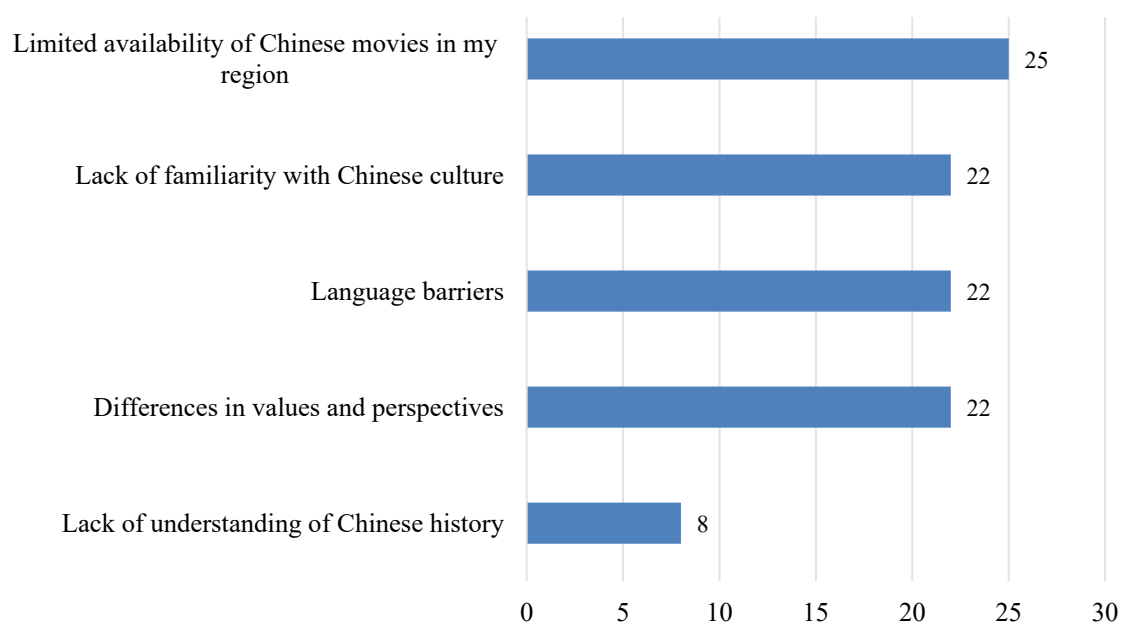


Chart 2: Main Obstacles to International Audiences Watching Chinese Films and TV Programmes

The digitalization of the media industry has dramatically changed the way Chinese films are distributed. The emergence of global streaming platforms (Netflix, iQiyi, Tencent Video) has helped expand the international presence of Chinese film products, but at the same time, increased competition and dependence on recommendation algorithms. According to Chen X., Yin H. & Ma P., the development of artificial intelligence in the Chinese film industry is laying the foundation for a new “industrial aesthetic” where film production and distribution are closely integrated with big data and audience analytics. This makes it possible to more accurately predict demand and develop effective promotion strategies in foreign markets [20].

The success of Chinese films on the world stage directly depends on government policy. On the one hand, government support ensures the development of the necessary infrastructure and financing of large-scale film projects. On the other hand, strict controls and censorship can hinder the free distribution of films and reduce their attractiveness to foreign audiences. The Belt and Road Initiative plays an important role. Within the framework of this program, joint film productions are actively developing, film festivals and educational events are held. This not only opens up new opportunities for Chinese films to be shown in the participating countries but also contributes to the creation of strong cultural ties.

Special attention should be paid to the distribution of Chinese films in Central Asian countries, and primarily in Kazakhstan. Historical ties, cultural interaction and geographical proximity create favorable conditions for the popularization of Chinese film production. The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region plays an important role in this process, acting as a center for cultural exchange and media cooperation. The Kazakh market is showing interest in Chinese films, which is due to the common historical heritage of the Great Silk Road and the similarity of some cultural aspects. However, there are certain difficulties, such as language barriers and



strong competition from Hollywood and Turkish films. In such circumstances, joint film projects, festivals, and educational programs aimed at strengthening cultural dialogue are effective.

In Kazakhstan, Chinese films are actively shown at such venues as the Eurasia International Film Festival and the Silk Road Film Festival. These events not only provide an opportunity to show films, but also facilitate the establishment of professional contacts. Research shows that the Kazakhstani audience is more enthusiastic about entertainment genres such as fiction ("The Wandering Earth") and animation ("Ne Zha"), but less willing to respond to historical and ideologically tinged paintings. This highlights the need to adapt films by genre and cultural content to reach a wider audience.

The film "The Composer" (2019), created in partnership with Kazakhstan, became an illustrative example of a successful co-production that opened the doors to the international market. This project demonstrates how collaborative filmmaking can promote cultural integration. The results of the analysis indicate that successful international communication of Chinese films is possible if a comprehensive strategy is applied, including careful consideration of cultural peculiarities and the development of flexible translation solutions. Active use of digital technologies and big data analytics for promotion. Providing institutional support within the framework of the "One Belt - One Road" initiative. Developing strong regional partnerships, including with Central Asian countries and Kazakhstan. As a result, Chinese cinema is being transformed from a phenomenon unique to one country into a global media product, while carefully preserving its cultural identity. Its international presence acts not only as an instrument of cultural diplomacy but also as a significant factor in global cultural dialogue.

## **Conclusion**

The international promotion of Chinese cinema within the framework of the One Belt, One Road Initiative requires a multifaceted strategy where cultural expression is harmoniously combined with global communication processes. Success on the global stage depends on the ability of Chinese films not only to use technological advances and expand distribution channels, but also, more importantly, to convey culturally significant stories in a form that is understandable and familiar to a wide audience.

Although technologies, including Artificial Intelligence for translation, reduce barriers, the human factor – the preservation of cultural authenticity and emotional expressiveness – remains crucial. Intellectual property-focused strategies, a variety of formats, and partnerships with international platforms are also contributing to increased reach.

Central Asia, and above all Kazakhstan, is of particular importance in this context. Acting as a cultural and geographical bridge, Kazakhstan creates unique opportunities for the dissemination of Chinese cinema and the strengthening of intercultural dialogue. The development of regional film production, the support of joint projects and the adaptation of films to local realities not only expand the presence of Chinese cinema but also promote mutual understanding along the Belt and Road.

Ultimately, the creation of a sustainable global communication model combining content innovation, technological integration, efficient distribution, and regional cooperation will be a

key factor in enhancing the international competitiveness of Chinese films. This model not only contributes to the globalization of the Chinese film industry but also serves as a powerful tool for promoting cultural soft power and strengthening mutual understanding in the increasingly interconnected modern world.

The study confirmed that the international distribution of Chinese films requires a comprehensive analysis that considers cultural, market and communication factors. The Kazakh context has revealed several features: Chinese films are becoming part of cultural diplomacy within the BRI; the success of promotion depends on the quality of translation and local adaptation; festivals and joint projects play a key role in generating audience interest; Kazakhstan acts as a media bridge between East and West, providing a unique platform for testing Chinese cinema strategies. Taken together, this allows us to consider cinema as an important tool for international communication and emphasizes the need to develop targeted distribution strategies considering regional specifics.

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### **Қытай фильмдерінің «Бір белдеу, бір жол» бастамасы аясында халықаралық коммуникациядағы тиімділігі**

**Андатпа.** Бұл зерттеудің өзектілігі – мәдени алмасу мен жұмсақ күшті фильм арқылы тарату маңыздылығының артуында, әсіресе «Бір белдеу, бір жол» (BRI) бастамасы шеңберінде. Бұл мақала қытай киносының халықаралық таралуын зерттеуді мақсат етеді, әсіресе мәдени баяндаулардың жаһандық нарықтарда қалай бейімделіп, қабылданатынына назар аударады. Зерттеу қытай кинематографистері мен үкіметтік органдардың шетелде мәдени көріністі арттыру және ықпал ету стратегияларын көрсетуімен маңызды, бұл ретте ««The Wandering Earth»» және «Ne Zha» фильмдері негізгі мысалдар ретінде қарастырылады. Зерттеудің теориялық үлесі – мәдени жаһандану теорияларын жұмсақ күш және трансұлттық кинотану зерттеулерімен біріктіре отырып, фильмді халықаралық коммуникация құралы ретінде түсінуге кешенді негіз ұсынуында. Практикалық тұрғыдан мақала саясаткерлерге, кинематографистерге және дистрибьюторларға батыс емес медиа контентінің жаһандық қолжетімділігін жақсарту жолдарын ұсынады. Әдістемелік жағынан зерттеу салыстырмалы жағдайлық талдау, дискурс талдауы және салалық есептер мен аудитория қабылдауы зерттеулерінен алынған екінші реттік деректерді қолданады. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, қытай фильмдері жаһандық көріністе

айтарлықтай ілгерілеушілікке қол жеткізгенімен, әртүрлі мәдени контексттерде локализация, баяндау қолжетімділігі және аудиториямен өзара әрекеттесу салаларында әлі де қиындықтар бар. Зерттеудің маңыздылығы – ұлттық кино индустрияларын, әсіресе дамып келе жатқан нарықтарда, халықаралық деңгейге шығару стратегияларын болашақта қалыптастыруға ықпал ету мүмкіндігінде.

**Түйін сөздер:** Бір белдеу, бір жол; халықаралық коммуникация; мәдениетаралық коммуникация; медиа конвергенция.

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### **Эффективность китайских фильмов в международной коммуникации в контексте инициативы «Один Пояс - один путь»**

**Аннотация.** Актуальность данного исследования обусловлена растущей значимостью культурного обмена и проецирования «мягкой силы» посредством кинематографа, особенно в рамках инициативы «Один пояс, один путь». Цель статьи – проанализировать международное распространение китайского кино, с акцентом на адаптацию и восприятие культурных нарративов в мировом контексте. Значимость исследования заключается в демонстрации стратегий, используемых китайскими кинематографистами и государственными структурами для повышения культурной видимости и влияния за рубежом, на примере таких фильмов, как «Блуждающая Земля» и «Нэчжа». Теоретический вклад исследования - интеграция теорий культурной глобализации с концепциями «мягкой силы» и транснационального кино, что предлагает всестороннюю основу для понимания кино как инструмента международной коммуникации. С практической точки зрения, статья предлагает политикам, кинематографистам и дистрибьюторам пути повышения глобальной доступности медиа-контента, не относящегося к западной культуре. Методологически исследование опирается на сравнительный анализ кейсов, дискурсивный анализ и вторичные данные из отраслевых отчетов и исследований восприятия аудитории. Результаты показывают, что, несмотря на заметный прогресс китайских фильмов в глобальной видимости, остаются вызовы в локализации, доступности нарратива и вовлеченности аудитории в различных культурных контекстах. Более широкое значение исследования заключается в его потенциале влиять на формирование будущих стратегий выхода национальных киноиндустрий на международный уровень, особенно в развивающихся странах.

**Ключевые слова:** пояс и путь, международная коммуникация; межкультурная коммуникация; медиаконвергенция.

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