Abstract

Those with most at risk politically and economically from the reaction against Globalization are the Chinese. Those with perhaps most at risk in narrower commercial terms are the Hollywood studios. Since China became the second largest movie market, studios have been in a position to ignore bad reviews, or even bad opening weekends, domestically as they chase the goal of finding narratives that function as the common denominator of two very differing cultures. Today's increasing cultural polarization, however, could make that goal unattainable. The Hollywood Blockbuster, perhaps more than any other cultural artifact today, has an incentive to create opportunities for dialogue across the Sino-American cultural boundary.

"The Great Wall" (2016) was the first big-budget production from Hollywood's Legendary Pictures since its acquisition by China's Wanda. The narrative of Zhang Yimou's epic is the classic narrative of Chinese history as seen by the Chinese: for thousands of years, aggressive, powerful, individualistic barbarians have come to China as conquerors, only to ultimately become convinced of the superiority of Han culture as an antidote to endless social chaos. Matt Damon plays a mercenary who comes to China with the intention of bringing gunpowder to the West, only to be convinced that such awesome power should not be in the hands of those whose culture has not yet developed the concomitant sense of greater responsibility. He learns the lesson of trust (信任), and ultimately gives up his selfish dream of riches to save the life of one true friend. The film's message is one of cooperation and dialogue in the face of irrationality and risk (embodied by the primeval monsters the Wall is keeping out).

The authors believe that the best window on cultural perceptions of the film is to be found on the Internet, the forum where opinions are formed among the film's market demographic. To the list of objections commonly garnered by the use of attitude research in the social sciences, researching the internet adds a lack of verifiability, uncertain provenance, ulterior motives and so on. Accepted methodologies for research of internet forums and such like are as yet thin on the

ground, and the present authors can think of no better method than to task some smart Mandarin-speaking students with mining the landfill of clickbait, trolls, hackers and the like to unearth nuggets that engage the issues we wish to explore. The difficulties are manifold, and perhaps the paper will ultimately deal more with the difficulties we encounter, but the promise of this kind of research we believe to be self-evident.