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# **Bollywood as a Tool of Economic Soft Power**

How the Indian film Industry is Making the World their  
Stage

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, the Bollywood industry has grown exponentially, both economically and reputationally. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and evaluate how Bollywood, as India's Film Industry, works in favor of the State. The thesis underlines how Bollywood is a key soft power tool to garner economic benefits for India, as well as improving its place in the international stage. The study will use two case studies to analyze its economic repercussions: China and the United States of America. The case study analysis employed strives to understand the impact of Bollywood through a global lens, as well as grasping the differences between these two countries.

Key words: Bollywood, India, soft power, China, USA, cinema, economy

## **Resumen**

Bollywood es una industria que ha experimentado un crecimiento exponencial, tanto económico como reputacional, en los últimos años. El propósito de esta investigación es analizar y evaluar cómo Bollywood, como industria cinematográfica de la India, trabaja a favor del estado. Se subraya que Bollywood es una herramienta de poder blando empleada para la obtención de beneficios económicos para la propia India, así como para la mejora del lugar que ésta ocupa en el tablero de las relaciones internacionales. Las repercusiones económicas se estudiarán a través de dos casos de estudio: China y los Estados Unidos de América, que ayudarán a comprender el impacto que provoca Bollywood a nivel global, y a explicar las diferencias entre aquéllos dos países.

Palabras clave: Bollywood, India, poder blando, China, EE. UU., cine, economía

## **Table of Contents**

1. Introduction and context.....	1
2. Purpose and Motivation.....	2
2.1 Globalization and soft power: the pillars of Bollywood.....	2
2.2 The growth of Bollywood.....	3
3. State of affairs and theoretical framework .....	4
3.1 The definition of Power (in all its manifestations) .....	4
3.1.1 Identifying soft power and its tools.....	5
3.1.2 Smart power .....	6
3.2 Soft power within international relations theories .....	7
3.2.1 Mainstream International Relations theories.....	7
3.2.2 Public Diplomacy Model .....	8
3.3 The (soft) power of culture .....	9
3.4 India in soft power indexes .....	10
4. Objectives and questions .....	11
5. Methodology.....	12
6. Analysis .....	15
6.1 Behind the scenes of Bollywood: context and economic potential .....	15
6.2 An Asian Affair: the “dramatic” relationship with China .....	16
6.2.1 Consumption of Indian movies in China .....	17
6.2.2 Perception of Indian movies in China .....	19
6.2.3 Co-production as cooperation .....	22
6.2.4 China and Bollywood’s romance on the big screen.....	24
6.3 Industry rivals: Bollywood in Hollywood’s turf.....	25
6.3.1 Consumption of Indian movies in the United States.....	26
6.3.2 Perception of Indian movies in the United States .....	29
6.3.3 Channels of collaboration.....	31
6.3.4 Hollywood and Bollywood in action .....	34
6.4 East vs. West: comparing the Chinese and American cases .....	35
7. Conslusions.....	37
8. Bibliography .....	39

## **Table of Figures**

<b>Figure 1.</b> Revenue of box office overseas for Indian theatrical films from financial year 2016 to 2020, with estimates until 2022.	4
<b>Figure 2.</b> Top grossing Indian films in China compared to the USA's revenue for the same productions (in millions of USD).	19
<b>Figure 3.</b> Answers to the question “Do you think that Bollywood Films are becoming popular in China?” in percentage (%) of participants.	21
<b>Figure 4.</b> Answers to the question “Do you have friends who are interested in and watch Bollywood films?” in percentage (%) of participants.	21
<b>Figure 5.</b> Box office revenue in Chinese Yuan (RMB) of Bollywood movies in China during the years 2010 to 2020. Sourced prepared by the author based on Hong (2021)	23
<b>Figure 6.</b> Top grossing Bollywood movies for each year in the US over the last 20 years.	27
<b>Figure 7.</b> Top grossing Indian films in the USA compared to China's revenue for the same productions (in millions of US Dollars).	28
<b>Figure 8.</b> Posters for E.T The Extraterrestrial (1982) and Koi... Mil Gaya (2003)	30
<b>Figure 9.</b> Posters for Girl on the Train (2016) and Girl on the Train (2021)	31

## 1. Introduction and context

Throughout history, the State and the entertainment industry have had a close relationship, although it has not always been apparent. From Roman politicians' using amphitheaters for self-glorification (Alten, 2012) to Shakespeare's *Richard III*'s clear adulation to the reigning dynasty (Alexander, 2016), the entertainment industry has seldom been free of governmental intention. The use of entertainment for the State's benefit is one of the few common grounds we find in all regimes, throughout history, even today. The United States have famously and successfully exported the idealized American lifestyle through Hollywood since the beginnings of said industry (Aydemir, 2017). However, countries in Asia have also begun "transnational" projects, like their own film industries (Dasgupta et al., 2020, p.179).

It is therefore logical that India has developed an industry of its own: Bollywood. Bollywood is a combination of the words Hollywood and Bombay (currently Mumbai), where this industry developed (Schaefer & Karan, 2013). Although sometimes criticized, as it is often perceived to put Bollywood second to Hollywood, the word is widely used to describe Hindi cinema (Schaefer & Karan, 2013). Presently, Bollywood, Hindi cinema, and the Indian film industry are used interchangeably to describe the production of movies in India.

Even though the Indian Film Industry has existed for much of last century, it was not until the nineties that these productions became purposefully accessible internationally (Mehta, 2010). Thanks to this progressive expansion, Bollywood is now the leading film industry in the world in terms of the number of productions (the United States leads in terms of revenue) (Santoreneos, 2019).

The relevance of this industry for India is reflected not only in its revenues or growth, but its presence. The devil is in the details, like the rise to fame of many Bollywood actors in the West or sudden appreciation for Indian cultural practices, which make Bollywood an incredible tool for the State. For example, Shah Ruhk Khan, considered one of the most famous actors in the world, has made several appearances in western media, with titles like "best dressed" (Casciato, 2011) or "most influential" (The Economic Times, 2008), as well as Netflix's special with US American talk show host, David Letterman (IMDb, 2019). However, Khan is a mere example in Bollywood's soft power engine.

The actors, language, topics, culture, or a combination of these elements are what makes Bollywood exportable. It is relevant in numbers, size, and reach. Throughout the present thesis, the use of Bollywood as a soft power tool will be analyzed, concretely, the economic results that the film industry can garner for its State. It will be divided by region of impact, understanding where and how Hindi movies are deployed successfully (with this soft power objective in mind).

## **2. Purpose and Motivation**

The motivation behind this thesis is two-fold: on the one hand, the combination of globalization and soft-power that allows Bollywood to succeed, and on the other hand the potential this has for India. However, there is one lone purpose: to understand how the country yields Bollywood to serve its socio-economic purposes, and the consequent effects this has.

The reasons behind this purpose are Bollywood's place and growth on the global stage and the increased use of soft power as a foreign policy tool in recent years. The importance of both lies in their unprecedented popularity and effectiveness, and consequently, their impact on India's ambitions and international presence (Schaefer & Karan, 2013). However, the pattern of exploiting soft power as a national instrument is not unique to India, and neither is the use of the film industry to this purpose; many countries have integrated this strategy into their policies (Aydemir, 2017). This underscores the potential impact of international soft power initiatives, as they are beginning to be widely used. Media and soft power therefore go hand in hand. Their relationship exists in a progressively global world and has consequently learnt to know no boundaries.

### **2.1 Globalization and soft power: the pillars of Bollywood.**

Both factors, globalization and soft power, have ensured the survival and expansion of Bollywood (Schaefer & Karan, 2013). The Indian film industry is clearly a symptom of these two aspects: it is hard to study the impact that the Indian film industry has beyond its borders, without the background of these two phenomena.

Globalization has been popularly defined as a process that exacerbates the interconnection between countries, but this definition often overlooks its cultural impact (Wu, 2017). We must also consider that globalization and its omnipresence in almost all

aspects is a facilitator of soft power, through, for example, culture (Zoysa & Newman, 2002). Therefore, globalization personifies the *why* of this thesis: Bollywood, a growing global industry, is an ideal soft power tool, and an increasingly used political gambit.

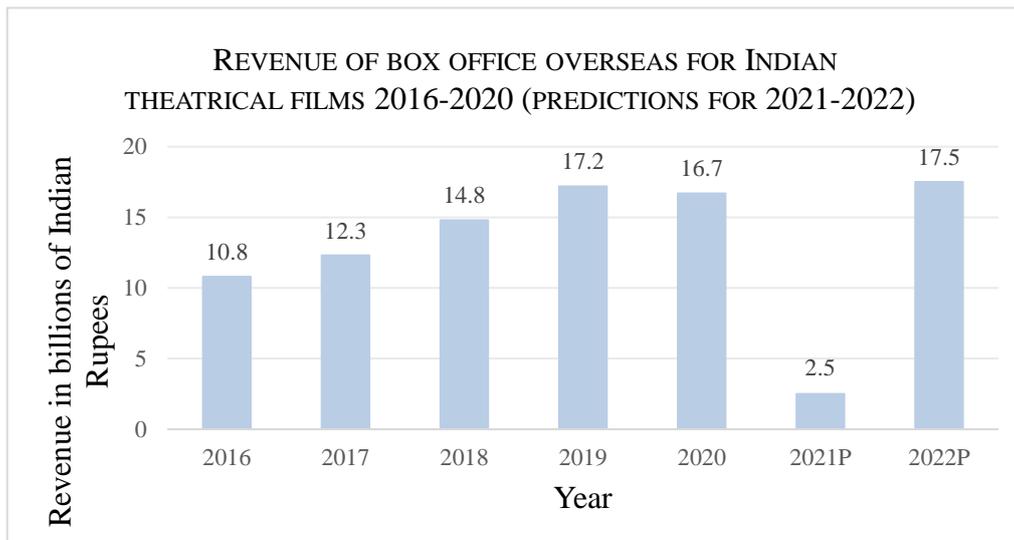
The relevance of the topic also lies in the growth of soft power, an increase caused both by the use of the term “soft power” as well as actions considered as such. Soft power, popularized by international relations scholar Joseph Nye, is widely used to describe all power that is not purely military or economic (Nye, 2021). For example, the use of international cultural relations institutions, one of the many ways soft power takes form, has grown (British Council, 2018). In general, we can see a pattern of increased investment in soft power initiatives on behalf of some of the largest economies in the world. Even though the USA remains at the forefront of soft power, Asian powers have started to do the same (British Council, 2018). This goes to show how soft power is an essential tool for most economic global powers, but specifically to India, as its international counterparts are also prioritizing this strategy.

## **2.2 The growth of Bollywood**

The growth of said industry is indisputable on a national level, as their revenues have been on the rise until the pandemic. On an international level, the trend is similar. In the Chinese market, for example, ten Bollywood movies were released in 2018, a stark increase compared to the single movie released only five years earlier. Furthermore, their presence in North America must be pointed out: the USA and Canada markets accounted for more than 40% of international box office revenue (excluding China), according to a report collaboration by Ernst & Young and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (EY & FICCI, 2019).

In fact, excluding the years most affected by COVID (2020 and 2021), the revenue of the industry has also increased steadily in international box offices, as seen in Figure 1. Even with the adverse effects of the pandemic, the revenue of Hindi movies on a global scale is estimated to bounce back to better-than pre-pandemic levels (KPMG, 2020).

As we can see in the following graph, the revenue of Bollywood has an increasing trend, except for the years where COVID-19 was rampant (2020 and 2021).



**Figure 1.** Revenue of box office overseas for Indian theatrical films from financial year 2016 to 2020, with estimates until 2022. Source prepared by the author and editor based on KPMG (2020).

The graph shows optimism for this year’s international revenue of Bollywood. The box office recollection is supposed to overtake the 2019 figure, therefore solidifying the pattern of growth the Indian film industry enjoys.

This proves how the Hindi movie industry is growing significantly. The omnipresence of all three mentioned factors (soft power, globalization, and Bollywood’s growth) makes the relevance of the topic apparent. Nevertheless, it is their combination that displays the reason behind this study: Bollywood, as an embodiment of soft power, can be used for India’s economic advantage.

### 3. State of affairs and theoretical framework

#### 3.1 The definition of Power (in all its manifestations)

Power is a very contested term in almost all fields. Joseph Nye, main authority in the area of soft power, defines power in itself as the “ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want” (Nye J. S., 2008, p.94). He figures that power can be felt in three main ways: as coercion, as incentives and as attraction. As an entity, we can exert power to realize our outcomes via attraction to who we are, like our policies, our values, or our prosperity (Nye, 2008).

To avoid simplification, he further explains how power can be seen as a two-way relationship, where the powerful are acknowledged as such by those who are not.

However, this definition excludes the use of force, as there is no relationship nor acknowledgment of power. For example, a dictator might execute a revolutionary, thinking this is power. Yet if the dissident wanted martyrdom, it could be argued that it is them who are powerful. Nevertheless, he underlines that this definition is incomplete, as there is no definite measurable power (for example, which resources are the best to exert power?). In the end, he decides, power must be defined within contexts and strategies (Nye, 2021).

It is along this line that he distinguishes the differences between soft and hard power. Hard power is a more traditional conception of power: money and force, or, in measurable items, the economy and the military of a country. Hard power lies in two out of the three mentioned ways power can be felt: coercion and incentives (Nye, 2021). Soft power is based on the last item, attraction, where countries reach successful outcomes via their appeal. As a simplified definition, he suggests that “hard power is push; soft power is pull” (Nye, 2021, p.6).

However, soft power is more nuanced, as explained as follows.

### 3.1.1 Identifying soft power and its tools

Besides understanding soft power as something opposite to hard power, or as an “attraction”, it is essential that we properly identify what soft power is exactly. Athique (2018) suggests that soft power fosters an external awareness, labeling the exerting country as “benign” (p.471), which in turn can make other States welcome their international initiatives. Furthermore, this type of communication can be the ideal way to further foreign policy, as it might feel less intrusive. Finally, he also underlines that countries with bigger populations have a natural ability of “projecting their cultures” (p.471), as vast populations can push this attraction into other regions (Athique, 2018). This fact is extremely important when considering India’s position, because its population is not only large, but diverse, and can influence similar surrounding cultures.

Nye (2008) identifies soft power as one that can shape others’ preferences. However, it is not only convincing, but also influential, to the point that it can succeed in achieving foreign policy objectives.

With regards to soft power tools, according to Nye (2008), a country’s soft power exists primarily in three elements: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policy. Culture

is effective when it is attractive to others, political values work if national and international policies are consistent, and foreign policies succeed if they are perceived as legitimate. Bollywood is categorized in the first element, culture. In fact, Nye explains that there is high culture (literature or art), and popular culture (entertainment); Bollywood is seen as being part of the latter.

Soft power can be spread through unexpected tools. Noya (2005) explains that soft power can be unintentional, a subproduct of non-soft power policies. He highlights that the line between hard and soft power is finer than we might believe. There is hard power because of soft power and vice versa. He believes, for example, that the use of English as a lingua franca, although initially cultural, is now a clear example of hard power, while using one's armed forces for humanitarian services is soft power (p.5). This simply sheds light to the idea that power (soft or otherwise) is a contested term in the field of policymaking, and that it is one that is better understood through examples or case application.

### 3.1.2 Smart power

However, soft power cannot be credited with the full capacity of changing the world. Here, smart power comes into play: the combination of soft and hard power tools (Nye, 2009). Nye (2009) explains that nations need to develop "contextual intelligence", a skill that enables countries to make policies that merge hard and soft power (p.2).

Wilson's (2008) definition of smart power is more complete. He also understands it as a mix of hard and soft power, but in that the result is "mutually reinforcing" (p.115) and that it successfully achieves the actor's goals. In a way, although he doesn't use the exact words, he also underscores the need for "contextual intelligence" (Nye, 2009, p.2). For example, the target State has to be ideal; the receiving country must be attracted to the exerting country (via soft power) as well as willing (via hard power). The following analysis will refer to it as "economic soft power" instead of smart power for two reasons:

1. The concept of smart power is less popular, and therefore a less specified term. Although soft power is a contested term, the general idea is settled. It is easier to understand it as a self-defining equation (economy + soft power), than explaining the nuances of a more ambiguous term like "smart power". Furthermore, since smart power is the combination of hard and soft power, I sought to be explicit in which hard power the present thesis will be focusing on, which is the economic one.

2. The definition of smart power makes policies related to it extremely purposeful. By this I mean that the combination of tools is carefully defined and with explicit goals in mind. As we will see later, the case studies related to Bollywood can vary from more to less obvious. There is no clear pattern: sometimes the economy serves soft power, sometimes it is the other way around, and at times, it may seem coincidental. This will be properly developed when analyzing the case studies.

### **3.2 Soft power within international relations theories**

Soft power has been heavily discussed by different theories due to its increased relevance, even before the term “soft power” itself was brought to life.

#### 3.2.1 Mainstream International Relations theories

##### *a. Realism*

Dhungana and Karki (2020) summarize realism as a “struggle for power” (p.165). They explain that the anarchic world around us motivates one thing: to be the most powerful. If not, you will be left to fend for yourself against self-interested States

Gallarotti (2010) argues that, despite popular conceptions, non- “hard” power is part of realism. For example, “endearment” (p.127) towards a country’s character, something realism considers, opens said country up to opportunities. Bilgin and Eliş (2008) suggest that power should be redefined to consider non-material factors the same way one would consider military prowess. This goes to show how soft power is indisputable: traditional explanations are having to adapt to this new element.

##### *b. Neoliberalism*

Commonly defined as the theoretical opposite of realism, neoliberalism developed in the post-war period, and solidified during the eighties. Although it agrees with the (neo)realist approach on several counts, they mainly disagree. For example, States cooperate and need each other, meaning that the price of war increases (Nye, 1988).

Due to globalization, neoliberalism highlights the concept of interdependence. Nye and Keohane (1987) believe that societies interact through different channels because they know they will benefit from it. They argue that, because of interdependence, the use of the military is less attractive. Furthermore, these channels may not include the military (Keohane & Nye, 1987). Unsurprisingly, Nye’s later analysis on soft power includes his neoliberal view. Resources (especially military) cannot fight most of today’s problems

on their own, like the COVID-19 pandemic. In these cases, soft power might be the only tool available (Nye, 2021).

### *c. Constructivism*

Constructivism is a newer international relations theory that questions the pillars on which classical theories are based. They focus on “ideational factors” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, p.393) such as culture or norms, and how these ideas are connected. Constructivists stress the importance of how these factors are “intersubjective”, or shared, between actors in international relations (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001).

Finnemore and Sikkink (2001) believe that the interaction between actors is based on shared ideas. Because of this, identities and interests define nations, which in turn define international relations. They are made up of “social facts” (p.393): facts like currencies or rights which do not exist in a material form but exist because we believe in them.

Having ideological construction as a pillar of its theory, constructivism easily adopts the idea of soft power. Ted Hopf (1998) describes it as “discursive power” (p. 177). Much like Nye’s differentiation of hard and soft power, Hopf (1998) differentiates material and discursive power; both are needed to understand international relations. While material power consists of the military or money, discursive power consists of intangibles, like knowledge, ideology or language, which shape social practices. Hopf (1998) makes sure to credit these practices as the reason for predictability in international relations. Thanks to them, we understand what all actors are doing (and could potentially do). It is easier to identify them, for example, as an enemy or an ally. Consequently, social practices give international relations a structure and identity (Hopf, 1998).

We could therefore conclude that constructivism has a closer relationship to the idea of soft power. While other theories have incorporated the term as soon as it became the new normal, constructivism has always considered soft power (discursive power) as part of the identity construction of States and the international system.

### 3.2.2 Public Diplomacy Model

Public diplomacy is one of many types of policies that tries to export a positive image of a country through attraction. It is not soft power exactly, but a branch within it (Gilboa, 2008). It is nevertheless useful to understand the Public Diplomacy Model, as its

similarities shared with soft power (like the use of attraction or agenda-setting nature) will also shed a light on how soft power has come to be (Gilboa, 2008).

Gilboa (2008) differentiates three public diplomacy models. The first is the “Basic Cold War model” (p. 59), where the use of public diplomacy was of interest due to the reluctance to resort to nuclear violence. The idea was to convince populations of a “favorable image of the other side” (p.59). The next model is the “Nonstate Transnational model” (p.60) which explains the increase in influence exerted by civil society actors, like NGOs. They would support causes (inherently related to the nation they represent), like pro-democracy. The final model is the “Domestic PR model” (p.60), where professionals are given the responsibility of attraction (like lobbyists or production companies). This model assumes that the positive image of a government is more successful when it apparently doesn’t come from them. A clear example of this is how the USA’s Department of Defense has assisted in the production of several movies, like *Iron Man* (2008) or *Man of Steel* (2013) as well as vetoed others (Mirrlees, 2020).

The theories behind soft power are therefore varied. For the sake of being comprehensive, a diverse array of theories has been discussed, but the present work will be guided by one: constructivism. Through this lens, the pillars of the analysis that follows will be easier to understand, as it grants the privilege of both being general (the world is built on ideas) as well as specific (States can rely on discursive power).

### **3.3 The (soft) power of culture**

In the following thesis, we will be focusing more specifically on one factor: culture. Haneş and Andrei (2015) define it as “social ideology” (p.34) and all systems related to it, which can include legislation, ideas, or science. As underlined before, Nye (2008) also provides a straightforward definition of the culture-inspired soft power. It can be high culture or popular culture, the latter being the cornerstone of this study.

The expansion of one’s culture can establish norms that favor the exerting country. This can be a source of international competitiveness: influence means being heard in the international stage. Culture can build soft power in a diversity of ways, as it can be a source of strategy. For example, when knowing others’ culture, an understanding is more likely. Furthermore, culture can build trust between countries, as learning others’ values

can help understand their context. Finally, culture allows for integration. In a way, homogenization builds bridges (Haneş & Andrei, 2015).

However, the exporting of culture can achieve less visible consequences. In the case of cinema, it can create identities in those watching. The messages and ideals that are in a film industry can motivate “political thought and action” (Frants & Keune, 2017, p.155). Therefore, the consequences of cinema can be seen in time, if only slightly. However, the impact is clear and is to be considered an advantage. The success will depend on how well culture, specifically films, are pieced together with policy objectives.

Soft power, in and out of the economic context, has clearly changed both how we see power, and how we exert it in international relations (British Council, 2018). This is important to point out, since there is a permanent attempt at understanding the decisions made by States, and those made between them. Therefore, grasping what and how we know soft power is essential.

### **3.4 India in soft power indexes**

Because the definition of soft power is neither objective nor explicit, several scholars have attempted to develop an efficient way of measuring it (Seong-Hun, 2018). Many initial endeavors measure the “favorability” (Seong-Hun, 2018, p.3) of a country. For the sake of a comprehensive view of India’s soft power efforts, the following section will outline its position in global indexes measuring soft power.

The Nation Brands Index began in 2005, and today, they conduct 60,000 interviews, measuring sixty countries (Ipsos, 2021). The more recent index also considers fluctuations regarding the impact of COVID, which puts India in the 40th place, 6 positions lower than the previous year (Ipsos, 2021).

Even though this index is the most renowned in this area, a newer index will be considered for the sake of specificity, as it includes a wider number of countries, albeit the information being more general: the Global Soft Power Index (Global Soft Power Index, 2020). It first began in 2020 after the Global Soft Power Summit and was especially interesting in that it wanted to consider the impact of COVID. Its methodology includes 75,000 surveys of the general public and hundreds of surveys of “specialist audiences” (Global Soft Power Index, 2021, p.25), who are leaders in their fields.

We can appreciate how, although India's rank has worsened from 2020 to 2021 (presumably from perceptions of the handling of the pandemic versus other countries), their overall score has increased, meaning that familiarity, reputation, and performance have increased. Furthermore, they highlight that Yoga and Bollywood are the main appeal of India's soft power (Global Soft Power Index, 2020).

#### **4. Objectives and questions**

As presented in the title of this thesis, the aim is to study the impact of Bollywood as a soft power tool, specifically in the economic arena. Therefore, the objectives of this investigation are as follows.

- Main objective: Investigate how Bollywood facilitates economic advantages to its country of origin, India, as a source of its soft power. In other words, understand, through case studies, how the Indian film industry is an agent of national gain due to its role in international relations.
- Specific objectives:
  1. Analyze the relationship between Bollywood consumption in different regions and the positive consequences it has in India
  2. Specify in what ways India benefits from an international movie industry and growth of its soft power
  3. Evaluate the success or lack thereof of Bollywood as an economic soft power tool in different areas and how they compare

The questions considered in this thesis will be:

- Is Bollywood the main source of soft power for India?
- Is Bollywood a successful soft power tool, specifically from an economic perspective?
- Where and why is Bollywood most successful in favoring India in international relations?

The hypotheses are:

- "Bollywood, as the main source of soft power of India, has been increasingly successful in exporting an encouraging image of its country, to the point of enjoying positive economic (and otherwise) consequences and an improved standing in international relations"

- “Bollywood will be more successful and popular in the regions where they have a larger diaspora”

## 5. Methodology

The present thesis has been researched and structured considering the following sources and information.

Firstly, throughout this study there will be clear reliance on literature review. This is especially true for recurrent definitions, like soft power or Bollywood, as there is an aim for accuracy and avoidance of ambiguity. Furthermore, said literature review will rely mostly on academic articles or books. The reason behind this is similar to the aforementioned objective of accuracy; this study strives to have a solid foundation and a supported line of inquiry. The sources of these articles and books are varied, but can be summarized as journals of political science, reviews specialized in the field and international annals, which include, for example, the *International Journal of Social Sciences*, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* or the *Journal of Cultural Economics*.

It is nevertheless important to also underline the inclusion of non-academic articles. Again, this decision arises from the aspiration of being as precise as possible. Given that the main factor studied, Bollywood, is a part of the entertainment industry, it stands to reason that popular media be included. Essential information, like public perception, reviews and popularity can be drawn and deduced from these sources. When it comes to soft power and its ability to define the international image of a country, public opinion is a genuine concern (Goldsmith & Horiuchi, 2012).

Secondly, the present thesis is also supported by quantitative data. Throughout the study, data will be drawn from reports or databases. This is to illustrate the more measurable side of soft power and its impact on a country’s position in the global context. These reports vary from soft power indexes to private studies from cultural institutions (such as the British Council). Other data include pertinent information such as box office revenue or number of movies premiered are sourced from, for example, *Box Office India* or *IMDb*; this sort of evidence will be regularly referenced, as it will apply in more than one instance or case study.

Thirdly, the analysis section of this work will consider two case studies. According to Zainal (2007), case studies are an appropriate line of investigation as it exemplifies the matter at hand and eases the understanding of it. It allows us to investigate the research question with the help of “contextual analysis” (p.2), employed, in the present case, in two different regions. It is the prime way to understand the research applied to “real-life” (p.5) circumstances, which is ideal to grasp in what ways Bollywood is yielded as a soft power tool, and the actual consequences of it. Other scholars also agree that case study analysis is an appropriate method of investigation. Cronin (2014) assures that case study gives a wider outlook since it considers different perspectives. She considers this is “fundamental” (p.21) to understand the object of the study. Gerring (2004) adds that although case studies are weak in their breadth (as there are only so many cases one can study), they are useful in that they can be compared for in-depth conclusions.

The case studies will identify the influence of Bollywood as soft power in different areas. The consideration of case studies will shed a light on the impact of this soft power tool through concrete examples and consequences. The regions that will be considered are China and the United States of America.

The reason behind this is threefold. The first, is the interest to study different continents. For example, geographical closeness or government interest might sway the impact of Bollywood. Studying different regions will give an insight as to how the Indian film industry is deployed as a tool and where their concerns lie. The second, the number of case studies in and of itself will allow for a more rigorous picture of that area and of Bollywood as a tool of soft power. While a single case study would avow an accurate analysis, two can grant a more meticulous one. The third and final reason appeals to the idea of globalization. It is the notion that Bollywood has become international that gives this topic such pull. If the paper focused on a single region, the study would be lacking.

Regarding the motivation behind the choice of regions, there are three main justifications. The first, for both the United States and China, we could appeal to the size of the country or its population, making them interesting objects of study. The second, the fact that the USA speaks mainly English, the *Esperanto* of our times (Ethnologue, 2022), which could influence their disposition to watch entertainment in foreign languages. The third, that they could both be viewed as leaders of sorts, whether it be economic, military or even

regional. However, they both have individual characteristics as to why the study of Bollywood's soft power might be useful.

On the one hand, the United States of America and India share a key phenomenon: the film industry. Hollywood, as the leading movie producer in the world in terms of revenue (Santoreneos, 2019), is an interesting contrast to Bollywood. The success (or lack thereof) of another film industry in the US, with a different language and a divergent taste, is bound to be of value. The strategies and challenges of Bollywood within the borders of its largest competitor are an interesting consideration to understand the impact of its soft power. Furthermore, the USA enjoys the second largest Indian diaspora (second only to United Arab Emirates), which is also an appealing factor (Hanna & Batalova, 2020).

On the other hand, as a homogeneous country, China's consumption of Bollywood is certainly interesting from a sociological point of view. Ninety-one percent of China's population is made up of the Han ethnic majority (Gladney, 2009), meaning the viewing of movies from another ethnicity and another language could be affected by this, as the content is far from what they are used to. Furthermore, China is a close neighbor, sharing 3500 kilometers of border (Ghoshal, et al., 2022). Contrasting with the US, China flaunts geographical closeness. This, along with the demographic aspect, makes the Chinese case unique.

Bollywood is significant and present in other regions. The United Kingdom, for example, could be an interesting area of study due to their colonial ties or diaspora (Hussain, 2005). Pakistan would also contribute to this research as a neighboring, controversial relation (Kumar, 2009). Even Australia, as a relatively close, English-speaking country could add to the present study. However, for the sake of comprehension, the two regions mentioned have been prioritized. This way, the research can go into details to understand the presence of Bollywood in the East and in the West, in English and non-English speaking countries, in areas with a larger Indian diaspora and in neighboring States. Although ideally a limitless number of countries would be considered, the two chosen in this work can be deemed as two of the most compelling cases to study, as they have several qualities that the mentioned countries also do, making them fitting for in-depth research.

Fourthly and finally, the methodology of this work includes comparative analysis. The opportunity of studying two different case studies allows for a comparison amongst them. Through this analysis, the main research questions will be explored: the reasoning behind

Bollywood as a soft power tool as well as the degree of its success; the impact this industry has in different regions, including how this impact differs; how these differences matter and why they do; but, above all, how Bollywood works in all areas to benefit India economically, and where it works best.

## **6. Analysis**

In this section, the analysis of the case studies will take place. The structure is as follows. In section 6.1 “Behind the scenes of Bollywood”, the context and economic potential of Bollywood are underlined. In section 6.2, “An Asian affair: the “dramatic” relationship with China”, the case study analysis of said country will be developed. Section 6.3, “Industry rivals: Bollywood in Hollywood’s turf”, the case of the USA will be analyzed. Both case studies have the same structure: consumption of Bollywood in that country, perception of the Indian Film industry there, in what ways Bollywood and that country cooperate and a final section summarizing and analyzing the relationship each country has with Bollywood. Finally, section 6.4, “East vs. West: comparing the Chinese and American cases” pursues a comparative analysis of both countries with regards to their connection to Bollywood.

### **6.1 Behind the scenes of Bollywood: context and economic potential**

Mehta (2020) assures that the phenomenon of Bollywood has just started to make noise in Western ears, but it is by no means new. Although it formally began production in the 1930s, when sound was made available in film, it can technically be pinpointed to 1899 with native, niche productions. In 1971, the output production surpassed that of the world leader, the USA (Mehta, 2020). In the next 40 years, their output would more than double; although the USA’s production would triple, their number would still be over three hundred movies short from its Indian counterpart (by 2004 India produced 946 films, while the United States, 611) (Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008).

However, the Indian Film Industry did not clearly consider global aspirations until the nineties. Although said movies were accessible abroad, it was difficult to do so. Because they were clearly culturally targeted until the 1990s, Bollywood productions were more niche and thematically less appealing. Since then, adaptations were made to make it more attractive to a global audience (Mehta, 2010).

After the success of *Hum Aapke Hain Koun..!* in 1994, which beat the record for highest grossing Indian film abroad, the industry realized the potential movie productions had. As soon as a year later, *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, starring Shah Rukh Khan, was produced (Mehta, 2010). The story follows Non-Resident Indians, (hereinafter NRI), living in London and the changes they go through when travelling across Europe. The movie has the world record for the longest run in movie theaters, going on more than 1270 weeks (halted for the first time during the pandemic) (Mishra, 2020). However, this movie is not only significant in that it has become a cult classic, but that it established a new pattern. Indian movies can be simultaneously Indian and international, to be simultaneously successful domestically and abroad, especially when targeting their diasporic population (Mehta, 2010).

However, the nineties were the beginning of Bollywood's promise. Bollywood went from producing 946 movies in 2004 (Kavoori & Punathambekar, 2008) to producing 1724 in 2013 (Dastidar & Elliott, 2019). The previous growth showed potential, yet the recent growth shows a pattern. Bollywood as an industry shows no indication of slowing down. In 2019, the Indian cinema box office revenues amounted to 2.5 billion US dollars (Hong, 2021); in 2012, this same value was 1.6 billion US dollars (Dastidar & Elliott, 2019). This is relevant in that the entertainment industry is part of India's services sector, which represents over 50% of the Indian economy (Hong, 2021). Even more pertinent, Fetschrein (2010) estimates that 20% of all entertainment revenue in India is from Bollywood alone (competing with television, print media, music, gaming, and animation). This highlights the importance of Bollywood, as a single industry, to the Indian economy as a whole.

## **6.2 An Asian Affair: the “dramatic” relationship with China**

Sino-Indian relations are complicated to say the least. Although they enjoy a long history of bilateral relations, traced back to antiquity, the start of their modern relationship can be pinpointed in the 1950s. Here is where the configuration of both countries started to resemble what they are today (Banerjee, 2021). They have shared key moments that showcase a strong bond between the two. They are increasingly migrating across borders, especially after academic related treaties that make it easier for students to go on exchange programs (Banerjee, 2021). Furthermore, they are each other's main trading partners. While India is China's third trading partner (excluding Hong Kong as a partner), China

is India's first (World Integrated Trade Solution [WITS], 2019). Suffice to say, they each play a vital role in the other's economy and politics.

Nevertheless, the relationship has not always been successful. While migration between both has increased, it is still small as compared to the population of both. There were a little under 50,000 Indians living in China in 2015 (Patil, 2015), an underwhelming number considering the 18 million Indians outside of India's borders (The Economic Times, 2021). Furthermore, although the cultural affair is growing, classic tensions are yet to be put to rest, like that of border disputes. Their shared border is a point of contention where the military of both is constantly deployed (Mittal, 2022). Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that despite recent tensions in disputed territories, China and India's trade has increased this past year to a record-breaking amount of \$125 billion (The Economic Times, 2022).

Whether it be via common ground or bitter confrontation, both States have started the phenomenon of "Chindia" (Karan & Schaefer, 2020, p.189). In the context of an increasingly global world, China and India are a force to be reckoned with. Both Asian powers, both with unprecedented growth (economic and demographic) and both with credible spheres of influence. The link between the two formed organically, as they both appreciate the joint profit. In fact, the combined "Chindian" global revenues in cinema are the largest worldwide (Karan & Schaefer, 2020).

#### 6.2.1 Consumption of Indian movies in China

The Chinese box office is the second largest in the world in terms of revenue, following the United States. It is generally thought of a difficult market to pierce, for multiple reasons. One is that the propaganda machine in China only allows for 34 foreign-made movies to be premiered in China a year. The total average for India is 2 premiers per year (up to 2018) (Hong, 2021). The Chinese regime does not take lightly to non-native narratives being spread within the population; the quota ensures control over what is being watched. Furthermore, the restriction of the number of movies is not the only government-established barrier. Censorship has also stopped Indian movies from premiering in China due to their content being vetoed (Hong, 2021).

Another reason for difficulty is the culture of piracy in India, a trend that is also popular in neighboring nations. This "leakage" as Roy (2012, p. 30) defines it, is almost cultural, the avoidance of bureaucracy and regulation as a means to an end. This practice makes it

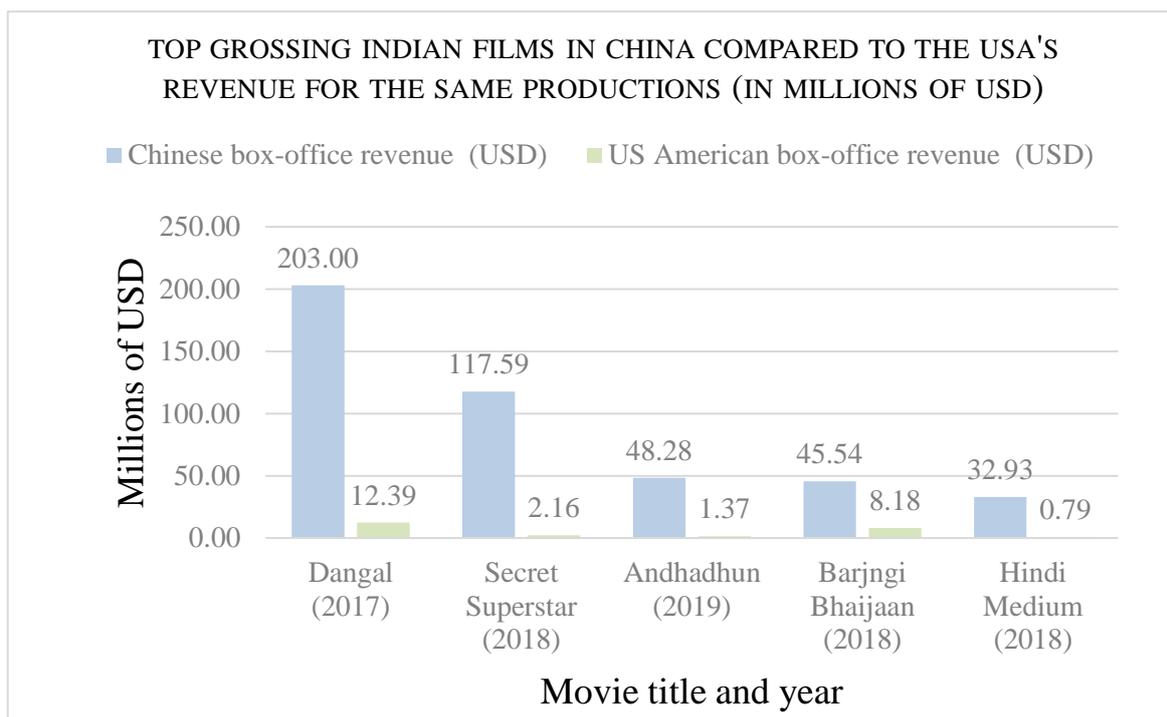
difficult to accurately measure the impact of Bollywood films abroad, as well as hampering the possibility of studying patterns (for example, which themes are most popular?). Nevertheless, piracy can also be thanked as an informal (and illegal) method of paving the way for official movie premiers (Roy, 2012). *3 idiots* (2009) starring Aamir Khan was released illegally in China yet enjoyed quite the success; Khan has since produced and starred in the two most popular Bollywood movies in China (Hong, 2021).

Despite these hiccups, Indian movies have managed to make their way into the Chinese box office, but not without their failures. In 2009, a co-production between China, the US and India titled *Chandni Chowk to China* failed miserably in both Asian States (Karan & Schaefer, 2020). Although seemingly an irreparable case, the 2016 movie *Dangal*, starring Aamir Khan would change the tide. The unprecedented popularity of this movie not only translated into revenues, but also created an environment for collaboration and further consumption of Bollywood (Karan & Schaefer, 2020).

According to Karan and Schaefer (2020), both the Chinese and Indian domestic box offices have a pattern of growth. In 2018, they grew by 9% and 12% respectively. Furthermore, Bollywood's international box office revenue that same year amounted to over 420 million US dollars, representing 17.8% of total box office revenue (Karan & Schaefer, 2020). This pillar of expansion in both countries is significant in that they grant the opportunity to grow together.

Despite not enjoying a large diasporic Indian population, China leads in Bollywood consumption. In 2018, Chinese consumption of the Indian Film Industry represented more than 60% of total international box office revenue. This is especially surprising when compared to the USA, where their box office that same year was well below the Chinese, despite having a larger Indian diaspora (Karan & Schaefer, 2020).

The top 5 performers in China had a much larger revenue than the same titles in the United States, highlighting the force of Indian soft power in China. As we can see in Figure 2, the box office collection in China is significant.



**Figure 2.** Top grossing Indian films in China compared to the USA's revenue for the same productions (in millions of USD). Source prepared by the author and editor based on Sacnilk (2019), Box Office India (2021) and Bollywood Hungama (2022)

Movies like *Dangal* (2016) made almost seventeen times more revenue in China than in the United States, a fact that underlines the potential and size of the Chinese market for Bollywood. Not only does this confirm that there is no need for a large diaspora for a movie to succeed, but also that patterns of consumption differ between countries. These facts are important when defining Bollywood as soft power. Firstly, because the initial and continuous target of NRIs abroad as the primary audience of Bollywood should be adapted. Although they are essential to Bollywood's relevance, the narrow focus can sacrifice a more diverse audience, as is the case with China. Secondly, Bollywood is varied in themes and popularity. *Barjngi Bhaijaan* (2018) is the fourth most popular Indian movie in China in terms of revenue, but it was more successful in the United States than those in second and third position in China (*Secret Superstar* (2018) and *Andhadhun* (2019), respectively). Therefore, we can conclude that Bollywood is not a one-size-fits-all, but a nuanced tool that can be adjusted.

### 6.2.2 Perception of Indian movies in China

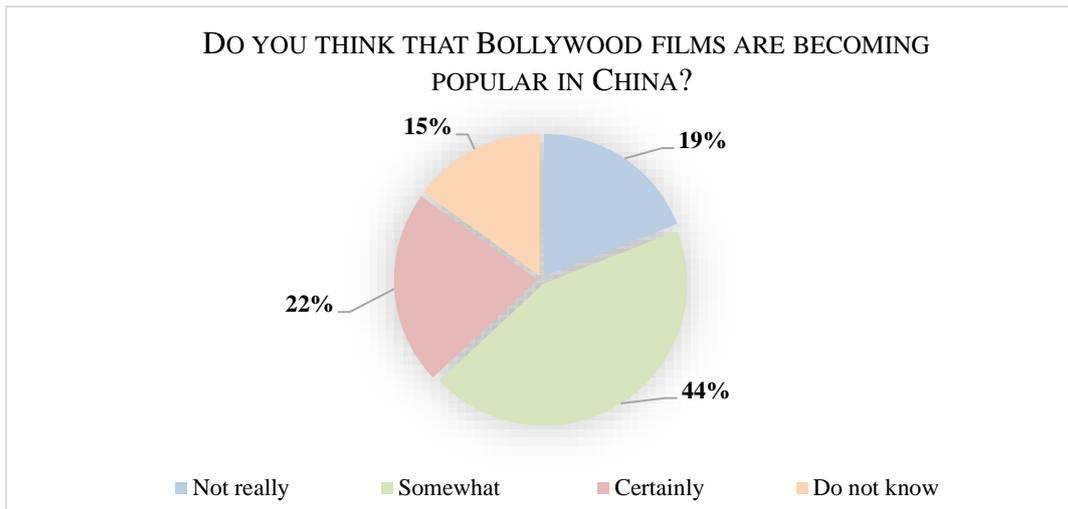
Bollywood is selling more than just theater tickets. Xi Jin Ping, China's leader, was sure to tell Prime Minister Modi at the 2017 summit how much he liked Aamir Khan's productions, and how he hoped to see more of them (Hong, 2021). In fact, Aamir Khan

has earned the nickname “Uncle Mi” (short for Aamir) among the general Chinese public. He is also titled one of the greatest Indian cultural icons in China (Hong, 2021). It may appear anodyne, but these successes are the embodiment of soft power. While before India’s culture and performers were anonymous, they have now seeped their way into society.

Hong (2021) conducted a small study to determine the standpoint of Chinese audiences on the Indian Film Industry. Regarding whether the participants liked Bollywood productions, only 25% responded that they had no positive nor negative opinion. 75% responded that they liked, or liked a lot, Bollywood movies. None responded with dislike. Furthermore, 31% of participants claimed they streamed Bollywood movies, 22% went to the cinema. Among other answers were watching television, watching at school or watching on a DVD, highlighting the diversity of access to Bollywood. The frequency the participants watched Hindi movies is also interesting. 25% claimed they watched them often, 72% said they did not, while the remaining 3% watched them gvery frequently.

This is interesting as there is a clear bias in favor of Bollywood movies (the majority of participants enjoy said productions), yet they are infrequently watched. Although the latter point affects the economic benefits of Bollywood (because the more frequency of watching, the better revenues), it still points to the power of cinema. Even though Bollywood has yet to become mainstream in China’s general population, its *reputation* has. While the conventional consumption of Bollywood is modest, they have managed great reviews from the general public.

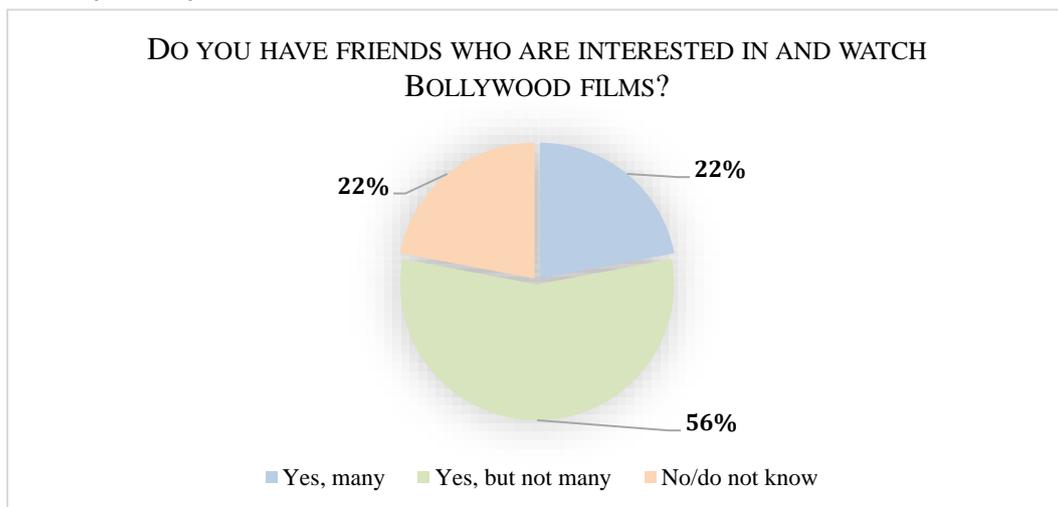
Yet, in Hong’s (2021) study we also find potential for the future. Figures 3 and 4 showcase the responses of Chinese participants to questions related to their consumption of Bollywood.



**Figure 3.** Answers to the question “Do you think that Bollywood films are becoming popular in China?” in percentage (%) of participants. Source prepared by the author and editor, based on Hong (2021).

The chart sheds a light on the positive attitude towards Bollywood. Only 19% of those surveyed explicitly believe that Bollywood films are *not* becoming popular. More people (22%) believe that they are certainly increasingly popular. The 44% of people who believe they are somewhat increasing in popularity is also a good sign, as it points to an increase, albeit small. In general, these figures give reason for optimism regarding the consumption of the Indian film industry in China.

Figure 4 explores the consumption of Bollywood by third parties of the people surveyed. This expands the breadth of the study, as it explores the perceived consumption of people not directly surveyed.



**Figure 4.** Answers to the question “Do you have friends who are interested in and watch Bollywood films?” in percentage (%) of participants. Source prepared by the author and editor, based on Hong (2021).

The vast majority (78%) assure that they know people interested in Hindi films (to a lesser or larger extent). Only the remaining 22% are unsure or know that they don't know anyone explicitly interested in this industry. It seems that the consumption of Bollywood is a self-fulfilling cycle. As it becomes more readily available, it becomes more liked.

### 6.2.3 Co-production as cooperation

As the largest combined market for entertainment, both China and India were yearning to grow. Both being soft power moguls, they understand the benefit of working together for mutual benefit. It is therefore unsurprising that they formalized a partnership regarding film production (Karan & Schaefer, 2020).

#### *a. What is co-production?*

Yang (2020) defines co-production as broadly including foreign investment, filming in international locations, or having an international team of production. However, she establishes that this definition is too broad, and that a true co-production is one where both creation and finance are shared between partners. In fact, this too is the definition of the 2014 co-production treaty between China and India (Yang, 2020).

China has long been viewed as a threat in international relations; in the entertainment arena, their content was consistently labelled as propaganda. To remedy this, they forged a new model, one that could paint them as friendly just like other powers had managed to do so. Through the Belt and Road Initiative (from now on, BRI), they established a web of positive influence. However, India has refused to join because they see the BRI as a clear threat (Yang, 2020).

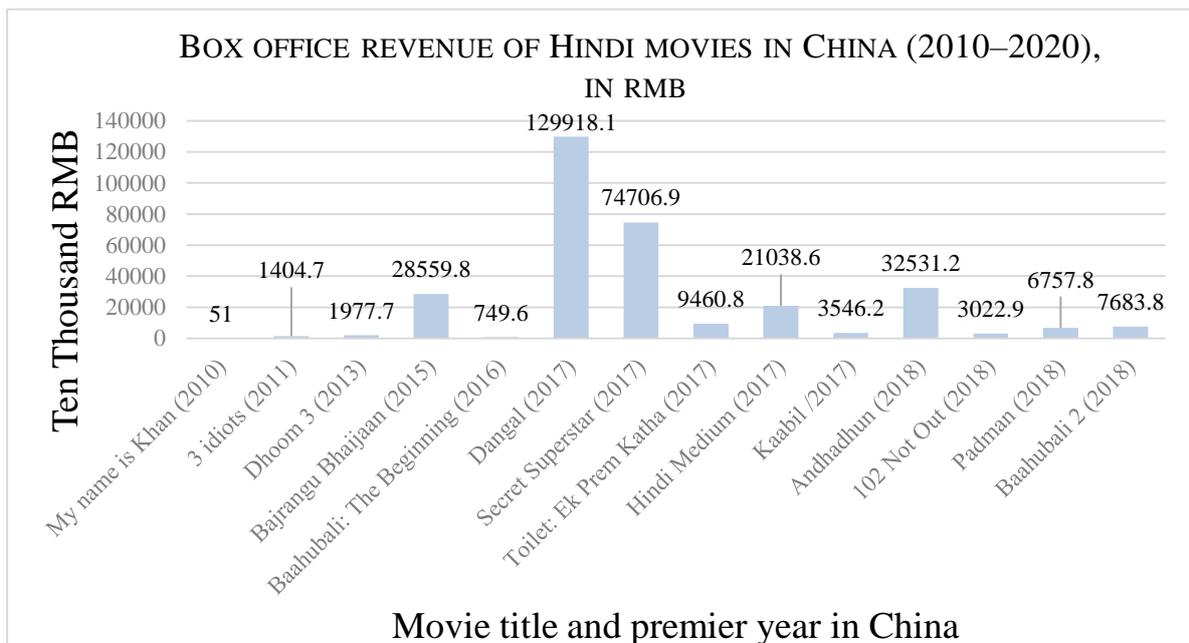
Nevertheless, India did see value in joining forces for entertainment, so instead of joining the BRI, they searched for the middle-ground: a co-production treaty. This way, co-produced movies would not face the scrutiny of the Chinese quota and content standards, as they would be deemed equally Chinese and Indian. Furthermore, their revenues would also increase, as foreign producers get a smaller percentage than domestic ones (Yang, 2020). This treaty also facilitates other industry related events, like joint film festivals, such as the first ever India-China Film Festival of 2018, which sought to “strengthen people-to-people” and “deepen cultural understanding” (Ministry of Information & Broadcasting of India, 2018, para.1).

b. Joint projects

Since the signing of said agreement, China and India have collaborated in three movies: *Xuan Zang* (2016), *Buddies in India* (2017) and *Kung Fu Yoga* (2017), the latter starring world famous actor, Jackie Chan. Although *Xuan Zang* is the only one that meets the requirements of equal partnerships, all three had, to some extent, the input of both countries (Yang, 2020).

However, the prominence of Chinese producers in all movies is relevant. All three movies were premiered in China, whose box office (for all of them) accounted for 99% of total revenue (Yang, 2020). The reason behind this is that the projects were biased in favor of Chinese corporations. The Indian domestic market did not enjoy the result of these co-productions because it was not made available to them. Even though this type of cooperation helps Indian filmmakers to penetrate the Chinese market, it would be even more successful if they were given creative license, as purely Indian productions like *Dangal* did better than these projects (Yang, 2020).

It is nevertheless important to point out that the 2014 co-production treaty has established a before and after in availability and consumption of Bollywood movies, as reflected in Figure 5. We can appreciate the increase in revenue per production, as well as in the number of productions accessible in China.



**Figure 5.** Box office revenue in Chinese Yuan (RMB) of Bollywood movies in China during the years 2010 to 2020. Sourced prepared by the author and editor based on Hong (2021)

We can clearly see two patterns. The first is that since 2014 revenues of Bollywood movies have increased immensely. The difference between *Bajrangu Bhajaan* (2015) the first post-agreement Indian premier and *My name is Khan* (2010) is stark. This is surprising as the latter was a record-breaking movie, having the highest premier weekend international box office revenue for an Indian movie at the time (The Numbers, 2010). This could show that the increased friendship between both powers also increases the interest for their productions. The second pattern is the number of movies premiered in China. While from 2010 to 2016 there was one official premier of Hindi movies per year, both in 2017 and 2018 enjoyed four or more premiers.

*c. Recent developments*

As seen in Figure 5, there have been no premiers since 2018. The reason behind this is that border disputes have exacerbated between the two, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, China has had the power to stop the dissemination of Bollywood movies. The link between politics and entertainment is therefore explicit in the case of China. This makes Bollywood valuable both as a source of soft power to appease potential disagreements, but also as a gauge of the happenings between both countries. The dispute has been recently resolved, and, as such, the premier of the movie *Chhichhore* was released in January 2022, originally distributed in India in 2019 (Davis, 2021). Despite not doing well compared to recent movies, it should be highlighted that general box office revenues in China have decreased since the pandemic, due to current ongoing confinements and unaffordable prices (Bollywood Hungama, 2022; Cheng, 2022). Finally, from 2019 onward, the two co-producers have decided to establish more balanced conditions to their filmmaking, learning from past mistakes (Yang, 2020).

6.2.4 China and Bollywood's romance on the big screen

As a mega industry for India, it is unsurprising that they yield Bollywood as such a significant source of soft power. Through the co-production treaty and general collaborations, India has established itself in a unique position. It is one of the few industries that enjoys several premiers in China, after a long-standing average of two yearly (Hong, 2021). It also has privileged positions when co-producing, accessing Chinese resources. But, more importantly, it has increased its global revenues exponentially since becoming more established in the Chinese market (Hong, 2021).

As it has been discussed, soft power seeps into the relations between countries and their image. These details can also be identified in Bollywood's expansion to the Middle Kingdom. While US American streaming services continue to be banned from China, India has sold movie clusters to Chinese streaming platforms. This potential is huge, considering that said platforms have more than 100 million users (Karan & Schaefer, 2020). This is also significant in that more than 30% of Chinese consumers watch Bollywood from a streaming service (Hong, 2021).

All this underlines the apparent fact that India is successfully branding itself positively in China through Bollywood. The reputational consequences are evident, with growing numbers of Chinese people being interested in their content, increasing their revenue.

We can appreciate how, in the Chinese case, Bollywood has definitely furthered India's soft power by rooting positive images in the general population. Not only is perception an essential aspect of soft power, but so is the collaboration with the country itself. Bollywood has served as an efficient tool to open the Chinese market despite its numerous barriers, as well as been a useful indicator to understand the state of Sino-Indian relations. China's huge market also ensured high revenues to the movies premiered, owing much of the profits to the improved relations between both countries. This box office collection is to be admired due to the fact that China does not have a large Indian diaspora, so we can therefore assume consumption is born out of consumer initiative rather than cultural links with Bollywood's content.

### **6.3 Industry rivals: Bollywood in Hollywood's turf**

US-India relations are much newer than those with China. As a relatively new State, the US didn't truly get involved in India until the 19th century. Even then, most contact was in the name of religious missions. It was not until India's independence that relations became more formal. The USA got involved in the new configuration of the Indian States, as well as mediated in the Pakistani-Indian border disputes. Nevertheless, the seventies saw an increased distance between the two because the USA supported Pakistan and contributed to the trade of arms in the region (Kumar, 2009).

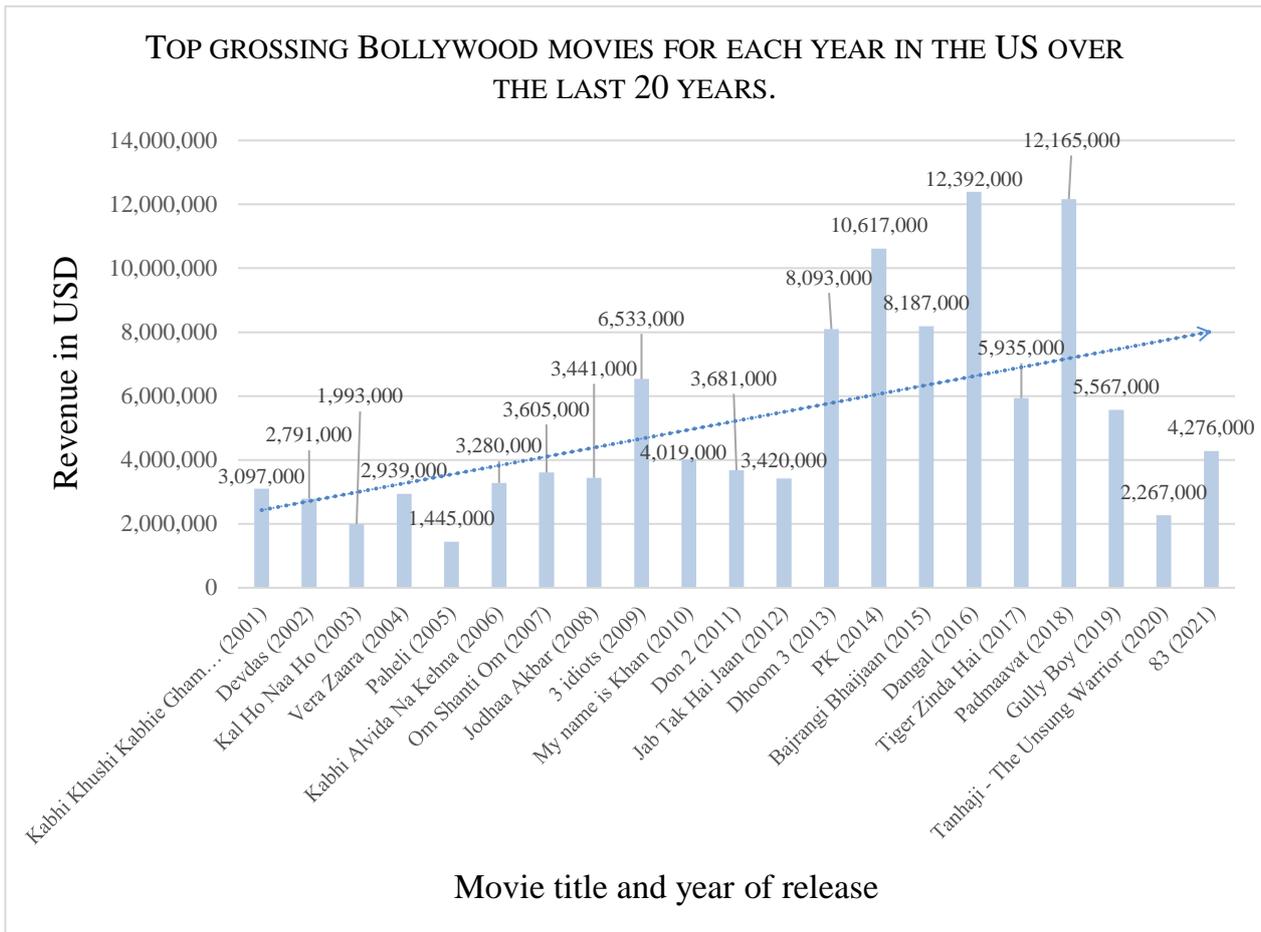
Hence, during the Cold War, India was dependent on the Soviet Union due to this circumstance (Kumar, 2009). However, with the fall of the USSR, both countries began to foster their relationship, albeit moderately. The decade of the nineties was still a

rollercoaster between the two, with nuclear proliferation as the main contingency point (Kronstadt, 2009). Nevertheless, the arrival of the new millennium would change the tide. After the 9/11 attacks, India was quick to pledge their support and resources to help the US with anti-terrorism intelligence. From this point forward, the relationship began to improve steadily (Kronstadt, 2009).

More recently, the relationship between both has been fruitful. From a political standpoint, the United States have gradually appreciated the value of India. As the largest democracy in the world, and one of the few in the region, their relationship is founded on a “commitment” to “democratic principles” (para. 2, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2021); this is highlighted through their cooperation in international organizations like the G-20. From an economic standpoint, their trade has expanded, reaching almost \$150 billion on goods and services in 2019 (Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 2021).

#### 6.3.1 Consumption of Indian movies in the United States

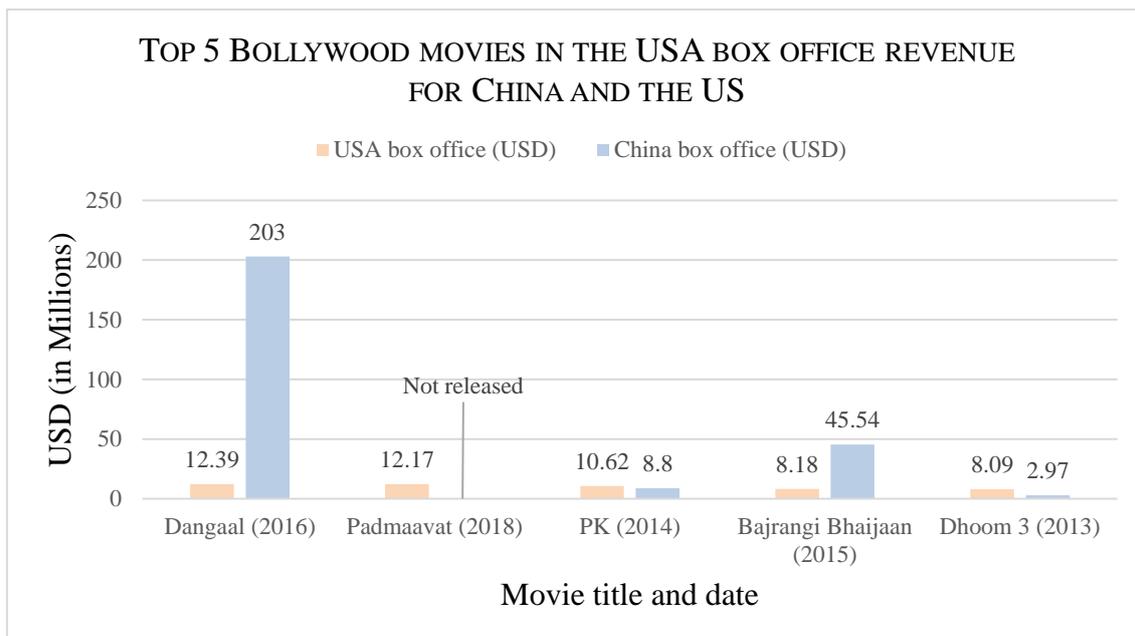
As mentioned earlier, Hollywood is the largest global film industry in terms of revenue (Santoreneos, 2019), and it is therefore interesting to see how Bollywood does with such domestic competition. According to a report by EY and FICCI (2019), the North American market (they combined the Canadian and US American consumption), enjoyed the release of 46 Bollywood movies in 2018. Although they were behind areas like the Gulf Region (who imported 50), they accounted for 44% (versus the Gulf’s 35%) of overseas box office collections, excluding China. When including China, the North American box office is still significant, accounting for a little over 10% of overseas box office revenues (Karan & Shaefer, 2020). Figure 6 below shows the highest grossing Bollywood movies premiered in the US for each year, since 2001.



**Figure 6.** Top grossing Bollywood movies for each year in the US over the last 20 years, in US Dollars. Source prepared by the author and editor based on Box Office India (2021).

The pattern of revenues is not clear-cut. For example, the top grossing movies fluctuate from making \$12 million USD in 2016, to a little over \$5 million USD the next year, to again over \$12 million USD in 2018. However, as shown by the upwards trend line, it has grown in the last 20 years. Since 2006, no top grossing Indian movie in the US has grossed less than \$3 million USD, except for 2020, due to COVID-19 (KPMG, 2020).

Much of the success of Bollywood in the USA is owed to the hit *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), as it perpetuated commonalities between Indian and Western culture. For example, the inherent theme of being self-made in the movie aligns well with the USA’s perception of “the American Dream” (Matusitz & Payano, p.127, 2012). Although this was not a Bollywood production, it did hint to what themes may appeal to American audiences. Similar to the Chinese case, Figure 7 underlines that the most popular movies in the US are not parallel for those in China, hinting at a difference in thematic preference.



**Figure 7.** Top grossing Indian films in the USA compared to China's revenue for the same productions (in millions of US Dollars). Source prepared by the author and editor based on Sacnilk (2019), Box Office India (2021), Bollywood Hungama (2022) and Box Office Mojo (2015).

Although we can appreciate how China has a larger revenue for two of the movies, we can also see the differences in taste, as pointed out earlier: many of the top grossers in the USA do not make it to the top grossers in China. Furthermore, although the 2015 and 2016 productions were much more popular in China, the rest have comparable revenue. Finally, the USA also enjoys more productions, as seen in the example of *Padmaavat* (2018), which was never released in China (Box office India, 2021).

#### a. *Diasporas*

An aspect that the USA has that China does not is its attraction of migrants. With 2.7 million Indian immigrants making up around 6% of foreign-born population in the US, this country is the second most popular destination for migrating Indians, after the United Arab Emirates (Hanna & Batalova, 2020). Indians are the second most popular foreign-born nationality in the USA, after Mexicans. However, their diaspora is much larger, with 4.8 million Non-Resident Indians. Throughout the following sections, “NRIs” and “Indian diaspora” will be used indistinctively.

Unsurprisingly, the NRI community was the first to exploit the growth of Bollywood, as the nostalgia of displacement meant Bollywood became their link home. In return, the Indian film industry saw an opportunity to exploit the stories of Indians abroad and further appeal to this sense of belonging (Desai, 2008). An investigation lead by Rayaprol and

Pinnamshetty (2021) showed that second-generation Indians use Bollywood as a way to stay in touch with traditions they normally have little access to. Moreover, they would much rather consume Bollywood movies that display Indian livelihoods than the more “westernized” (p.8) content. Although it is difficult to measure their impact to the exact number, as the tracking of consumption is not racially defined, Matusitz and Payano (2012) conclude that Bollywood movies are more successful in remote areas where Indian expatriates are located, suggesting a preference of consumption by said group.

Desai (2008) points out that NRIs do not only contribute to the Bollywood industry via consumption, but also via production. The Indian diaspora, being an important global demand, shape the stories told by Bollywood, and in some cases, directly influence it by participating in the production. Since many NRIs found success and wealth in their immigration, they can now be involved in filmmaking. Although this is mainly an influence in talent (like actors) rather than an economic one, the contribution is a cycle. If NRIs aid in the production of movies, NRIs are likely to enjoy said movies (Desai, 2008).

### 6.3.2 Perception of Indian movies in the United States

The US American audience is diverse and large; therefore, pinpointing their perceptions can be complicated. While no poll like Hong’s (2021) has been made to measure US Americans' opinions on Bollywood, movie reviews are more than abundant. For example, the New York Times has several reviews where they appreciate the colors and musicality of the productions, but are also critical of social aspects, like the portrayal of women (Webster, 2014; Kenigsberg, 2016; Rapold, 2022). However, these are simply examples of a wider, more extensive phenomenon.

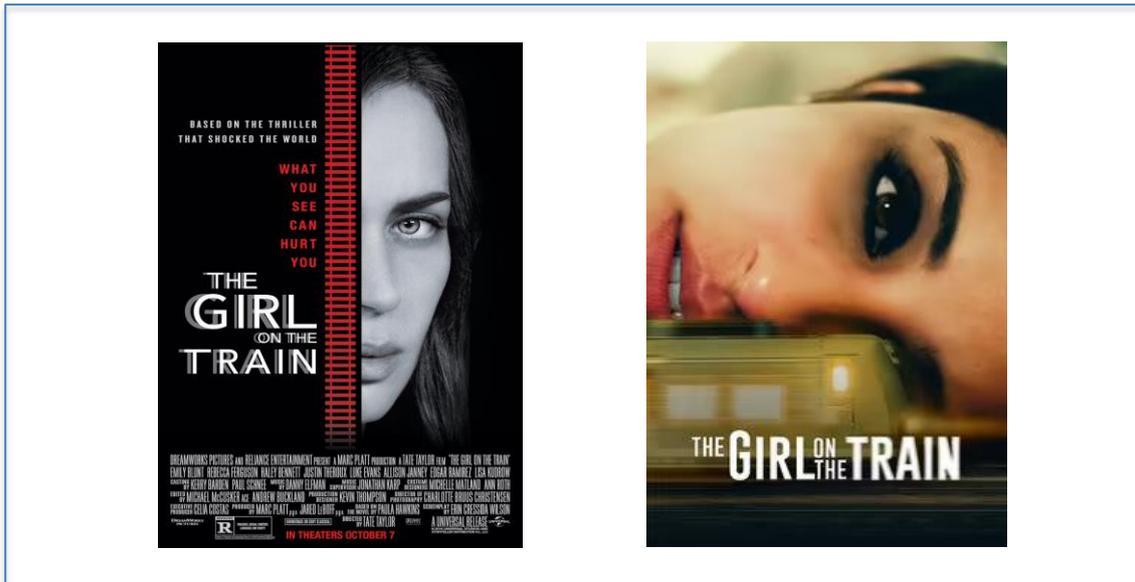
An analysis by Matusitz and Payano (2011), studies what US Americans think of the Bollywood industry and films. They highlight how the consumption of Bollywood has increased and has perpetuated the “Bollywood effect” as a “virtual form of tourism” (p.72). This establishes Bollywood as an exotic, escapist tool for viewers. The image they sell is one of fantasy. This new fanbase has reshaped Bollywood content. Traditionally, Americans were portrayed as villains; today, this character has disappeared. This showcases the priority of the industry to adapt to international audiences. Regarding the work of the industry, perceptions are also positive. American producers found they wer

similar to Indian ones in their drive and competence. This fosters the relationship with the two and eases the working together (Matusitz & Payano, 2011).

However, there are also negative perceptions Bollywood must deal with. There are two main narratives in the American public: those who believe the industry should adapt further to Western tastes, and those who believe it has adapted too much. Much like the mentioned New York Times reviews, Matusitz and Payano (2011) underline that some audiences view the flamboyant, music filled productions as alien or excessive. It is therefore understandable that Bollywood has included Western narratives. Many Hindi movies have imitated Western narratives. While some movies have “adapted” their story, like *Koi... Mil Gaya* (2003), whose plot is similar to *E.T.*’s (Ostrowski, 2007), others are a remake in their language, like *Girl on the Train* (2021), based on the same book the Hollywood version was (Kanyal, 2021). Even the way they promote movies is parallel in an explicit attempt to draw in the American audience (Panigrahi, 2022), as seen in the following figures.



**Figure 8.** Posters for *E.T The Extraterrestrial* (1982) and *Koi... Mil Gaya* (2003) (IMDb, n.d).



**Figure 9.** Posters for *Girl on the Train* (2016) and *Girl on the Train* (2021) (IMDb, n.d)

As we can appreciate, Bollywood is careful to make their designs similar to those of the United States in an attempt to attract them. Figure 9 shows the effort of appealing to Western design by being remarkably similar. Not only does this movie show a comparable storyline, but the artworks of the films are alike. Similarly, Figure 10 shows the affinity in design. Although in this case both explicitly follow the same story as they are based off the same book (opposite to what *Koi... Mil Gaya* intended, as they did not formally relate to *E.T.*), the poster design also hints towards an intentional similarity. In this case, the focal point half of the main character’s face divided by a train or train tracks.

### 6.3.3 Channels of collaboration

Both Bollywood and Hollywood have a lot to gain from each other. As regional hegemony, both industries strive to monopolize the entertainment industry (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012). Although the Indian film industry has much to gain from a partnership with its US American counterpart, the interest is in no way one-sided. Rasul and Proffitt (2012) highlight how the massive population of India is not drawn to English-speaking productions: Hollywood’s films constitute 7% of India’s market. The growth of Bollywood and its monopoly over the area have made Hollywood keen to get involved.

The case of Bollywood and Hollywood co-producing is more complicated to define than the partnerships with China. Rasul and Proffitt (2012) understand this co-production as flexible: it can include simply distributing the movie, the division of responsibilities or even the merging of technologies and know-how. In general, it does not need to be

completely symmetrical for both industries to consider it a co-production. The mandatory factor is that they share the costs and profits.

*a. Co-productions*

Like China, the USA has exploited the opportunity that comes with co-producing films. However, the style of the collaboration is different; while China has a strong grip on the end result, the USA gives more leeway. This is mainly because China has interests in the content and cultural portrayal of the co-produced movies (Yang, 2020), while the US is more interested in the economic and monopolistic aspects of movie production (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012).

Co-production with the United States is also different in that there is a wider array of production companies; producers in India can choose the enterprise they feel better fits in with their goals. According to Rasul and Proffitt (2012), there are two examples of this, one which took time to adapt, and another that was careful to be target-conscious from the beginning. The first can be seen through the partnership between Sony Pictures Entertainment (Hollywood) and SLB Films (Bollywood), who co-produced the 2007 film *Saawariya*. Despite not being a box office blockbuster, Sony Entertainment was happy with the work and potential. The initial project did motivate further collaboration despite its failure. This was a wise decision as, ten years later, Sony collaborated on *Pad Man* (2018), which was a box office success (Box Office India, 2018).

The second kind of partnership can be seen in the collaboration of the Walt Disney Company and Yash Raj Films. They co-produced *Roadside Romeo* (2008), an animated film. Although the movie did not garner huge profits, it was a critical success. Furthermore, they were praised for their adaptation to the target audience and Bollywood enjoyed access to technology that they would have otherwise not used (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012). Other examples of successes are *My name is Khan* (2010), a box-office record-breaker about a Muslim Indian living in the US after September 11th or *Padmaavat* (2018) a historical drama that almost tripled *My name is Khan*'s revenue (Box Office India 2010; 2018).

*b. Other joint projects*

Co-production is not the only way Bollywood and Hollywood have furthered their relationship. The presence of actors in each other's industry have normalized collaborations from the point of view of the audience. Many household names in the

United States have appeared in Bollywood productions, such as Will Smith or Sylvester Stallone (Chakraborty, 2020). On the flip side, many Indian actors have also found success in Hollywood. For example, Mahapatra (2016) assures that Priyanka Chopra's leading roles in American TV shows, or Deepika Padukone's characters in US action movies are cases of "soft power assets" (p.5).

Co-production may not be enough of a leap for some production houses. Therefore, another manifestation of this collaboration is the presence of production companies in India (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012). For example, DreamWorks appropriated half of Reliance Big Pictures (an Indian producer) in 2008, with the aim of producing six films a year each. Through this set-up, Ambani, owner of Big Reliance Pictures, has access to the American counterparts' resources, while ensuring that the productions carry the essence of Bollywood (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012). Paramount Pictures (previously ViacomCBS) have started a joint venture with Network 18, an Indian conglomerate, called Viacom18, intended to produce and distribute both Hindi and Hollywood movies (Viacom18; Littleton, 2022). One of the many productions of Viacom18 is the aforementioned *Padmaavat* (2018), the highest grossing Bollywood film in the North American market that year (Box Office India, 2018).

*c. The role of the Indian government*

The Indian entertainment industry's exports were worth \$40 million USD in 1998, only three years later, this figure reached \$180 million USD. This is mainly thanks to the reduction of barriers for Bollywood on behalf of its government (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012). The declaration of Bollywood as an industry in 1998 officialized Bollywood in the eyes of the world. This meant that Bollywood would have to finance itself legally (until then, much of it was illegal funding), but also that laws would protect the industry, favor the export of movies, enable widespread filmmaking and even access finance through, for example, the Bombay Stock Exchange (Ganti, 2012).

Regarding finances, the Government of India has also made it easier for foreign direct investment to enter the country, as well as reducing tax related to the entertainment industry making it easier for foreign and domestic investors to produce Hindi films (Rasul, 2015). Specifically, the entertainment industry enjoyed a "tax relief" (Rasul, 2015, p.80) on all revenues grossed in overseas box offices.

Finally, the government of India acts as “guarantor” (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012, p.574) of the agreements between both industries, easing the path of foreign enterprises to invest in Bollywood. More recently, the Indian government has shown good faith in partnering with the US to ensure copyright laws. As previously mentioned, many Bollywood movies carry similar plotlines of earlier-produced Hollywood blockbusters. This way, US American producers will be protected against plagiarism (Motion Picture Association, 2016).

Working together was the main reason Hollywood saw value in investing in Bollywood. The Hindi film industry offered services that were not possible in the USA. For example, a top production in India can cost around \$20 million USD; in the US it is five times more (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012). The cost of production, together with the government incentives mentioned, made the partnership even more attractive. The possibility of losses was a risk, but since these losses were shared, the fear was significantly reduced. Even when sustaining losses, producers like Sony were not disincentivized to continue collaborating thanks to the opportunity granted by the Indian film industry (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012).

#### 6.3.4 Hollywood and Bollywood in action

As each other’s competition, one could assume that Los Angeles and Mumbai would rather not collaborate. However, Rasul and Proffitt (2012) conclude that the opposite is true: the fact that they are both leaders in the film industry has been a catalyst for cooperation.

The combination of both industries is unique. The United States simultaneously has the largest film industry in the world and enjoys a large Indian diaspora, (Hanna & Batalova, 2020; Santoreneos, 2019) something that China does not. This makes it attractive to both States to find common ground and produce movies that will make a profit in either or both countries. Furthermore, the blend of Hollywood and Bollywood also allows them both to expand; being professionals in their craft, they can each share knowledge and improve their attraction to the target audience. This is especially true for Hollywood, as they cover a meager 7% of India’s market, making Bollywood a huge monopoly over the Indian population’s taste (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012).

Although the perception of US American audiences is varied from positive to negative, Hindi films are beginning to adapt to fit in better with Western tastes. Despite many criticisms linked to the difference in values, which may be difficult to change, India has

been smart to exploit stories that capitalize on commonalities (like *My name is Khan* and the American Dream) or stories they are familiar with (like the case of *Koi... Mil Gaya* and *E.T.*) (Ostrowski, 2007; Box Office India 2010).

It is therefore evident that the Indian film industry is employed as a soft power engine when it comes to the relationship with the USA and their industry. The easing of business on behalf of the Indian government is an explicit way in which they ensure that Bollywood expands to the US (Rasul & Proffitt, 2012). Furthermore, the increased consumption of Bollywood in North America and its relation to escapism results in a positive perception of Indian entertainment. On top of this, the purposeful appeal of Bollywood to their diaspora has also helped its growth as a soft power agent (Matusitz & Payano, 2011). These aspects have contributed to a larger and positive presence of India in the USA and have benefited India in terms of revenue, as well as reputation and shared knowledge.

#### **6.4 East vs. West: comparing the Chinese and American cases**

As pointed out throughout, China and the United States have very different ways of collaborating with Bollywood. We can see differences in three main ways, the number of movies in which they have collaborated, their conditions and the revenues of Bollywood in these countries.

##### *a. Number of movies*

As highlighted earlier, China has a severe vetoing process for foreign movies, allowing only thirty-four per year (Hong, 2021). The United States, as a democracy, does not apply such barriers on foreign productions, therefore enjoying movies that China might not. This means that in terms of connection, Bollywood is more likely to reach American audiences frequently, as they have easier access to their market than China's. This could enable soft power further due to the increased contact with the target audience. While the Chinese only access a limited number of productions chosen by the State (Hong, 2021), hindering a fuller contact with the diversity of Bollywood, the USA has the privilege of enjoying a wider spectrum.

Along this line, it is also more common to encounter USA-India co-productions than Chinese counterparts. This is because the definition of co-production for the US is more flexible and less demanding, while the Chinese have stark requisites that make co-

production a more complicated affair (Rasul & Proffit, 2012; Yang, 2020). The contact between Hollywood and Bollywood is, as a result, more intimate. Bollywood's influence is therefore also found within the industry, through professional networks or a good reputation in the eyes of the US American industry (Matusitz & Payano, 2011).

*b. Conditions*

The way both partnerships have tackled production also differs. China, as mentioned, is stricter in who participates in the production of movies. The importance of Chinese participation is found to be essential, and access to technology and resources is not easily available (Yang, 2020). The conditions of the USA's production processes are different. Not only are they more flexible in defining their collaboration, but they are willing to share expertise, cast and crew, and even be stakeholders in production companies. The American strategy is more involved in financial terms, yet more malleable in terms of control. As long as the risks and the benefits are shared, the collaborations of Bollywood with the Americans tend to be as faithful to Bollywood as any fully Indian-produced movie (Rasul & Proffit, 2012).

The United States' approach to collaborating with Bollywood can be deemed as a better enabler of soft power, as the stories told under their co-productions are loyal to Bollywood's taste and image. Furthermore, the easy conditions also make production simple, allowing for the focus to be in filmmaking rather than pre-established conditions or checkboxes to fulfill (Rasul & Proffit, 2012). This focus on superior production could aid in making Bollywood bigger and better.

*c. Revenues*

Interestingly enough, Chinese box office revenue was larger than the US American one. While North American box office collection is not insignificant, the Chinese revenues do tower over them, making up 60% of overseas box office in 2018 (Karan & Schaefer, 2020). This is especially significant considering the previously mentioned factors. Despite being more difficult to premier and work in China, it is still worth the process. The economic significance of Bollywood should not be underestimated, as it is part of the services sector (on which India is heavily reliant) and contributes around one fifth of the entertainment industry (Fetscherin, 2010). Therefore, the revenues made in China are a sign of Bollywood's prowess, as it has produced considerable economic profit.

## **7. Conclusions**

As underlined throughout the present thesis, Bollywood is an essential tool of India's economic soft power. Through collaborations and revenues from other countries, the Indian film industry has proven to be useful for its government. There are therefore three conclusions we can draw from this analysis.

The first, is that Bollywood is a significant source of soft power for India. The film industry has opened doors for the country that would have otherwise been difficult. In the case of China, Bollywood managed to infiltrate a discriminating market and settle a positive image. Not only this, but also served as an indicator of Sino-Indian relations and border disputes, a major responsibility. Similarly, the industry's relationship with their US American counterpart has enabled an overture to the world that would have been hard without it. The opportunities gained from a friendship with Hollywood benefit consumers domestically and internationally. Considering these cases, it is sensible to conclude that Bollywood is the main source of soft power for India, given its size, predominance and relationships forged.

The second, is that Bollywood, as India's soft power agent, was successful in garnering economic results. Not only is this true for overseas box office revenues, but also through the cutting of production costs thanks to co-productions, the access to knowledge that would have otherwise needed a huge investment, and the benefit of avoiding taxes or tariffs due to a good relationship with the government (domestically and abroad). Therefore, Bollywood has been successful in expanding India's soft power, specifically from an economic standpoint.

The third and final conclusion is that Bollywood consumption internationally is nuanced; the outcomes drawn from one case do not necessarily apply to another. As pointed out, China and the USA consume different movies. While China enjoys larger revenues, the USA enjoys more productions. The success is therefore subjective. However, it must be pointed out that Hindi cinema has surpassed more barriers in China. These are not only governmental, but social. Since China is a homogenous country, the diversity of Indian movies could have not been welcomed; this is especially true considering their small Indian diaspora. Consequently, given that the Chinese market was a more arduous one to

secure, it can be considered a larger success, thus proving wrong the second hypothesis of the thesis.

While the first hypothesis (“Bollywood, as the main source of soft power of India, has been increasingly successful in exporting an encouraging image of its country, to the point of enjoying positive economic (and otherwise) consequences and an improved standing in international relations”) has been proven correct, as highlighted by the first and second conclusions, the second (“Bollywood will be more successful and popular in the regions where they have a larger diaspora”) has failed to be true. China, a country with a significantly smaller population of Indians or people of Indian origin, managed to boast a bigger success.

In both cases, however, Bollywood has demonstrated to exert power and sway public opinion in foreign countries in favor of India, therefore achieving its goal as a soft power agent. We could consider both the USA and China as success stories of India’s soft power intentions, whose results we see in diverse ways and to different extents. Bollywood is an elemental tool for India in economic terms, as well as improving India’s position in international relations.

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