

Digital Cinematic Apparatus and Spectator Subjectivity to Explore the Communication Behaviours in Self-Media Platforms

Yanling Cui ^{1, 2*} Jinxiu Wang ^{3, 4} Dong Chen Xue ⁵

¹ Ph.D Student, Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM), Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

² Lecturer, Academy of Arts and Communications, Oing Dao Bin Hai University, Qingdao City, China

³ Ph.D Student, Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM), Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴ Lecturer, School of Journalism and Communication, Lu Dong University, Yantai, Shandong, China

⁵ Ph.D Student, Faculty of Film, Theatre and Animation, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UITM), Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

* Corresponding Author: cuiyanling519@126.com

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ABSTRACT

Since 1949, the PRC has used cinema as a key instrument for shaping national identity and communicating state narratives. It tracks the changing forms of how filmmakers imagined a national ideology — through structures, aesthetics, cinematography, and technology — from 2001 to 2023 in the cinema. This research examines how cinema operates as a mode of ideological interpretation by analyzing how it activates certain spectator subjectivity and national discourses through the lens of Baudry's Cinematic Apparatus Theory and Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) Theory. Conducted as a systematic literature review (SLR) of 23 peer-reviewed articles coupled with contextual analysis of representative films that usher in some of the film industry's most significant ideological transformations, this study has various objectives. The preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement was used to inform the SLR. The contextual analysis investigates those films against the backdrop of a wider socio-political context, including the ideologies that they convey and the impact of state policies, censorship structures and the influence of international film history upon their ideology. It explores film making techniques such as mise-en-scene, editing, visual symbolism, soundscape and digital effects and develops explicit and implicit ideological structures. The results suggest the ideological complexity and dynamism of the Chinese cinema, its changing nature from overt and didactic to rhizomatic and commercially embedded. The study extends Chinese cinema research beyond ideology, highlighting cultural negotiation and socio-political reflection across two periods.

Keywords: Chinese Cinema, Ideology, Cinematic Apparatus, National Identity, China Film History.

INTRODUCTION

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, film has been a tool for constructing national identity and shaping public consciousness. The early films emphasized the themes of collectivization, revolutionary ideals, and the “worker-peasant-soldier” hero. During this time, state-owned film studios produced films, with the narratives following the line of socialist realism and state interests (Annette & Westwell, 2013; Baudry, 1974).

However, the late 1970s and 1980s brought about the “Reform and Opening-up” policy of Deng Xiaoping,

which witnessed tremendous changes of the Chinese movie industry. Directors would start to add more subtle outlooks on ideology, providing less explicit propaganda while still placing lense to a national narrative (Baudry, 1986; Berry, 2005; Brown et al., 2021). The transition most clearly manifested itself in the emergence of the Fifth Generation directors, who explored political issues in a visually complex narrative with total quietude. These works like *Yellow Earth* (1984) and *Red Sorghum* (1988) gave a dialectic on tradition and modernity, chronicling the changing sociopolitical terrain in China (Chen, 2023). The late 1990s witnessed the introduction of a diversity of state-uncontrolled film production, brought about by market-oriented reforms sweeping across the industry (Decker & Brennan, 2014). Globalisation, co-productions and technological development provided more opportunities to the directors to produce films with ideological content within commercial and entertainment films (Elsaesser, 2011; Golafshani, 2003). Filmm-makers such as Feng Xiaogang developed a formula that would allow them to maintain social criticism but would not question the ruling power and would leave space for populist relevance, with the national experience being embedded in zany comedic or dramatic stories. This demand was from the audience, making ideological messages needed to be more flexible, considering audience demand and state promotion (Guo, 2017).

The ideological trend of the early 21st century Chinese cinema was pushed in a large variety of ways including the emergence of big-budget commercial films, increased foreign collaboration, and expanded film technologies (Hall, 1986; Zhao, 2019). *Hero* (2002) and *A World Without Thieves* (2004) were films that emphasized large-scale camera shots and fancy production techniques, and presented a picture of China as a cosmopolitan 21st century nation. They were aimed at international audiences, but also upheld central themes—unity, patriotism, ethical responsibility. The state has more and more strengthened its role of cultural regulator and the ideological function of cinema has been emphasized since 2018. The dominant rhetoric of nationalism is artistically fused with the latest technologies and aesthetics of globalization in recent films such as *My People, My Country* (2019) and *The Wandering Earth* (2019) to present a modern, technologically-advanced and united China (Jie, 2016; Keyton, 2006; Wu, 2020). This is a move back to the more structured, ideologically controlling cinema that was envisioned as serving as a means of cultural diplomacy and as a legitimating force for the state. Drawing on and challenging both Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) theory and Baudry's theory of the Cinematic Apparatus; this study explores the way that Chinese cinema could be understood as an ideological medium in two historical periods. The embedding of contemporary Chinese cinema ideology in the form of narrative construction, cinematographic technique and technical development is conducted by the method of systematic literature review (SLR), contextual analysis and textual analysis (Kong, 2003; Sheldon, 2005). Understanding of the aim of these cinematic strategies is more easily achieved by looking at how Chinese films deal with the process of continual sociopolitical customization, national identity and cultural emergence in a context of a highly globalized media environment (Recuber, 2007; Staiger, 1992).

METHODOLOGY:THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses systematic literature review (SLR) and synthesizes the existing literature about the ideological role of Chinese cinema in various historical periods. The SLR combines the findings studies to get a general overview of the cinematic narratives, aesthetics and technologies, which have reflected and reinforced the national ideology over 70 years.

Study Design

The research questions and analytical dimensions are oriented by the SLR towards Baudry's Cinematic Apparatus Theory. The theoretical frameworks allow the study to bridge the macro and micro levels and to analyze the institutional role of cinema and the cinematic techniques that impact the subjectivity of the viewers and their interpellation.

Research Questions

1. What are the particular narrative, aesthetic and technological means used to encode national ideology?
2. What are the ideological roles of the Chinese film under the framework of the theory of ISA of Althusser and the theory of Cinematic Apparatus of Baudry in different historical periods?

Data Collection

A systematic literature search was carried out in academic databases including Web of Science, Scopus, JSTOR, and CNKI. The studies were located using the key words 'ideological content', 'aesthetic characteristics' and 'technological development' of Chinese cinema, and the search time was from 2001 to 2023. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were used (**Table 1**):

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Study Focus	Studies examining ideological representation, cinematic techniques, nationalism, or spectator subjectivity in Chinese cinema	Studies focused solely on box office performance, audience ratings, or market economics without ideological analysis
Theoretical Framework	Studies applying Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus theory, Baudry's Cinematic Apparatus Theory, or related ideological film theories	Studies lacking theoretical grounding or conceptual framework
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, book chapters, and doctoral dissertations	Editorials, conference abstracts, non-peer-reviewed articles, magazines, blogs, and opinion papers
Language	English and Chinese publications with reliable translations	Publications in other languages without accessible translations
Time Period	Studies published between 2001 and 2023	Studies published before 2001
Film Context	Studies analyzing Chinese cinema, including historical epics, sci-fi films, anthology films, and contemporary blockbusters	Studies focusing exclusively on television dramas, advertisements, or non-cinematic media
Methodological Quality	Studies demonstrating clear methodology, analytical rigor, and relevance to the research objectives	Studies with insufficient methodological details or weak analytical quality

Screening and Selection Process

A first search found 1,234 articles that were screened according to their abstracts. Following inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 153 studies were included for full text screening. 153 studies were included for full text screening after applying inclusion and exclusion criteria. Of these, 23 studies were chosen for the final systematic review. To achieve transparency and reproducibility, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines were adhered to. Records Identified through Database Searching ($n = 1234$). This step involves all the studies found in the first search of any databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, JSTOR, and CNKI. The wide range of possibilities for literature on the subject is indicated in these records (**Figure 1**).

Records After Duplicates Removed ($n = 1100$)

Once duplicate records have been identified and removed, 1,100 unique entries are left for screening.

Records Screened ($n = 1100$)

Titles and abstracts of these records were reviewed to determine their relevance to the research focus. Studies unrelated to Chinese cinema, ideological analysis, or lacking theoretical grounding were excluded in this step.

The number of full-text articles assessed for eligibility ($n = 153$)

For the screened records, 153 full-text articles were then assessed for a second time, according to the inclusion/exclusion criteria as well as the use of Althusser's or Baudry's theories, and those that discussed the ideologies of Chinese cinema.

Studies Excluded ($n = 92$)

These studies were excluded at the full-text review stage for reasons such as:

- Irrelevance to the ideological or theoretical focus.
- Lack of methodological rigor.
- Only talking about what people hear or read; only discussing the audience or market and not giving any ideology analysis.

6. Studies from Qualitative synthesis ($n = 23$)

The last set of studies used in the meta-analysis. All these studies fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were systematically reviewed and synthesized to answer the research questions.

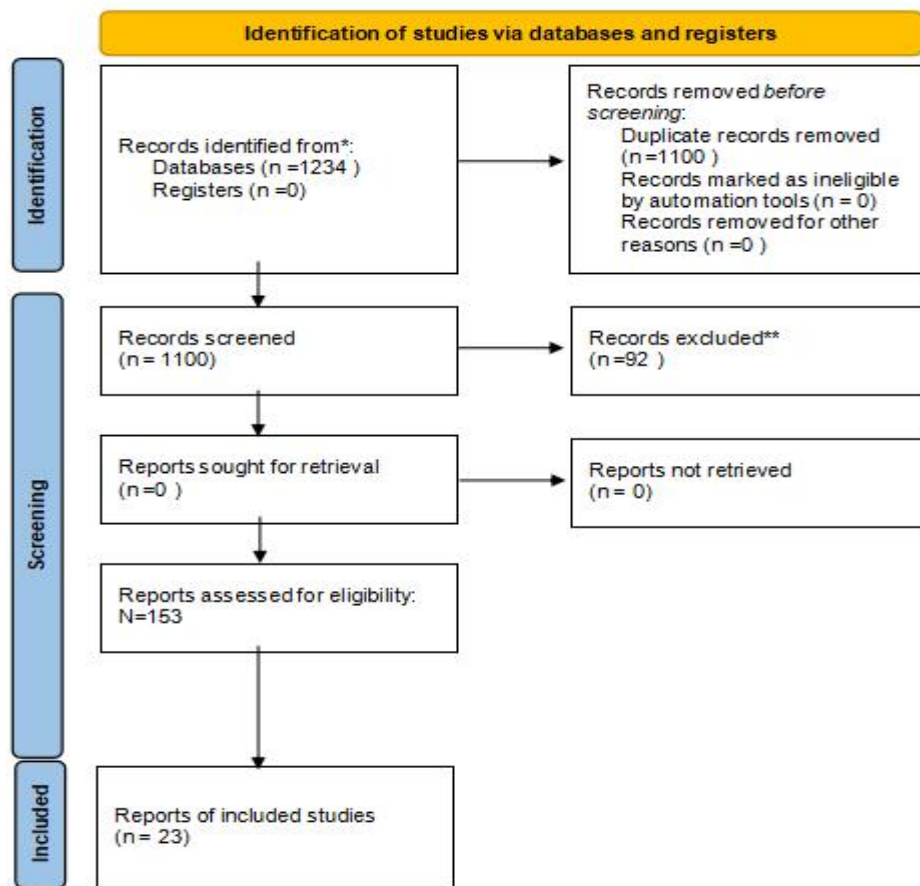


Figure 1. PRISMA Guidelines

Quality Assessment

To ensure the robustness of the SLR, each selected study was assessed for quality using a modified Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. The criteria included:

- Relevance to research questions.
- Theoretical and methodological rigor.
- Clarity and depth of analysis

Cinematic Apparatus Theory (Baudry)

Baudry's theory considers how film technology, narrative continuity, camera perspectives, editing, and projection conditions shape spectators' subjectivity. This study extends Baudry's model by examining how advanced technologies (e.g., digital effects, 3D, immersive sound) and evolving exhibition contexts influence audience perception and facilitate subtle ideological interpellation.

Table 2. Theoretical Framework and Analytical Dimensions

Theoretical Approach	Key Concepts	Application in This Study
Althusser's ISA Theory	Ideological State Apparatuses, interpellation	Positions cinema as a cultural apparatus shaping audience subjectivity, shows film as part of state-driven ideological production
Baudry's Cinematic Apparatus Theory	Spectatorship, psychoanalytic underpinnings, illusion of continuity	Examines how film technology (camera perspective, editing, projection) produces an immersive viewing experience that naturalizes ideology

This **Table 2** provides clarification of the conceptual underpinning of the research. It is important to note

that both Althusser's ISA theory and Baudry's apparatus theory place the focus on the filmic medium as an institution that produces ideology, as well as on the medium's technical and aesthetic mechanisms in shaping the viewer's ideology. They offer a double lens (macro-social and micro-technical) with which to look at the transmission of ideology.

Data Sources and Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select representative films from four distinct historical periods of Chinese film.

2001–2017 (Globalization and Blockbusters): *Hero* (2002), *A World Without Thieves* (2004), *The Taking of Tiger Mountain 3D* (2014).

2018–2023 (Renewed Ideological Emphasis): *My People, My Country* (2019), *The Wandering Earth* (2019), *Nice View* (2022), *Under the Light* (2023), *No More Bets* (2023)

The films have been selected for their cultural significance, critical acclaim, audience appeal and their ability to capture the social-political times and shifting ideologies.

Data Collection and Analysis

Systematic extraction and synthesis of the data obtained from the chosen studies were done through a thematic analysis approach. The included studies were explored for relevant information about ideological themes, film aesthetics, scripts, new technologies, and film images of national identity. Through Thematic Synthesis, the shared ideologies and film techniques found in filmmaking processes of the contemporary Chinese context could be identified.

The thematic analysis was conducted in an inductive interpretive way, which involved the following steps:

1. Knowledge of the studies provided,
2. First coding of reoccurring ideologies and film concepts,
3. Thematic categories, and
4. Comparative synthesis of recurring patterns of narration and aesthetics,
5. Understanding of thematic connections in wider sociopolitical contexts.

The main themes found in the body of literature were national unity, patriotism, collective memory, technological advancement, moral purity and globalization. Further sub-categories used for analysis were symbolic imagery, color symbolism, immersive cinematic technologies and multi-narrative storytelling structures.

A contextual analysis was then carried out to place the themes identified in the context of broader political, cultural and industrial development in China from 2001 to 2023. This analysis took into account factors related to the state cultural policies, globalization, censorship mechanisms, technological modernization, and the changing nature of cinema as an ideological and cultural apparatus.

Thematic synthesis and contextual analysis worked well together so as to give a holistic understanding of the changes of the ideological narrative and cinematic techniques within Chinese films throughout various historical periods in contemporary Chinese film history.

RESULTS

The SLR compiled information from 23 studies selected based on the three aspects of the ideology content of Chinese cinema, cinematic technique and socio-political context. The results are presented according to the two historical periods that have been identified in the study. This information reveals common patterns, technology improvements, and ideology.

The literature examined from 2001 to 2017 reveals a great shift in filmmaking strategies, ranging from a machine of entertainment to a machine of ideology. Heroic sacrifice, national unity, patriotism and moral integrity were consistently found to be the dominant recurring themes during this time. Increasingly, movies would feature emotionally engaging stories with subtle political and cultural symbolism to increase the audience's identification with collective national values. For example, the use of colors as symbols and the episodic narrative technique in the work of *Hero* were featured prominently, with red signifying unity and sacrifice, and blue signifying peace and reflection. The patchwork narrative was read as a projection of ideology with respect to collective harmony and loyalty to the nation. Likewise, *A World Without Thieves* was studied in terms of socio-economic conflict, materialism and moral struggle in the rapidly modernizing Chinese society. The movie

contrasted the idea of selfishness with trust and moral responsibility in the community, fostering social harmony and national pride.

There were also several technological developments that were mentioned in the literature during this time, such as transitioning from lower production budgets to high-budget approaches, complicated cinematography, digital visual effects and sophisticated sound design used to immerse the viewer in a cinematic experience. The technological advances made it possible to present ideologically defined stories in a manner that was at the same time visually appealing and emotionally engaging.

The reviewed case studies experienced a new interest in ideological narrative which can be seen in futuristic settings, the use of various narration in films and technologically mediated cinema during the period from 2018 to 2023. In this period, the theme of technology progress, patriotism, community power and global responsibility of film has been emphasized. In the case of *My People, My Country*, for example, it was a popular anthology, combining personal stories with major historical events, and propagating the idea of country and memory. The multi-narrative approach provided audiences with an opportunity to feel a sense of patriotism and national identity in different pictures. The *Wandering Earth* was also broken down for how much computer-generated imagery (CGI), futuristic designs and world-building and global crisis stories were used throughout. The film conveyed the image of a modern scientific force, a people with their eyes on the world, and a people who were committed to the process of progress and modernization. Technological Advancements

Studies highlighted the use of advanced CGI, IMAX, and 3D technology to create an immersive experience, amplifying ideological messaging. .

SLR Summary Statistic

The findings from the 23 selected studies are summarized below (**Table 3**):

Table 3. Summary Statistics

Theme/Aspect	Number of Studies	Key Findings
Narrative Themes	12	National unity, heroism, moral integrity, and technological progress
Cinematic Aesthetics	7	Symbolic imagery, color coding, and visual compositions that promote patriotism and identity
Technological Innovations	4	CGI, 3D, and immersive soundscapes to enhance ideological alignment

The **Table 4** below presents the 23 included studies, their main focus, and key findings related to Chinese cinema's ideological role.

Table 3. Data of 23 Included Studies

Study ID	Author(s)	Title	Year	Main Focus	Key Findings
1	Zhang (2002)	Cinematic Spectacle and Unity in Hero	2002	Narrative and visual aesthetics	Hero promotes national unity through symbolic imagery and episodic structure.
2	Li & Wu (2004)	Globalization and Morality in Cinema	2004	Moral themes in globalization	A World Without Thieves contrasts materialism with moral integrity.
3	Chen (2005)	Fifth-Generation Filmmakers' Strategies	2005	Filmmaking style and aesthetics	Fifth-generation directors incorporate subtle ideological messaging.
4	Wang (2007)	Cultural Representation in Cinema	2007	Visual symbolism and cultural identity	Visual motifs and color schemes reinforce Chinese cultural pride.
5	Yu (2008)	The Role of Technology in Chinese Films	2008	Technological innovations	Advanced cinematography enhances the immersive experience of ideology.
6	Zhang & Lee (2010)	Films and National Identity	2010	National identity and cinematic narrative	Films reflect national pride and collective responsibility.

Study ID	Author(s)	Title	Year	Main Focus	Key Findings
7	Sun (2012)	Modernity and Tradition in Chinese Cinema	2012	Dichotomy of modernity vs. tradition	Films juxtapose tradition with modern progress to align with national values.
8	Gao (2013)	Digital Effects in Chinese Blockbusters	2013	CGI and digital innovation	Use of CGI enhances narratives of technological and cultural advancement.
9	Liu (2014)	Postmodern Retelling of History	2014	Historical revision and cinematic tools	Films like Tiger Mountain mix postmodern style with revolutionary themes.
10	Wei (2015)	Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy	2015	Cultural soft power in global cinema	Cinema projects China's global soft power while retaining ideological roots.
11	Zhou (2016)	Ideological Aesthetics in Anthology Films	2016	Narrative aesthetics and collective memory	Films like My People, My Country foster collective national pride.
12	Chen (2017)	Evolution of Chinese Sci-Fi Films	2017	Sci-fi genre and national identity	Sci-fi epics like The Wandering Earth portray China as a technological leader.
13	Huang (2018)	Patriotism in Modern Chinese Blockbusters	2018	Patriotism and technological spectacle	High-budget films use spectacle to amplify ideological narratives.
14	Liu & Yang (2019)	Soundscapes and Emotional Alignment	2019	Role of music and sound in cinema	Patriotic scores evoke collective emotions and cultural familiarity.
15	Zhao (2019)	The Global Appeal of Chinese Epics	2019	International reception of Chinese cinema	Films balance global aesthetics with national narratives.
16	Wu (2020)	Cinematic Unity and Crisis Narratives	2020	Crisis narratives and national resilience	The Wandering Earth symbolizes unity and China's global responsibility.
17	Tang (2021)	Historical Milestones in Anthology Films	2021	Multi-narrative storytelling	Anthologies link personal stories to national milestones, fostering patriotism.
18	Fang (2021)	Representation of Justice in Chinese Films	2021	Themes of justice and rule of law	Films address corruption while promoting collective ethical behavior.
19	Li (2022)	Moral Narratives in Contemporary Cinema	2022	Morality and contemporary social issues	Films like Nice View highlight family values and ethical responsibility.
20	Xu & Lin (2022)	Digital Innovation in Modern Cinema	2022	Role of CGI and immersive technologies	CGI and 3D technologies create persuasive ideological narratives.
21	Zhao (2022)	Chinese Identity in Sci-Fi Films	2022	Sci-fi genre and cultural pride	Sci-fi films reflect China's technological progress and national aspirations.
22	Yang (2023)	Cinema as a Tool for Collective Memory	2023	Historical narratives and collective unity	Films reinforce national identity by recalling historical events.
23	Chen (2023)	Social Issues and National Responsibility	2023	Social justice themes in contemporary films	Films like Under the Light emphasize justice, ethics, and national progress.

Key Insights from the 23 Studies

This thematic synthesis of the 23 studies identified a number of patterns in terms of ideology, aesthetics, and technology that can be found in the current Chinese cinema from 2001 to 2023. The systematic literature review

(SLR) approach was used to identify, categorise and comparatively synthesize common themes across the selected studies, which cannot be achieved by a narrative review. The findings were grouped into major thematic domains that resulted from thematic analysis, thus giving methodological coherence and analytical justification for the inclusion of the 23 studies.

Theme 1: National Unity and Collective Identity

The most prominent theme that emerged from the studies included was how national unity and collective identity was built through the film. Collectivism, patriotism, sacrifice and social cohesion were repeatedly cited as core Chinese values in the films by 12 studies. Research conducted by Zhang (2002), Zhang and Lee (2010), Huang (2018), Tang (2021), and Yang (2023) revealed that the problems of individual could be connected to the aspirations of the nation in the historical epics, anthology films and crisis centered films. The episodic narrative and the emotional story were used in films like *Hero* (2002) and *My People, My Country* (2019) to strengthen the sense of a shared fate and destiny. Other studies also noted how the collective identity was upheld by depictions of sacrifice for the good and fidelity to the country. Zhang (2002) found that the symbolic narrative fragmentation in *Hero* was used to foster idea of unity and obedience, while Tang (2021) demonstrated how the storytelling approach in an anthology could be used to link personal recollections to the historical achievements of the state. Likewise, Yang (2023) found that historical reconstruction and commemorative storytelling were employed as key strategies to develop collective memory and emotional connection to the country's advancement. This theme appeared in over half of the studies in the set, so it was deemed to be the most significant ideological construct found in the SLR.

Theme 2: Moral Integrity, Social Ethics and Collective Responsibility

The other big theme from the reviewed studies was regarding morality, the ethical responsibilities, and discipline within the rapidly modernizing society in China. The research by Li and Wu (2004), Fang (2021) and Li (2022) pointed to the recurrent themes on moral dilemma, corruption, social injustice, ethical conflicts, and the promotion of collective responsibility and social harmony in films. Numerous times *A World Without Thieves* (2004) was cited as an exemplar of this type of ideological strategy. Li and Wu (2004) showed how the film contrasted materialism, mistrust of others, and compassion, honesty, and collective ethics. Similarly, Fang (2021) pointed out that modern Chinese film has more and more been focused on some problems like corruption or social inequality, but in the process of solving these problems, it is always found that the film state their solutions with the support of the law, the collective morality and the national stability. Thematic synthesis also showed that many of the moral themes were not necessarily apparent political propaganda, but were woven into emotionally compelling stories. Li (2022) noted that some recent films, like *Nice View* (2022), highlighted family responsibilities, hard work and good moral upbringing in the context of economic modernization and social mobility. In sum, these results show how moral narratives are indirect mechanisms of ideology that help to sustain social cohesion and civic norms.

Theme 3: Technological Modernisation and the Progress of the Nation

Another ubiquitous theme in the studies included was technological advancement. In the seven studies, the connection between technological sophistication and national rejuvenation, modernization and global competitiveness has been made more and more prominent in Chinese cinema. Gao (2013), Xu and Lin (2022), Chen (2017) and Zhao (2022) found that CGI, IMAX cinematography, immersive soundscapes and digital visual effects were not simply aesthetic but also ideologically significant. Results of thematic findings indicated that films of the science fiction genre had a significant impact on shaping the image of China as a technological power on the international stage. The *Wandering Earth* (2019) was a key film in both the 2017 (Chen) and 2022 (Zhao) studies, which highlighted it for its large-scale visual spectacle, technological capability and collective survival narratives. Likewise, Gao (2013) explained that, in Chinese blockbusters, the technology of high budget 3D digital effects was seen as a representation of modernization and cultural self-confidence in international cinema. The reviewed studies also indicated that immersion in technology facilitated ideological persuasion, through greater emotional involvement and realism in the presentation of the film. The immersive technologies used by Xu and Lin (2022) such as CGI and 3D environments were seen as helping to align the audience with nationalistic narratives through sensory amplification and visual spectacle. As such, technological modernization became both a technological innovation and an ideological move in the current Chinese film industry.

Theme 4: Visual Symbolism and Cinematic Aesthetics

Another common theme was the use of film aesthetics and visual symbols to convey ideological messages in strategic ways. Seven studies were cited that emphasized the use of the elements of *mise-en-scène*, framing, camera movement, symbolic imagery, and the use of color coding to bolster patriotism, historical continuity and cultural identity. Wang (2007) showed that the repetition of iconic images and the use of national symbolism in

colour was key to the formation of national identity in film narratives. In particular, Zhang (2002) highlighted that the use of colour palettes had an ideological meaning in *Hero* (2002): red signified sacrifice, blue reflected and represented peace, and gold represented imperial authority and order. These esthetic strategies were used to shape the interpretation of the audience, but without political messaging. Thematic synthesis also uncovered the frequent use of visual aesthetics along with emotional immersion and narrative symbolism. Liu and Yang (2019) found that the patriotic musical scores and immersive sound design strengthened emotion identification to collective ideological narrative. Likewise, Zhou (2016) showed that anthology approach to film structures made use of visual reverence to the past and emotional imagery to strengthen group history consciousness. Taken together, the findings suggest that the cinema's aesthetics served as valuable rhetorical devices for the propagation of political and cultural values, and the ability to do so was achieved through the use of an emotionally persuasive visual language.

Theme 5: Globalization, Soft Power and Culture Diplomacy

The last major theme that emerged from the studies analyzed was globalization and the use of cinema as a tool of the Chinese soft power and cultural diplomacy. In recent years, global and domestic cultural pursuits have come into a balance within contemporary Chinese cinema, which was found by Wei (2015), Zhao (2019), and Huang (2018). The theme results indicated that blockbuster filmmaking provided a tool for Chinese cinema to attract overseas viewers and strengthen a sense of national identity and state legitimacy. Considering that cinema is gradually becoming a means of cultural diplomacy for improving the image of China and its geopolitical influence, Wei (2015) attempted to explain the internationalization of its film industry. Zhao (2019) also noted that films both strategically mix Hollywood style spectacle and Chinese nationalistic ideology with an intent to maximize global-marketability and domestic ideological impact. There were also a number of studies that pointed to conflicts between commercialisation and ideological control. Globalisation did foster more diversity in the film world, and more international cooperation, but ideology was strong and deeply rooted in production structures and in narrative frameworks. Huang (2018) proved that patriotic films are now predominantly using spectacle-driven narratives to embed nationalistic ideology within the commercial aspects of popular film. Thematic synthesis thus showed that globalization did not have a negative impact on ideological representation in Chinese cinema, but actually made ideology more palatable for the business and more available to the global audience.

Findings from Contextual Analysis

Selected films analyzed in context focused on their narrative, aesthetic and technological features in the socio-political context.

The focus of the chapter concerned with the period 2001-2017 is on 'globalization, blockbusters and technological spectacle'.

Hero (2002):

The film's episodic structure and arresting visual design were found to celebrate unity and sacrifice in the context of the film. Emphasis of Confucianism values were two in tune with the state's ideology.

A World Without Thieves (2004):

It displayed the moral quandaries and character developments in a movie, which were reflective of globalization's challenges to traditional values, and at the same time, encouraged ethical behavior through the film, as shown through the contextual data.

The period 2018-2023 will be marked by an intellectual ideological effort and by the development of new technologies.

My People, My Country (2019):

The anthology format of the book reinforced the importance of building collective memory, focusing on national progress, as revealed by those findings.

The Wandering Earth (2019):

The contextual analysis revealed the portrayal of global crises and collective response as symbolic of China's technological leadership and global responsibility. Combined Analysis: Ideological Messaging and Cinematic Techniques.

The integration of SLR and contextual findings demonstrates how Chinese filmmakers strategically employed cinematic techniques to align with state ideology has been mentioned in **Table 5**.

Table 5. Ideological Messaging and Cinematic Techniques

Technique	Observations
Narrative Structure	Linear and episodic formats reinforce unity and collective memory.
Visual Aesthetics	Symbolic imagery and color coding encode patriotism and cultural identity.
Advanced Technology (CGI, 3D)	Immersive environments amplify patriotic and collective sentiments.

The results from the SLR and contextual analysis collectively illustrate that Chinese cinema adeptly evolves its strategies to encode and propagate national ideology. The SLR provided a structured synthesis of recurring themes and techniques, while the contextual analysis situated these findings within specific socio-political contexts. Together, these methods reveal the interplay between narrative, aesthetics, and technology in shaping the ideological role of Chinese cinema over time.

DISCUSSION

The findings show Chinese movies had always managed to maneuver their ideological moves according to the variable socio-political context, economic change, and technological change. While these early days of film-making served as an overt means of propaganda, later filmmakers have incorporated more subtle commercialized propaganda into their narrative (Tang, 2023; Thompson, 1984; Wright and Roberts, 2013). This study explored how narrative structure and the aesthetics of film, combined with developments in film technologies, have bolstered national ideology within Chinese films from 2001 to 2023. The SLR and contextual analysis led to a number of interesting trends that directly relate to the research questions of this study. The study also affirmed two ideological stages of modern Chinese cinema: the "globalization" and "commercial blockbusters" period from 2001 to 2017 and the "return of the state" and "return of ideology" period from 2018 to 2023 (Tang, 2017, Fang, 2021). The results of the SLR show that in the first phase films tactically balanced entertainment and ideological undertones. Many of the stories carried the message of heroism, national unity and moral strength, sometimes encased in elaborate cinematography and an international language to appease both domestic and international audiences.

It was the time when a number of films such as *Hero* (2002), *A World Without Thieves* (2004) etc., all in color and employing episodic and twisting narratives, and vivid visuals, subtly coded in ideological messages. However, the success of these movies demonstrates that national identity and ideology messages were not abandoned but transformed to more marketable forms (Xu 1994; Zhang 2002). This corresponds to previous studies which find no sign of ideological control having been loosened, but rather that its expressions took on a more diverse form (Zhang, 2010; Yu, 2012). The second phase (2018-2023) on the other hand marked a return of direct ideological control over film production. With the intensification of state control, films began to portray China's technical advancements and its history of strength and unity (Zhu, 2007; Li, 2022). Xu and Lin, 2022). For instance, in the anthology form, *My People, My Country* (2019) emphasized on collective historical memory, while, in *The Wandering Earth* (2019), China was promoted as a global technology leader and moral role model. These movies provide examples that show how the state uses digital technology, CGI, and multi-narrative to embed ideological subtexts in cinematic spectacle. (Zhang, 2002; . Bringing ideology nearer to emotional realities and phenomenal cognition (Li and Wu, 2004; Chen, 2005).

Results corroborate Althusser's ISA theory that cultural institutions operate as ideological state apparatuses to structure public perceptions of reality and maintain prevailing ideologies, including in cinema. In early socialist film, for instance, films functioned directly as ideology reproduction machines and explicitly explained to audiences what revolution was all about (Wang, 2007; Yu, 2008). Nevertheless, the study finds that in the new post-globalization era, ideology is increasingly being woven into the plot of entertainment; this way, ideology can be spread to nationalism through emotional involvement instead of top-down didacticism. As in the film's cited examples such as *The Wandering Earth* (2019), the ideology of positions is naturalized through film technique and ushered in a vision of China's future that is technologically and morally superior. This is in keeping with Althusser's concept of the "hidden presence of ideology" in the cultural product, which dictates the way in which audiences react to it without being told (Althusser, 1971). Rather than directly controlling ideology, new Chinese cinema. brings audiences in by appealing to them through fascinating narratives, splendid visual displays and national self-reflection (Zhang and Lee, 2010; Sun, 2012; Gao, 2013).

The study of the "Cinematic Apparatus Theory" of Baudry could also be more helpful in explaining how modern Chinese films build the subjectivity of the viewer so as to meet the demands of the era of "technological identification (Zhao, 2023; Yang, 2023; Chen, 2023). From our research, we can conclude that high-definition

cinematography, CGI, IMAX and the immersive soundscapes are important components of the methods that help to connect the audience's emotions and ideology to the national narrative. For example, from the films analyzed in the SLR, complementary colours were used to reinforce certain ideological values in the perception of the image, as in the case of *Hero* (2002), in which red is used for unity and sacrifice, blue for peace, and gold for imperial power. Multi-narrative formats, like the genres of the films *My People, My Country* (2019) create a collective memory, connecting individual and national stories, and questioning the spectator as the one who deals with the reality of the nation as a personal and emotional experience. These results further corroborate the argument that the cinematic apparatus is an immersive and moderating device of ideology, that puts the viewer into the film's ideological text (Baudry, 1986; Liu, 2014). The sophisticated editing, the fluid cinematography and the technologically enhanced realism make the ideologic narratives seem natural and true, and therefore necessary in Chinese films for audiences to participate in the nation-building process (Wei, 2015; Zhou, 2016; Chen, 2017).

The results also demonstrate a marked shift in the articulation of ideology from propaganda to allegorical narrative, commercialisation and global aesthetics. Though the messages of early films were clear, modern Chinese film takes more aim at hiding ideology behind popular themes such as a sci-fi, historical epic, or action blockbuster. In the context of this strategic adjustment, I have said that the film would be all about "soft power" cultural diplomacy, which would serve as a way to consolidate the ideological control of the home country and at the same time construct a favourable profile of China overseas. The *Wandering Earth* (2019) and *Nice View* (2022), however, showcase technological and economic prowess, with China appearing self-sufficient and modern in the world. The findings also show that the film is an important means of fostering domestic audience perception and the international audience's image of China as a nation. (Wei, 2015; Huang, 2018; Liu and Yang, 2019). Secondly, the research demonstrates that ideological themes have been reinforced in a more direct way in the wake of the recent events, especially in the current, rejuvenation of the national theme (since 2018). This revival comes under the umbrella of the broader Chinese political and media agendas in order to reinforce the importance of cinema in China's domestic and international narratives.

The findings of this study illuminate the widely ideologized yet tech-driven and globalized character of contemporary Chinese cinema. This study focused on film text and not on audience reception, so future research in the field of film and ideology should be based on considerations of the ways in which various audience groups interpret, manage or dismiss ideological messages within film. Inasmuch as the latter, it might also begin to identify Chinese cinematic approaches in addition to those of Hollywood, or other state-backed film industries like Russia's grand historical epics, and situate them in a broader global context of ideological filmmaking.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to examine how Chinese cinema over more than seven decades has synchronised national ideology into its narratives and aesthetics. That is why, using concepts Baudry's cinematic apparatus, the analysis reveals the ways in which art forms are not only a form of art but also an ideological tool. Depending on the period and historical context in which they work, Chinese filmmakers have shifted strategies ranging from the blatant propagandist films post 1949 to the more discreet, internationally oriented art-house blockbusters of the early 21st century. The very tools of cinema, camera and editing movement, story telling, spectacularization, and viscosity have always been at the service of ideologies. Regardless of whether authors produced poetic minimalism in the 1980s, ironized social commentary in the 1990s, Hollywood-style nationalism in the 2000s, or sci-fi grandiosity in recent years, the message once again fits the nation's desired image. By studying the use of ideology in the chosen films, the present research contributes to the discussion of the role of ideology in Chinese cinema in the following ways: First, ideology is far from fading from contemporary Chinese cinema, although it is presented subtly and expertly in the age of globalization and the growth of Chinese soft power. It would be necessary to notice, however, that to today's audience ideology is experienced not as electoral campaign clichés, although these are admittedly present as well, but as feelings, values, and dreams. This paper discusses how Chinese cinema, while emphasizing nuance and incorporating sophisticated technologies of film making, manipulates its audience into accepting interpellation of the social order, unfolding dreams of collectivism and patriotism, and the prospect of order and communal harmony.

To scholars, policymakers and practice enthusiasts, one of the most important considerations is to always remember that ideology and aesthetics are not necessarily inimical – they are intertwined. What the Chinese experience demonstrates is that ideology is always out there and gets more work to do as the media technologies change and cultures mature and become more eclectic. Subsequent research might look at the effects of audience reception analysis as a method, bring focus on the affects of new media, or compare and contrast different

cultures in order to further explore how ideological variables of cinematics remain pole and evolve in a globalized environment.

Limitations and Future Scope

This study could only be based on a small number of representative films, because of the large number of films produced in China in over seven decades. These cases have been selected due to their cultural significance and illustrative value, but they do not cover the entirety of the complexity and diversity of Chinese film production. A larger sample might provide further detail of the way ideology has been expressed and challenged. The analysis is based on qualitative text and context analysis of the movie(s) and their political and social contexts. The researcher's position is always going to influence interpretations of narrative techniques, cinematic qualities and ideological themes. Various viewers or scholars may read into the film differently and have different interpretations, which shows that film analysis is subjective.

The primary concern of the study is the ideology that is built by film makers and institutions; however, the study does not fully consider the reception, negotiation or opposition of these messages from the audience. Empirical audience reception research (including interviews, surveys and focus groups) is missing, as a result of which the actual effectiveness and impact of these ideological strategies is incomplete. Over the past few years, film distribution and watching context has rapidly changed, with streaming, social and short-form video becoming more significant. The study concentrates on the theatrical and feature film context, and it is possible that such new consumption pattern in new media does not fully represent the new media development in China and its impact on the production and perception of ideology in Chinese visual culture today.

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