

# THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE FILM

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to study the origin and development of Chinese cinema. The methodology involves observing, recording, and interviewing. Research has found that Chinese cinema, as a unique cultural and artistic form, has undergone a long history and changes. In 1895, after the Lumi è re brothers screened their first film at a café, cinema was officially born. The origin of Chinese cinema can be traced back to 1905, when Ren Qingtai, the founder of Beijing Fengtai Photography Studio, filmed the scene of Ding Junshan starring the famous Peking Opera actor Tan Xinpei. This is the first film made by Chinese people. The birth of movies and how they were introduced into the early historical context of China. In the 1990s, Chinese films gradually entered the international market, and the themes and creative styles of films became more diverse. Many movies have started to focus on issues in modern society, and commercial blockbusters have also emerged, such as Jet Li's "Faye Wong" series and Zhang Yimou's "Raise the Red Lantern". Around 2010, the development of Chinese cinema, the technology that changed its appearance after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, and the integration of Chinese cinema with excellent traditional Chinese culture around 2010. The beneficial impact on society, the help to spread Chinese culture, and the cultural confidence it brings to the Chinese people.

**Keywords:** Chinese Film, Artistic Characteristics, Cultural Meaning

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## INTRODUCTION

Films are a multidimensional art form. It not only covers art categories such as literature, drama, music, art, and dance, but also includes two communication media: visual and auditory. In films, visual expression is conveyed through the composition of images, the use of light and shadow, and the presentation of scenes, while auditory expression is conveyed through the use of sound effects and music. In addition, some people believe that films should also include the transmission of multiple senses such as touch, taste, and smell. In China, the beginning, development, and prosperity of film are influenced by its unique historical environment. In addition to the commonalities in the development of world film, Chinese film also presents unique features, reflecting its unique culture, history, and social outlook. (He Aijun and Zheng Xiangyang, 2024)

From the perspective of the development track of China's film market and the reform process of China's film industry, with the sixth technological revolution of the mobile Internet and the further acceleration of China's modernization process, the advantages of China's technology, China's strength and China's wisdom are increasingly prominent, which further requires the high-quality development of Chinese films, as well as the automatic matching of the supply of cultural works that can support the rich connotation of the "Chinese spirit" and be loved and widely spread by the public. The Chinese film market has grown and developed through the gradual intelligent connection between the genes of "content" and "audience". The vast majority of people want to watch more excellent films and better enjoy the various experiences of integrating films into their lives. However, despite the significant achievements of Chinese films worldwide, they still face many challenges. The market competition is becoming increasingly fierce, and the demands of audiences are diverse. Content creation and technological innovation urgently need to be improved. Whether Chinese films can withstand the test is still a question. To this end, the industry should focus on strengthening the development of original content and encourage the exploration of diverse themes to better meet the expectations of the audience. While satisfying their abundant material needs, they can also satisfy their spiritual needs. However, whether the current film market can provide sufficient supply for these demands (i.e. whether there are enough excellent films, and whether there are enough technical methods and channel systems to widely disseminate excellent films) has become a fundamental contradiction in the operation of the Chinese film market (Zhang Yuhu, 2023).

In the context of globalization, how to enhance the cultural identity and national characteristics of Chinese films, so that they can better spread Chinese culture and values internationally, while also meeting the aesthetic needs of audiences in different countries and regions, and improving the international influence and competitiveness of Chinese films.

China from 1905 to 1949. In a period of intense social change and transformation. Early films were mostly driven by commercial interests and began to sprout and develop, with some private capital entering the field of film production. During this period, as the tide of the times advanced, the government gradually began to pay attention to the management and regulation of the film industry. For example, the Nationalist government once introduced some relevant censorship regulations in an attempt to control the content of films, which to some extent affected the direction of film creation. In addition, many knowledgeable people are actively exploring the artistic value and social significance of films. Some progressive filmmakers have created a large number of works that reflect social reality and awaken the public, such as "Crossroads". At the same time, the cultural characteristics and social styles of different regions are deeply imprinted in Chinese film. Shanghai, as the center of film at that time, provided rich materials and inspiration for films with its fashionable and diverse urban culture. Some stories with local characteristics have also been brought to the silver screen, showcasing the diverse charm of Chinese film. Similarly, the mainstream trends of the times and the advocacy of

cultural elites have profoundly influenced the development of film during this period, making it an important artistic carrier that reflects the changes in Chinese society and the voices of the people.

Films have carried the cultural imprint of their time since their inception. The origin stage of Chinese film reflects the cultural atmosphere, traditional values, and folk customs of early Chinese society. For example, in Chinese films of the early 20th century, such as “Love of the Laborer” (1922), it depicted the everyday life of ordinary people at that time. By studying its origins, we can uncover many cultural details such as the way of life and social etiquette of our ancestors. These details are like fragments of a historical and cultural puzzle, piecing together a complete picture of cultural memory, avoiding the disappearance of these precious cultural elements over time. While inheriting cultural memory, we can understand the evolution of culture, reflect social changes, record technological progress, and explore the foundation of film art at the level of artistic development. Studying the origins can find the source of Chinese film art style. Early Chinese films had unique explorations in narrative structure, camera language, performance style, and other aspects. For example, early Chinese films were influenced by traditional literary narrative in their storytelling, emphasizing the transition from beginning to end. In terms of camera language, from simply recording scenes to consciously using scene changes to create atmosphere. Understanding the artistic techniques of these origin stages helps us understand the formation and development of Chinese film art styles, providing traditional nourishment for contemporary film art creation. It is also possible to compare the differences in international film development, while absorbing Western film technology and integrating its own cultural characteristics. This comparative study helps us accurately grasp the position and characteristics of Chinese films in the context of global film development, and better promote the exchange and reference between Chinese and international films.

## **LITERATURE REVIEWS**

Films are a multidimensional art form. It not only covers art categories such as literature, drama, music, art, and dance, but also includes two communication media: visual and auditory. In films, visual expression is conveyed through the composition of images, the use of light and shadow, and the presentation of scenes, while auditory expression is conveyed through the use of sound effects and music. In addition, some people believe that films should also include the transmission of multiple senses such as touch, taste, and smell. In China, the beginning, development, and prosperity of film are influenced by its unique historical environment. In addition to the commonalities in the development of world film, Chinese film also presents unique features, reflecting its unique culture, history, and social outlook. Film works are all recorded by machines, so directors have greater flexibility in scene structure through techniques such as montage, editing, and special effects. In addition, the use of photography techniques gives the backgrounds of films and TV dramas a deeper sense of reality. Editing is a very important part of film production. This is both a technical task and a creative labor. Combine scattered shots into a complete film based on the plot development of the story. The emergence and development of special effects have epoch-making significance. It can bring a whole new world to the audience, which cannot be achieved on stage. Stage plays and films both have characteristics that the other does not have. Although they expressed the same thing, they brought different experiences to the audience. (Zhang Wangh, 2023)

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Quantitative Study**

**Documentary**

Researchers conducted a comprehensive literature search using websites and other resources (<https://www.baidu.com>). Refer to relevant papers on China National Knowledge

Infrastructure for information extraction. Collect a large amount of data through questionnaire surveys of film actors and enthusiasts, and then use statistical methods for analysis, with a focus on collecting information related to the origin and development of films to expand the knowledge framework.

### **Interview method**

Interview film enthusiasts as research subjects. Firstly, ask them why they enjoy watching Chinese films and what Chinese films have brought to them. Under the guidance of these themes, let the interviewees understand their views and experiences on these aspects. Secondly, use open-ended questions to guide the interview, asking “What is your favorite Chinese film and why?” Finally, during the interview process, use recording devices or take notes to record the conversation with the interviewee. After the interview, carefully organize and analyze the interview content to gain meaningful insights and perspectives.

### **Observation**

Face Changing in Sichuan Opera in the Chinese film, face changing and color change in the film will suggesting the development of the plot.

Character personality transformation, in the early stages of the film, the protagonist may be an aimless and idle person, but as the plot progresses, they constantly push the protagonist to acquire good habits and character to gradually advance the plot and reach its climax.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

The Origin of Chinese film

### **The birth of films and how they were introduced to China**

Early screening stage (around 1896):

On December 28, 1895, the Lumière brothers in France successfully screened their film at the coffee at 14 Rue Capusin in Paris, marking the official arrival of the film era. Afterwards, the Lumière brothers hired twenty assistants to travel to five continents to screen films, which began to spread worldwide.

On August 11, 1896, the film appeared at the Xuyuan Acrobatics Amusement Park in Shanghai, China, and was known as “Western film”, which was a landmark event for the introduction of film into China. At that time, only a very small number of wealthy and powerful upper class individuals were able to watch films.

### **Early historical background**

The origin of Chinese film can be traced back to the early 20th century. At that time, Western film technology gradually spread to China. In 1905, the “Guangming film” in Shanghai began screening films, marking the birth of Chinese film. Early films were mostly silent films with diverse content, covering forms such as opera and feature films. At that time, films were mainly influenced by foreign films and lacked local characteristics.

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In 1905, the first film “Dingjun Mountain” shot by the Chinese themselves was born in Beijing Fengtai Photo Studio. This milestone event has become an important turning point for Chinese film, opening a new chapter in the Chinese film industry. The birth of “Dingjun Mountain” marks a milestone in the Chinese film industry and lays the foundation for the increasingly prosperous film industry. After its release at the Grand View Tower in Qianmen, Beijing, this film received high praise from the audience. Its emergence laid a solid foundation for the Chinese film industry and raised people’s expectations for Chinese film. (He Aijun and Zheng Xiangyang, 2024)

After 1937, war and political turmoil had a huge impact on the Shanghai film industry. The turning points of this period include the disappearance of celebrities, the disintegration of Lianhua, and the southward movement of Tianyi, leading to the gradual decline of the old film industry. This marks the abrupt end of the first golden age of China's film industry development amidst the sound of war. Subsequently, it entered the peak of film creation during the War of Resistance Against Japan. In the 1980s, the Chinese film industry developed rapidly, especially with the rise of literary biographical films. In the 21st century, the determination of the film industry to commercialize has been recognized by the entire industry. This means that the film industry has shifted from a traditional production model to a market-oriented approach. With the determination of marketization, film production and distribution pay more attention to market demand and audience reputation, rather than just artistic creation.

In the 1920s, a batch of long story films emerged in China, such as "Yan Ruisheng" directed by Ren Pengnian, "Sea Oath" by Du Yu, and "Red Skull" by Guan Haifeng, marking the transition of Chinese film from its initial stage to its growth stage.

In short, the introduction of films into China is a gradual process of development, which has gone through multiple stages of evolution from the initial screening to the production of local films, and then to the initial formation of the film industry. (baidubaike)



**Figure 1** Dingjun Mountain

### **The Development of Chinese Film in the Early 21st Century**

In the 21st century, the determination of marketization in the film industry has been recognized throughout the industry. This means that the film industry has undergone a transformation from a traditional production model to a market-oriented approach. With the determination of marketization, film production and distribution pay more attention to market demand and audience reputation, rather than simply artistic creation. For example, an increasing number of film production companies are incorporating marketing strategies into their production processes, confirming audience needs through market research, in order to better integrate into the wave of marketization. In this process, various professional terms related to film production, such as market research and marketing strategies, have become increasingly important key vocabulary. This means that the film industry is no longer limited to the field of artistic creation, but is seeking better development in a market-oriented environment. (Chen Weihua, 2022)



**Figure 2** The Great Tangshan Earthquake

### **The development of Chinese film around 2010**

The development of Chinese film during this period was a diversified exploration, reflected in a series of representative films. For example, “Red Cliff” showcases the epic of ancient Chinese warfare, highlighting the wisdom and courage in war, as well as the political struggles and grudges of the time. The Tangshan Earthquake, set against the background of the 1976 Tangshan earthquake, shows the tenacity and solidarity of the Chinese people in the face of disasters through people’s struggle for survival. Detective Dee Renjie, Let the Bullets Fly, Cold War, and other works showcase the development of detective and gangster themes in China.



**Figure 3** let the bullet fly

### **The integration of excellent traditional Chinese culture and Chinese film**

During the Republic of China period, there were innovations in facial changing techniques, and actors began to explore new ways and skills of expression. For example, the technique of changing faces adds more dramatic effects and visual impact to performances, enhancing the audience’s viewing experience. In addition, the dissemination of face changing techniques during this period also received more support and recognition, laying the foundation for its subsequent development. (Liu Xiaolei, 2007)

## Theories and Concepts

**Montage:** Montage means "splicing" in French, but in Russia it was developed into a theory of lens combination in movies. In the paint and painting industry, Montage is also a unique artistic technique and the meaning of free style painting.

When different lenses are spliced together, they often produce specific meanings that do not exist when each lens exists separately.

**Object awareness:** The object that an actor focuses on in a certain action. During the performance, actors are more likely to focus on objects in front of the mirror, but more difficult to focus on distant objects.

**Performance emotion:** refers to a psychological reaction of an actor during creation. When an actor is subjected to a certain stimulus, this psychological reaction will occur, leading to a series of logical behavioral actions. The performance of an actor reflects the character's image by generating certain emotions and behavioral actions through various external and internal factors.

**Action clues:** The inherent logical development patterns provided by characters for actors. The action clues should be continuous in both conversational and non-conversational scenes. The actor maintains the integrity of the action clues throughout the performance, ensuring that the character's behavior is thought-provoking, complete, and coherent.

**Actor:** A collective term used in ancient times to refer to artists who engaged in singing, dancing, comedy, and acrobatic performances. It is generally believed that those who mainly perform banter are called "haiyou", while those who mainly perform music and dance are called "advocating excellence". Artists who play music are called "actors". Since the Song and Yuan dynasties, opera actors have often been referred to as actors.

**Dramatic virtuality:** Refers to the process of using artistic virtuality to express the reality of life, which is the basic technique for traditional Chinese opera to express life. It utilizes the assumptions of the stage to flexibly handle time and space. In the relationship between art and life, strive for resemblance in spirit rather than in form. For example, to draw prizes for virtual boating, to explore virtual nights, and to express changes in time with louder sounds.. It can help to express the emotions of characters, embellish dramatic colors, and enhance and enhance the atmosphere of the stage.

**Drama Program:** The artistic and technical rhythm and norms formed and developed in the performance of traditional Chinese opera. It refines and processes language and actions in daily life, forming standardized performance methods for singing, reciting, doing, playing, music accompaniment, makeup, clothing, etc., and making the form of life musical, dance, and standardized. There are basic fixed formats for closing doors, boating, and running horses in performances. It is more expressive and formal than natural forms in life, and its programs must constantly enrich, change, and develop with the development of society.

**Industry:** Categories of traditional opera characters. In modern times, there are two main branch methods: Sheng, Dan, Jing, Chou, and Sheng, Dan, Jing, Mo, and Chou. There are several branches in each profession, such as Sheng, which can be divided into Lao Sheng, Xiao Sheng, etc. There are also differences in the levels and titles of various genres in terms of complexity.

**Profession:** the category of traditional opera roles. In modern times, there were two kinds of general branch methods: health, Dan, Jing, Chou and health, Dan, Jing, Mo, Chou. There are several branches in each profession. For example, students are divided into old students and young students. There are differences in the level of branches and titles of various plays.

**Theatrical virtuality:** it refers to the process of expressing the reality of life with the emptiness of art, which is the basic technique of drama to express life. It uses the assumption of the stage to deal with time and space flexibly. In the relationship between art and life, we should strive for similarity in spirit rather than shape. Such as virtual sailing with prizes, virtual night with

groping, time change with louder voice, etc. It can help to express the characters' emotions, tint the drama, and highlight and render the stage atmosphere.

Drama formula: the artistic and technical rules and regulations developed in the drama performance. It refines and processes the language and actions in life, so that singing, reading, doing, playing, music accompaniment, makeup, clothing and so on form a standardized performance method, making the form of life musicalized, danced and standardized. For example, there are basically fixed formats for closing the door, sailing, horse racing, etc. in the performance. It is more expressive and formal than the natural form in life, and the formula must be enriched, changed and developed with the development of society.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The rise and development of Chinese film have benefited from its unique historical environment and cultural background. This process not only conforms to the general laws of world film development, but also presents its own unique characteristics. Chinese films face numerous challenges in their growth, including creative limitations and market competition. However, Chinese films still have broad prospects for development. The international influence and box office revenue growth trend of Chinese films indicate the possibility of steady growth in the future. The rapid development of China's film industry cannot be separated from the shaping and dissemination of socialist culture with Chinese characteristics. Through in-depth research on Chinese films, we can better understand their artistic features and cultural significance. In modern society, Chinese films not only continue to develop, but also play an important role in cultural dissemination on a global scale. (He Aijun and Zheng Xiangyang 2024)

Chinese films have undergone several historic transformations, from the initial stage of imitation, to gradually developing unique artistic styles, and now becoming an important member of the global film industry. In terms of creation, Chinese films not only inherit rich traditional culture, but also absorb the technology and ideas of Western films, constantly exploring new forms and contents. With the globalization of the film market and the internationalization of Chinese films, Chinese films will undoubtedly continue to occupy an important position in the global film industry in the future. From the beginning of spring in a small town, with a river flowing eastward, eight thousand miles of clouds and moon, flower garlands on high mountains, to Huang Feihong, Huo Yuanjia, and now various films emerging endlessly, the development of Chinese film will continue to improve.

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