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**Piracy Cultures**

# Broadening the Scope of Cultural Preferences:
# Movie Talk and Chinese Pirate Film Consumption
# from the Mid-1980s to 2005

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How do structural market conditions affect people's media consumption over time? This article examines the evolution of Chinese pirate film consumption from the mid-1980s to 2005 as a structurational process, highlights its different mechanisms (as compared to those of legitimate cultural markets), and teases out an unconventional path to broadening the scope of societal tastes in culture. The research reveals that, in a structural context consisting of a giant piracy market, lacking advertising or aggregated consumer information, consumers developed "movie talk" from the grassroots. The media environment comprised solely of movie talk guides people's consumption of films toward a heterogeneous choice pattern. The noncentralized, unquantifiable, and performative features of movie talk that may contribute to such an effect are discussed herein.

## Introduction

Literatures in both cultural sociology and communication endeavor to explain cultural preferences. Current research concerns mainly cross-sectional studies with individuals as the unit of analysis (Griswold, Janssen, & Van Rees, 1999; Webster, 2009). The majority of extant theories focus on linking cultural consumption patterns to individual consumers' psychological predispositions (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) or socioeconomic statuses (Bourdieu, 1984; Van Rees & Van Eijck, 2003). However, *chronological changes* in the consumption patterns are relatively underexplored (Tepper & Hargittai, 2009, pp. 227–228). For instance, longitudinal research of the formative role of structured

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media environments, or "intermediary institutions," in the establishment of cultural appreciation and preferences has long been called for (Griswold et al., 1999).

The recent decades witnessed a dramatic transformation of the cultural market. In the age of broadcasting, people could only receive limited content that was pre-packed and scheduled by the broadcaster. In today's digital era, the individual is able to choose from a vast universe of cultural products, and to benefit from the newer, on-demand, nonlinear mode of distribution. This change of cultural marketplaces has spurred some interesting scholarship regarding how structural and institutional features of the market affect cultural preferences over time. Some critics hail the present cultural market for expanding consumer freedom and enhancing cultural diversity (Anderson, 2006). However, other empirical research reveals that people in this environment may end up paying even less attention to the initially less popular options. This concentration of media choices is due to ubiquitous consumer behavior metrics and heavy marketing by corporate giants, which effectively guide peoples' choices in cultural consumption (Webster, 2009, 2011).

Observing existing cultural markets provides contextual evidence of how people use the resources offered by the current media environment to enact their preferences, drawing attention to a continued trend toward concentrated cultural choice. But is it possible to interrogate the evolution of cultural consumption in a market that provides a plethora of items under a nonlinear model of distribution, yet is free of consumer statistics and advertising? Against such a theoretical backdrop, this study examines, historically and sociologically, the pirate film consumption in China. This particular market exhibits the exact features in need, thanks to a peculiar combination of state policy, global media capital, and local piratical practices.

It is worth noting here that the purpose of this study is neither to assist policy-making aimed at eliminating piracy (Mertha, 2005; Priest, 2006; Zimmerman & Chaudhry, 2009), nor to decry the claimed injustice of current intellectual property laws (Lessig, 2005; Miller et al., 2005, pp. 351–357; Pang, 2004a). Also, this study does not seek to illustrate local cultural (re)creations mediated by piracy, as the cultural studies perspective or free culture movements argue (García-Canclini, 2005; Sundaram, 2005; King, 2007). Equally, it is not simply an elucidation of the political economy of piracy, which fixates on the power struggle between the state and global capitals (Fung, 2008, pp. 1–12; Pang, 2004b; Sardar, 2005). However, this study does attempt to question a framework shared by some critical scholars, one that assesses the implications of contemporary global cultural piracy in terms of the long-standing thesis of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1969, 1991). In this view, piracy has successfully "bypassed" the state fortress; it now amounts to the same kind of dominant media flows in cultural imperialism (J. Dai, 2000, p. 342, 2002; Pang, 2004b, p. 115) and is a form of the United States' "accidental public diplomacy" (Sigismondi, 2009). Such a theoretical appropriation assumes that piracy consumption operates with the same structural specificities on which the cultural imperialism thesis dwells. This is something we need to examine sociologically. In this article, I analyze the underlying structural conditions of Chinese pirate film consumption, and anchor this case specifically for the purpose of teasing out those conditions and processes—in stark contrast to those of legitimate, mainstream cultural markets—that have given rise to the expansion of societal tastes.

To accomplish this, the present study traces the contour of Chinese local piracy consumption from the mid-1980s, when piracy rose in its primitive form, to 2005, when free Internet downloading became increasingly common.[1] It aims to explain how an extremely lean market acquired a huge cinematic inventory within a short period of time. Specifically, it implements a structurational theory on media consumption to frame the evolution of the Chinese pirate film market as a structurational process, one "in which institutions and users mutually construct the media environment" (Webster, 2011, p. 43). Findings show that, in a structural context that consists of a giant piracy market and no advertising or aggregated consumer information, consumers have developed certain forms of "movie talk" which effectively orient film consumption at the grassroots level. This study attempts to enrich our understanding of the structurational mechanisms of cultural markets by identifying an alternative set of structural features that potently push for cultural diversification in the local market, and bring out the power and mechanism of noncentralized, unquantifiable, and performative information in orienting and broadening societal cultural preferences. In addition, the article also provides a sociological and historical account of local pirate film consumption, something which is still largely lacking in the cultural piracy literature.

The paper proceeds in four sections. First, it introduces the general picture of film piracy in China. Subsequently, it lays out the structuration framework and uses it to contrast the Chinese pirate film market with legitimate cultural markets. This case study provides a unique opportunity to reassess mechanisms and theories developed under mainstream situations. Progressing from the theoretical discussion, the paper then presents a two-decade history of Chinese film piracy to extricate the alternative recipe that broadened the scope of societal tastes in culture. Finally, it highlights the key ingredient— movie talk—and discusses how its three characteristics help to drive consumers' attention to heterogeneity.

## Film Piracy in China

As the country with the highest piracy rate, China stands at the heart of the international piracy "epidemic." Even among other major financially suffering industries, such as business software, music recording, and entertainment software, the piracy rate in China for motion pictures is still most striking. It was up to 93% in 2005, which meant that 93 out of every 100 film products sold in the country were pirated (IIPA, 2010).

What distinguishes China from other developing countries with widespread film piracy is the government's firm stance in restricting film imports. Cinema in China has been officially positioned as a state-funded cultural institution, aimed essentially at national cohesion and ideological unification. In 1978, faced with ruins from the collapsed Cultural Revolution, China began to build initial contacts with the outside world. The state started bringing in a small number of low-budget foreign movies to what was largely a vast ground of "image deprivation," to quote the award-winning director Zhangke Jia (2005). At

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[1] After 2005, increasing practices of free Internet downloading and newer forms of Internet communication like social network sites radically transformed the ecological dynamics of the Chinese pirate film market. The structurational process involved in the post-2005 environment requires a different analysis.

the same time, pirate videocassettes began to be smuggled in by fishermen from the coastal regions. However, resolute to firmly control the "cultural inroads," the Chinese government set a strict quota on film imports. As a result, ever since 1994, when *The Fugitive* marked Hollywood's re-entry to the Chinese market after a 45-year absence, the U.S. government has imposed increasing pressure on China to allow greater market access, in addition to calling for a piracy crackdown. The 2001 World Trade Organization (WTO) accession brought some concessions from the Chinese government, including the import of up to 20 revenue-sharing foreign films (up from the previous quota of 10); but, in terms of piracy, the situation has not changed significantly in the past decade, despite government-sponsored anti-piracy campaigns (IIPA, 2010).

### The Evolution of a Piracy Market: A Structurational Process

Inspired by Anthony Giddens (1984), Webster (2011) theorizes that certain media consumption patterns, or public attention, result from a structurational process. In this process, consumers, while bound by institutional constraints, also purposefully appropriate resources offered by media institutions; simultaneously, institutions respond to willful consumers by answering to their need and channeling it in desired directions. In other words, "structure and agency are mutually constituted in a continuous process of reciprocal causation" (p. 51).

Pirates are the major film providers in China, but the illegitimate and spread-out nature of piracy makes it difficult to peek into their production practices. However, it is reasonable to assume that the scope of pirated products in circulation in China is, by and large, indicative of the societal tastes of the time. From the standpoint of economic sociology, the informal economy answers genuine consumer demands that the formal economy fails to fulfill in terms of availability and affordability (Porter & Haller, 2005, p. 406). Running on extremely low costs, film pirates react promptly to viewers' preferences. In addition, unlike other mass culture producers that manipulate content design to maximize sales, the business of pirates is much simpler: They bring to the local market items from the world's cinematic inventory across time and space, based on the slightest sense of consumers' preferences. Second, the gigantic pirate film market in China has constantly been over nine times as big as the legitimate one—the options offered by which are delimited by the state (IIPA, 2010; Appendix 1). Hence, it follows that the availability in the piracy market covers not only marginal and cult tastes, but the entire spectrum of cinematic choices.

Thus, the question becomes this: How does structure—institutional and media environments—shape people's cultural preferences, or how do people make use of resources in structure to guide their choices in cultural consumption? This is the focus of the present study. It can be extensively explored by conducting theory-based structural analyses of the Chinese piracy case, followed by empirical research on local practices utilizing a variety of materials gathered over the years.

*Chinese Pirate Film Market: Availability and Affordability of Cultural Products*

When studying the specific role of structure in affecting peoples' film preferences, researchers have to consider the factors of program availability in the market, and of viewer awareness enabled by the

media environment (Webster, 2009; Webster & Phalen, 1997). In terms of program availability, piracy distinguishes itself not only because it grants potential accessibility to the widest pool possible, but also by how it affects the local distribution of world cinemas in certain ways: It reduces Hollywood movies to the same level as obscure film productions.

The global distribution network is vital to the success of Hollywood (Miller et al., 2005, pp. 294–311; Scott, 2004; Wildman, 1994). The major studios directly control distribution systems in their foreign markets to a degree unsurpassable by the rest of the world's film industries. Hollywood's control over distribution ensures that its products will be exhibited locally at an appointed time and space. However, this privilege has been gravely damaged by film piracy (S. Wang, 2003, pp. 7–20). Pirated films in digital forms traverse continents overnight, regardless of the windowing strategies set for theatre premiers, regional zone restrictions for DVDs, or the lack of any formal distribution channels, as in the case of underground and amateur productions.

Monetary expenses are another often-neglected feature in studying media choice (Scherer & Naab, 2009). Scholars find that, in pay-per-use types of media consumption, compared to flat-rate scenarios, consumers not only select more discreetly, but also their total consumption is highly sensitive to changes in the item-cost (Scherer & Naab, 2009). Falling under this category, pirated films are available at extremely low prices that allow the consumer to simultaneously choose purposefully and copiously.

*Chinese Pirate Film Market: Viewer Awareness of Cultural Products*

Film piracy is characterized by its potentially unrestricted scope, indiscriminate distribution, and cheap price. While the structural constraints of product availability (and affordability) are greatly relaxed in China, the issue of viewer awareness becomes crucial for comprehending the evolution of cultural consumption. How do people come to know about new cultural products and decide to try them out?

In legitimate, mainstream cultural markets, advertising and other market-driven publicity bear significant impact on consumption patterns. Hollywood best illustrates the impact of marketing on the consumption of cultural products. In a well-regulated movie market with few access restrictions, Hollywood movies enter hand-in-hand with carefully designed, large-scale promotional efforts that are worth billions of dollars annually (Miller et al., 2005, pp. 259–276; Scott, 2004). Due to the overwhelming financial power of Hollywood, films from elsewhere are left at a vital disadvantage even before their release. In mainstream free-access local markets, piracy circulates in the same media environment, which means that people bombarded by Hollywood commercials may seek pirate copies. Two ethnographic studies, one on illegitimate video viewing in Mexico, and the other on pirate disc consumption in Malaysia, both reveal a relatively homogenous, Hollywood-dominated piracy market (García-Canclini, 2005; Sardar, 2005). However, the Chinese situation differs fundamentally. The government's policy allows only 20 foreign films, at most, to be exhibited in Chinese theatres per year. Hollywood therefore has no motivation to promote products other than those that are allowed, even though, every year, hundreds of Hollywood-branded works flourish in the black market. As a result, the Chinese people face a market with all possible choices, but which is relatively clear of monopolized promotion manipulated by global corporate giants.

Audience measurement, an instrumental tool for market interest, also plays a big role in the domination of Hollywood flows. The individual experiences the statistical representation of the consuming public as a reflexive collectivity (Shimpach, 2007). A person's decision depends on the *visibility* of the choices made by other people (Salganik, Dodds, & Watts, 2006). From such micro-mechanisms arise a ubiquitous phenomenon illustrated as power-law distribution: When faced with many options to choose from, people end up giving a disproportionate amount of attention to a small subset of the whole (Barabási & Albert, 1999; Easley & Kleinberg, 2010, pp. 543–560; Webster, 2011, pp. 54–55). In sum, closely monitored media consumption tends to culminate in power-law distribution and homogenized content consumption. But in China, since the gigantic piracy market is just an informal economy, there has never been statistical representation of the actual film consumption of the Chinese people, such as "scientifically" calculated "public opinion" or popularity lists. This reduces the trend for average consumers to rush toward the most popular products, which further enables possible diversification of consumption choices.

A last point to clarify regards the possible influence of purposeful search, a new means provided by the Internet to help navigating through huge inventories of cultural items (Anderson, 2006, pp. 55–57; Webster, 2009, pp. 226–228). Empirical studies suggest that the role of search engines in orienting cultural consumption is rather limited. People tend to use the Internet to find more details about certain forms of culture they are already interested in (Kayahara & Wellman, 2007), and the Internet basically reinforces existing musical habits shaped by "traditional factors," such as friends' recommendations and mainstream media (Tepper & Hargittai, 2009). In short, people do not *discover* new cultural items through purposeful search online.

Accordingly, the Chinese people, faced with potentially the most abundant film options at low prices, yet lacking market-driven publicity like advertising and consumer statistics, have to resort to limited sources for product awareness. The following sociological and historical account of piracy consumption intends to shed light on the specific nature and mechanisms of what I call "cine-spaces," which offered information that oriented people's preferences in cinematic culture over the years.

## Data and Methods

My research includes a variety of archival and ethnographic sources. I perused official yearbooks of the Chinese film industry and old research data. Although they seldom addressed the issue of piracy explicitly, I was able to detect traces of piracy consumption. For instance, it was a telltale sign when people reported movie preferences that were not sanctioned by the state.

The major sources of data include contemporaneous accounts of film-viewing from newspapers, memoirs, essays, and movie-related books, as well as blogs and other online accounts that point to piracy consumption (usually in retrospection). I screened all the Chinese books published from 1980 to 2008 in the film section of a major Chinese university library, which consisted of more than 100 volumes ranging

from dense film theory monographs to more leisurely movie-inspired essays.[2] I examined the prefaces and postscripts of these books for the authors' personal reminiscences. Moreover, I browsed through volumes of *Movie View Biweekly* (*Kan dianying*), the most popular Chinese film magazine, from 1999 through 2005. For online materials, I began with current prominent film blogs maintained by film critics, and I followed their leads for more references. These accounts, I found, referenced each other extensively, and were usually quite candid about film piracy. They constituted an important part of the data not only based on their testimony of (pirate) film consumption, but also because these film critics played crucial roles in the co-evolution of multiple cine-spaces.

I conducted ethnographic research December 2004–August 2006 in Zhongguancun, Beijing, one of the most bustling places for piracy consumption in China. During my 21-month stay, I frequented six pirate shops in Zhongguancen, popular stores in Xinjiekou, and stores located on campuses of film institutions, as well as many street vendors. I observed the ranges of products, fluctuation in prices, and interactions between patrons and sellers. In those spots, I also mingled with avid (pirated) film viewers, including college students and myriad neighborhood residents. Inevitably, because I was living in the area at the time, some of them were from my existing circles of friends and relatives. During this period, I also immersed myself in online ethnographic observation, gathering a myriad of information on films.

However, because of the illicit nature of piracy, I relied mainly on an unobtrusive approach. Most data cited herein are from legally published print media and public cyberspace, and therefore, probable ethical issues are greatly mitigated, as such methods of data collection bypass the potential problems of interviews on such a sensitive topic. Nonetheless, I still quote moderately from informal conversations with ordinary people, having protected their anonymity in this paper, to compliment and triangulate this two-decade account of Chinese pirate film consumption.

## Chinese Pirate Film Consumption: A History

The following account is primarily chronological, with two themes unfolding over time: first, the state of the piracy market, the dominant medium and mode of distribution, and the scope of inventory; second, the ways in which people interact around movie interests and check out new films. These two themes are necessarily intertwined, but I present them separately to better correspond to the theoretical pursuits of this paper.

### *The Piracy Market: Video Halls (Mid-1980s to Mid-1990s)*

The history of video halls dates back to the 1979 open-door policy that followed China's 10-year-long Cultural Revolution. In flat sales, the China Film Corporation started buying a small number of low-budget, second-rate films from socialist allies, and occasionally from developed countries (Xu, 1998). Nevertheless, due to the rise of television as the primary format of social recreation for the general public, and partly due to the institutional ills of the country's own film sector, a steady erosion of movie attendance took place starting in the mid-1980s (Feng, 2006, pp. 10–26; T. Wang, 2006, pp. 25–38). In

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[2] This was carried out at the Chinese University of Hong Kong Library, February–May 2008.

fact, another leisure activity developed during this period: going to the video hall, which was the first frontier of Chinese film piracy.

In its heyday, there were over 50,000 video halls across the country (Tuo, 2001). As Jinhua Dai recognizes, the huge national network of video halls, including video production, distribution, and screening sectors, far exceeded the contemporaneous network of cinema circuits (2000, p. 418). An old patron recalls that, at one time, video halls could be found everywhere in his little hometown, and before long, even the town movie house, which had mainly been for domestic films, turned into a big video hall (personal communication). A renowned film critic recalls that, back then, video halls were often located in the alleys near schools to better serve those playing hooky (Weixidi, 2007).

"A large quantity of foreign films that existed only in video screenings dragged audiences away from the theatre" (Feng, 2006, p. 16). The video hall networks disseminated the latest Hollywood flicks, Hong Kong gangster movies, martial art movies, and all sorts of wacky Hong Kong comedies across mainland China. However, some "good works," something different from the dominant Hong Kong commercial movies (nonetheless legally inaccessible), did pop up on occasion (Jia, 2009). With no clue about what these films were, video halls added to the diversity of the local cinematic pool. These serendipities, "albeit only a handful," served for some people as "the entrée into the temples of culture" (personal communication). An old video hall patron writes nostalgically:

> Those available movie portfolios in the culturally deprived age made up almost my entire
> first impression about the beauty of film. Those obscure ones jostled among the horror
> and the erotic turned out years later to be the artworks of the masters, who were never
> aware that the sap of their creativity nourished those impoverished souls in a video hall
> of a country far away. . . . Sometimes you can tell how important a certain movie is by
> listening to the deafening uproar of people crying to the manager demanding a switch to
> a "colored" flick. (Binglvcha, 2008)[3]

The trend of attending video halls continued into the 1990s, with an increasing Hollywood presence. Then, alongside the rise of Video Compact Disc (VCD) players and computers, and later of the Internet, a series of government regulations that prevented dissemination of "unhealthy" content and copyright violation eventually led to the halls' collective demise (Tuo, 2001).

*The Piracy Market: Epoch of the Video Compact Disc (Mid-1990s to 2005)*

In 1993, faced with the continuing decline of movie attendance, the Ministry of Radio, Film & Television announced a groundbreaking decision to delegate China Film to import ten "excellent" foreign films (Tian, 1994). Film import started to operate on a revenue-sharing basis, rather than via flat sales, which enabled the importation of global blockbusters (J. Dai, 2000, pp. 426–434; T. Wang, pp. 25–38). Almost immediately, the annual IIPA "Special 301" Reports started attending to Chinese film piracy, marking the level of piracy at an astonishingly high 100% in 1995, in essence indicating a market completely filled with illegal VCDs (Appendix 1).

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[3] All translations from Chinese to English are made by the author.

VCD was considered an obsolete recording format in the West, but in Asia, it experienced an unexpected rebirth due to piracy (Pang, 2004b; S. Wang, 2003, pp. 49–58). In 1996, the VCD player industry saw skyrocketing growth, squeezing videotapes and Laserdiscs out of the national market. In 2000, 36.4% of urban households in China owned a VCD player (S. Wang, 2003, p. 52). A 1998 audience survey showed that 64.3% of the respondents in downtown Beijing watched at least one film per week on these players (D. Dai, 1999, p. 94).

In mid-1997, the digital videodisc (DVD) format flooded the piracy market; it was desirable because of its high storage capability. The price of pirate DVDs went down drastically, from the initial 30–40 RMB to, on average, less than 10 RMB apiece after 2000 (US$1.2 at the time). Cheaper DVD players also quickly came to dominate the market. Zhang tells how his first player, an expensive imported one, was proved impotent in the face of domestic DVD players, which were built with super compatibility for piracy (2008, pp. 171–172). In 2000, Chinese player production reached 3 million, a number that soared to 19.7 million in 2001 (Lu & Mu, 2003, p. 65). The VCD/ DVD player boom went hand in hand with the prevalence of personal computers in China. As a result, many (especially college students) watched compact discs on computer screens.

The scale of piracy became gigantic. In 2000, it was estimated that pirates sold 25 million copies of *Titanic*, versus only 300,000 legitimate copies (Smith, 2000). Zhang depicts two afternoons in 2001 at Xinjiekou, a famous audio-visual black-marketplace in Beijing: "Starting from Jishuitan Bridge, all the way down to 'High Steps' near Xisi . . . I filtered every shop. The journey was no lighter than a professional hiking into the wild" (2008, p. 174). It is noteworthy that within this "wild," the building complex of China Film Corporation is located.

The rise of the compact disc marked an epoch of unprecedented diversity. People who were interested in cinema used to read film scripts of the world's classics and imagine the frames. Now they could finally indulge themselves in the moving images. It was sudden luxury. A film critic recalls, "The ultimate problem [then] was, the world was too fabulous, cinema too splendid, appetite too wide. In front of all good works, we were like hungry tigers pouncing on their prey" (Z. Wang, 2004, pp. 316–317). A "Millennium Survey" conducted by *Movie View* in the summer of 2000 showed that, with regard to Chinese cinema, audience preferences went overwhelmingly to Hong Kong films (Huayu yingmi shiji diaocha, 2000).

In 2000 and 2001, a Beijing-based graduate student in film studies interviewed groups of people from all walks on "the roles of cinema in their lives" and concluded that "on the whole, college students favor European and 'not typical Hollywood' U.S. cinema. . . . They see most of films not in movie houses . . . but on VCD, DVD, and videotapes" (Guo, 2002, pp. 182–183). The interviewees provided two reasons for this consumption pattern: Their favorite films were unavailable in movie houses, and "piracy" is cheap, convenient, and offers the widest options.

*Cine-Spaces: Non-Official Film Societies and Cineclubs (1997–2005)*

As the dominant pirate formats evolved from videotapes in video halls to VCDs and DVDs for private consumption, the way Chinese people interacted based on film interest, as well as how they learned about new films, also changed. Given the historical and political context, "[t]o the Chinese, even a film made in 1910 was new" (Jia, 2005). Although pirates were ready to bootleg anything from the vast pool of world cinema, if consumers were ignorant about film, the market would remain lean. What makes people aware of and interested in new films, and in turn, contributes to the expansion of local inventory over time?

Prior to the late 1990s, spaces where strangers could get together and talk about movies were hard to find. In 1997, China's first non-official film society, Office 101, was established. It was Shanghai-based and claimed to have about 200 regular members, a group made up of teachers, students, civil servants, and workers. Office 101 had a cultural center as a regular screening venue, held post-screening seminars, and circulated film discussions via internal periodicals (Jia, 2005). In a couple of years, such screening societies ballooned in urban areas across mainland China. Their presence enriched the then comparatively narrow offerings at the local shops: "Choices were limited at the piracy retailers. I watched a lot of classics in a members-only cine-club. Seems many cities got such clubs, with good taste" (personal communication). Soon after their establishment, most of these societies openly extended their activities to the public level by turning cafés into temporary screening venues. With varied orientations along the cultural, political, and economic axes, these cine-clubs and cafés served as a major space for communication (Nakajima, 2006). A scene from one such club around 1998 is described as follows:

> Back then . . . every Tuesday or Thursday by the dusk, I arrived at a café ["Sculpting in Time"] (now renowned and franchised), got a 15-yuan beverage, for a film on the 21-inch TV screen. Movies were limited in the then-emergent [pirate] VCD market. Only three art-house films: Kieslowski's *Three Colours*. At the utmost you count in *Lolita* [1962, UK] and *Blue Velvet* [1986, United States]. Many thanks to the café that got Taiwan-produced videotapes. It had dazed us all, and made Truffaut, Fellini, and Almodóvar no longer just names on the page. (Liu, 2008)

*Cine-Spaces: Online Movie Forums and Blogs (1998–2005)*

In December 1998, even though the Chinese Internet was in its adolescence, Rear Window movie forum (rearwin.xici.net) was established at Xici Hutong, the then-most popular BBS (bulletin board system) cyber community in China. From 1998 to 2004, Rear Window was widely cherished for its high quality film reviews and social interactions. The founder Weixidi (a pseudonym transliteration of "VCD") reminisces about his six years with Rear Window:

> The reason I established this forum is . . . most importantly, the yearning for communication, to communicate after watching a film. In all these years passed, I sought films discussed by others, and vice versa. Life has probably been fundamentally

> transformed because of such daily communication. . . . This was unimaginable before
> the advent of the Internet. (Weixidi, Huang, & Xu, 2005, pp. 307–308)

In 1999, Weixidi met the friends he made on Rear Window in real life for the first time. One of the subjects for discussion was how they could get to see Kieslowski's *The Ten Commandments* (1989–1990, Poland) (Weixidi, 2009). From then on, people from cyberspace began to show up in person and hung out:

> [And] just like that, an open circle gradually formed. This circle is at the utmost margin
> of the film industry, yet forever inclusive, and starts voicing out, calling for attention;
> before that, stories about films could only be released from within the industry. (Weixidi
> et al., 2005, p. 307)

As film reviews proliferated, more and more movie viewers visited the forum for reference, and meanwhile, an appreciation of art cinema became a popular thing to espouse. Movies being addressed in the forum, on most occasions, were impossible to reach via legitimate channels. For example, in a book Weixidi and his friends later edited in memory of the forum, all of the 73 selected online reviews are about black market offerings (Weixidi et al., 2005).

Rear Window declined in popularity as the BBS medium in general did. Several once-bustling movie forums slackened off around the year 2003 (Li, 2006). Some BBSs turned into information boards for newly released pirate DVDs. The proliferation of Internet information adds up to the cost of searching and processing. Blogs, consequently, replaced BBS forums as the major conduit for influential figures, since blogging with an established, consistent identity allows their voices to be heard more efficiently. Weixidi, Daqihupi, and Huangxiaoxie, to name a few, all followed the typical trajectory, and are now popular film bloggers (see Appendix 2 for films in Weixidi's blog throughout 2005).

*Cine-Spaces: The Print Media (1999–2005)*

In his groundbreaking analysis of the Soviet second economy, Feldbrugge (1989) demonstrates the symbiosis of the first and second economies. Rather than being parallel, the two are in close relation, and there is widespread interpenetration. In China, cultural piracy not only supplements and replaces the deficiency of the official apparatus, but also serves as the very base of popular periodicals and cinema book publishing, since the content of these publications mainly concerns pirated films.

*Movie View*, with a circulation of 680,000, has become the most successful movie magazine today. It published its first volume at the end of 1999. Soon, newly emergent movie magazines, catering to consumers of pirated films, dominated the market, as old brands like *Popular Movies* (*dazhong dianying*) radically shrank. Then, an interesting phenomenon took place: Starting in 2000, editors from various print media managed to recruit online film critics to publish their articles in newspapers and magazines to fill the dearth of expertise about the ever-popular pirated movies. It was not long before online film critics actually took over the movie pages of print media in China. "For common viewers the

ambiguous feelings obtained from a movie became something that needs articulation. . . . Their voices have been recognized by traditional mass media" (Weixidi, 2005, pp. 308–309).

The realm of book publishing was prospering, as well. In the first wave, there came movie guides, the most famous of which was the huge two-volume *Raymond Zhou's Film Guide* (2004), which contained information on over 3,000 films, more than half were non-English language. In the foreword, the editor Raymond Zhou, a well-known cross-media film critic, introduced the mission:

> First of all, I believe we need a full-scale reference for movies in the domestic book market. In other countries, ordinary folks cannot afford large DVD collections. . .  They only venture in rental stores. . . . We need guides before we *purchase*. . . . Information on the pirated discs is not that reliable. Therefore we hope this guidebook will direct you. (Zhou, 2004, pp. 1, 3)

As online movie guides continued to thrive, printed hard-fact movie guides faded out, and more elegant series of movie guides arose, marked by careful selections and in-depth reviews. For example, the Movie Plus series considered itself as collecting only the "most noteworthy" films of the year. "Faced with assorted movie books," writes the editor, "we feel the need to provide for a perspective, one that at least crystallizes what the important works were in the past year" (Weixidi, 2003, p. 1). The second volume made a daring point: "We hope the book is a guide for pirating films, not [only] for purchasing them" (X. Zhang, 2004, p. 2). The contributors to this project were online critics, film teachers, and students, who were also joined by senior critics from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Another significant category of books on film in China is called the "cinema essay" (*dianying suibi*). This is not a scholarly essay on film, but a type of freestyle subjective writing about an individual's emotional reaction to a film. Most of the films covered are non-mainstream films, and Hollywood commercial movies usually do not give birth to stylish and chic writing. Starting in 2003, many books in this category became bestsellers. Then, scholarly works on film emerged. The most profoundly interesting event was that, in 2003, mainland publishers took over the "Cinema Hall" series, once the glory of Taiwan. Born in 1985, the scope of this project covered a variety of subjects: film theories, film histories, sociologies of film, and accounts of various cinemas, mostly translated from other languages. After nearly 200 books had been published, the series was dying in its birthplace in the late 1990s (Yin, 2007). A number of mainland publishers recruited Cinema Hall's editor to continue the series brand. "The new 'Cinema Hall' was immediately a hit in the mainland," said the Taiwanese editor in an interview, "which indicates people's strong interest in cinema culture" (Jiao & Zang, 2006).

### Movie Talk: Broadening the Scope of Cultural Consumption

Between the mid-1980s and 2005, the first decade belongs to video halls, a primitive form of film piracy in China. To some extent, video hall viewing was characterized by the traditional linear mode of media delivery, as screenings were strung together in a temporal sequence pre-determined by the manager. Constituting an important means of recreation during that period, video halls brought Hong Kong gangster movies, comedies, and Hollywood blockbusters to the Chinese people. Although art films

and underground work popped up on occasion and kindled some individuals' alternative appetites, deviance from the most popular genres never stabilized.

A milestone for the significant expansion of the local film inventory was the sudden prevalence of compact discs as a medium in the mid-1990s, which marked the birth of a market system relying on nonlinear distribution, through which people were able to purposefully seek out products that interested them from a vast volume of new material. Accompanying this new mode of distribution were the successive proliferations of cine-spaces, where people contributed and found information and opinions about movies. What flooded these cine-spaces were personal conversations, subjective descriptions, individualist interpretations—what I call "movie talk"—which, since the end of the 1990s, have served as the major force orientating film consumption in China.
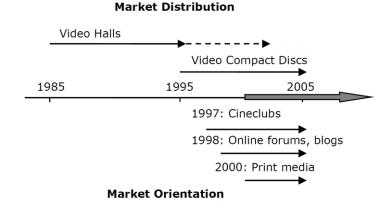


**Figure 1. Development of Chinese film piracy and cine-spaces (1985–2005).**

Movie talk evolved from its initial iterations in physically constrained film societies and movie clubs, growing to include online forums and blogs, film magazines, newspapers, and different kinds of film-related books. The Internet further accelerated the process by enhancing the possibilities for movie talk to reach afar and engage more. An explosive widening of market choices is observable at the beginning of the new millennium (i.e., the fat arrow, Figure 1).

Constituting the entire media environment, movie talk serves as the intermediary through which piracy offerings and consumer needs interact in this structurational process. More remarkably, unlike its counterparts elsewhere—systematically aggregated consumer information and product publicity designed by media institutions—the phenomenon of movie talk shows how consumer agents, situated in a certain

and seemingly disadvantaged structural context, act up on a micro-level and collectively change the structural environment that cultivates their consumer preferences. Movie talk of this kind has three features contributing to its special power in broadening societal tastes: its decentralized pattern (of reviewed films), its appeal to empathy (of the audience), and its performativity (for speakers).

First, movie talk in China differs greatly from mainstream film reviews in other societies in its bottom-up, community-oriented characteristics. The People's Republic of China lacks the tradition of film criticism being postured both as consumer guides, and as vehicles for the critics' own creative and artistic responses to artworks. Film criticism as a stand-alone occupation had never existed in mainland China. Since 1949, the Communist Party has controlled both the domestic film industry and film criticism to make them part of the ideological apparatus. In the past decades, official film criticism remained ossified and outdated, with very limited social influence. The Western debate of whether the Internet has marked the death of professional film criticism is not applicable to China (see Ebert, 2010; Magasa, 2010). On the contrary, the first generation of Chinese film critics emerged as the Internet fueled the piracy market. Typically born in the 1970s, these new critics were either working in an unrelated profession—for example, Weixidi was a structural engineer—or were college students majoring in film-related areas during the movie forums' heyday (1998–2004). Five to ten years later, these people became influential critics and editors of domestic mass media, or graduate students in film (usually at overseas institutions), while still maintaining active online presences. Besides the most renowned figures, the Internet also gave birth to numerous amateur film critics and everyday-life film reviews. Director Jia Zhangke once mentioned that the avid cinephiles nurtured by pirated films, with whom he mingled, were people working as "airplane repairmen and bill stickers" (Jia, 2009, p. 35). The entire scene in China echoes the earliest research of Katz and Lazarsfeld (2003) on "movie leaders," recognized and respected by peers, who rise from the community and the audience, instead of being appointed by media institutions. The fact that such people later took up gatekeeping roles in print media further attests to both the different cross-media dynamics of the Chinese media environment, and the decentralized tendencies that orient exploration of new films.

Second, movie talk carries rich and unquantifiable accounts of viewing experience, which distinguishes it from lists of bestsellers and recommendation systems based on collaborative filtering. The latter collect and aggregate hits and purchases without considering consumers' evaluations and opinions; they are essentially reactive, and thus promote a systematic bias towards popularity (Webster, 2011). Even if some recommendation systems integrate user ratings into the algorithms, their results pale when faced with the multifarious dimensions and subtleties displayed in movie talk. People may still choose to see a movie, regardless of its otherwise mediocre ratings, if they are struck by a novel connection nicely depicted in a review, or a small conversation. In this sense, movie talk helps to cultivate what Susan Sontag (2001) calls "the new sensibility" by generating a pluralistic set of ways looking at cultural products and the world, which leads to "an adoption of taste criteria flexible enough to accommodate the sheer variety of releases" (Taylor, 2001, p. 95).

Finally, movie talk enables the utmost performativity in cultural consumption. In *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu (1984) points out that consuming specific types of culture signals an individual's social status. The emphasis is not on what cultural products one consumes, but on the actual practices of one's

cultural consumption (Holt, 1997; Sullivan & Katz-Gerro, 2007, p. 124). For example, displaying one's choice of films and talking about the viewing experience is essentially different from consuming the same films in private. So far, researchers have tended to highlight the social function of media consumption as a means of making water cooler conversation, a search for commonality which systematically consolidates media consumption (e.g., Webster, 2011, p. 60). But a countervailing force is overlooked: the yearning for distinction that may result in the consumption of esoteric and obscure cultural items, whether they be considered high culture, or simply located on the margins of a wide cultural pool (see Peterson & Kern, 1996; Sullivan & Katz-Gerro, 2007). In fact, postwar American movie cultism emerged through a vigorous reassertion of oppositional snobbery, and it ended up broadening the scope of tastes in society (Taylor, 2001).  Such a process cannot develop without the crucial means of film criticism, or movie talk.[4]

## Conclusion

From the mid-1980s to 2005, the film inventory in China developed from one characterized by "image deprivation" to one that consisted of huge varieties of world cinema. This was not simply a story of how the black market rose up to meet people's preexisting, unsatisfied demands, but more a chronological representation of expanding cultural appreciation at a macro-level. The case serves as a grand laboratory to reexamine our ideas about evolving media consumption on a structural level; it evokes visions of unconventional paths to increasingly diversified cultural markets.

The history of Chinese pirate film consumption shows that a giant illegitimate cultural market alone, like the national network of video halls, does not guarantee diversified cultural preferences. Nor does a nonlinear on-demand media system, such as the market of cheap pirated compact discs, generate the diversity. Here, the Chinese piracy case supports previous research in "normal" markets, in that the nonlinear mode of distribution, by itself, is even more susceptible to concentration than linear delivery systems (Webster, 2011, p. 57).

On the contrary, cultivation of wider cultural appreciation requires certain structured media environments that make the consumer aware of what is out there that may suit them. As the Chinese case also demonstrates, the recipe for a broadening of the societal scope of film tastes is a market of sheer availability and affordability, combined with a media environment comprised solely of movie talk. Movie talk is generated bottom-up on a large scale by consumers themselves; it, in turn, constitutes the crucial structural context within which they enact their agency of consumption. Apart from being rich in opinions and experiences that generate empathy, movie talk also enables performative consumption of culture in which the yearning for distinction encourages exploration of new and potentially "uncomfortable" pieces. Thus, it drives consumers' choices toward more heterogeneous patterns.

Six years have passed since a Chinese movie buff rushed to the community store for a new pirated DVD after reading an affecting blog post by her favorite film critic. The ecological dynamics of the

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[4] A society's general craving for individual differences and its level of snobbery is historically and culturally contingent. It is not unreasonable to suspect that, in contemporary China, the yearning for cultural distinction may be stronger than it is in a country like the United States.

Chinese pirated film market have not stopped evolving. In terms of film distribution, while hard-good piracy like that of DVDs continues to be immensely popular, Internet piracy is growing enormously (Barboza, 2010; IIPA, 2010). This change further loosens the structural restrictions on product availability. As for the media environment, movie talk remains the major form of market orientation, but giant online social network sites for cinephiles like Douban.com have started to occupy a major role in its facilitation and expansion. As ever more people get involved, certain types of online statistics have also been made available to the public. Indeed, new rounds of experiments are being held in the grand laboratory of Chinese film piracy. What can those tell us about cultural consumption, cultural market, and social media? Only more sociological investigations will show.

**Appendix 1**

People's Republic of China: Estimated Trade Losses Due to Piracy (in millions of US dollars) and Piracy Rates, 1995-2005.[5]

|  | *1995* | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* | *2001* | *2002* | *2003* | *2004* | *2005* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Loss** | **124.0** | **120.0** | **120.0** | **120.0** | **120.0** | **120.0** | **160.0** | **168.0** | **178.0** | **280.0** | **244.0** |
| **Rate** | **100%** | **85%** | **75%** | **90%** | **90%** | **90%** | **88%** | **91%** | **95%** | **95%** | **93%** |
| Totals * | 2,323. | 2,309. | 2,792. | 2,553. | 2,137. | 1,085. | 1,506. | 1,893. | 2,859. | 2,530. | 2,643. |
| Proportion * | 5.3% | 5.2% | 4.3% | 4.7% | 5.6% | 11.1% | 10.6% | 8.9% | 6.2% | 11.1% | 9.2% |

*Sources*: Compiled from annual statistics by IIPA "Special 301" Reports, People's Republic of China (http://www.iipa.com/countryreports.html#C)
* *Totals* are the total estimated losses due to piracy, including sections of motion pictures, sound recordings, business software applications, entertainment software, and books. I calculated the proportion of the motion picture sector in the total loss.

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[5] We must bear in mind that the accuracy and validity of the estimates, however, are questionable, and especially may be exaggerated. See for detail: National Research Council (2000). *The digital dilemma: Intellectual property in the information age.* Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press; Priest, E. (2006). In addition, the reported loss results only from piracy of physical copies; they do not include losses from the thousands of websites and numerous peer-to-peer file-sharing networks that make films free to Internet users in China. Thus, numbers of the recent years may be underestimated. In 2004, the Motion Picture Association (MPA) commissioned to develop a methodology that analyzes both physical and Internet piracy, which refers to all piracy on the Internet or through mobile communications platforms and similar technologies. 2005 was the last year that the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) released statistics on the motion pictures section.

**Appendix 2: Films in Weixidi's blog in the Year 2005\***

| Films being reviewed, or Topics being discussed | Films mentioned and commented |
|---|---|
| **January** | |
| Shimotsuma monogatari [Kamikaze Girls] (2004, Tetsuya Nakashima, Japan) | Ni pour, ni contre (bien au contraire) [Not for, or Against (Quite the Contrary)] (2002, Cédric Klapisch, France) |
| Sekai no chûshin de, ai o sakebu [Crying Out Love, in the Centre of the World] (2004, Isao Yukisada, Japan) | Quill (2004, Yôichi Sai, Japan) |
| How mainland Chinese cinema represents reality | Chung Kuo – Cina (1972, Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy); Xin xiang [The True-Hearted] (1992, Zhou Sun, China); Piao liang ma ma [Breaking the Silence] (2000, Zhou Sun, China); Zhou Yu de huo che [Zhou Yu's Train] (2002, Zhou Sun, China); Lie chang zha sha [On the Hunting Ground] (1984, Zhuangzhuang Tian, China); Dao ma zei [The Horse Thief] (1986, Zhuangzhuang Tian, China); Xiaocheng zhi chun [Springtime in a Small Town] (2002, Zhuangzhuang Tian, China); Guizi laile [Devils on the Doorstep] (2000, Wen Jiang, China); Xuese Qingchen [Bloody Morning] (1992, Shaohong Li, China) |
| Chinese Cinema and food | Chung Hing sam lam [Chungking Express] (1994, Kar Wai Wong, Hong Kong); Fa yeung nin wa [In the Mood for Love] (2000, Kar Wai Wong, Hong Kong); Lian lian feng chen [Dust in the Wind] (1986, Hsiao-hsien Hou, Taiwan); Hai shang hua [Flowers of Shanghai] (1998, Hsiao-hsien Hou, Taiwan); Bei qing cheng shi [A City of Sadness] (1989, Hsiao-hsien Hou, Taiwan) |
| **February** | |
| La mala educación [Bad Education] (2004, Pedro Almodóvar, Spain) | |
| **March** | |
| Sennen joyû [Millennium Actress] (2001, | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Satoshi Kon, Japan) | |
| Open Water (2003, Chris Kentis, US) | |
| Vendredi soir [Friday Night] (2002, Claire Denis, France) | |
| Clear and Present Danger (1994,Phillip Noyce, US) | Patriot Games (1992, Phillip Noyce, US); The Saint (1997, Phillip Noyce, US) |
| The Sum of All Fears (2002, Phil Alden Robinson, US) | The Bone Collector (1999, Phillip Noyce, US); Sliver (1993, Phillip Noyce, US) |
| Yi ge mo sheng nu ren de lai xin [Letter from an Unknown Woman] (2004, Jinglei Xu, China) | |
| Jules et Jim [Jules and Jim] (1962, François Truffaut, France) | L'histoire d'Adèle H. [The Story of Adele H] (1975, François Truffaut, France) |
| My Own Private Idaho (1991, Gas Van Sant, US) | Zabriskie Point (1970, Michelangelo Antonioni, Italy); The Chronicle History of King Henry the Fifth with His Battell Fought at Agincourt in France (1944, Laurence Olivier, UK) |
| Hong Kong Film Awards 2000 | Kung fu [Kong Fu Hustle] (2004, Stephen Chow, Hong Kong); Siu lam juk kau [Shaolin Soccer] (2001, Stephen Chow, Hong Kong); Wong gok hak yau [One Nite in Mongkok] (2004, Tung-Shing Yee, Hong Kong); 2046 (2004, Kar Wai Wong, Hong Kong); Tian xia wu zei [A World Without Thieves] (2004, Xiaogang Feng, China); Yau doh lung fu bong [Throw Down] (2004, Johnnie To, Hong Kong); Dai si gin [Breaking News] (2004, Johnnie To, Hong Kong); Xin jing cha gu shi [New Police Story] (2004, Benny Chan, Hong Kong); McDull, prince de la bun (2004, Toe Yuen, Hong Kong) |
| Random | Cha ma gu dao xi lie [Tea-Horse Road Series: Delamu] (2005, Zhuangzhuang Tian, China) |
| **April** | |
| A Chinese book about Hitchcock | The Farmer's Wife (1928, Alfred Hitchcock, UK); Vertigo (1958, Alfred Hitchcock, US) The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog (1927, Hitchcock, UK); Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari. [The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari] (1920, Robert Wiene, Germany); Der letzte Mann [The Last Laugh] (1924, F. W. Murnau, Germany); |

| | The Pleasure Garden (1926, Alfred Hitchcock, UK); The Birds (1963, Alfred Hitchcock, US); Frenzy (1972, Alfred Hitchcock, UK); The Manxman (1929, Alfred Hitchcock, UK) |
|---|---|
| Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie [The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie] (1972, Luis Buñuel, France) | Un Chien Andalou [An Andalusian Dog] (1929, Luis Buñuel, France) |
| M (1931, Fritz Lang, Germany) | The Man Who Knew Too Much (1959, Alfred Hitchcock, US) |
| The Crying Game (1992, Neil Jordan, UK) | |
| Vertigo (1958, Alfred Hitchcock, US) | |
| The School of Rock (2003, Richard Linklater, US) | |
| **May** | |
| Papillon (1973, Franklin Schaffner, US) | Escape from Alcatraz (1979, Don Siegel, US); |
| The Shawshank Redemption (1994, Frank Darabont, US) | |
| Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith (2005, George Lucas, US) | The Wizard of Oz (1939, Victor Fleming et al, US); |
| Saam cha hau [Divergence] (2005, Benny Chan, Hong Kong) | Tian mi mi [Comrades: Almost a Love Story] (1996, Peter Chan, Hong Kong) ; Xin jing cha gu shi [New Police Story] (2004, Benny Chan, Hong Kong); Speed (1994, Jan de Bont, US); The Rock (1996, Michael Bay, US); Chung fung dui liu feng gaai tau [Big Bullet] (1996, Benny Chan, Hong Kong) |
| Le Cercle Rouge (1970, Jean-Pierre Melville, France) | Mission: Impossible (1995, Brian de Palma, US) |
| **June** | |
| Batman Begins (2005, Christopher Nolan, US) | Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban (2004, Alfonso Cuarón, US) |
| Tau man ji D [Initial D] (2005, Wai-keung Lau et al, Hong Kong) | |
| Mighty Aphrodite (1995, Woody Allen, US) | Melinda and Melinda (2004, Woody Allen, US) |
| Zao Chun Er Yue [Threshold of Spring] (1963, Tieli Xie, China) | |
| Qing hong [Shanghai Dreams] (2005, Xiaoshuai Wang, China) | Gu ling jie shao nian sha ren shi jian [A Brighter Summer Day] (1991, EdwardYang, Taiwan); Zire darakhatan zeyton [Through the Olive Trees] (1994, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Abbas Kiarostami, France/Iran) |
| **July** | |
| Dong [The Hole] (1998, Ming-liang Tsai, Taiwan) | |
| 36 Quai des Orfèvres [36th Precinct] (2004, Olivier Marchal, France) | Heat (1995, Michael Mann, US); Mou gaan dou [Infernal Affairs] (2002, Wai-keung Lau & Alan Mak, Hong Kong) |
| Le Notti Bianche [White Nights] (1957, Luchino Visconti, Italy) | |
| Mr. & Mrs. Smith (2005, Doug Liman, US) | The Bourne Identity (2002, Doug Liman, US); Fight Club (1999, David Fincher, US); Kramer vs. Kramer (1979, Robert Benton, US); La Femme Nikita (1990, Luc Besson, France); True Lies (1994, James Cameron, US) |
| **August** | |
| War of the Worlds (2005, Steven Spielberg, US) | Independence Day (1996, Roland Emmerich, US) |
| Heaven Can Wait (1943, Ernst Lubitsch, US) | |
| Lhing vjags kyi ma ni rdo vbum [The Silent Holy Stones] (2005, Tresden, China/Tibetan) | |
| **September** | |
| San wa [The Myth] (2005, Stanley Tong, Hong Kong) | |
| The Killers (1946, Robert Siodmak, US); The Killers (1964, Don Siegel, US) | |
| Jeux d'enfants [Love Me If You Dare] (2003, Yann Samuell, France) | |
| Le dernier métro [The Last Metro] (1980, François Truffaut, France) | La sirène du Mississipi [Mississippi Mermaid] (1969, François Truffaut, France); To Be or Not to Be (1942, Ernst Lubitsch, US); The Woman Next Door (1981, François Truffaut, France); Laissez-passer [Safe Conduct] (2002, Bertrand Tavernier, France); Les quatre cents coups [The 400 Blows] (1959, François Truffaut, France); Vivement dimanche! [Confidentially Yours] (1983, François Truffaut, France); Jules et Jim [Jules and Jim] (1962, François Truffaut, France); La nuit américaine [Day for Night] (1973, François Truffaut, France) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Hwal [The Bow] (2005, Ki-duk Kim, South Korea) | Bin-jip [3-Iron] (2004, Ki-duk Kim, South Korea); Bom yeoreum gaeul gyeoul geurigo bom [Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring] (2003, Ki-duk Kim, South Korea); Samaria [Samaritan Girl] (2004, Ki-duk Kim, South Korea); Seom [The Isle] (2000, Ki-duk Kim, South Korea) |

**October**

| | |
|---|---|
| Random | Trois couleurs: Bleu [Three Colors: Blue] (1993, Krzysztof Kieslowski, France/Poland); Trzy kolory: Bialy [Three Colors: White] (1994, Krzysztof Kieslowski, France/Poland); Trois couleurs: Rouge [Three Colors: Red] (1994, Krzysztof Kieslowski, France/Poland); |
| Hak se wui [Election] (2005, Johnnie To, Hong Kong) | Cheung fo [The Mission] (1999, Johnnie To, Hong Kong); PTU (2003, Johnnie To, Hong Kong); Yau doh lung fu bong [Throw Down] (2004, Johnnie To, Hong Kong); Sergio Leone's Westerns |
| The Horse's Mouth (1958, Ronald Neame, UK) | |
| Random | The Seven Year Itch (1955, Billy Wilder, US); The Apartment (1960, Billy Wilder, US) |
| Random | Cinema Paradiso (1988, Giuseppe Tornatore, Italy) |
| Nikutai no mon [Gate of Flesh] (1964, Seijun Suzuki, Japan) | Kenka erejî [The Born Fighter] (1966, Seijun Suzuki, Japan); Yajû no seishun [Youth of the Beast] (1963, Seijun Suzuki, Japan) |

**November**

| | |
|---|---|
| Hauru no ugoku shiro [Howl's Moving Castle] (2004, Hayao Miyazaki, Japan) | Tonari no Totoro [My Neighbor Totoro] (1988, Hayao Miyazaki, Japan); Mononoke-hime [Princess Mononoke] (1997, Hayao Miyazaki, Japan) |
| Saat po long [Kill Zone] (2005, Wilson Yip, Hong Kong) | Xin jing cha gu shi [New Police Story] (2004, Benny Chan, Hong Kong); Saam cha hau [Divergence] (2005, Benny Chan, Hong Kong) |
| Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (2005, Mike Newell, US) | Four Weddings and a Funeral (1994, Mike Newell, UK) |
| Tom yum goong [The Protector] (2005, Prachya Pinkaew, Thailand) | One-bak [Ong-Bak: The Thai Warrior] (2003, Prachya Pinkaew, Thailand) |
| Les poupées russes [Russian Dolls] (2005, Cédric Klapisch, France) | L'auberge espagnole [The Spanish Apartment] (2002, Cédric Klapisch, France); |

| | Chin bui but dzui [Drink-Drank-Drunk] (2005, Tung-Shing Yee, Hong Kong); Du zi deng dai [Waiting Alone] (2004, Dayyan Eng, China) |
|---|---|
| Me and You and Everyone We Know (2005, Miranda July, US) | American Beauty (1999, Sam Mendes, US); Lost in Translation (2003, Sophia Coppola, US) |
| Kedamono no ken [Sword of the Beast] (1965, Hideo Gosha, Japan) | Sanbiki no samurai [Three Outlaw Samurai] (1964, Hideo Gosha, Japan) |
| **December** | |
| Wu ji [The Promise] (2005, Kaige Chen, China) | Ba wang bie ji [Farewell My Concubine] (1993, Kaige Chen, China) |
| Wan zhu [The Troubleshooters] (1989, Jiashan Mi, China) | Lun hui [Samsara] (1988, Jianxin Huang, China); Da chuan qi (1988, Daying Ye, China) |
| Caché [Hidden] (2005, Michael Hanake, France) | Funny Games (1997, Michael Hanake, Germany); Code inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages [Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys] (2000, Michael Hanake, France); La pianiste [The Piano Teacher] (2001, Michael Hanake, Austria); Chi to hone [Blood and Bones] (2004, Yôichi Sai, Japan) |
| Hong yan [Dam Street] (2005, Yu Li, France/China) | |
| Ru guo · Ai [Perhaps Love] (2005, Peter Chan, China) | Moulin Rouge! (2001, Baz Luhrmann, US); Chicago (2002, Rob Marshall, US); Singin' in the Rain (1952, Stanley Donen & Gene Kelly, US); Dancer in the Dark (2000, Lars von Trier, Spain) |
| Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (2005, Tim Burton, US) | Big Fish (2003, Tim Burton, US); Edward Scissorhands (1990, Tim Burton, US); 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968, Stanley Kubrick, UK) |

* Data are collected from Weixidi's blog, *Zhaochang shenghuo* (Live as Usual), at http://vcd.cinepedia.cn. I compiled all the films he mentioned in the blog for the entire year of 2005, removed two films that he suggested he had not had a chance to watch, and listed the rest in the table. The left column contains films or topics that a single blog post discusses. These were films he just watched or re-watched (if a better edition was pirated and released) not long before posting. In the right column are films he discussed in the same post. These were films he had seen in the past. The table uses the International Movie Database (IMDb.com) for the film title (with English translation if non-Anglophone), year of release, name of director, and country of production.

The exact composition of the Chinese pirate film market cannot be substantiated scientifically. These data intend only to convey the general flavor and scope of film viewing of a popular Chinese film critic in 2005, the closing year for the two-decade history presented in this paper. Over 90% of the films being commented on in his blog were not legally obtainable in China (Weixidi was based in Nanking, a second-

tier city). Even for the Chinese films here, more than half were censored by the authority and circulated only in the piracy market.

In my personal correspondence with him regarding his audience, Weixidi describes his impression that from the establishment of the blog to 2005, the active participants gradually expanded from the old, movie forum circles to "broadly defined *wenyi qingnian*." This Chinese term, literally translated as "literary and art youth," can refer to *anyone*, self-perceived or perceived by others, to take some interest in reading, writing, movies, or music. It is an all-over-the-place, everyday term. Weixidi comments that followers of film bloggers like himself are a broad population: "some are students or perspective students in cinema, but more are just passionate cinephiles"—"students [in all areas], and the nine-to-fivers with stable jobs" (Personal correspondence, November 27, 2011).

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