

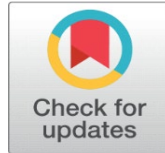
NAVIGATING CULTURAL INFLUENCE IN CHINA'S POST-WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION ERA: CONCEPTUALISING SOCIALIST CULTURAL MARKET

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the historical contexts that shaped the theory of the socialist cultural market in the late 1990s, when Chinese cinema experienced a dramatic decline. It offers insights for English-language theoretical and analytical studies on cultural and industrial governance, both in China and beyond. Through an analysis of academic literature and original policy documents, the study traces the chronological development of the socialist cultural market theory, considering its industrial challenges, historical background, and political necessities. Central to this model is the emphasis on “social effects”, which are coordinated with “economic returns” within a stateregulated, yet relatively open and competitive market setting. Within this system, stateowned enterprises and their cultural products play a leading role, while private and foreign entities also participate. This cultural governance framework helps explain the evolution of cultural policies and sectors—such as film, television, and publishing— across both offline and online domains.

Keywords: Socialist Cultural Market, Social Effects, Economic Returns, State-Owned Enterprises, China

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Chinese films have achieved remarkable box-office success in the domestic market. In 2025, the Chinese animated film *Nezha 2* (2025): *Mo Tong Nao Hai* gained substantial success as the top-grossing film in a single market (internal market) [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#), the first non-Hollywood film to join the global \$1billion club [Hua \(2025\)](#). Likewise, another Chinese blockbuster, *The Eight Hundred* (2020), gathered US\$450.4 million [Rifkin \(2021\)](#). the animated *Ne Zha* (2019), made about US\$720.4 million [Zhu and Tariq \(2019\)](#). The fact-based film *Dying to Survive* (2018) grossed US\$450 million in the domestic market [Kuipers \(2019\)](#). Such box office success is inseparable from the official intent to build a socialist cultural market [Sun \(2024\)](#).

We note a potential research gap in Chinese cinema studies. Even though existing scholarship has widely acknowledged the significant influence of China's cultural and film policies on industry development [Aranburu \(2017\)](#), [Diao \(2020\)](#), major studies have primarily examined the evolution of these policies and industries through historical, political and cultural economy, or soft power frameworks [Baljinnyam \(2024\)](#), [Diao \(2020\)](#), [Fong and Lim \(2024\)](#), [Keane \(2016\)](#), [Peng and Keane \(2019\)](#), [Su \(2021\)](#), [Su \(2022\)](#), [Yang \(2016\)](#), [Yang \(2019\)](#), [Zhai \(2024\)](#), [Zhu and Keane \(2020\)](#). I do not mean to weaken the significant contributions of Western theories to the study of China's cultural policies and industries, but China has developed its own theoretical framework to guide its policy development. Also, the theory of the socialist cultural market has been used as an analytical framework in recent studies [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2026\)](#). However, studies on the contexts in which the socialist cultural market was formulated are far from sufficient. The definition of the cultural industry does not differ substantially between China and the West. In fact, China places greater emphasis on the domestic dimension in cultural governance [Rosen \(2021\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#). The socialist cultural market framework offers a valuable lens for analysing the drivers behind major transformations in China's cultural policies in the post-WTO era (post2001) [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Yang \(2016\)](#), [Zhu and Nakajima \(2010\)](#). This framework is shaped by China's socio-historical context and international competition. To address the research gap, this study will investigate the conceptual emergence of the socialist cultural market and present implications for future studies, thereby broadening the theoretical and methodological horizons of research on China's cultural policy and industry.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study combines existing literature with document analysis to explore the conceptual formation and substantial principles of China's socialist cultural market. By engaging with both Mandarin and English scholarly works, this dual-language study not only establishes a theoretical foundation but also provides a springboard for original academic inquiry [Snyder \(2019\)](#). It enables a comprehensive tracing of the conceptual inception of the socialist cultural market. Thus, doing so provides insights for Englishlanguage academia to inform future studies.

Document analysis, a well-established method in social science research [Peng \(2015\)](#), [Stokes \(2003\)](#), proves particularly valuable for this investigation. As [Bowen \(2009\)](#) notes, this approach involves a systematic examination of policy documents to uncover the underlying motivations and intentions of policymakers. The method's strength lies in its ability to reveal policy characteristics and evolutionary trends across different periods. However, as [Fowler \(1991\)](#) reminds us, an in-depth analysis ultimately depends on human interpretation and contextual understanding — a crucial consideration when examining China's unique cultural policy landscape.

Due to space constraints, this study focuses on six original national cultural blueprints, also known as five-year cultural plans (see [Table 1](#)), to demonstrate how the government intends to consistently institutionalise the construction of a socialist cultural market. The Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development is issued by the National People's Congress (NPC), the highest official and legislative organisation in China. These plans serve as crucial blueprints that set the direction for periodic updates to nation-building efforts in the cultural, defence, economic, and technology areas. The cultural blueprint is officially promulgated in March each year [Sun \(2024\)](#). Due to China's top-down authoritarian system, official five-year plans play a pivotal role in guiding institutional policies set forth by organisations such as the State Council, ministries, bureaus, and commissions [Hu \(2019\)](#). Five-Year Plans, under the guidance of the CCP, provide ideological input to ensure that political discourse embodies its "spirit" and "leadership" [Dreyer \(2024\)](#). As such, China's cultural blueprints set foundational principles for policy areas such as film, television, music, and publishing [Yuan and Zuo \(2011\)](#). For this reason, these plans offer strategic guidance for cyclical updates to cultural development, reflecting the state's sociocultural priorities. Thus, an investigation of these cultural blueprints will give valuable insights into how the country plans to develop culturally over the next five years. Because this study focuses on the domestic level, China's foreign cultural soft-power strategy, as outlined in cultural blueprints, falls beyond its scope and has been discussed elsewhere [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#), therefore, I will not elaborate in detail.

Table 1

Table 1 Five-Year Plans 1996-2021	
1996	Nine Five-Year plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (1996-2000) and the Outline of the 2010 Longterm Goals (1996-2000)
2001	Tenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2001-2005)

2006	Eleventh Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2006-2010)
2011	Twelfth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2011-2015)
2016	Thirteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2016-2020)
2021	Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China and the Outline of the 2035 Long-term Goals (2021-2025)

In addition, the collection of blueprints is documented in Chinese characters to ensure authenticity. These documents are retrieved from the official website of the State Council (<http://www.gov.cn/>), so the data is publicly available. Chinese-language names and phrases are presented in English translation. To ensure the accuracy of the translation, we reviewed a number of prior studies on China's cultural policy and industry [Su \(2016\)](#), [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2026\)](#), [Yang \(2016\)](#), [Yang and Higbee \(2024\)](#). As such, this study makes a significant scholarly contribution by translating key terms of Chinese documents. Such translation work is particularly valuable given the scarcity of up-to-date English versions of many Mandarin documents [Peng \(2015\)](#), thereby enriching the English-language literature on China's cultural landscape. By bridging this linguistic gap, the research provides international scholars with access to crucial materials that would otherwise remain inaccessible to non-Mandarin readers. Therefore, analysing these blueprints is critical to understanding the institutionalisation of the socialist cultural market.

3. HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

To contextualise this study, it is crucial to first explore the role of cultural products since the inception of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Cultural products have served as tools for political ideology. This notion can be traced back to Mao Zedong's (the first president of the PRC) 1942 Yan'an speech, which asserted that "art serves politics" [Sun \(2024\)](#). Based on previous studies [Holbig \(2009\)](#), [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#), the term Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is used. Among all cultural products, the CCP considered films a better reflection of a country's faith and moral condition compared with other cultural forms, including television and publications [Jenkins \(2022\)](#), March 27, [Liu \(2014\)](#), [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Wang \(2022\)](#). As a visually driven medium, film serves as a highly effective tool for mass education in cultural values and political ideology [Kim \(2016\)](#), [Kubrak \(2020\)](#), [Perry \(2017\)](#). An advantage of films is their ability to convey complete narratives within a substantially more condensed temporal structure than television serials. With the increase in urbanisation and education in the post-Open Door era (post-1980s), more Chinese people have chosen film as their primary cultural product to consume [Song \(2018\)](#). Compared with films, the Chinese government has adopted a relatively lenient stance toward print publications owing to the widespread illiteracy and low book readership among the populace. All cultural products, however, were still subject to official censorship before they could be publicly available [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Wang \(2022\)](#).

The conceptual emergence of the socialist cultural market was triggered by the dramatic decline of Chinese cinema in the late 1990s. Under the influence of the Open-Door policy, a notable 1994 reform of film imports ended the 40-year-old tradition of purchasing outdated, low-quality products and allowed 10 foreign films to enter China's market through the revenue-sharing system [Chu \(2021\)](#), [Su \(2011\)](#). However, the stateowned China Film Group Corporation (CFG) continued to monopolise film importation. The reform of film imports improved the quality and variety of films available to Chinese audiences and highlighted the importance of balancing economic interests [Zhu \(2002b\)](#). However, this reform raised Chinese audience expectations for film content and intensified the competition between imported and domestic films. Ten revenue-sharing imports—mainly from Hollywood—dominated China's market in 1995. That year, just nine foreign films accounted for nearly 40% (US\$4.39 million) of box-office revenue, compared to 135 domestic releases [Zhu \(2002a\)](#), [Zhu and Nakajima \(2010\)](#). Hollywood's influence peaked from 1996 to 1997, with *Jurassic Park: The Lost World* (US\$8.7 million) and *Titanic* (US\$47.1 million) breaking records [Huang and Wang \(2013\)](#), [Xiao \(2017\)](#). As a result, the market share of domestic films in box office receipts decreased from 63.9% in 1993 to 31% in 1997 [Chu \(2002\)](#), [Zhang \(2016\)](#), [Zhang \(2004\)](#).

Chinese audiences preferred to watch imported films with more entertainment elements, while formulaic "Main Melody" films with rigid ideological narratives and repetitive plotlines failed to captivate them [Zhang \(2016\)](#), [Zhu \(2002a\)](#). In the late 1980s, the concept of the Main Melody film emerged, intending to promote CCP-approved narratives of socialism, patriotism, and collectivism [Bell and Oakley \(2015\)](#), [Chen and Fan \(2019\)](#), [Guan and Hu \(2021\)](#), [Moon and](#)

[Yin \(2020\)](#). This genre is derived from the Film Administrative Bureau's slogan, the "Promotion of Main Melody and Advocation Diversification" in 1987, which dictated that all cultural products must align with socialist propaganda and the official ideology [Liu \(2014\)](#), [Lu \(2020\)](#). Since then, Mainstream Culture has been perceived as a vehicle of socialist culture and values, while Mainstream Narrative has aligned with the officially endorsed narrative [Cai \(2014\)](#). For instance, *The Birth of New China* (dir: Li Qiankuan and Xiao Guiyun, 1989), categorised as a Main Melody film, narrates the establishment of the PRC and is believed to be one of the pioneering entries in the Chinese film market [Qian \(2022\)](#). However, its narrowly conceived narrative failed to resonate decisively with Chinese audiences [Morrison \(2021\)](#), February 22, [Qian \(2022\)](#).

The insufficient implementation of effective policies did not arrest the downward trajectory of Chinese cinema in the late 1990s. To counter foreign competition, the State Council issued the document Memorandum of the Meeting on Questions Related to the Studies of Television (1995), also known as the "9550 Project", aiming to rejuvenate Chinese cinema by producing 50 high-quality films over five years starting in 1995 [Fan \(2019\)](#). However, the films produced under this project largely adhered to the principles of the propaganda-driven Main Melody genre, which promoted socialist culture (e.g., collectivist and nationalist) and failed to resonate with Chinese audiences [Nilsson \(2015\)](#), [Zhu \(2002b\)](#). Filmmakers struggled to balance commercial appeal with ideological constraints, reflecting Chinese cinema's dual role as both an industry and a propaganda tool. Meanwhile, the government made commendable efforts to reform the exhibition sector to address the decline in box-office market share. For example, the Film Administrative Regulations (1996), issued by the State Council, mandated that two-thirds of screen time should be allocated to domestic films annually (Article 45) [State Council \(1996b\)](#). The State Council issued the Regulation of State Council on

Further Improving Cultural Economy (1996), which aimed to enhance the National Film Development Funds (Article 4) [State Council \(1996c\)](#) and to provide crucial financial support for the construction of theatres and for film production [Parc et al. \(2022\)](#). However, these policies failed to halt the decline of Chinese cinema in the late 1990s due to fierce foreign competition [Sun \(2024\)](#). By the late 1990s, confronted with increasing foreign competition, the Chinese government had to strategise how to cultivate a robust socialist cultural market that aligned with its socialist ethos.

The decline of Chinese cinema sparked anxiety among the Chinese government and its filmmakers [Chu \(2002\)](#), [Keane and Fung \(2018\)](#), [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Wang \(2014\)](#). More than that, the anxiety from the Chinese government stems from recognition that cultural activities, goods, and services possess not only economic but also ideological natures [Goff \(2019\)](#). The Chinese government's concerns were well-founded, given WTO accession commitments requiring further liberalisation of its cultural market. This situation was metaphorically portrayed as "wolves at the door" [Keane et al. \(2020\)](#), highlighting the grim predicament faced by Chinese cinema [Zhou \(2007\)](#). The Chinese scholar Dai Jinhua figuratively asserted, "A warning of an approaching wolf eight years ago today translates into warnings of an approaching pack of wolves" [Wang \(2003\)](#), underscoring the fiercer competition that Chinese cinema would face. Additionally, one of China's most influential film directors, Chen Kaige, described Chinese cinema at the Film and Literature Conference in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, in 1999 as being precariously placed at "the crossroads between survival and collapse" [Chu \(2002\)](#). Indeed, Chen feared that Chinese cinema "will be destroyed within one or two decades" [Chu \(2002\)](#).

4. SOCIALIST CULTURAL MARKET AND ITS REGULATION

As Chinese cinema faltered under foreign competition, the concept of a socialist cultural market emerged in the late 1990s amid industrial decline. The socialist cultural market is based on the socialist market economy system [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). The debut of the "cultural market" was in the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1991-1996) [State Council \(1991\)](#). A market is a platform in which "the suppliers and demanders of commodities meet" [Kozel \(2006\)](#) "for the exchange of commodities" [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). In 1999, the practice of a socialist market economy was formally affirmed in the Ninth Five-Year Plan and the Outline of the 2010 Long-term Goals, which emphasised elevating living standards and promoting the development of the cultural market system [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#), [State Council \(1996a\)](#), reflecting the Chinese government's preparations to navigate the cultural influences in the post-WTO era. Broadly, a cultural market is a platform for the production, provision, and trade of cultural products [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#), [Zheng \(1996\)](#). The practice of a socialist market economy was affirmed after Deng Xiaoping's "Southern Sojourn" in 1992, which won the consensus from the Party cadres [Gallagher \(2002\)](#), [Liu \(2014\)](#). Since 1994, China's "socialist planned commodity economy system" has been shifting to "the socialist market economy" [Chin \(2017\)](#), [Wang \(2002\)](#). In China, the planned commodity economy serves as an intermediate, temporary system that bridges the gap between the planned economy and the socialist market economy. The socialist cultural market specifically deals with cultural products, while the socialist market economy

concerns the broader economic system, integrating market principles into socialist governance [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#), [Zheng \(1996\)](#).

From a legislative perspective, Chinese scholars [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#) examine the principles underlying the socialist cultural market. The socialist cultural market includes markets for “performance art, cultural entertainment (such as bowling alleys and skating rinks), books, newspapers, films, and audio products” [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). In principle, it is crucial to develop and promote socialist “cultural undertakings” that prioritises “social effects” in the socialist cultural market. Based on prior studies [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#), we use the translation “social effects” for the Chinese concept Shehui Xiaoyi to fully capture its broader semantic range, which includes, but is not limited to, positive outcomes. Even though “social effects” include “political”, “moral”, and “cultural” effects, the “political effects” are given precedence [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). “Political effects” here refer to the benefits of constructing the “socialist spiritual civilisation” [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#), [Zheng \(1996\)](#). This concept, which emerged in the late 1980s, encompasses the “ideals” of socialist “morality” and “discipline” [Ding \(1994\)](#). The principle of discipline implicitly guides people to abide by the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (1982) and laws. That is to say, China’s political leadership is employing stringent measures of political control to unify the populace under a cohesive national ideology [Zhu \(2022\)](#). Therefore, the government should encourage and support “Main Melody cultural products” [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#), pp. 11-15) to reflect their ideological nature, employing “soft techniques of governance” [Gallelli \(2024\)](#) on cultural values and political beliefs. Additionally, films should guide the behaviours of teenagers in the socialist cultural market [Jiang \(2005\)](#). In other words, film creation and cinema should act as catalysts for advancing the socialist cultural market and promoting its expansion [Wang \(1994\)](#). Cultural products should guide people’s “thoughts”, “morality”, and “values”, as well as “to educate” [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). Thus, state-owned enterprises and their products are meant to lead in the state-controlled socialist cultural market, as the government can largely influence them to illuminate “social effects”. Cultural products play a key role in fostering “socialist culture” [Lin \(2007\)](#). While private and foreign enterprises also participate [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#), the “economic returns of enterprises and individuals” should be subordinate to the principle of “social effects” [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#).

Also, [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#) examine the regulatory framework of the socialist cultural market. The regulations for a socialist cultural market include administrative and legal measures to address and govern the various relationships within it, thereby ensuring its sustainable development. The guiding principles for regulating the socialist cultural market should be based on the Constitution (1982) and a combination of social and economic effects [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). Governance of the socialist cultural market should strive to promote reform, openness, and competition while also regulating market supply and demand dynamics [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). The regulation of the cultural market is anchored in national laws, such as regulations, decisions, and provisions, and is administered through official procedures [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). Once the principles and systems for cultural market management are established by law, they hold long-term stability and continuity and should not be subject to arbitrary changes. Likewise, [Wen \(1994\)](#) asserts that the government should oversee and regulate market behaviours by formulating market rules, issuing regulations to manage the cultural market, maintaining market order, and penalising violations of national laws and regulations.

As China approached WTO membership, the Chinese government heightened its intention to establish a socialist cultural market. For example, the report of Communiqué of the Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in late 1996 emphasised the importance of actively promoting the development of the cultural market, vigorously supporting the production of healthy cultural products, and advocating for beneficial cultural and entertainment activities that align with public consumption levels [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). In 1997, the former paramount leader, Jiang Zemin, in his report to the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, emphasised the significance of creating a favourable cultural environment as a prerequisite for promoting social civilisation, reform, and modernisation [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). However, it is important to recognise that the construction of the socialist cultural market was still in its early stages and required further development in the late 1990s [Zheng \(1996\)](#). In this evolving landscape, challenges such as inadequate governance and a lack of directional guidance persist. As a result, in the face of increasing international competition, it is imperative to proactively issue and enforce policies and regulations that provide macro-level governance [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#). Therefore, cultivating a robust socialist cultural market represents an emerging task grounded in the context of globalisation.

5. INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE SOCIALIST CULTURAL MARKET

China's blueprints have outlined a clear theoretical framework of the socialist cultural market. Due to space limitations, I provide a brief discussion here. For more detailed information, please refer to [Sun \(2024\)](#). Since 2001, China's five consecutive cultural blueprints have emphasised the aim of constructing a "unified", "open", "competitive", and "orderly" socialist cultural market [State Council \(2001\)](#), [State Council \(2006\)](#), [State Council \(2011\)](#), [State Council \(2021\)](#). This reflects the government's intent to maintain stringent control over the cultural sector [Sun \(2024\)](#).

Building on the previous paragraph, "unified" refers to the government-led management, "open" signifies diverse capital forms (e.g., foreign and private capital) can enter the cultural sector, "competitive" means cultural enterprises to compete fairly in an open market through content innovation, product quality, service standards, and management efficiency, rather than relying on administrative privileges or monopolistic dominance, and "orderly" denotes standardised operations under the rule of law and official oversight [Li and Cao \(1998\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2026\)](#). For example, the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) first introduced the term "cultural industry" alongside "cultural undertakings" [Hu \(2019\)](#), [Keane \(2019\)](#), [State Council \(2001\)](#), aligning "social effects" with "economic returns" in a socialist cultural market. The use of the term "cultural industry" highlights the significance of cultural capital and productivity [Bornmann \(2013\)](#). In other words, culture serves both "politics" and "economy" in the post-WTO context [Shan \(2014\)](#). This reflects that the Chinese government recognises the significance of both ideological control and economic viability in cultural activities, goods and services [Lee \(2016\)](#), [Overpeck \(2017\)](#), [Zhu \(2003\)](#). Because cultural products convey identities and values, they should not be viewed solely in terms of their commercial values [Goff \(2019\)](#). The deliberate incorporation of the term "cultural industry" at the highest echelons of official documents spurred the emergence of new institutional sub-discourses, such as the film, television, and publishing industries.

Furthermore, those blueprints, the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) and the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), have highlighted that cultural production must prioritise "social effects" over "economic returns" [State Council \(2001\)](#), [State Council \(2011\)](#). In other words, "economic returns" is subordinated to "social effects", indicating their "asymmetrical relationship" [Baker and Ellece \(2011\)](#). To achieve "social effects, the government supports the production of Main Melody products, reinforcing official ideology [Sun \(2024\)](#). "Cultural undertakings", as a means of reinforcing "social effects", underscores the role of cultural products in serving socialism by carrying out political education and promoting officially sanctioned ideology, thereby ensuring social stability [Sun \(2024\)](#). "Cultural industry" in cultural blueprints emphasises the "economic returns" of cultural products. In the socialist cultural market, state-owned enterprises take the lead, while private and foreign firms are permitted to participate. This aligns with China's adherence to Marxist-Leninist principles, resulting in an institutional framework that encourages direct oversight of the media's economic outcomes [Haenig and Ji \(2024\)](#). However, cultural products that emphasise political messages (e.g., political consensus and authoritarian socialist values) may struggle to attract a broad international audience. Still, the Fourteenth Five-Year Plans (2021-2025) reflect a concerted commitment to constructing a socialist cultural market. This is achieved through integrating private and foreign capital, advancing cultural undertakings, and modernising the cultural industry [State Council \(2016\)](#), [State Council \(2021\)](#). Because of China's top-down approach, this theoretical framework has endured to this day. It has been further incorporated into China's cultural policy, issued by the State Council and its ministries. For instance, the Film Industry Promotion Law (2017) [State Council \(2017\)](#) and the Regulations on the Publication Market (2016) [SAPPRFT \(2016\)](#) highlight that films, publications, and other audio products should prioritise "social effects".

Domestically, a socialist cultural market is emerging, but all cultural products must pass official censorship to ensure "social effects". The film sector receives particular attention. From 2001 to 2019, China's box office surged from \$130 million to \$9.4 billion, making it the world's second-largest film market after 2012 [Shackleton \(2023\)](#), May 24, [Sun \(2024\)](#). State-funded "Main Melody" films increased from 20 in 2003 to 45 in 2021, their box-office share rising from 3% to 20% [Deng \(2011\)](#), [Zhou \(2023\)](#). Two state-owned distributors, China Film Group Corporation and Huaxia Film Distribution Co. Ltd, collected up to 50% of domestic revenues (2004-2019) [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Yin and Sun \(2021\)](#). Domestic dominance is reinforced by censorship, import quotas (around 34 foreign films annually), and a rise in co-productions (18 in 2002 to 94 in 2019) [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#). Similar trends appear in publishing, where imported books held only 10-12% of the market share (2015-2020) (Anderson, 2021, December 17), and in television, where domestic dramas lead [Fu \(2007\)](#), [Sohu \(2025\)](#). Television dramas have often served as a medium for patriotic education and are produced under strict content guidelines. Although the country had 586 publishing houses by early 2024, the

book industry remains largely oriented toward domestic readers [Cao et al. \(2018\)](#), [Su, 2024, January 3](#)). Foreign capital is barred from the news media, all outlets are state-controlled and serve as the CCP's mouthpiece, portraying China in a positive light [Zhang \(2021\)](#). These culturally controlled products generate soft power domestically and support social stability [Keane \(2016\)](#), [Rosen \(2021\)](#). Detailed studies regarding China's cinema, television, and publications are discussed elsewhere [Chin \(2017\)](#), [Diao \(2020\)](#), [Meng \(2012\)](#), [Sun \(2024\)](#), so I would not elaborate further.

We note that the strategy of promoting cultural exports—often referred to as cultural “going out”—as a means to enhance China's soft power was first introduced during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2006–2010) [State Council \(2006\)](#). However, the present study focuses primarily on the domestic rather than the international dimension. For further discussion of the cultural “going out” strategy at the international level, see [Keane \(2016\)](#), [Keane and Fung \(2018\)](#), [Sun \(2024\)](#), [Sun and McKirdy \(2025\)](#), and [Sun \(2010\)](#).

6. CONCLUSION

This article has explicated the cultural governance framework of the socialist cultural market and proposes a novel analytical approach for future research. To safeguard China's cultural sovereignty amid globalisation, the government institutionalised a socialist cultural market as a strategic response to foreign cultural influence. This conceptual framework emerged during the late 1990s, a period marked by the decline of domestic cinema and the impending China to the WTO accession. The socialist cultural market is a hybrid system that integrates state governance with market mechanisms. Unlike liberal market models, it uniquely combines ideological imperatives (e.g., collectivism and nationalism) and public welfare mandates with commercial incentives. Within this framework, cultural production prioritises “social effects”—ensuring alignment with core socialist values—while permitting controlled market operation.

Post-WTO cultural blueprints reinforced the institutionalisation of the socialist cultural market. It is not surprising that cultural production prioritises “social effects” through state supervision, ensuring alignment with core socialist values while permitting controlled market operation. The discourses in China's cultural blueprints reveal that, after the WTO, cultural products were still expected to uphold the legitimacy of the CCP leadership and to function as vehicles for political education and ideological reinforcement. This strategy enabled the government to retain firm control over China's cultural, political, and economic spheres. The government balanced ideological governance with economic development, ensuring that the socialist cultural market reconciled “social effects” and “economic returns”. This approach strengthened social stability and consolidated the Party's enduring leadership. Indicatively, the Chinese government prioritises promoting socialist culture over fostering cultural diversity. As a consequence, China's cultural policies, issued by the State Council and its ministries, had to continually adapt, shaping a socialist cultural market that could withstand intensifying global competition of the post-WTO era. Within this state-controlled socialist cultural market, state-owned enterprises and their cultural products are positioned to play a dominant role, while private and foreign actors are also allowed to participate. Thus, China's national cultural policies—formulated by the State Council and relevant ministries—would emphasise the official oversight to ensure “social effects,” while simultaneously aligning them with “economic returns.”

Post-WTO accession, China's cultural blueprints deepened the institutionalisation of the socialist cultural market. Under state supervision, cultural production prioritises “social effects” aligned with core socialist values, while permitting controlled market operations. Cultural products are expected to uphold the CCP's legitimacy and serve as vehicles for political education and ideological reinforcement. This strategy secures government control across cultural, political, and economic spheres, balancing ideological governance with economic development. The socialist cultural market thus reconciles social effects with economic returns, strengthening social stability and consolidating the Party's enduring leadership. Notably, promoting socialist culture takes precedence over fostering cultural diversity. Consequently, cultural policies issued by the State Council and its ministries continually adapt, shaping a market resilient to intensifying post-WTO global competition. Within this state-controlled framework, state-owned enterprises and their products dominate, yet private and foreign actors are permitted to participate.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this article provides further insight into the historical background of the evolution of China's cultural policy and its industry. This study, with hope, provides implications for comparative studies across different political systems and the relevance to online research.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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