

An Analysis of Overseas Marketing Strategies for Chinese Cultural Films: The Last Emperor and Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon as Examples

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Abstract: Movies, being a vital vehicle for cultural exchange, hold sway in international cultural interactions. In recent years, the Chinese film industry has chalked up remarkable achievements in the domestic market, with the number of films and box-office takings on the continuous rise. Nevertheless, when cast eyes on the international stage, there's still a yawning chasm in influence when pitted against international film behemoths like Hollywood. The question of how to make Chinese films shine in the international market and boost their global competitiveness has become a pressing issue that the film industry must address post-haste. Among the multitude of Chinese films venturing into the international market, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Last Emperor* are two iconic works. They've reaped remarkable international rewards, garnering widespread acclaim and substantial box-office earnings, offering invaluable experience for Chinese cultural films aiming to go global.

1 INTRODUCTION

This research zeroes in on the overseas marketing strategies of Chinese cultural films, taking *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Last Emperor*, two films enjoying high popularity and influence abroad, as prime examples for in-depth scrutiny. These two films embody the accomplishments of Chinese cultural films in overseas dissemination across different eras, encompassing diverse themes and cultural manifestations. Studying them can yield copious and representative insights and lessons for the overseas marketing of Chinese cultural films. In previous research, scholars have probed into the overseas marketing of films from various angles. Some studies have hosted on the dissemination of film cultural elements, analyzing their functions in cross-cultural communication (Liao, 2024). Others focused on film marketing channels and tactics, exploring ways to enhance the promotional impact of films in the international market (Jia, 2024).

However, there remains a dearth of systematic and in-depth research on the overseas marketing strategies of Chinese cultural films, especially those integrating specific data for quantitative analysis.

This article will employ literature analysis to sum up measures to mitigate cultural discount. It will also utilize data analysis techniques, selecting multiple indicators such as the correlation between box-office figures and the number of countries of release, the disparity between Chinese and foreign ratings, cultural dissemination potency (the duration of Chinese elements in the film), and film festival nominations. Data will be gathered via professional data platforms like Box Office Mojo and then organized and analyzed.

Subsequently, this article will thoroughly discuss the hardships and challenges confronted by Chinese cultural films during the process of overseas marketing and analyze the key components of successful marketing. Finally, it will summarize the research findings, propose improvement suggestions, and look forward to the future development of the overseas marketing of Chinese cultural films.

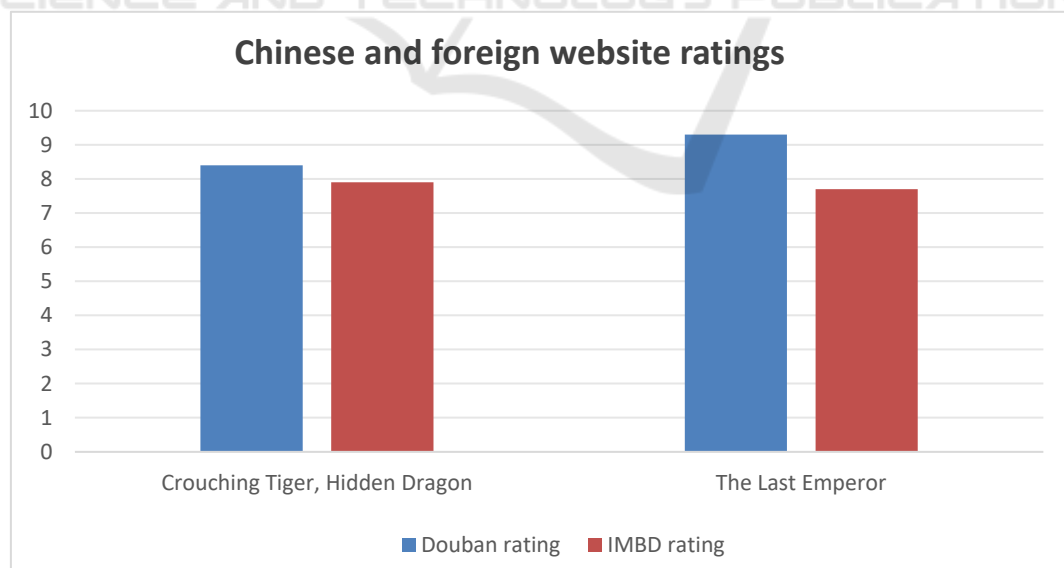
2 DATA ANALYSIS

2.1 Indicator Explanation

The film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is characterized by the photography and visual performance of the Chinese-speaking team and its original soundtrack. In 2001, it won several awards, including the Best Foreign Language Film, Best Cinematography, Best Screenplay, and Best Original Score at the Oscars. It also won the Best Foreign Language Film, Best Director, and Best Original Score at the Golden Globe Awards. The film achieved box-office success in many regions around the world, such as the United States, northwestern Europe, Australia, and Taiwan. Its global box - office reached \$213 million, and its box - office in the United States was \$128 million. As shown in figure 1, in terms of ratings, the film has an IMDb rating of 7.9 (with 287,000 raters) and a Douban rating of 8.4 (with 500,000 raters), reflecting a high level of recognition from international audiences. In addition, as shown in figure.2, the total duration of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is 120 minutes, with classical music accounting for 17.5% (21 minutes), martial arts scenes accounting for 20.8% (25 minutes), and Chinese classical cultural symbols accounting for 42.5% (51 minutes).

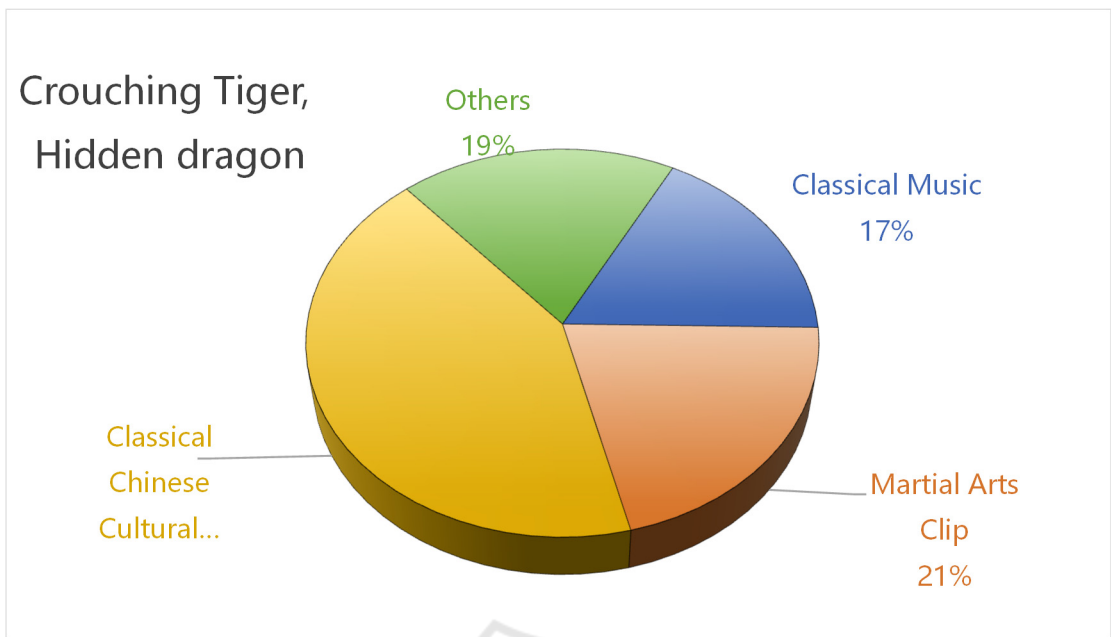
The film *The Last Emperor* benefits from the photography skills of the Italian director, the visual

performance of the Chinese-speaking team in costume and art design, and the auditory performance of the Japanese team in music. In 1988, it won eight Oscars, including Best Director, Best Cinematography, and Best Art Direction. It also won the Best Director and Best Original Score at the Golden Globe Awards. This film was mainly released exclusively in the United States and re - released in Europe for film festivals. Its global box-office was \$43.99 million, and its box - office in the United States was \$43.98 million. The film has an IMDb rating of 7.7 (with 115,000 raters) and a Douban rating of 9.3 (with 970,000 raters), indicating a higher level of discussion among domestic audiences. In addition, as shown in figure.3, the total duration of the US - released version of this film is 163 minutes, with the symbols of oriental imperial power accounting for about 18.4% (30 minutes), Manchu - style clothing accounting for about 21.5% (35 minutes), color imagery accounting for about 30.7% (50 minutes), and traditional music and Peking Opera accounting for about 12.3% (20 minutes). Both films incorporate a large number of Chinese cultural elements, but with different emphases. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* focuses more on elements such as martial arts and classical cultural symbols, while *The Last Emperor* emphasizes the symbols of oriental imperial power, clothing, and color imagery.



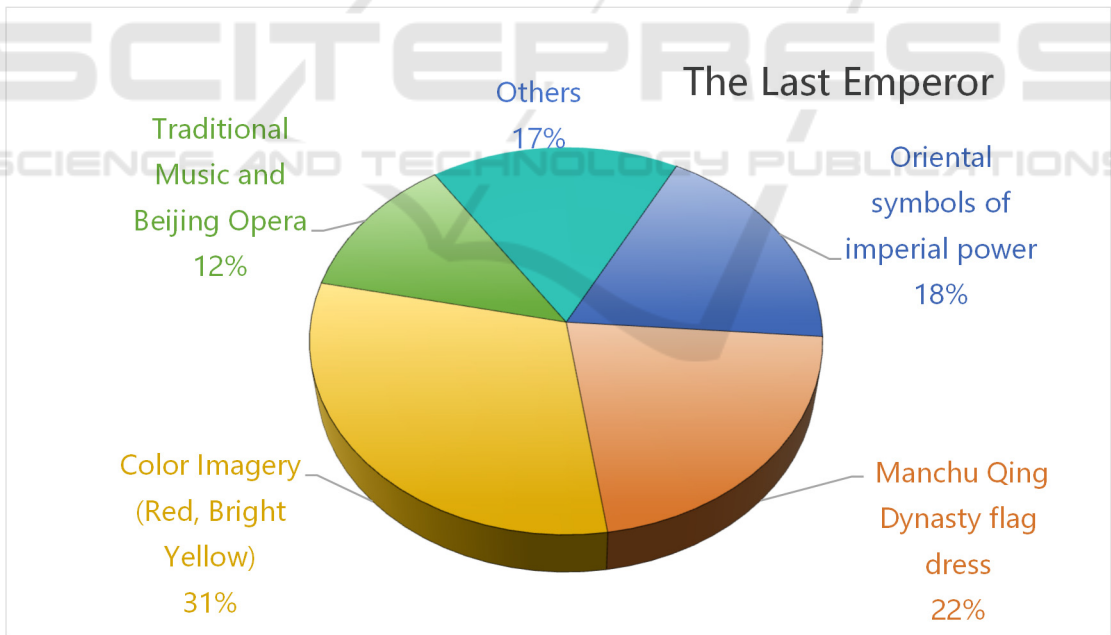
Alt Text for the figure: This picture reflects the Douban score and IMBD score of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Last Emperor*.

Figure 1. Chinese and foreign website ratings.



Alt Text for the figure: The figure shows the proportion of China elements in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon movies, including classical music, martial arts scenes, China classical cultural symbols and other elements.

Figure 2. The Proportion of Eastern Elements in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon.



Alt Text for the figure: The picture shows the proportion of cultural elements in China, the film of the last emperor, including symbols of oriental imperial power, satisfying costumes, color images, traditional music and Peking Opera elements.

Figure 3. The Proportion of Eastern Elements' Duration in The Last Emperor.

2.2 Data Graph Analysis

The Cultural Discount Index is a tool used to gauge the extent of cultural barriers that crop up when a cultural product or service is disseminated across national borders (Shen et al., 2022). P-local represents the average price or level of popularity in the local market, and P-foreign stands for the corresponding metric in the international market.

The difference between these two indicators, divided by P-local, represents the cultural discount index. A larger CDI value means a higher cultural discount. In plain English, this implies that due to cultural disparities in the international market, the acceptance of the cultural product takes a nosedive. On the flip side, a smaller CDI value translates to a lower cultural discount. In real-world scenarios, “popularity” isn't just a one-dimensional concept; it's reflected through a whole host of data. Popularity can be measured by box office takings, the number of people flocking to the theaters, and ratings. For instance, in this document, for movies like Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon and The Last Emperor, data from platforms like IMDb and Douban ratings are used to get a sense of their popularity in different markets. This, in turn, serves as a useful reference for analyzing the Cultural Discount Index. However, relying solely on ratings to measure the Cultural Discount Index is like trying to see the whole picture with one eye closed. It's not comprehensive enough.

To accurately assess how much cultural products are affected by cultural differences in the international market, this paper considers data on box office revenues, movie attendance, and other relevant aspects. Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon has a cultural discount index of 6%, while The Last Emperor has an 18% index. The lower cultural discount index of Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon shows that its cultural elements are a hit in the international market. The Chinese cultural elements in the movie can easily cut through cultural differences and be grasped and embraced by overseas audiences. On the contrary, The Last Emperor has a higher Cultural Discount Index. This might be because some parts of the film, like the oriental court plot viewed from a sexual voyeurism angle, pique the curiosity of Western audiences but also create a bit of a rift with local culture. As a result, the overall acceptance of the cultural elements in the movie takes a hit.

When looking at the Cultural Discount Index and box -office figures, the way cultural elements are presented in Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon might be better for cultural spread and market approval. It

showcases elements like martial arts and classical cultural symbols, which jibe with the top-ranking keywords “female heroes” and “martial arts”. This hits the nail on the head when it comes to meeting the international audience's fancy and expectations for Chinese martial arts culture. On the flip side, some of the debatable plots in The Last Emperor may, to a certain degree, put a damper on its cultural dissemination. Even though it has a wide array of cultural elements, its uptake in the international market is relatively lackluster. This chart makes it crystal clear that Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon zeroes in more on martial arts and classical cultural symbols, like bamboo. Meanwhile, The Last Emperor centers around oriental symbols of imperial power, as well as clothing and color imagery.

3 MEASURES TO REDUCE CULTURAL DISCOUNTS

First off, films ought to establish a star brand. Take "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" for example. It featured well-known Chinese -speaking stars such as Chow Yun-fat, Michelle Yeoh, and Zhang Ziyi. These stars already had a fair amount of popularity and a solid fan base not just in Asia but also in some corners of the world.

Since audiences were big fans of these stars and held them in high regard, they were more likely to shell out money to see the movie at the theater. This, to a certain degree, smoothed out the acceptance hurdles that could stem from cultural disparities (Chen, 2024).

Secondly, it's a smart move to make use of top-notch teams from different countries (co-produced films). For instance, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" was the fruit of a high - flying collaboration between a Chinese-speaking team and a Hollywood team. When it came to photography, visual effects, and original music, the Chinese-speaking team brought their profound knowledge of Chinese culture and their one-of-a-kind aesthetic sensibilities to the table, creating scenes and music that were oozing with Chinese charm. The Hollywood team, on the other hand, with their tried-and-true film making know-how and global distribution experience, pitched in with special effects production, post-editing, and global market promotion. This partnership not only kept the essence of Chinese culture intact but also upped the film's production value and global clout thanks to Hollywood's professional edge, making the film more palatable to

international audiences. "The Last Emperor" was helmed by Italian director Bernardo Bertolucci. It combined a Chinese-speaking costume and art design team with a Japanese music - scoring team. The Italian director injected Western film-narrative styles and shooting techniques, making the film's pacing and visual look more in tune with Western audiences' viewing preferences. The Chinese - speaking team's painstaking work on costume and art design authentically recreated China's historical settings and clothing traditions, while the Japanese team's music added a distinctive auditory touch to the film. The cooperation of these different national teams struck a balance between Eastern and Western cultures in the film and lessened the cultural discount (Zhang, 2020).

Building a director's brand is crucial. Ang Lee, the director of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, is a household name in the international film arena. He's a whiz at blending Eastern culture with Western viewpoints. His earlier works like "Pushing Hands" and "The Wedding Banquet" caught the world's eye and won widespread acclaim. Audiences had an inkling of Ang Lee's creative style and artistic caliber. When "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" hit the screens, because of their trust in the Ang Lee brand, audiences were more than willing to give this film with Chinese -cultural elements a shot. The director's brand power helped the film reel in a huge number of international audiences and removed the roadblocks caused by cultural differences. Bernardo Bertolucci, the director of "The Last Emperor", also has a sterling reputation in the international film community. He's renowned for his unique storytelling methods and in-depth exploration of historical themes. His works such as "Last Tango in Paris" and "The Dreamers" have had a far-reaching impact globally. "The Last Emperor" lured many Western audiences to the cinema under the Bertolucci brand. They were eager to see how Bertolucci would tell China's historical tales, which made the film more readily accepted in the Western market and cut down on the cultural discount (Ethnicity and Global Dissemination..., 2024).

Fourthly, opt for low - context and high-visual-impact communication. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is brimming with visually arresting scenes. Take, for instance, the bamboo forest fight sequence. The verdant bamboo, fluttering bamboo leaves, billowing robes, and spectacular martial arts maneuvers crafted exquisite images (Li, 2024). These scenes didn't call for excessive verbal elaboration. Viewers could directly sense the tense ambiance, the chivalrous essence, and the allure of Chinese martial arts culture. Chinese classical cultural emblems like

Hui - style architecture and the capital city's edifices were showcased via beautiful visuals, enabling international audiences to directly experience the distinct charm of Chinese culture. The high - visual - impact scenes made up for potential comprehension hurdles stemming from cultural disparities. The Last Emperor also placed emphasis on the pictures' expressiveness. The re-creation of settings such as the Forbidden City and the Summer Palace in the film revealed magnificent and beautiful Eastern architectural vistas. Puyi's palace living scenes, through the meticulous arrangement of elements like colors, costumes, and props, generated a powerful visual impact. For example, the grandeur of Puyi's coronation scene, with Puyi donning a resplendent dragon robe, seated on a majestic throne, encircled by solemn palaces and bowing subjects. This high-visual-impact mode of presentation enabled Western audiences, even those with limited acquaintance of Chinese history and culture, to glean the emotions and tales conveyed by the film through the images, thus lessening the cultural discount.

Fifthly, films need to be precisely positioned, and the market segmented. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* deftly melded Eastern martial-arts elements with themes that piqued Western audiences' interest, such as female self-development and the quest for freedom. "Female hero" emerged as one of the film's top-ranking keywords. This setup accurately lured the Western female audience demographic and sated Western audiences' curiosity about the enigmatic Eastern martial-arts realm. The film producers spotlighted diverse selling points for different regional markets. In the European and American markets, they stressed action scenes and individualistic values, while in the Asian market, they zeroed in on promoting the film's cultural legacy and star-studded cast, achieving targeted marketing. The Last Emperor centered on the legendary life of Puyi, the final emperor of China's feudal dynasty. This theme carried a profound sense of mystery and historical heft, which held great appeal for Western audiences. The film gratified Western audiences' curiosity about Eastern history by depicting Puyi's vicissitudes. During the marketing process, it accentuated the unique historical backdrop and character narratives, attracting history buffs and audiences seeking in-depth content (Song, 2018).

Sixthly, movies ought to focus on publicity tactics and topic creation. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* capitalized on the international clout of its lead actors for promotion. Big-name stars such as Chow Yun-fat, Michelle Yeoh, and Zhang Ziyi took part in film promotion events across the globe, catching the eye

of the media and the public. The awesome trailers and posters put out by the film producers zeroed in on the thrilling martial arts action sequences and the gorgeous Eastern imagery, stoking the audiences' eagerness. The movie snagged multiple Oscar and Golden Globe nominations, and the producers jumped at the chance to promote it like crazy, which further boosted the film's popularity and influence and generated a lot of buzz. In the promotion of *The Last Emperor*, the international standing of director Bernardo Bertolucci and his one-of-a-kind filmmaking style were played up to draw in the audience. The Chinese palace culture and the enigmatic Eastern historical elements presented in the film became the main selling points. Thanks to media coverage and film critics' endorsements, it sparked discussions and piqued the curiosity of the viewers. The film bagged eight Oscars and two Golden Globe Awards, and the award-winning news became a major selling point, luring more people to theaters (Liu, 2023).

Seventhly, movies need to be mindful of the choice of release dates and scheduling strategies. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* hit the screens in 2000 when the global film market was booming. It steered clear of the peak release times of Hollywood blockbusters, thus carving out more market space for itself. When it came to scheduling, the producers got in touch with major cinemas to secure more prime screening slots, especially in the key cinemas of major European and American cities, making sure the film got enough exposure and was easily accessible to the audience. Through smart release - date selection and scheduling strategies, the film's box - office performance got a significant lift. When *The Last Emperor* was released in 1987, it also took the release-date factor into full account and was launched at a time when Western audiences were eager to watch movies. In terms of scheduling, it was distributed across both art - house cinemas and large - scale commercial theaters, satisfying the preferences of art - film enthusiasts while also reaching a broader audience and increasing the film's market share.

Hurdles in the Overseas Dissemination of Movie Cultural Content. China still had an air of mystery in Hollywood and Europe. Bernardo Bertolucci threw in some ambiguous interactions between the last emperor and his empress, sexual scenes involving the emperor, empress, and concubines, and same - sex love between Kawashima Yoshiko and the last empress in the film. By using these out-of-the-ordinary love scenes, he took a voyeuristic approach to peek into the East. However, by 2000, the market no longer needed the strange and decadent image of

the Eastern palace to tickle people's aesthetic fancy. The otherworldly martial - arts realm came into the limelight, and the chivalrous spirit and the female rebellious spirit helped eastern films make their mark on the global stage. The voyeuristic angle did pique the interest of Western audiences, but it still carried the vestiges of Western colonial thinking, causing some disconnect with Chinese cultural symbols among the locals.

In the evolution of Chinese cultural films, certain movies, particularly martial - arts flicks, went overboard in showcasing visuals and gradually got stuck in the quagmire of formalism. These films were all about chasing eye-popping visual effects, but they turned a blind eye to delving deep into and effectively conveying the cultural essence. Take some martial arts movies for example. They merely used kung - fu sequences and fantastical special effects as crowd - pullers, barely skimming the surface of cultural meanings like the chivalrous ethos and traditional Chinese values without really unpacking them. Consequently, after watching these films, viewers could only recall the thrilling fight scenes and struggled to grasp the cultural significance hidden beneath. This led to these films lacking staying power and slowly losing their allure in the marketplace. Chinese cultural films grapple with the issue of cultural discount in the international arena. Owing to cultural disparities, the distinctive cultural emblems, values, and storytelling approaches in Chinese cultural films present a steep learning curve for foreign viewers. For instance, some movies rooted in traditional Chinese operas and folk legends come with intricate performance styles, unique linguistic quirks, and profound cultural backstories, which make them a hard nut to crack for Western audiences. As a result, the overseas reach and influence of these films are limited. Disseminating the Chinese cultural core via cultural films can help boost a country's cultural soft power and foster international understanding and recognition of China.

Nevertheless, there are numerous hurdles in the actual dissemination process. On one hand, it's essential to appropriately adapt and present the cultural core while preserving Chinese cultural traits to better align with the aesthetic and comprehension preferences of international audiences. On the other hand, it's necessary to break free from the shackles of the Western mainstream cultural discourse system and aesthetic benchmarks and establish a cultural dissemination framework with Chinese characteristics, endowing Chinese cultural films with a unique edge in the international market (Zhu, 2024).

4 CONCLUSION

This study selected *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Last Emperor* as case studies to conduct an in - depth analysis of the overseas marketing tactics of Chinese cultural films. The figures indicate that *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* outshone in terms of global box-office earnings, market penetration, and international audience reception. Even though *The Last Emperor* boasted high artistic merits, its acceptance in the international market was hampered by some plot elements. The strategies employed by these two films to mitigate cultural discounts are worthy of emulation. Directors can draw in audiences by capitalizing on the star power and directorial influence on lower cultural barriers, embrace the co - production model to combine the strengths of different parties, utilize high - impact visual communication to surmount cultural hurdles, and precisely target the market to meet the diverse needs of audiences. However, the overseas marketing of Chinese cultural films is fraught with challenges.

Some movies pay more heed to visuals than to substance and lack long-term impact. The cultural discount is a significant problem, and cultural differences make it a tough ask for foreign audiences to understand these films. In the future, Chinese cultural films should zero in on exploring the cultural core, innovating in expression forms, beefing up international cooperation and market research, and devising more effective marketing strategies. With the march of globalization, Chinese cultural films stand a good chance of overcoming difficulties, enhancing their international clout, spreading Chinese culture, and fortifying the country's cultural soft power.

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