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Is China The Next Bollywood?

BY [BEN GLEITMAN](#) / ON DECEMBER 8, 2016

For those English language lovers, the word "*synecdoche*" (pronounced si-NEK-də-kee) is a figure of speech in which a word is used to represent the whole of something else. Thus, the city of Hollywood, California represents, figuratively, the whole of the film industry. For the Indian film industry, there is the cleverly devised "Bollywood," an obvious play on the California city, with the B for [Bombay](#) in lieu of the H in Hollywood. Now that China looks to expand its already burgeoning film industry, perhaps the next figure of speech in the movie world will be Sinewood (pronounced SEE-nay-wood) from the prefix "*sino*" which refers to China or the Chinese people, and a definite play on the word "*cine*," which means film.

China is currently the 2nd largest economy in the world, only behind the United States. And if things continue to go as they are in China's film industry—last year the sale of tickets to movies in China grew a prodigious 50%—[China box office](#) revenues will top those of the United States by 2017. Long thought the consummate pirate of movies and DVD's and a real threat to the worldwide film industry, China is now considered a welcome force on the movie-making stage.

So how has China become a respected leader in films rather than a confirmed pirate of them? To answer this question, a look at some recent developments is required. Unlike here in the US, China derives 80% of film-related revenues from the box office. The political move in the East from a communist society to a more democratic-socialist one has created an exploding middle class, and a hungry population of urbanites who relish going to the movies. In fact, this phenomenon is not only seen in China but in more and more countries as they adopt western styles. For example, from its early history in 1913 to present, Bollywood has become an international sensation, especially after director Danny Boyle's 2008 blockbuster, [Slumdog Millionaire](#).

Well, it certainly helps to have some [major players](#) like China's richest man, [Wang Jianlin](#), scooping up AMC Theatres and Legendary Entertainment, and Jack Ma of Alibaba, through Alibaba Pictures, getting behind the financing Hollywood hits. Given the extraordinary growth in box office, as well as the huge online user base in this Asian juggernaut—estimated at [650 million](#)—China is set to become an international powerhouse in all aspects of film production, distribution, and licensing.

Not surprisingly, the move in this direction came about with the adoption of a film law aimed at reducing [piracy and box-office fraud](#). With the imposition of strict penalties for these violations, China has sent a welcoming message to Hollywood, opening the door to enhanced relations and laying the groundwork for continued investment, theatre expansion, increased joint-ventures, and foreign acquisitions.

There are some problems, however, with this new expansion in the People's Republic. For one, China is still intent on preserving its cultural identity. Although the country is no longer seen as a repressed, communist dictatorship, China has a long way to go before becoming completely westernized—if ever—from a cultural, economic, and ideological perspective. As much as the country is respected by its western counterparts for its economic dominance in the world market, China is still seen as a propaganda-driven behemoth that, if not checked, could seek world dominance. Insofar as its new film law goes, China makes clear that no movie should ever [compromise sovereignty](#) or national unity. Without doubt, the state still reserves the right to censor films and discipline any actors who engage in morally corrupt or unethical behavior. Indeed, China is still a nation bent on preserving every vestige of its long and rich cultural heritage.

As Chinese moguls continue to set sights on foreign film-making acquisitions, Hollywood lopes along, seeking to adjust to the new world economy and the prospects of increasing globalization. And while China continues to open [20 new theaters](#) a day to accommodate the growing demand of movie lovers, and Wang Jianlin eyes his next possession, Hollywood and Bollywood realize they are no longer the only kids on the block.

Given these developments in the Chinese film industry, it would be no surprise if the United States woke up one day to see that it is not the only country with a Walk of Fame dedicated to celebrities. In fact, if China's leaders can temper a little their staunchly held attitudes of control over film-making, while easing up on the forced provincialism that these beliefs impose, the People's Republic might soon be known more for its blockbuster movies than its finely crafted silk.

Ben Gleitman is a second-year law student at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law and a Staff Editor of the Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal. He is an active member of the Entertainment Law Society and works in-house at a digital media company. Ben looks forward to a career in entertainment law.