Academic Education Publishing House
-AEPH-

2024 Annual Review of the Development of China's Film Industry

Yu Liu
Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications, Chongqing, China

Abstract: The year 2024 marked a downturn for China's film industry. The box office has dropped back to levels seen a decade ago, and the number of moviegoers has decreased by 240 million compared to 2015. Despite efforts to attract audiences through lower ticket prices and aggressive early sales, the impact has been limited. The main contributors to box office revenue have been popular films and key release periods. An noticeable trend is the continued shift of the overall box office to third- and fourth-tier cities, along with a steady increase in the market share of imported films. The landscape of film production remains diverse and rich, but comedy films continue to be the most preferred genre among audiences. In the context of economic recovery and adjustment following the pandemic, there have been significant changes in film creation, box office performance, and audience behavior. These changes present multiple challenges for the Chinese film industry.

Keywords: 2024; Chinese Cinema; Film Market; Film Production; Film Industry

1. Film Market

1.1 Box Office Analysis: A New Decline in the Last Decade

In 2024, the box office revenue for Chinese films was 42.502 billion RMB, with domestic films accounting for 33.439 billion RMB, or 78.68%. The number of moviegoers in urban cinemas reached 1.01 billion. A total of 79 films grossed over 100 million RMB at the box office, 55 of which were domestic films [1]. Compared to 2023, with a box office revenue of 54.9 billion RMB, there was a notable decrease of 22.6%. This figure is even lower than the 43.8 billion RMB recorded in 2015 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Changes in Mainland China's Film Box Office (2015-2024) (Unit: 100 Million RMB)

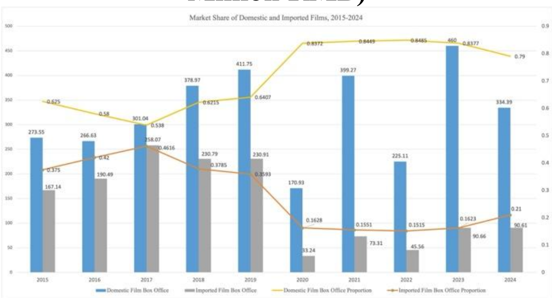

Figure 2. Market Share of Domestic and Imported Films (2015-2024) (Unit: 100 Million RMB; %)

However, the overseas box office performance was impressive. *The Wandering Earth 2* earned 600 million USD globally, and *Lost in the Stars* set a new record for Chinese films in North America and Australia since 2020. In 2024, China's box office contributed 5.914 billion USD to the global film market, ranking second globally, out of a total global box office of 27.857 billion USD.

Although domestic films continue to dominate the box office, both the box office revenue per film and their market share have decreased. Domestic films earned a total of 33.439 billion RMB, accounting for 79% of the market share, while imported films generated 9.061 billion RMB, making up 21%. Data shows that imported films have set new records in terms of quantity, box office revenue, and market share, although they still lag behind pre-pandemic levels (see Figure 2).

In 2024, a total of 74 films grossed over 100 million RMB at the box office, with 50 of them being domestic productions. Seven films earned over 1 billion RMB, and 18 films grossed over 500 million RMB (see Table 1). Compared to the previous year, where 12 films grossed over 1 billion RMB and 31 films earned over 500 million RMB, this marks a significant decline. In recent years, domestic films have made notable progress in storytelling, production quality, and genre exploration, further consolidating their box office dominance in the local film industry (see Table 2).

Table 1. Top 10 Domestic Films by Box Office in China (2024)

Rank	Film Title	Total Box Office (in 100 million RMB)	Average Ticket Price	Country/ Region	Genre
1	Hot and Spicy	34.17	48	China	Comedy/Drama
2	Pegasus 2	33.61	48	China	Comedy/Drama
3	Claw Machine	33.27	41.4	China	Comedy/Drama
4	Article 20	24.29	46.3	China	Comedy/Drama
5	Boonie Bears: Time Twist	19.84	46.0	China	Animation/Comedy
6	A Place Called Silence	13.51	41.2	China	Crime/Suspense
7	The Volunteers: Battle for Survival	12.06	41.3	China	Drama/War
8	Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire	9.56	42.8	USA	Sci-Fi/Action
9	How Do You Live	7.91	38.9	Japan	Drama/Animation
10	Alien: Romulus	7.86	40.6	USA	Horror/Thriller

Data Source: Lighthouse APP, Table Compiled by the Author

Table 2. Top 10 Domestic Films by Box Office in China (2024)

Ran k	Film Title	Total Box Office (in 100 million RMB)	Average Ticket Price	Country/ Region	Genre
1	Hot and Spicy	34.17	48	China	Comedy/Drama
2	Pegasus 2	33.61	48	China	Comedy/Drama
3	Claw Machine	33.27	41.4	China	Comedy/Drama
4	Article 20	24.29	46.3	China	Comedy/Drama
5	Boonie Bears: Time Twist	19.84	46.0	China	Animation/Comedy
6	A Place Called Silence	13.51	41.2	China	Crime/Suspense
7	The Volunteers: Battle for Survival	12.06	41.3	China	Drama/War
8	The Last Frenzy	7.81	40.1	China	Comedy/Drama
9	Her Story	7.17	42.2	China	Drama/Romance
10	Twilight of the Warriors: Walled In	6.85	41.0	China	Action/Crime

Data Source: Lighthouse APP, Table Compiled by the Author

In 2024, China screened a total of 93 imported films, with a combined box office revenue of ¥9.061 billion. *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* led the pack with ¥956 million in earnings, slightly behind the previous year's top-performing import, *Fast X*. These films were released across various periods throughout the year, excluding the Chinese New Year season. They helped diversify the domestic market and met audience demand. Overall, the imported films were concentrated in a few genres, with science fiction and animated films dominating the top ten. However, there was a lack of imported films with exceptional box office appeal. While American films continued to dominate, the source countries for imports remained relatively limited. In contrast, Japanese animated films saw a steady rise in box office earnings. After winning the Oscar for Best Animated Feature, Hayao Miyazaki's *How Do You Live?* earned ¥791 million after its release in mainland China.2024 also marked the 30th anniversary of Hollywood's revenue-sharing model in the Chinese market. (See Table 3)

Table 3. Top 10 Imported Films by Box Office Revenue in China in 2024

Rank	Film Title	Total Box Office (in 100 million RMB)	Average Ticket Price	Country /Region	Genre
1	Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire	9.56	42.8	USA	Sci-Fi/Action
2	How Do You Live	7.91	38.9	Japan	Drama/Animation

3	Alien: Romulus	7.86	40.6	USA	Horror/Thriller
4	Venom: Let There Be Carnage	6.84	41.3	USA	Action/Sci-Fi
5	Deadpool & Wolverine	4.30	43.4	USA	Sci-Fi
6	Minions: The Rise of Gru	4.23	39.7	USA	Action/Comedy
7	Kung Fu Panda 4	3.73	40.6	USA	Animation/Action
8	Dune: Part Two	3.52	47.8	USA	Sci-Fi/Action
9	Inside Out 2	3.44	41.0	USA	Animation
10	Spy Family: Code White	2.93	38.8	Japan	Animation/Comedy

Data Sourced from Lighthouse APP; Table Compiled by the Author

In China, the release date is no longer merely a time window for film releases; it has evolved into a cultural phenomenon, which is underrepresented by complex industrial logic, market mechanisms and audience psychology [2]. In the first half of 2024, mainland Chinese films grossed a total of ¥23.773 billion, representing a 9.5% decline year-on-year. In the second half of the year, box office earnings reached ¥18.727 billion. In January, there were no major films that satisfied audiences, but the Chinese New Year period saw a significant 18.47% increase. The box office revenue for mainland films during the Spring Festival reached ¥8.016 billion, growing by 18.47%, making it the first time the Spring Festival box office surpassed ¥8 billion. Audience attendance totaled 163 million, with 3.9029 million screenings, both showing significant growth compared to the previous year. Four films, including *Hot and Spicy*, accounted for 97.7% of the total box office revenue. The growth in ticket sales was notably driven by the increase in people returning home for the holiday, with a clear trend of the box office spreading to third- and fourth-tier cities [3]. The box office for each month is shown in Figure 3.

During the Spring Festival period, the absence of high-quality visual effects films led to a decline in revenue from special effect theaters. The box office performance of major films was largely driven by female audiences. Public data shows a noticeable increase in the number of people returning home this year. Thanks to several high-quality films and a longer holiday period, audiences had more viewing options, and as a result, the overall Spring Festival box office set a new record.

During the Qingming Festival, the box office grossed ¥842 million over three days, breaking the previous record of ¥822 million set in 2021. Imported films played a key role, with Hayao Miyazaki's *How Do You Live?* leading the box office, setting a new record for Miyazaki's films in the Chinese market.

The May Day holiday box office revenue reached ¥1.527 billion, reflecting a modest 0.38% growth year-on-year. Lacking the support of a major blockbuster, the box office performance was driven mainly by competition among dozens of new films. Overall, the May Day box office was weaker compared to pre-pandemic levels, with per-screen attendance at only half of what it was before the pandemic.

The summer holiday period, being one of the longest seasons, did not perform as expected: the total box office revenue reached ¥11.643 billion, nearly halving compared to 2023. The main reason for this decline was the lack of high-quality films to support the market. Only three films grossed over ¥500 million, with the imported film Alien: Romulus ranking third. Despite the addition of more theaters and screens, the market downturn could not be reversed due to the impact of short videos and the absence of films with strong box office appeal. However, the summer holiday period still contributed nearly 60% of the total annual box office revenue.

During the Mid-Autumn Festival, the three-day box office revenue was ¥389 million, showing poor overall performance, and the market faced a slowdown.

The National Day period saw a total box office of ¥2.104 billion, with no blockbusters and an average performance. The National Day holiday was one day shorter than last year. Despite a strong start with many films, the market lacked momentum in the following days. Before the National Day holiday, the imported film Transformers: Origins briefly led the market. However, the 749 Bureau experienced a decline in reputation, and other films failed to pick up the slack. The film with a significant contribution to the box office was The Volunteers: Battle for Survival. Compared to previous years, the number of viewers and the number of screenings during the National Day period both saw a decrease.

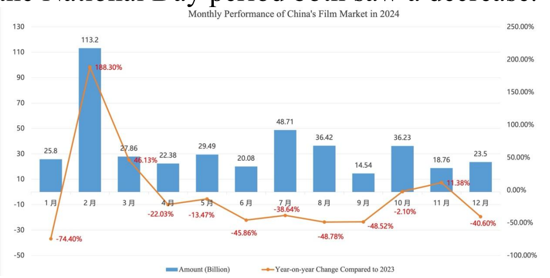

Figure 3. Monthly Performance of the Chinese Film Market in 2024 (Unit: Billion ¥)

1.2 Film Production: Significant Decline Compared to the Previous Year

In 2024, a total of 612 domestic feature films were produced, with an overall film output of 873 titles, showing a significant decrease compared to 2023. 497 films were released in theaters, 11 fewer than in 2023, as shown in Figure 4. Nonetheless, this figure still reflects the ongoing vitality of the film production market.

Compared to 2023, the proportion of imported films among the released films remained relatively stable. However, in terms of box office contribution, domestic films underperformed relative to imported films. Among the imported films, the number of American releases slightly decreased to 36, accounting for 61.3% of the imported film box office revenue. In contrast, Japanese films saw a significant increase, with 22 films released, contributing 23.8% of the imported film box office. A portion of imported films also came from regions such as Thailand and India [4]. Following the end of the pandemic, the number of imported films is gradually recovering, as shown in Figure 5.

1.3 Film Audiences: Significant Decline in Viewership

In 2024, the total number of moviegoers in China reached 1.01 billion, a 22.3% decline compared to 2023 (see Figure 6). The significant drop in moviegoers is primarily due to more rational consumption behaviors amid economic challenges, compounded by a lack of high-quality blockbuster films to attract viewers, and the impact of various entertainment options such as short videos. Audience growth continues to be primarily in third- and fourth-tier cities, where the box office share remains relatively stable. However, first- and second-tier cities have slightly higher viewing frequencies. In 2024, the top five cities with the highest number of moviegoers were Shanghai, Haikou, Beijing, Wuhan, and Lhasa. According to Maoyan Research Institute, another significant change in movie audiences is that, for four consecutive years, the average age of domestic moviegoers has been increasing. Among the top ten box office films, only *A Place Called Silence* and *Alien: Romulus* had relatively younger audiences.

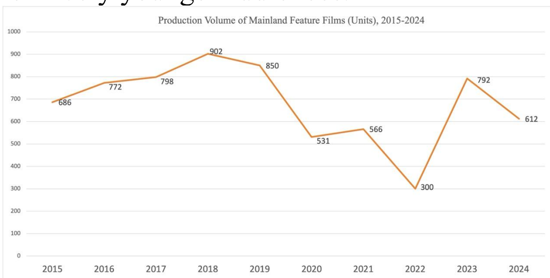

Figure 4. Domestic Feature Film Production in Mainland China (2015–2024) (Unit: Number of Films)

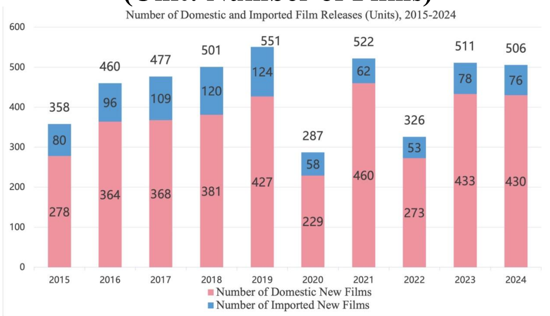

Figure 5. Number of Domestic and Imported Films Released in Mainland China (2015–2024) (Unit: Number of Films)

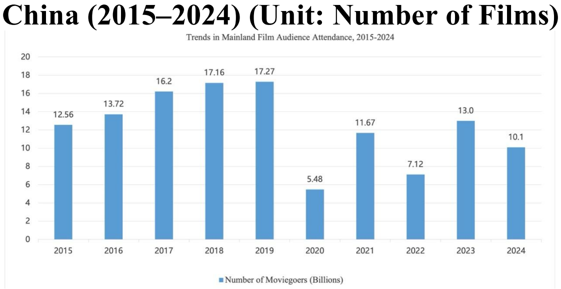

Figure 6. Change in the Number of Moviegoers in Mainland China from 2015 to 2024 (Unit: 100 Million People)

Data indicates that in November 2024, cities like Jiangmen and Linyi, categorized as third- and fourth-tier cities, experienced a box office growth exceeding 25%. This suggests that the film box office market remains active in these emerging markets. As the film markets in first- and second-tier cities become increasingly saturated, the substantial audience base provided by young populations in third- and fourth-tier cities, including county towns, has become a new focal point for competition. Consequently, film distributors have adjusted their promotional strategies, shifting from organizing specific promotional events to implementing low-price promotions and themed theaters to enhance attendance rates in third- and fourth-tier cities. Relevant cinema chains have proactively expanded to seize market share, and undoubtedly, the cinema market in third- and fourth-tier cities will continue to be a battleground for dominance. As "small-town youth" in these cities gradually become the primary audience, exploring diversified development paths and establishing targeted communication strategies to meet varying viewing demands have become key challenges for filmmakers.

The characteristics and trends of China's film box office distribution are: growth is primarily driven by lower-tier markets, with combined box office revenues from third-, fourth-, and fifth-tier cities surpassing half; leading cities, notably Beijing and Shanghai, maintain high box office concentrations; significant variations across release periods, such as during the Spring Festival and summer holidays, where box office shares in third- and fourth-tier cities notably exceed regular periods. This indirectly reflects the evolving landscape of movie audiences: dominance by first- and second-tier cities, the rise of third- and fourth-tier cities, and the unlocking of potential in fifth-tier cities.

Another characteristic of moviegoers is that the proportion of female viewers accounts for 58%, making them the primary supporters of female-centered films. In fact, in some films, the proportion of female viewers is more than twice that of male viewers. The rise of female audiences represents not only a transformation brought about by the diversification of film genres and the innovation of characters, but also a reflection of China's progress in gender perceptions and the upgrading of cultural consumption.

Moviegoers' tastes also differ across cities. The segmentation of movie audiences, influenced by the internet, is most evident among viewers in third- and fourth-tier cities. Compared to first- and second-tier cities, they are more tolerant of and accepting of the roughness in domestic films. On the other hand, moviegoers in first- and second-tier cities are the main contributors to the box office success of artistic films and documentaries like A Generation of Romance and The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru. This divergence in cultural consumption habits and aesthetic preferences has led to an increasingly clear binary structure in the Chinese film market.

1.4 Cinema Chains and Screens: Exploring Multiple Value-Added Methods

The situation in cinema construction and operations is also far from optimistic. In 2024, 1,026 new cinemas were added, and 6,103 new screens were installed (see Figure 7). While this represents a significant recovery compared to pre-pandemic levels, there are still considerable pressures in operations. Among cinema chains, China Film Group's cinema chain built 103 new cinemas, making it the only chain to exceed 100 new cinemas in a single year. China Film South and Zhejiang Film Times built 85 and 81 cinemas, respectively. Wanda Cinema Line ranked fourth with 67 new cinemas in 2024. Additionally, Huaxia United, Shanghai United, Dadi Cinemas, and Happy Blue Ocean all added more than 50 new cinemas each in the same year [5].

To increase revenue, cinemas have implemented diversified operational strategies. For instance, content such as concert films has been brought to the big screen, and other entertainment activities like gaming have become new ways to utilize cinema space. In December 2024, China's first Mandarin-language concert film, Zhang Jie: Yao Bei Dou World Tour Concert, was released, grossing 28 million yuan on its opening day and breaking multiple records. At the beginning of the year, Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour also became a unique cinema screening format, ultimately achieving a box office revenue of 60 million yuan. These two concert films are not unprecedented; similar instances occurred decades ago. This approach helps cinemas reduce operational risks and explore new revenue streams. Detective Conan: The Crossroads of the Labyrinth held its premiere at the Shanghai Peaceful Night Sakura Rain event, with tickets selling out within hours. The various cherry blossom elements at the screening attracted dedicated Conan fans and couples, creating a unique cinematic experience.

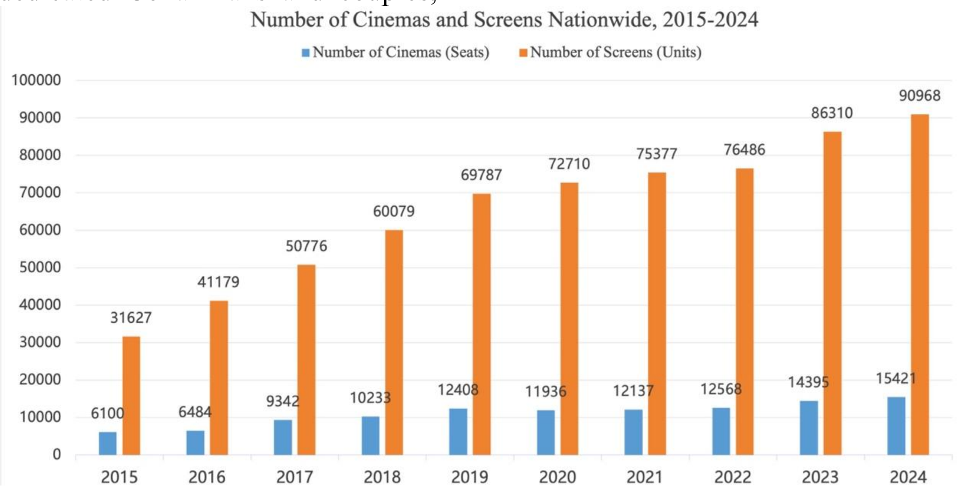

Figure 7. Number of Cinemas and Screens Nationwide from 2015 to 2024 (Units: Seats; Screens)

In 2024, the box office scale of cinema chains showed a year-on-year decline, with 27 chains achieving box office revenues exceeding 300 million yuan. Wanda continued to lead with a significant advantage, accounting for nearly one-fifth of the market share, a trend sustained for eight consecutive years. Leading cinema chains have maintained a clear competitive edge, while medium and small chains face greater challenges (see Table 4).

Table 4. 2024 Annual Revenue Rankings of Cinema Chains Top 10

Rank	Cinema Chain Name	Box Office Revenue	Average Ticket Price	Attendance (10,000 people)	Market Share
1	Wanda Cinema Line (Zhuhai)	6.478 billion yuan	39.8	16000	17.51%
2	China Film South (Shenzhen)	3.294 billion yuan	38.2	8631	8.51%
3	Shanghai United Cinema Line	3.039 billion yuan	41.5	7330	7.8%
4	China Film Digital (Beijing)	2.93 billion yuan	38.5	7611	7.24%
5	GD Dadi Cinema Line (Guangdong)	2.244 billion yuan	36.5	6155	5.83%
6	China Cinema Line	1.876 billion yuan	37.0	5069	5.13%
7	Hengdian Cinema Line	1.657 billion yuan	36.0	4599	4.40%
8	Jiangsu Happy Blue Ocean Cinema Line	1.627 billion yuan	37.2	4372	4.20%
9	Guangzhou Jinyi Zhujiang Cinema Line	1.45 billion yuan	37.7	3842	3.82%
10	Zhejiang Film Times	1.285 billion yuan	36.7	3502	3.34%

1.5 Film Marketing: New Media Marketing Has Become Mainstream, UGC Content Drives Box Office Growth

According to a survey by Lighthouse App, 73% of audiences consider ticket prices above 50 yuan to be "too expensive," while 82% think ticket prices under 30 yuan are "cheap." High ticket prices are undoubtedly a barrier to attracting audiences to cinemas, but low ticket prices do not necessarily serve as a motivator. The average ticket price in 2024 was 42.1 yuan, maintaining a level above 40 yuan for four consecutive years. This figure was slightly lower than that of 2023, marking the second price drop since the end of the pandemic (see Figure 8). However, the decrease was primarily observed in first-tier cities, while ticket prices in third-tier cities actually experienced a slight increase. The decline in attendance suggests that the reduction in ticket prices has not led to audience growth but has instead compelled some films to consider lowering ticket prices as a strategy to attract viewers.

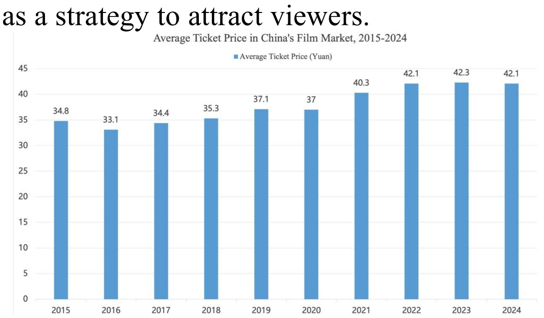

Figure 8. Average Ticket Price in China's Film Market from 2015 to 2024 (Unit: Yuan)

Apart from discount pricing strategies, leveraging new media to generate greater attention has long been a focal point in film marketing. Compared to previous years, interactions in movie promotions on new media platforms have significantly increased. According to a social media marketing analysis by Maoyan Research Institute, the Douyin hashtag for the movie *Article 20* garnered 12 billion views, with 161 trending topics, including 12 at the top position. The official Douyin account amassed 1.483 million followers and received 120 million likes. Notably, Zhao Liying's Douyin post achieved a peak of 390 million views and 8.46 million likes. These statistics underscore the transition of film marketing into a more refined era.

Engaging audiences and generating UGC content have become significant drivers in building pre-release momentum for films. The *2024 Douyin Film Annual Report* indicates that user-generated content and sharing authentic viewing experiences are current trends. In 2024, 4.78 million UGC users published movie-related videos, a 56% year-on-year increase, creating approximately 10.63 million videos with a total of 69.8 billion views—a 372% rise. Shares totaled 158 million (up 193%), and comments reached 51.73 million (a 23% increase). On Douyin, both the quantity and viewership of movie-related videos have surged.

By utilizing user experiences and engaging marketing tactics on Douyin, social media topics were created that captivated audiences. For instance, *@Mingdao* addressed *Ruan Jingtian* on Douyin, sharing an anecdote about being mistaken for the lead in *The Three Evils*, resulting in 600,000 likes. Additionally, users shared fun movie experiences related to *Alien: Covenant*, sparking discussions that propelled the film's topics into the top five trending lists.

2. Film Production

2.1 Film Products: Active Production of Genre Films, Comedy Films Yielding Great Results

Ten years ago, in 2015, action films accounted for one-third of China's box office, followed closely by comedy films. Ten years later, comedy films have successfully dominated the charts, while the box office share of animated films has significantly risen to second place (see Table 5). In 2024, the Chinese film industry is characterized by: comedy dominance, stable animation, the rise of realistic themes, and continuous integration of technological films. However, comedy films' reliance on star power and formulaic plots is expected to decline; animated films continue to successfully attract audiences through strong IPs; realistic themes achieve emotional resonance and positive word-of-mouth by addressing social issues; technology-driven special effects films are reshaping film genres and styles.

Table 5. Box Office Share by Main Film Genres in 2024

Type / Share	Comedy	Animation	Realism	Action	Sci-Fi/Art Films, etc.
Share	36%	19%	16%	14%	15%

Comedy films became the dominant force in the 2024 box office. Among the top five films, *Hot and Spicy*, *Pegasus 2*, *Article 20*, and *Time Twist* were all released during the Spring Festival period, while *Claw Machine* was a summer release. All five films incorporated comedic elements: during family gatherings, comedy films are often the preferred choice to cater to diverse tastes.

Female-centered films have become an important genre that has seen significant breakthroughs following the rise of female creative forces in recent years. *Hot and Spicy* captivated audiences with its clever narrative twist, blending an inspirational female story both on and off the screen, ultimately claiming the title of the year’s top film. *Her Story* garnered widespread attention on social media, remaining at the top of the Douyin movie trending chart for nine consecutive days. Subsequently, the lead actress, Song Jia, saw her search volume increase tenfold, gaining 300,000 new followers. Female-centered films address a broad range of topics, including women’s roles, marriage, rights, and gender discrimination. At present, in domestic films with female themes, only when they tell stories related to women themselves can the identity and significance of women be established [6].

Realistic-themed films generally performed moderately, but *Article 20* achieved both box office success and critical acclaim. The screenplay was inspired by real-life self-defense cases, such as the August 27th Kunshan knife attack and the July 11th Laiyuan self-defense case. The film's title refers to Article 20 of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China. It explores various aspects, including morality and law, and the relationship between secular values and legal systems, while embedding the common legal theme of self-defense within its comedic elements.

The documentary T*he Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* grossed 47 million yuan, sparking widespread international attention. The film also plays a crucial role in the diversification of Chinese film genres, the in-depth exploration of cultural values, and enhancing the country's international communication capabilities.

It is evident that the film market must continually push beyond established narrative frameworks to attract audiences to theaters. Different genres are always able to meet the diverse needs of various audiences.

2.2 Film Talent: Veteran Directors Fade, New Filmmakers Emerge as Pillars

In 2024, the average age of domestic film directors in China is 46, with nearly half of them being from the post-80s generation, and less than one-third from the post-70s generation. Among all working directors, 85% are male. Big-name directors like Feng Xiaogang, Xu Zheng, Ning Hao, and Lu Chuan have all faced box office failures with their films. *If You Are the One 3* reportedly incurred losses of over 160 million yuan; *Back to 1989* was criticized by critics as "a group of poor people watching rich people pretend to be poor and move themselves"; *Good People* failed to generate box office hits due to the disconnect between its creative content and real life; *Boonie Bears: Time Twist* was dubbed by netizens as "a poorly executed film with no plot, effects, or logic." Past reputations and star-studded casts may not guarantee box office success this year. A solid story and high-quality production are now what draw audiences' attention.

In 2024, many new films were directed by emerging filmmakers, with their overall performance being fairly satisfactory. *A Place Called Silence*, directed by Ke Wenli, grossed 1.35 billion yuan at the box office; *White Snake: The Fate*, co-directed by Chen Jianxi and Li Jiakai, earned 425 million yuan; the documentary *The Son of Light*, directed by Ka Xianjia, and *Safe Evacuation from the 21st Century*, directed by Li Yang, both garnered good reputations. Since 2015, a growing number of cross-disciplinary professionals with rich experience, solid film knowledge, and an internet-driven mindset have entered the film industry, becoming the new backbone of film creation. These new creators have emerged in the center of the film market, bringing fresh genre experiments and box office success to Chinese cinema. However, their success, closely tied to the internet, relies heavily on audience support rooted in a shared cultural and aesthetic mindset, which inevitably infuses their works with a distinct focus on entertainment. The narrative skills of the new generation of young directors still need improvement. Therefore, behind the rising box office numbers, there is a need to remain cautious of the potential misdirection in the cultural guidance of cinema.

2.3 Art Films: Challenging Exploration and Genre Breakthroughs Achieve Modest Success

The very nature and demands of art films make it difficult for them to achieve the huge profits that commercial films enjoy. However, it cannot be denied that art films have made significant contributions to optimizing the film product landscape and exploring new aesthetic expressions. In response to this, cultivating a differentiated audience and building cinema systems that allow different viewers to find cultural identification with films in theaters has become especially important. In recent years, Chinese art films have been striving to drive word-of-mouth promotion and distribution efforts, hoping to find a breakthrough amidst the pressure of mainstream theatrical films.

The documentary *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* focuses on the theme of World War II and tells the story of Chinese fishermen rescuing Allied prisoners of war. By integrating Chinese stories into global historical narratives, the film not only helps in promoting China abroad but also resonates with Western audiences through universal values from a Chinese perspective. Despite the box office pressures faced by documentaries worldwide, *The Sinking of the Lisbon Maru* still achieved considerable success in the market through short video marketing and targeted audience communication. The film draws on narrative techniques from feature films and employs a variety of methods, including documentary-style shooting, interviews with those involved, and animation restoration, to break through the narrative genre of historical documentaries while balancing commercial success. This film provides an example for Chinese cinematic storytelling in the global dissemination of its narratives.

The late Tibetan director Wanma Caidan's film *Snow Leopard*, released in April 2024, utilized extensive CGI technology to present a clear and realistic image of the snow leopard, enhancing the visual appeal of the artistic work. The film reflects the director's deep connection to Tibetan culture while addressing the universal theme of survival conflicts between humans and animals, sparking reflection and discussion on ecology and faith.

Jia Zhangke's film *The Era of Glory*, released in November 2024, faced a double blow of domestic box office failure and difficulties in overseas distribution. While the film retraced the director's creative career, it also provided a summary of the era both on and off the screen. Despite being backed by Takeshi Kitano as an investor, the audience seemed to view it as a simple patchwork and was not swayed by the marketing concept of "filming for 22 years." Ultimately, the film, which had only been released for 22 days, ended in failure.

3. Film Industry Analysis

3.1 Slowing Capital Operation, More Rational Investment

In 2024, there are 27 A-share listed companies investing in China's film industry, with 9 of them having a market value exceeding 10 billion yuan. The top five companies by market value are Mango Excellent Media, Light Media, Wanda Film, China Film, and Perfect World. Due to the sluggish film market, most companies reported losses [7]. The era of raising funds based on proposal PPTs seems to have come to an end, and even investment amounts have decreased, leading to a more rational approach to film capital. Compared to previous years, the current film capital investment and financing exhibit the following characteristics:

Firstly, there has been a concentration of capital in major films. In the top films of 2024, the number of production companies has significantly increased. *Hot and Spicy* saw a total of 31 companies involved in its co-production, attracting internet companies and new director companies to join alongside traditional film and television enterprises. The investment landscape is more diversified, with risks shared among different investors. However, under the joint investment model, the decision-making speed is relatively slow. The complex decision-making procedures will affect the project advancement speed, and the ownership of rights related to film projects is also rather complicated [8].

Secondly, investment in key films has shrunk. The number of production companies for low- to mid-budget films has decreased, making it harder to attract investment. This is because smaller films, with a lower tolerance for market risks, struggle to secure funding.

Furthermore, finding new investment avenues has become an important trend in the film investment industry. For example, integrating films with cultural tourism or the gaming industries not only expands revenue opportunities for investors but also helps mitigate revenue risks. Some films have involved local cultural tourism companies, reflecting that many regions have recognized the promotional value of films for local tourism. The support from local cultural tourism for films is also on the rise.

Given this, changing the return model for film investments, developing new cultural film products, and exploring various ways of adding value to films are key challenges that future film investment companies must address.

3.2 Film Supply Basically Restored, Domestic Films Still Need Efforts

In 2024, among the 497 films released, the box office share of domestic films saw a significant decline, dropping by 29.1%. Their market performance was actually weaker than that of imported films. The slowdown in economic development has also led to a downgrade in consumer spending, which presents new challenges for the film market. Overall, the supply of the Chinese film market in 2024 can be described as stable in quantity but divided in quality, concentrated in certain genres but lacking innovation. Structural contradictions and transformation explorations coexist: first, there is an imbalance in both quantity and structure, with a lack of works that feature topics or innovations, especially heavy-industrial genre films such as science fiction, war, and fantasy. Secondly, there is a disconnect between project reserves and production cycles. In 2024, more than 2,700 films were proposed, but due to production cycle constraints, most films could not be released on schedule.

In terms of distribution and promotion, some films overly rely on marketing or audience from specific release periods. To boost box office, they either depend on past market experience or potential fan audiences, resulting in some films experiencing a reversal in reputation or poor box office performance after their release.

In the future, in addition to facing external factors such as audience attrition and competition from short videos, the film supply in China needs breakthroughs in content depth, audience stickiness, and technological drivers, in order to transition from “reliance on release periods” to “sustained prosperity.” Only in this way can one participate in the global film competition. Some scholars believe that in terms of international dissemination, Chinese films need to enhance their competitiveness in three major aspects: overseas expansion capacity, cultural dissemination capacity, and creative production capacity, in order to achieve cross-border or global dissemination [9].

3.3 Investment in Special Effects Theaters Increased, Visual Effects Blockbusters Attract Audiences

Currently, special effects theaters in China include IMAX, CGS China Giant Screen, Dolby Cinema, and the latest, CINITY. By 2024, there were a total of 9,949 special effects theaters in China, accounting for 12.3% of all theaters, with their numbers steadily increasing each year. However, ticket sales from special effects theaters have dropped by 23.4%, amounting to 8.53 billion RMB. IMAX earned 1.436 billion RMB, which is a 32.9% decrease year-on-year, but still retains the highest market share at 16.9% [10]. Movies like *Hot and Spicy*, *Claw Machine*, and *Pegasus 2* have topped the special effects theater box office charts. CINITY, a LED cinema projection system developed by China Film Group, is the world's first 4K/120Hz high-format cinema LED projection system. It has a massive screen size of 23.68 meters in width and 18 meters in height. This system features high brightness, high contrast, high dynamic range, high frame rate, wide color gamut, and immersive sound, making it ideal for screening documentaries, natural films, and similar content. As of the end of 2024, there are 180 CINITY LED theaters in China, with plans to open dozens more internationally.

The data suggests that special effects theaters, developed with immersive and experiential advantages, have unmatched power in retaining audiences. However, Chinese fantasy visual effects blockbusters often excel visually but struggle with their storytelling. Thus, while visual effects are a film's expressive power, the core competitiveness lies in its story.

4. Film Policy and Management

As the most market-oriented sector within the cultural industry today, the government's macro-control function plays a crucial role in the reasonable and orderly development of the film market. In 2024, several policies were introduced to support the environment and growth of Chinese domestic films. For example, government subsidies were provided for rural film screenings, with a total of 8.21 million screenings held throughout the year. The film industry was included in the "Guidance Catalogue for Industrial Structure Adjustment (2024 edition)" under the encouraging category, aimed at upgrading the film industry.

In terms of international cooperation, revisions to the "Film Management Regulations" and the "Film Industry Promotion Law" were made. These revisions now require joint Chinese-foreign film productions to be approved by the State Council. The new regulations prohibit foreign institutions from independently producing films, ensuring that the content aligns with national interests. Support for participation in international film festivals has also been provided, aiming to promote Chinese films globally.

In January 2024, the "2024 Beijing Municipal Government Work Report" emphasized the need to organize the Beijing International Film Festival and other cultural exchange activities, such as the International Design Week.

In February 2024, the Film Bureau of the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, in collaboration with the Digital Currency Research Institute of the People's Bank of China, hosted the 2024 Chinese New Year Digital RMB Movie Consumption Discount Event in Jiangsu. In August, the National Film Administration held the Movie Consumer Season in Chengdu, and in December, a new spring movie consumption season event was launched in Hainan, covering the New Year’s Day and Spring Festival periods.

5. Reflection

2024 was a turbulent year for Chinese cinema. On one hand, the exploration of diverse genres met audience demands. On the other hand, the market lacked high-quality blockbusters capable of driving significant box office returns. The potential audience for Chinese films still lies largely in lower-tier cities, where film-watching frequencies remain low. Defining film positioning, attracting potential audiences, and solidifying mature creative genres continue to be challenges for Chinese cinema.

It is important to note that, although domestic films have achieved impressive box office returns in recent years, a lack of innovation remains a major challenge. Competition between individual films is still lagging, film genres are limited, and cultural expression is weak. These challenges need to be addressed before Chinese cinema can establish a modernized production model. Moving forward, China needs to create more "genre films" with global appeal and explore the development of a film industry system that reflects China’s unique cultural characteristics. Currently, the Chinese film industry is still in the stage of expansive growth. The supporting service systems are still being improved, and diverse film genres are still under development. Audiences remain to be fully explored, and a film culture needs to be cultivated gradually. The global expansion of Chinese cinema is inevitable. To achieve this, domestic films must improve industrial standards through diversified development, especially in genre filmmaking, such as science fiction and animation, which showcase the strength of the film industry. The stories and efforts beyond the screen are still waiting to be written by Chinese filmmakers.

References

[1] Zhengpeng Ji. "2024 Film Box Office Exceeds 42.502 Billion RMB". China Film News, 2025, 2.

[2] Wangli Huang, Xu Dan. Release Schedule Dynamics and Cultural Undercurrents: Observations on the Chinese Film Market in 2024. New Films,2024, (6)

[3] "2024 Chinese Film Market Research Report for the Spring Festival". China Film News, 2024, 3.

[4] Top Data. "2024 China Film Annual Market Research Report". Beijing: Beijing Top Times Information Consulting Co., Ltd., 2024.

[5] "2024 Chinese Cinema Line Development Memorandum". China Film News, 2025, 1.

[6] Ji Li, Yanling Wang. “The Other” in the Adversarial “Gaze” and “Anti-gaze” in Chinese Women’s Films since the 1980s. Contemporary Cinema, 2020, (6):

[7] Communication University of China. "2024 China Listed Companies Film Investment Report". Beijing: Communication University of China, 2025.

[8] Yongmei Wang, Yongpei Liu. Dealmaking in China’s Film Industry. Peking University Press, 2021:354.

[9] Wang Yan, Jianping Chai. Data mining in Film industry. Tsinghua University Press, 2021:511.

[10] Top Data. "2024 China Film Annual Market Research Report". Beijing: Beijing Top Times Information Consulting Co., Ltd., 2024.