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Chinese cinema in Spain, 1970-2020

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Abstract

This chapter presents an overview of the history of the translation of Chinese films in Spain, covering from the first screening of a Chinese film back in the early 1970s until 2021. According to our data, in this time span, more than 1,000 Chinese films have reached Spain. In order to provide empirical quantitative data, we have created an online open access database of all the Chinese films that have been translated and screened in Spain. It contains data on the original films and their translations into Spanish or other official languages, such as Catalan. This database allows for an in-depth quantitative study of the translation and distribution channels, which is completed with a qualitative analysis of the most recent trends regarding selection and distribution, based on the results obtained from five interviews with key agents in this area.

Keywords: Chinese cinema, Chinese-Spanish audiovisual translation, history of translation, distribution channels, cinema programmers

1. Introduction

Cinema is one of the many manifestations of culture and, as such, it is a mirror other cultures look at to build an image of the Other. To what extent this reflection enables the target culture to construct a faithful image of the Other, or a rather distorted one, will depend upon many aspects, the main ones being which films are selected to reach the foreign audience and through which channels they arrive.

As an important part of each country's culture and soft power, Chinese cinema is key to the creation of such an image. Moving away from the terminology debate between "Chinese cinema" and "Chinese-language cinemas" discussed by many authors and reviewed by Lu and Yeh (2005, 1-12) and Sun (2016), in this study the term "Chinese cinema" is used to embrace three distinctive but intertwined cinematographies that share a linguistic and cultural background. This comprises all films in Mandarin Chinese and other languages spoken in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, regardless of their origin. For our purposes, we agree with Berry (2008, 297-298), taking Chinese films as those from the abovementioned territories that are in Mandarin (or other Chinese variants), but we also consider films by transnational production companies, and pay attention to the different trends in each of these cinemas. However, since language is the key factor taken into account in this study, films produced in Singapore and Malaysia in Mandarin Chinese (or other variants) are also included in the analysis, although it must be said that they account for a really small number of films.

In a globalized world, audiovisual translation has become one of the main means of communication between different cultures. In Spain, cinema has proved to be an extremely powerful tool in bridging the gap between local and foreign cultures. According to the official data provided by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport (MCD 2022), only 22.8% of films shown in cinemas between 2000 and 2021 were Spanish productions and, more significantly, they only achieved an audience and market share of around 16% (see figure 1). Therefore, audiovisual translation plays a key role in making films from other countries and in other languages available to the Spanish audience.

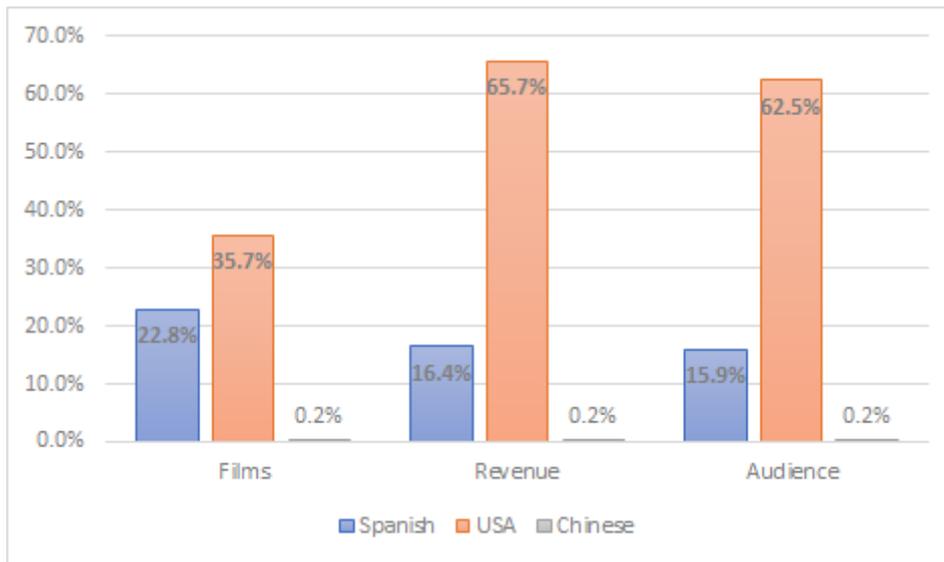


Figure 1 Percentage of films, revenue, and audience according to a film’s origin (2000-2021). Data source: Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport (MCD 2022)

According to the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport (MCD 2022), during the 2000-2021 period, only 85 Chinese films reached Spanish cinemas, of which 75 came from mainland China, five from Taiwan and five from Hong Kong. This number accounts for only 0.2% of the total number of foreign films screened in Spain for our period of study.

As figure 1 shows, the number of Chinese films that reached the Spanish audience is scarce compared to productions coming from other countries, especially the USA. The latter has a predominant position in terms of audience (up to 62.5%) and revenue (65.7%), even though North American films represent only 35.7% of all films shown in Spanish movie theatres. However, it must be noted that these official data seem to be partial and incomplete, as they include fewer films than those compiled by Casas-Tost et al. (2019-2022). They also do not account for Chinese films screened in other settings, such as TV, home cinema and, especially film festivals, which play a crucial role in introducing Chinese cinema into Spain, as will be seen in the results section.

According to Gambier (2009, 17), “[v]ery few systematic studies have examined the production and reception or the cultural and linguistic impact of audiovisual translation (...).” This is especially true in the case of Spain and the languages involved. After a literature review on the topic of Chinese-Spanish audiovisual translation, we mostly found grey literature focusing on the translation of different aspects, such as titles, subtitles or realia for a given film. Apart from Casas-Tost & Rovira-Esteva’s (2019) work, which covers up to 2017, we find no studies offering an overall and historical perspective. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to contribute to descriptive and historical studies of audiovisual translation from Chinese, focusing on both the process and the product, from the point of view of its channels of introduction and reception in the Spanish market.

In this context, this study offers an overview of the Chinese films that have reached the Spanish market from a diachronic perspective, and attempts to address the following research question: What is the Chinese cinema that has reached Spain like? This is a very general question and embraces many aspects that would need to be singled out for a proper analysis, so the following five more specific research questions have also been drafted:

1. How many and what kinds of films have been made available to Spanish audiences from the first film screened in Spain until 2021?
2. Where have the films been produced?
3. Which main channels and key agents have been involved in the introduction of Chinese cinema in Spain?
4. What translation process is followed, and which languages are involved?
5. Can we see a pattern of evolution for these different parameters?

This chapter is structured as follows. After this introductory section summarising the current motivations and research questions behind this study, the next section explains the methodology used to address these. Since our research questions are interconnected and not necessarily discrete categories, the results and discussion section are organised in four subsections, covering the when, (from) where and who, what and how. The chapter finishes with concluding remarks, the limitations of this study and suggestions for future lines of research. The conclusions are followed by three appendixes.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data collection and preparation

To carry out this research we have used the data obtained from *El cine chino traducido en España* (Chinese cinema translated in Spain) (Casas-Tost et al. 2019-2022). This is the only existing database which brings together information about the translation and screening conditions in Spain of films originally produced in any of the languages spoken in China. Criteria about film inclusion are explained in detail in the database website.¹ Suffice it to say that this database attempts to systematically include all the feature films that have been available to the Spanish audience at any time regardless of the screening venue or format, excluding short films and documentaries.

We should bear in mind that, for different reasons, some of the source data involving our object of study are very difficult, if not impossible, to gather. Within the whole process of making a foreign film available to the Spanish audience, translation is considered a step of secondary or minor importance. Therefore, the name of the

¹ <https://dtieao.uab.cat/txicc/cine/>

translator or the modality used, as well as the language films have been translated from, are most often not available. Obtaining official data has also proven to be a crusade. Although the Spanish Government has a policy of data transparency and provides citizens with official data upon demand regarding the number of viewers and revenues for each film – mainly in cinema theatres –, neither the quality of the data nor the format provided are ideal for research purposes. Last but not least, video-on-demand (VOD) platforms, as private enterprises fighting for their share of the market, are reluctant to provide any information which can be perceived as confidential and unnecessary for the average customer. All in all, although we cannot guarantee exhaustiveness, we consider this database to be quite complete considering all the above-mentioned constraints, and to be representative of our object of study.

A copy of *El cine chino traducido en España* was exported to an Excel file on 27th of January 2022. At that time, the database contained 1,158 entries, which were manually checked for errors and inconsistencies. Data corresponding to 2022 and mute films were excluded from this analysis. Thus, the period of analysis ranges from 1972 to 2021. The derived database contained less information than the one available online, since some of the fields, such as film synopsis, images, distributing company, number of viewers, revenue, number of directors or whether the film is based on a literary work, were not going to be analysed for this study. It should be noted that while some of the fields were not included as they were not the focus of our research, others had to be excluded because there were too many missing data. This is not to blame the database compilers, because many of the data are often not publicly available –especially if the film is rather old– or the agents involved are not willing to provide them.

The derived Excel database for this study contained an identification code for each film, the film's title in sinograms, pinyin and its translation into Spanish and/or

Catalan, country or region of origin, year of original release, languages spoken in the film, target language of the translation (either Spanish or Catalan), translation modality (subtitling, dubbing or both), translator's name, year of the translation, a note indicating if the film has been translated directly from Chinese or through a pivot language, film genre (action, adventure, animation, comedy, crime, drama, fantasy, martial arts, romance, horror or thriller), director's name in sinograms, pinyin and their internationally-known name, director's origin, the year the film was first screened in Spain, as well as formats and channels through which the film has been made available to the Spanish audience (cinemas, film festivals, TV, VOD platforms, hard copies – DVD, VHS and Blu-ray– or public film archives).

In some cases, films have been assigned to more than one country, language, director or genre. After considering different options, the labels for the film genre were eventually borrowed from IMDb.² Only one new label was added, “martial arts”, that is generally included in action films, because it is specific to Chinese cinema, and also because of its importance in quantitative terms in our database. Since managing these aggregated pieces of information would have complicated the analysis procedure and the presentation of the results, the information in some of the fields had to be processed and simplified prior to data analysis. For instance, film genre and the language(s) spoken in the film have been simplified considering only the most representative one.

2.2. Semi-structured online interviews with key agents

After a first analysis of our results, we identified the eight venues or agents that have played a leading role introducing Chinese films to Spain. After contacting all of them on

² <https://www.imdb.com/>

several occasions, only five accepted being interviewed, namely *Casa Asia*, *CineAsia*, *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*, *Filmoteca de Catalunya* (Catalonia Film Archive) and the *Sant Sebastian International Film Festival*. The rest either did not answer or declined our request. The interviews were conducted online between November 2021 and March 2022 and were carried out by the two researchers of this study. They were video recorded once the respondents had signed the informed consent, which had been previously validated by our university's ethics committee. Table 1 shows the basic information of the agents interviewed.

Table 1 Information about the interviews with key agents

Name of the interviewee	Title and organization	Date	Length
Esteve Riambau	Director of Filmoteca de Catalunya	16/11/2021	1:02
Gloria Fernández Enrique Garcelán	CineAsia co-founders	18/11/2021	2:09
Roberto Cueto	Member of the San Sebastian International Film Festival Selection Committee	25/11/2021	1:57
Menene Gras	Director of Culture and Exhibitions of Casa Asia	17/03/2022	1:22
Quim Crusellas	Director of Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic	28/03/2022	1:18

Our informants belong to two distinctive groups from public and private institutions. On the one hand, we have the *Filmoteca de Catalunya*, which was originally an outpost of the National Film Library of Spain in 1963 and was established as independent entity in 1981. It is currently responsible for the preservation and dissemination of Spanish audiovisual and film heritage and culture, with special attention to Catalonia, but screens films from all over the world six days a week throughout the twelve months of the year. *Casa Asia* was created in 2001 as a public consortium consisting of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, the government

of the Autonomous region of Catalonia and both Barcelona's and Madrid's city councils. Its aim is to contribute to better understanding between Spain and Asian countries, and to promote institutional, economic, cultural, and educational relations as well as encouraging exchanges in the domains of culture, ideas, and projects of shared interest. In contrast, we find *CineAsia*, which is a two-person private initiative dating back to 2003 which attempts to promote and disseminate Asian cinema in Spain through weeks of Asian cinema, publications, courses, and film festivals. Apart from *CineAsia*, currently the main stakeholder related to the dissemination of Asian cinema in Spain, there are also two film festivals which we have focused our attention on. *The San Sebastian International Film Festival*, created in 1953, is the only A-Class Film festival in Spain out of the 15 accredited by the International Federation of Film Producers Associations in the category of competitive feature films. *The Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic* takes place in a medium-sized Catalan city and started in 2004. Albeit working with a rather modest budget, and thanks to the support of a long list of public and private sponsors, its goal is to present Asian culture through its cinema.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of sixteen questions organised in four main blocks: general issues, audience, translation, and paratexts³ (see Appendix 1 for a translated version). The researchers departed from a basic outline which had been customised to fit each agent's specific profile taking data from our database. No transcript of the interviews was carried out because the researchers had been taking notes during the interviews and the videos were only viewed again in case there was any information missing or that needed to be checked. Once we had a first

³ Paratexts include all kinds of texts and images related to the film and that somehow intend to present it to the audience, in our case posters, reviews, synopses, amongst others.

draft of this manuscript, it was sent to the interviewees so that they had the opportunity to amend or complete the data concerning their contribution as informants.

In sum, to obtain the most comprehensive and thorough picture possible, we have triangulated data from different sources: the on-line database the research group has been gathering for the last ten years from different sources, official data offered by the Spanish government and first-hand information obtained from five key agents through online interviews.

3. Results & discussion

Our ad hoc database comprised a total of 1,100 Chinese films shown in Spain in a time span of 49 years from 1972 until December 2021. In this section we have organised our results into four blocks, namely, when, where and who, what and how.

3.1. Evolution of the screening of Chinese cinema in Spain

In comparison to other Western countries, such as the USA or France, where Chinese cinema arrived as early as the 1920s and 1930s, Spain did not screen its first Chinese movie until 1972, when the People's Republic of China was in the throes of the Cultural Revolution. This film was the drama *Four Moods* by the Hongkongese and Taiwanese directors Bai Ching-Zue, King Hu, Lee Shing and Lee Hang-Shiang.⁴ It arrived two years after its release in Taiwan in 1970 and was translated into Spanish using its international title in English. It was screened at *the Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia*, one of the oldest and most important film festivals in Spain.

⁴ See appendix 2 and 3 for the complete list of directors and films written in Chinese.

In 1972 there was only one Chinese film screened in Spain, while in 2021 there were almost 70, only taking into account cinemas and film festivals, because if we were to add VOD platforms, the number would easily be three times bigger. Figure 2 shows the evolution of Chinese films in this near 50-year period.

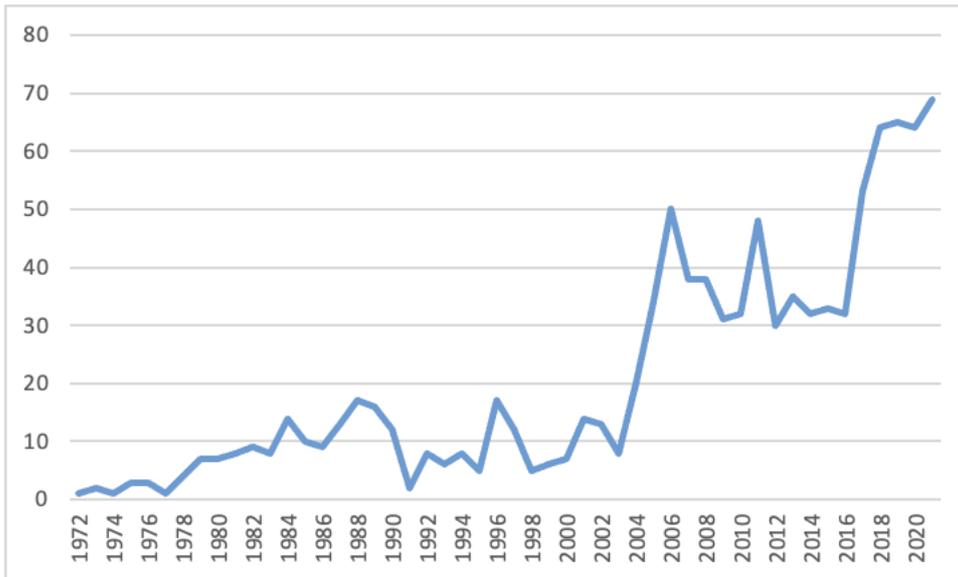


Figure 2 Years of Chinese films released in Spain

As can be seen, since the early 1970s, there has been a growing trend in screening Chinese cinema in Spain, with a turning point in the 2000s when Chinese films began to make their way into film festivals. While in the 1970s Spaniards would have the chance to watch from one to five Chinese films per year, in the next 20 years the average rose to almost 10 per year. This runs in line with the export moments for Chinese cinema pointed out by Berry (2008, 297), starting with martial arts films in the 1970s and following with the launching in the 1980s of the Fifth Generation of Chinese filmmakers in mainland China and the works by the so-called Taiwan’s New Cinema directors, alongside action films from Hong Kong directors such as John Woo.

In the 2000s, with the creation of two Asian film festivals, *Barcelona Asian Film Festival* (BAFF) – which later evolved into the current *Asian Film Festival Barcelona* (AFFBCN) – and *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*, the average number of Chinese films screened reached 25 per year. The peaks in 2006 and 2011 are mainly due to the 30 films screened in the above-mentioned film festival in Barcelona and to the thematic retrospective devoted to Chinese cinema in San Sebastian, respectively. Finally, the peak starting in 2017 corresponds to the sum of old and new film festivals and the emergence of VOD platforms. In fact, the advent of VOD platforms at the end of the 2010s and beginning of the 2020s with the COVID-19 pandemics has dramatically increased the number of foreign film productions that can be viewed across the globe and has changed the way audiovisual products are consumed nowadays. It is also the case of Chinese cinema in Spain, with its offer having at least tripled, which makes it more difficult to keep track of all platforms and their offer of Chinese films available.

Our data also reveals a clear trend in the narrowing of the time span between the year of release in China, Hong Kong or Taiwan and the year the same film was screened in Spain. The turning point is again the 2000s, when the average drops to only 2.1 years and it then drops to 1 in the next decade, the 2010s. This is obviously a result of globalisation and advances in technology and communication media. However, it is also due to the efforts of Chinese soft power diplomacy in exporting their products, on the one hand, and the closer economic and cultural exchanges between China and Spain, on the other. This has in turn resulted in a growing interest among Spanish audiences for Chinese cinema and especially of programmers in offering premieres to their audiences. For instance, it is very common to find Spanish and even European or world premieres for Chinese films in film festivals, especially in the case of specialized film festivals

such as *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*, or internationally renowned film festivals like Sitges or San Sebastian, where most Chinese films are premiered. At the same time, the growing importance of VOD platforms also contributes to this trend, since world cinema has entered Spanish homes making Chinese films more easily accessible for the public. For example, if one looks at the 71 films produced between 2020 and 2021 from our database, 51 were shown at important Spanish film festivals such as San Sebastian, Sitges, AFFBCN or *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*, and almost 30 were shown in VOD platforms.

However, it must also be noted that there are still many retrospectives of old films in film festivals or film archives. For example, in 2017 the *Filmoteca de Catalunya* (Catalonia's Film Archive) programmed the retrospective *Inèdits xinesos en femení* (Unknown Women's Chinese Films), with 17 films from mainland China ranging from the 1930s to the 1960s, with films such as *New Women* (Xin Nüxing, dir. Cai Chusheng, 1935). The same year the *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic* had a retrospective of female martial arts stars featured in Chinese action films.

Even though our database is not exhaustive regarding the Chinese films screened in VOD platforms, due to their size, dynamism, and difficulties in obtaining systematic information, it can be concluded that distribution channels of Chinese cinema have changed and that nowadays cinema theatres are the least important venues. As Fernández & Garcelán (2021) point out, in 2019 cinemas only screened five films and in 2020 three. Film festivals are, thus, the main gateway for Chinese cinema in Spain, followed by VOD platforms, as can be seen in Figure 3.

The relationship among these three channels is changing. Garcelán (2022) states that only around 1 to 2% of Chinese films screened in film festivals later reach cinemas. Our data also show that the role and importance of cinemas is declining, and the

COVID-19 pandemics has had a major impact on them, as audiences and revenues have fallen dramatically. To give an example with one of the most well-known Chinese directors in Spain, if one compares the audience Zhang Yimou used to have in cinemas back in the 1990s and 2000s with his last release in 2021 titled *One second* (Yi Miao Zhong, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2020), the difference is just enormous. In the 1990s the number of viewers was well above 100,000 with films such as *To live or Raise the Red Lantern* (Da Hong Denglong Gaogao Gua, dir. Zhang Yimou, 1991), and the number raised up to more than 275,000 with films such as *The Curse of the Golden Flower* (Man Cheng Jin Dai Huangjin Jia, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2006) or *Hero* (Yingxiong, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2002) in the 2000s. His record in Spain was over 750,000 viewers with the blockbuster *The Great Wall* in 2017. However, his last film barely reached an audience of 6,000 people.

Cueto (2021), from *San Sebastian International Film Festival*, in the same vein states that, proportionally, film festivals have larger audiences in only a few screenings than theatre cinemas do in a few weeks. For example, *I am not Madame Bovary* (Wo Bu Shi Pan Jinlian, dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2016) had 2,000 viewers in *San Sebastian International Film Festival*, and around 7,400 in cinemas across the whole country in a couple of weeks. He also argues that film festival audiences are more loyal than for cinemas, and that the only context where audiences could continue to grow is on VOD platforms, as their offer is broader and differs from the audiovisual products traditionally screened in cinemas and at film festivals.

With the growing pre-eminence of VOD platforms in the audiovisual industry, the situation is currently somewhat contentious between festivals and platforms (Cueto 2021). Platforms that hold the rights to certain films decide if and when they can be screened in festivals, although he acknowledges that some are beginning to realise that

they can benefit from screening these films at festivals before being added to their catalogue, as it serves as a means of promotion. Two phenomena are clearly visible at the moment: the decline of the role of cinemas in favour of the growing relevance of VOD platforms, and the shift in the relationship between platforms and film festivals, as they share part of the audience, although the two cover different market niches.

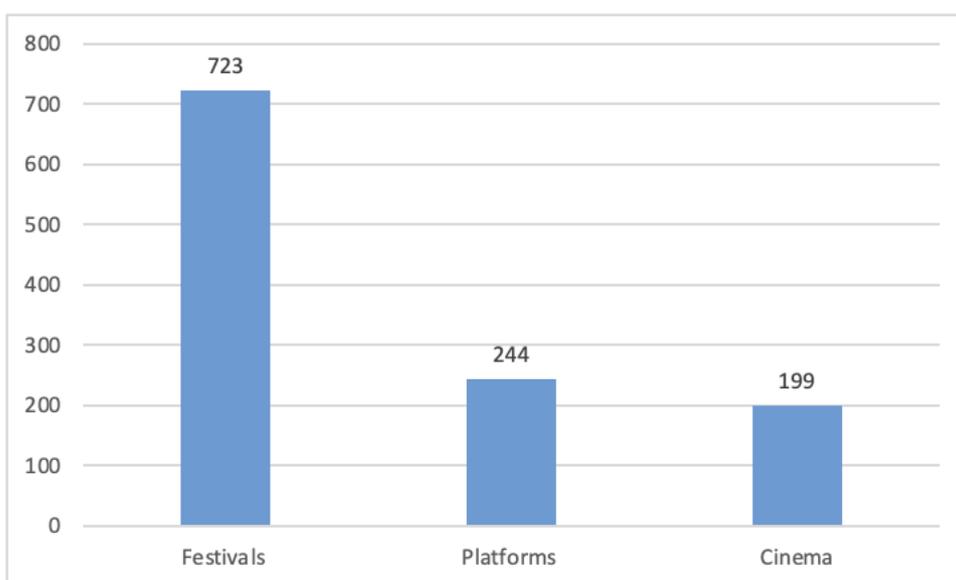


Figure 3 Distribution channels of Chinese films in Spain (1972-2021)

As figure 3 shows, film festivals are nowadays by far the most important distribution channel for Chinese cinema in Spain. There are more than fifty film festivals in Spain, but only four are the most important in terms of Chinese cinema, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. On the one hand, we have the two oldest international film festivals in Spain: *Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival* in Catalonia (which includes Chinese films annually in its programme for the past 20 years, with a total of 113 Chinese films screened since 1972), and *San Sebastian International Film Festival* (with 97 Chinese films since 1987, screening Chinese cinema every year since 1992). On the other hand, there are two festivals that have

specialised in Asian cinema. The oldest and biggest is *Asian Film Festival BCN* (AFFBCN), with a total of 286 Chinese films screened up to 2021. It has evolved from the first specialized Asian film festival in Spain, in 1999 known as *Muestra de Cine Asiático de Barcelona* (Barcelona's Asian Cinema Show), which was followed by the *Barcelona Asian Film Festival*, and superseded by the *Casa Asia Film Festival* in 2011, later called *Casa Asia Film Week*. The second is *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*, which has so far screened 153 since 2005. Between 2017 and 2019 there was another specialized film festival, the only one exclusively devoted to Chinese cinema, called *Lychee International Film Festival*. It started in Barcelona and later included a new venue in Madrid. With only three editions it had screened up to 40 films, but unfortunately it did not survive the COVID-19 pandemics. The remaining film festivals that have screened Chinese cinema are either more recent and do not show special interest in Chinese cinematography, or are specialized in other topics, such as films made by women or gay cinema. Therefore, they occasionally include Chinese cinema in their offer, and the films they screen have already been shown in other film festivals or venues.

In addition to film festivals, there are two other key agents in the programming of Chinese cinema, public film archives and Confucius Institutes, especially the one located in Barcelona. In Spain every autonomous region has got its public film archive, but the two that stand out in relation to Chinese cinema are the one in Madrid (*Filmoteca de España*) and the one in Barcelona (*Filmoteca de Catalunya*), having screened more than 100 Chinese films and almost 50, respectively. Moreover, the range of films they screen is wider than other venues, having programmed films not screened elsewhere. They are also important in qualitative terms because their role in the projection of Chinese cinema is stable and constant. The other film archives, located in

smaller cities, usually screen films by already very famous directors such as Zhang Yimou, Hou Hsiao-hsien or Wong Kar-wai, or martial arts films, so their role is clearly more modest.

Finally, the Confucius Institute in Barcelona is another important agent, as it has already screened more than 50 films only since 2017. It collaborates with industry specialists and film festivals, such as *CineAsia* and *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*, and in 2022 has become a venue for the newly created section devoted to Chinese cinema of the BCNFilmFest.

3.2 Origin of the Chinese films screened in Spain

As for the origin of Chinese films, this study maintains the traditional division among three main areas with distinct cinematographies: mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. However, such a distinction is somewhat blurred by the growing tendency towards film co-production, both among these territories, especially between Hong Kong and mainland China after Hong Kong's return to the PRC in 1997 (for an in-depth analysis see Leung 2012), and with other countries as well (see, for example, the case of Korea as analysed by Yecies [2016]). This trend has been enhanced by China's cultural diplomacy boosted from the mid-2000s, which includes the expansion of its cinema. However, we lack data to confirm whether this trend will remain as strong in the 2020s, following internal changes in the PRC, growing tensions in Hong Kong and with Taiwan, and China's role in the international arena. Therefore, we have considered the participation of each territory in the production of all films, without excluding the other parties. As figure 4 shows, Hong Kong still leads the production of Chinese cinema, followed closely by mainland China, and with Taiwan still having a significant share of the whole picture, taking into account its size in comparison with the mainland.

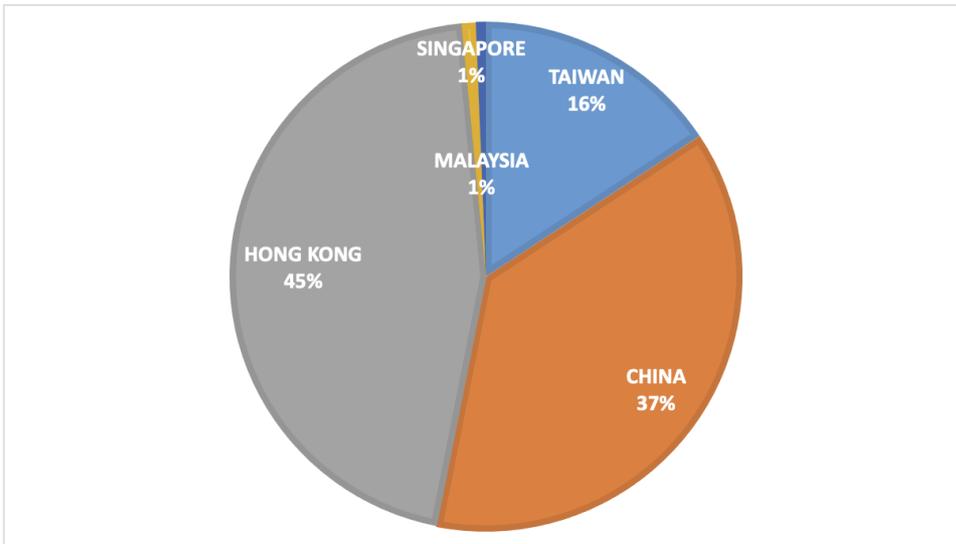


Figure 4 Origin of films in Chinese screened in Spain

The origin of films is also reflected in their directors. According to our data, the most prolific directors (with nine or more films) whose films have been screened in Spain are presented in table 2 with their names in pinyin or as they are known internationally:

Table 2 Most prolific directors and relative visibility in the Spanish market

Directors	Origin	Films	% over their production
Johnnie To	Hong Kong	24	43%
Tsui Hark	Hong Kong	23	53%
Zhang Yimou	Mainland China	22	96%
Sammo Hung Kam Bou	Hong Kong	15	39%
Hou Hsiao-Hsien	Taiwan	14	78%
Ann Hui	Hong Kong	13	48%
John Woo	Hong Kong	13	52%
Chen Kaige	Mainland China	13	81%
Tsai Ming-Liang	Taiwan	12	100%
Wong Jing	Hong Kong	11	12%
Wong Kar-wai	Hong Kong	11	100%
Jackie Chan	Hong Kong	11	85%

Herman Yau	Hong Kong	10	14%
Oxide Pang	Hong Kong	9	47%
Jia Zhangke	Mainland China	9	90%
Andrew Lau	Hong Kong	9	20%
Corey Yuen	Hong Kong	9	32%
Dante Lam	Hong Kong	9	36%

It is interesting to note that out of these 18 directors, only three come from the mainland and two from Taiwan. However, as Fernández & Garcelán (2021) pointed out in their interview, in the past ten years the mainland is gaining a larger market share, while the opposite is happening with Hong Kong cinema, also because of the growing flow of co-productions. For example, while Hong Kong directors such as Johnnie To, Tsui Hark, Sammo Hung, John Woo or Jackie Chan led the cinema production in the 1980s and 1990s that later arrived in Spain, the flow of films by directors from the mainland is steadier and still growing, being Zhang Yimou, Cheng Kaige and Jia Zhangke the most prominent examples, who are now well-known in Spain and have had film cycles devoted to them in film archives across the country. This is also the case for the two Taiwanese directors from table 2, and it must be noted that the number of Taiwanese directors that reach the Spanish screens remains steady with no significant changes from a quantitative perspective.

Another interesting point shown in table 2 is that, in relative terms, some directors' filmography is much better represented than others. In other words, the percentage of films being introduced by each director in relation to their overall production changes significantly from one director to the other. As a matter of fact, out of the 18 directors from the above list, only eight have had more than half their production screened in Spain. Wong Kar-wai and Tsai Ming-liang lead the list, since 100% of their production has reached the Spanish market, followed by Zhang Yimou and Jia Zhangke whose entire filmography has been screened in Spain except for only

one film. Jackie Chan (85%), Chen Kaige (81%) Hou Hsiao-hsien (78%), Tsui Hark (53%) and John Woo (52%) also have more than half of their production translated in Spain.

Another variable that should be considered together with these data is that some of these directors' films have been screened several times in different venues over these years, which also contributes to increasing their visibility and prestige in Spain. For example, Wong Kar-wai's *In the Mood for Love* (Huayangnianhua, 2000) and *Chungking Express* (Chongqing Senlin, 1994) have been screened in cinemas, three film festivals (including San Sebastian), seven film archives, they are also available in DVD and in the VOD platform Filmin and *In the Mood for Love* was even screened on TV. Hou Hsiao-hsien's *The Assassin* (Cike Nie Yinniangu, 2015) has been screened in cinemas, four film festivals (including *Sitges International Film Festival* and *San Sebastian International Film Festival*), four film archives, the Confucius Institute in Barcelona, it has a DVD version and since 2018 is also available in the VOD platform Filmin both in Catalan and Spanish. Finally, *Coming Home* (Guilai, dir. Zhang Yimou, 2014) has been distributed in cinemas, one film festival, three film archives across Spain, the Confucius Institute in Barcelona, is now available in the VOD platform Filmin and in DVD and Blu Ray.

3.3. What kind of films have been screened in Spain

When speaking about Chinese cinema there is one word that appears to be unavoidable: censorship. Fernández & Garcelán (2021) argued that there is a bias in all the films coming from mainland China, since they all need to have the “dragon seal”, i.e., to be approved by Chinese government's censors. When asked about the differences among the films from mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, Cueto (2021) pointed out that

in mainland China there are still some sensitive or taboo topics that cannot escape censorship. This is not the case of films coming from Taiwan. He also mentioned that on some occasions Chinese films are selected to compete for the awards and later retrieved because the Chinese government does not allow their international exhibition.

Generally speaking, the selection of films is made by experts in Asian cinema who keep up to date on what is going on in the market. *CineAsia*, embodied by Fernández and Garcelán, is a private enterprise that collaborates with different festivals and assesses them in this area. They make up their own list of must-see films and suggest their screening to different venues (festivals, film archives or VOD platforms) according to their audience profile and interests.

The San Sebastian International Film Festival is particularly interested in independent cinema and films by unknown directors. It has four different ways of selecting the films. First, they rely on the delegates specialised in Chinese cinema who are in contact with local production and suggest potentially interesting titles for the festival. Second, they attend other international festivals, production fora or work in progress sessions where they have access to new material. Sometimes they are offered a title previously acquired by a European distribution agency. Finally, they also view all the films directly submitted by their directors or distribution agencies to be included in any of the competition sections. However, Cueto (2021) says that in this regard Chinese directors are not always aware of this possibility, and they often need to actively contact the directors themselves.

In the case of *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*, focusing on popular cinema and with a special predilection for martial arts, the selection of films also relies on a combination of strategies. Crusellas (2022) mentioned they attend different film festivals, such as the *Hong Kong Film Art*, they have contacts in Taiwan who suggest

possible titles and work with distribution agencies or platforms which offer them films at a very low cost to ensure these films are screened in Europe. In their case, although A-class festivals awards are among their selection criteria, they also screen many premieres and make risky choices.

In the case of *Casa Asia*, they have their own department devoted to their festival organisation. They are primarily interested in the most recent films (corresponding to the last three previous years) and when they spot something interesting then try to negotiate a reasonable price with the distribution agencies. The budget of *Casa Asia* for its festival is mainly based on private sponsors and Asian governments' patronage through their embassies. According to Gras (2022), their main selection criteria is the filmic style or narrative, rather than international prizes since this usually raises the costs. Their preferred genre is drama and do not consider anime nor fantasy films.

The director of the *Filmoteca de Catalunya* is the only interviewee that stated that they do not have any expert in Chinese cinema of their own (Riambau 2021). They often cooperate with *CineAsia* and other film archives around the world, including the China Film Archive and the Chinese Taipei Film Archive from Taiwan. The main criteria for film selection are cultural diversity, their suitability for given film cycles, price, and availability. As they are non-commercial, they screen films that cannot be seen elsewhere, like those mentioned in section 3.1.

The evolution of genre types in Chinese films is also closely related to the origin of films and their directors. Even though, as shown in Figure 5, drama is currently the most important genre, if martial arts and action films are put together, they are still predominant, as they were until the 1990s, when action and martial arts films accounted for almost all Chinese films imported into Spain. This was in fact the trend in the West,

where Bruce Lee's and later John Woo's exotic martial arts films entered Spain's film market and both directors and martial arts stars exerted an increasing influence (Su 2010, 320). The Oscar-winning *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Wohucanglong, dir. Ang Lee, 2000) represents the high tide of this phenomenon from the point of view of revenues. In fact, as Berry (2008, 316) states, the main revenue for these productions comes from the USA, Europe, and Japan. The impact of this export-led phenomenon is no exception in Spain. From the 1990s onwards, more dramas arrived on our screens, reversing the trend. More recently, in the past ten years, new genres such as animation, adventures, thrillers and horror films are gaining popularity. Contrary to what one may think in relation to animation films, in Spain they are mainly shown in film festivals and in VOD platforms. Films such as *Monster Hunt* (Zhuo Yao Ji, dir. Raman Hui, 2015), which became the highest-grossing film in China in 2015, and that even had two sequels, was only shown in the *Festival Nits de cinema oriental de Vic*. As Fernández & Garcelán (2021) regret, China has a lot to offer in this respect, but animation films are still largely unknown to Spanish audiences.

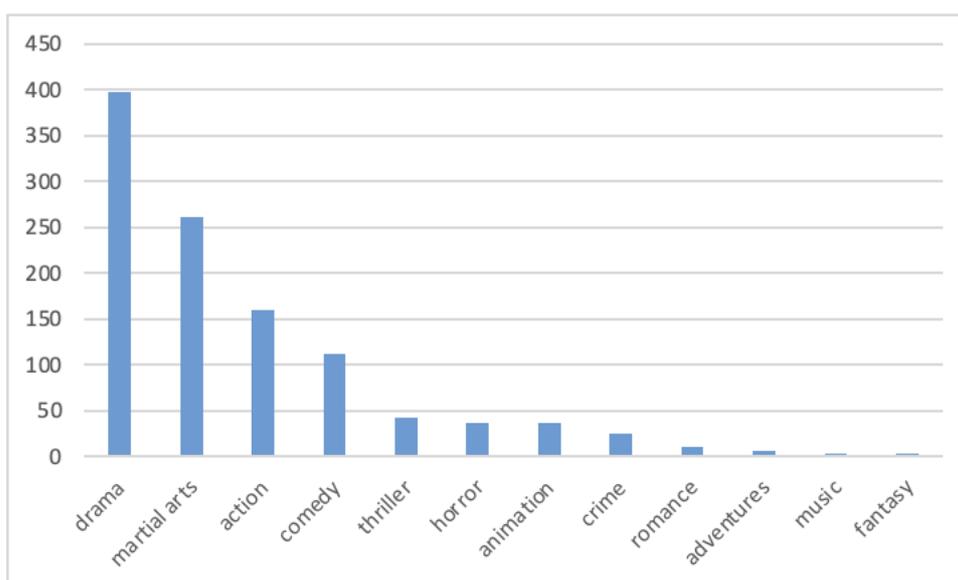


Figure 5 Number of Chinese films by genre (1972-2021)

3.4. Channels of distribution of Chinese films in Spain

Research on the translation of Chinese films is a rather tricky issue. The first thing to point out is the lack of information regarding the name of the translators and the process. As opposed to what used to happen until the 1990s and early 2000s, when there were professionals translating from Chinese into Spanish, in the past couple of decades, when the number of Chinese films has significantly increased, almost all films are translated from their English version made in China. All the interviewees confirmed that, since films are provided with English subtitles, the translation process is mainly via the English pivot translation. Although they all acknowledge the importance of translation, they are willing to pay the price of using an indirect translation. This is especially worrying since studies such as Casas-Tost and Bustins (2021) have shown that mistakes occur when translations are not done directly from the original language. In order to minimise the drawbacks of indirect translations, in some cases, programmers resort to proof-readers to guarantee a minimum quality and faithfulness to the original. In this respect, Crusellas (2022) mentioned they usually have their translations proofread by someone who understands the original version in Chinese to make sure cultural or linguistic twists are correctly transferred. Gras (2022) affirmed it would be impossible for them to pay for direct translations for their high cost. She also considers audiovisual translators not to be so important as literature translators because the language used is simpler and more colloquial. However, even though their translators work from English subtitles, some can also speak Chinese. In the case of San Sebastian, Cueto (2022) maintains that when they select a film to be screened in their festival, they ask the Chinese party to provide a copy with Spanish subtitles, which sometimes needs to be reviewed. He mentions the lack of knowledge they have about the translators and

the translation process proper and believes translation should ideally be performed by native Spanish-speakers directly from the original not from a pivot language. He refers to the case of Korean films, that are translated into English by a professional US translator, whose role is key in bringing the films to international audiences.

Therefore, either used as an instrument of cultural soft power or merely for pragmatic reasons, the Chinese party is partially financing the cost of Chinese films screening in Spain, whereas the Spanish party accepts the deal for financial reasons without much questioning of the intercultural and linguistic implications.

Thus, we are now facing two paradoxes. First, it is the time when more Chinese films are screened in Spain and when more and better training in translation from Chinese into Spanish is available, yet almost no films are translated by professional Chinese-Spanish translators. Second, as all our interviewees acknowledge, the audience that attends their festivals is very loyal. It is made up of people interested in other cultures and open to foreign films, which includes people that study or understand Chinese. Although it is not the norm for all festivals and film archives, and Fernández & Garcelán (2021) even say that they are a minority, Gras (2022) mentioned that in the last edition of AFFBCN they noticed an increase in the number of spectators of Chinese origin.

As for the translation modality, subtitling is usually the norm, as film festivals only screen subtitled films, unless they are aimed at children, when they can also be dubbed. Chinese films that arrive in cinemas, the TV and most VOD platforms may have both versions: the dubbed one and the subtitled one. A key element in this respect is the target audience, the wider and more mainstream it is, the more likely it is to have a dubbed version. However, as Fernández & Garcelán (2021) state, the quality of a dubbed translation will also depend on the expected potential revenue. In the case of TV

both versions may only be available in specific TV channels that allow for the selection of subtitles, otherwise Chinese films are mainly dubbed on TV.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that, according to our data, 80% of films have been screened in Spanish, while 20% have been translated into Catalan. Some films have both versions, but most only one. This fact is worth highlighting because it is not the usual trend for all foreign films. Notwithstanding, three of the most important Spanish film festivals in relation with Chinese cinema are in Catalonia and screen films both in Catalan and in Spanish. At the same time, the public Catalan TV is also an important agent in the selection of Chinese cinema and the VOD platform Filmin has also got a very wide offer of Chinese cinema, both in Catalan and Spanish.

However, there are two positive initiatives in this regard, all supported by *Casa Asia*, that deserve a special mention. First, the new Casa Asia channel created in the VOD platform Filmin in 2020, whose catalogue already contains more than 400 films. Second, the so-called Orient Express cycle of Asian cinema at Barcelona's local *betevé* TV channel. It was meant to last for ten weeks, but Gras (2022) said they plan to renew it with more films due to its great success. Even though these two projects are devoted to Asian cinema in general, they have an important number of Chinese films and they both resort to Catalan as one of their target languages.

4. Conclusions

This study presents the development and characteristics of Chinese cinema based on a database of 1,100 Chinese films shown in Spain in the last 50 years. The analysis has addressed the issue from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective, attempting to provide new data and insights into different aspects related to the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter.

We have found that the number of films made available to the Spanish audience from the first film screened up to date has grown exponentially, especially in the last two decades, mainly due to the change in the leading role of film festivals and, more recently, the incursion of VOD platforms, especially Filmin and Netflix. These new trends have somehow changed both the standard viewer profile and the genres involved, which in both cases have diversified compared to the 1980s and 1990s. Most films come from mainland China, but both Hong Kong and Taiwan still maintain their own idiosyncrasy and distinctiveness in programmer's eyes. However, we have also found that co-productions are increasing and that it is becoming more difficult to establish a clear-cut division among these different cinemas.

Spanish film festivals programmers are currently struggling in the international arena for premieres to be screened in their festivals or to discover new gems affordable for smaller markets. Festivals such as the ones that take place in San Sebastian or Sitges can rely on their international prestige and trajectory to attract Chinese premieres, while smaller festivals, such as the ones in Barcelona and Vic need to resort to a number of sponsors, both public and private, to be able to maintain an attractive and distinctive offer. Thanks to globalisation and a growing interest among the public for Chinese films, the gap between the year of a film's original release and its screening in Spain has clearly decreased. However, it is also noteworthy that many films, especially those considered to be classic works or iconic for given directors or genres, have been screened once and again in different venues and formats, such as cycles and retrospectives all over the country.

Amongst this sort of flourishing of Chinese cinema in Spain, we have one piece of bad news. Having ourselves a background in Translation Studies, all those data concerning the translation of cultural works as a means of intercultural communication

is one of our main research concerns. However, the effort to collect the relevant information has not only proved to be rather difficult and partial, but the analysis of the available data is discouraging, since most of the translations are not made directly from Chinese but through English. This means that Spanish viewers consume most Chinese cinema through mediated translations and none of the parties (producers, programmers, and audience) seem to care much about it. What seems to go against the general trend in Spain is the fact that Chinese films are mainly subtitled rather than dubbed and that the quota for Catalan is higher than average.

This descriptive study represents an initial insight into the evolution and status of Chinese cinema in Spain, even though some of our results might reflect global trends in audiovisual translation, specifically from Asian cinema in general and they might not be specific to Chinese cinema. However, it has a few shortcomings and opens up new avenues of research. One important limitation of this study is the database which has been the main source of data used. Although *El cine chino traducido en España* has more than 1,000 records, the information of some fields is not always complete. Moreover, it does not include documentaries or short films, nor does it include all the existing channels (such as regional TVs, platforms such as HBO, Apple TV, Rakuten or Amazon Prime), not only due to the limitation of human resources, but also because this kind of information is often ephemeral, inaccurate, or directly not retrievable when looking for the data. As already mentioned, most of the information concerning the translation is usually missing and needs an extra effort from the compilers side to be found. Therefore, both the results on translation modes and volume on indirect translation, as well as the official data offered by the Spanish Ministry of Culture and Sport, where we spotted several biases and flaws, should be taken with certain caution.

With this research we hope to have contributed to a better understanding of the who, what, when, where and how of Chinese cinema in Spain. However, it needs to be followed up with complementary studies that touch upon aspects not covered here. Future lines of research could focus on the analysis of cultural images and stereotypes about the Chinese other through film selection, their images and paratexts, delve into the differences in the reception of Chinese films in Spain compared to other places, or review the evolution of cinema from Hong Kong, with their greater connections with the mainland and their reception in Spain and abroad in general. Apart from the above approaches, more agents could be included through interviews or questionnaires involving the few translators we are aware of, or other film festivals programmers of film distribution agencies. Moreover, it would be very interesting to carry out reception and comparative studies with both the public and Chinese film fans, as well as longitudinal studies in the mid- or long term, and see the evolution of the different parameters analysed in this study. Hopefully, this study will help to shed some light on the current situation and promote a better understanding of how the translation of feature films from Chinese takes place and reaches the Spanish audience, so that policy makers and agents involved can take note and act accordingly.

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Appendix 1: Outline of the interview for programmers (translated version)

General

1. What does Chinese cinema offer us that cinema from other places does not have?
2. Do films from Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong have any distinguishing features?
3. What genres would you say characterize the cinema of Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong? / Would you say that there is a genre that represents the cinema of mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong as a whole?
4. Who makes the selection, do you have an expert in Chinese cinema to advise you? Which are the selection criteria? What role do foreign awards and festivals play in the selection of films?
5. Could you briefly describe the process of selecting a Chinese film on your part?
6. What is the distribution and rights acquisition process? Are there agreements with other festivals or distributors to share the costs of managing or screening Chinese films?
7. What are the main distribution channels for Chinese cinema in Spain? After the COVID-19 pandemics streaming platforms have gained more weight, what do you think the future will be like in this regard?

Audience

1. In general, what is the profile of the Spanish viewer of Chinese cinema? In general, do you consider that it is a cinema still linked to an audience interested

in alternative (non-commercial) cinema or a type of viewer who follows a very specific type of genre?

2. What do you think the Spanish audience is looking for in Chinese cinema?
3. Do you think that in the last 20 years the tastes of the Spanish audience have changed in relation to Chinese cinema? Have you noticed a change in the profile of the viewers?
4. Do you think there is room for growth in the number Chinese cinema viewers in Spain or have we already reached a top?

Translation

1. What is the translation process that you usually follow? Is it different for cinema projections? Is it usually translated directly from Chinese to Spanish or is it translated from other languages? Why? Do you think it can somewhat affect the quality or the final result?
2. Do you think that the translator is important? Why is their name often not visible, and why is it so difficult to obtain this information?
3. Why do you think subtitling is the preferred mode of translation for Chinese films?

Paratexts

1. Who is in charge of selecting the poster or writing other paratexts such as reviews, etc.?
2. Do you consider that the image that is given of China through the cinema and its paratexts is faithful to reality or somewhat orientalist?

Appendix 2: List of directors' names appearing in this chapter

International name	Chinese name	Name in pinyin
Feng Xiaogang	冯小刚	Feng Xiaogang
Andrew Lau	刘伟强	Liu Weiqiang
Ang Lee	李安	Li An
Ann Hui	许鞍华	Xu Anhua
Bai Ching-Zue	白景瑞	Bai Jingrui
Cai Chusheng	蔡楚生	Cai Chusheng
Chen Kaige	陈凯歌	Chen Kaige
Corey Yuen	元奎	Yuan Kui
Dante Lam	林超贤	Lin Chaoxian
Herman Yau	邱礼涛	Qiu Litao
Hou Hsiao-Hsien	侯孝贤	Hou Xiaoxian
Jackie Chan	成龙	Cheng Long
Jia Zhangke	贾樟柯	Jia Zhangke
John Woo	吴宇森	Wu Yusen
Johnnie To	杜琪峰	Du Qifeng
King Hu	胡金铨	Hu Jinquan
Lee Hang-Shiang	李翰祥	Li Hanxiang
Lee Shing	李行	Li Xing
Oxide Pang	彭顺	Peng Shun
Raman Hui	许诚毅	Xu Chengyi
Sammo Hung Kam Bou	洪金宝	Hong Jinbao
Tsai Ming-Liang	蔡明亮	Cai Mingliang
Tsui Hark	徐克	Xu Ke
Wong Jing	王晶	Wang Jing
Wong Kar-wai	王家卫	Wang Jiawei
Zhang Yimou	张艺谋	Zhang Yimou

Appendix 3: List of films' titles appearing in this chapter (English alphabetical order)

Translated title	Chinese title	Title in pinyin
<i>Chunking Express</i>	重庆森林	<i>Chongqing Senlin</i>
<i>Coming home</i>	归来	<i>Guilai</i>
<i>Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon</i>	卧虎藏龙	<i>Wohucanglong</i>
<i>Four moods</i>	喜怒哀乐	<i>Xinu'aile</i>
<i>Hero</i>	英雄	<i>Yingxiong</i>
<i>I am not Madame Bovary</i>	我不是潘金莲	<i>Wo Bu Shi Pan Jinlian</i>
<i>In the mood for love</i>	花样年华	<i>Huayangnianhua</i>
<i>Monster Hunt</i>	捉妖记	<i>Zhuo Yao Ji</i>
<i>New Women</i>	新女性	<i>Xin Nüxing</i>
<i>One second</i>	一秒钟	<i>Yi Miao Zhong</i>
<i>Raise the Red Lantern</i>	大红灯笼高高挂	<i>Da Hong Denglong Gaogao Gua</i>
<i>The Assassin</i>	刺客聂隐娘	<i>Cike Nie Yinniàng</i>
<i>The Curse of the Golden Flower</i>	满城尽带黄金甲	<i>Man Cheng Jin Dai Huangjin Jia</i>
<i>The Great Wall</i>	长城	<i>Changcheng</i>
<i>To live</i>	活着	<i>Huozhe</i>