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Research on the Promotion of Economic Development by the Film Industry — Taking China as an Example

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Abstract

This paper takes the Chinese film industry as the research object, combining industry macro data and typical cases, to analyze its current development status, the path of driving economic growth, as well as its direct and indirect contributions to GDP, tax revenue, and related industries; the research finds that the Chinese film industry has formed a complete industrial chain, with core indicators leading globally by 2025, and the proportion of domestic films reaching nearly 80%. The industry drives the economy through cultural technological innovation, market cultivation, and industrial chain collaboration. The growth rate of the derivative market is significant. In 2024, the industry paid nearly 19 billion yuan in taxes and stimulated related industries such as tourism, catering, and advertising, as well as employment. At the same time, it points out the existing problems and research limitations of the industry, clarifying that the film industry is an important engine for stimulating domestic demand and optimizing the economic structure, with both cultural dissemination and economic driving functions, providing references for policy and academic research. Currently, the industry has problems such as content homogeneity, regional imbalance, high dependence on technology, and difficulties for small and medium-sized films to survive. It is necessary to release potential through policy guidance and innovation incentives.

Keywords

Chinese Film Industry; Economic Effect; Industrial Chain Collaboration; Related Industries; Industrial Optimization

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Driven by digitalization and the upgrading of cultural consumption, the film industry has transcended the boundaries of traditional entertainment industries and become a key force driving economic growth. In recent years, the Chinese film industry has shown strong development momentum, with the total number of

screens and annual box office revenue consistently ranking among the top globally. Numerous domestic films with both positive reception and market success have emerged, and a full industrial chain system covering production, distribution, screening, and derivative product development has also been established. With the deep integration of cutting-edge technologies such as 5G and virtual reality into the film industry, new business models such as online streaming platforms and immersive cinemas have continuously emerged, continuously expanding the influence boundaries of the film industry and highlighting issues such as the convergence of creative themes and the need to enhance international competitiveness.

1.2. Research Significance

Exploring the role of the Chinese film industry in promoting economic growth has significant cognitive value for understanding the intrinsic relationship between cultural industries and economic operations. From a practical perspective, clarifying the economic value of the film industry helps to grasp its mechanism in driving employment and stimulating consumption; from an academic learning perspective, this research can deepen the understanding of the correlation between industrial development and economic growth in textbooks.

1.3. Research Methods

This study will comprehensively employ literature analysis, data comparison, and case study methods to systematically collect macro-development data of the Chinese film industry, combined with market performance analysis of typical films, to deeply analyze the specific paths through which the film industry drives economic development, providing an empirical reference basis for explaining the economic functions of cultural industries.

2. The Development of China's Film Industry

2.1. Macro Development Data of China's Film Industry

In recent years, China's film industry has witnessed remarkable growth. A series of key indicators have depicted its continuous and positive development trajectory, making it a highly dynamic growth point within the cultural industry. The specific manifestations are as follows:

First, box office revenue continued to rise, demonstrating strong market potential. After market adjustments, movie consumption rapidly recovered. As of October 2025, the national box office revenue reached 43.789 billion yuan, surpassing the total box office revenue of 2024 and steadily moving towards the annual target of 65-80 billion yuan. This growth trend is mainly attributed to the support of national policies, the improvement of residents' consumption levels, and the advancement of film industry technology. For instance, the popularization of 3D technology and

IMAX theaters significantly enhanced the viewing experience for audiences, thereby attracting more people to visit cinemas. [2] However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 had a huge impact on the film industry, resulting in a sharp decline in box office revenue. Nevertheless, under strict epidemic prevention and control measures, the Chinese film market rapidly recovered in 2021, with the growth rate of box office revenue turning positive, and the total box office revenue once again ranked first globally. [1]

Second, the construction of cinema infrastructure has made significant progress. The total number of screens across the country has increased from 34,000 in 2015 to 90,900 in 2024, expanding to approximately three times its size over the past decade, maintaining its global leadership position. The layout of screens shows a trend of deepening into lower-tier cities and county markets from first- and second-tier cities, with nearly 70% of new cinemas located in county areas, significantly enhancing the accessibility and coverage of movie services.

Furthermore, content production and capital investment have maintained a steady development trend, and the industrial ecosystem structure has continued to optimize. Against the backdrop of the industry's transformation from scale expansion to quality improvement, high-quality film projects continue to receive market recognition. In 2024, the output of domestic feature films reached 873, providing a basic guarantee for the market with a stable content supply. Simultaneously, the policy support system has been continuously improved, and the national film development special fund has effectively stimulated the improvement of creative quality through targeted funding for key works.

Meanwhile, diversified industry activities have shown an active trend, promoting industry exchanges and upgrading. From concentrated marketing during core periods such as New Year's Eve and the Spring Festival to actively participating in international film festivals and exhibitions to expand cooperation, and to the implementation of themed activities like "Exploring Science through Movies," the functions of various industry platforms have been strengthened. These activities not only enhance the international visibility of Chinese films but also promote the coordinated dissemination of film technology and cultural value.

2.2. Issues of Market Vitality and Innovation Capacity

China's film industry, according to macro data, presents significant problems of insufficient market vitality and weak innovation capacity. Although box office revenue has generally shown a growth trend, the growth rate has slowed in recent years, indicating a clear growth bottleneck. According to relevant research, this growth bottleneck mainly stems from the homogenization of content creation and intensification of audience fatigue in terms of aesthetic preferences. [3] . For instance, the homogenization of genre films is particularly prominent. Many films lack innovation in their subject selection, narrative structure, and presentation form,

resulting in a gradual decline in audience interest in domestic films. Additionally, the continuous rise in imported films' box office share reflects the insufficient competitiveness of domestic films, further highlighting the lack of market vitality. [4]

2.3. Analysis of the Path of the Film Industry Driving Economic Development

The film industry's development path can be analyzed from the following three dimensions.

2.3.1. Cultural and Technological Innovation as Core Driving Forces

At the cultural innovation level, domestic films actively draw inspiration from traditional cultural resources and contemporary social issues for their creation. For example, "Nezha, the Demonic Child" reinterpreted the traditional mythological narrative in a modern way, achieving a box office revenue of 5.035 billion yuan; "Full River Red" was created based on historical allusions and achieved a box office of 4.544 billion yuan, effectively promoting cultural value dissemination while also stimulating the consumer market. In terms of technological innovation, high-format screening technologies such as 3D and IMAX significantly enhanced the visual immersion of sci-fi films like "The Wandering Earth," providing technical support for its 4.687 billion yuan box office; moreover, the application of cutting-edge technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence has given rise to new business models like online films, opening up new tracks for industry growth.

2.3.2. Cultivating a Diversified Market to Expand Industry Growth Space

With the upgrading of residents' consumption structure and the differentiation of aesthetic demands, the film market has shown a trend of refinement and segmentation, gradually establishing a market system covering different age groups, cultural preferences, and consumer groups. For instance, the animated film "The Return of the Monkey King," targeted at young audiences, achieved a box office of 9.56 billion yuan, marking the revival of domestic animation; "Hello, Mrs. Li," targeted at family audiences, achieved a box office of 5.413 billion yuan in the Spring Festival season, stimulating family consumption potential; and "I'm Not a Drug Dealer," focused on social reality issues, achieved a box office of 3.1 billion yuan while also triggering widespread social discussions. With the support of industry policies, film types such as art films and documentaries, which previously had a smaller market share, have also gained development opportunities. "Fragrant Youth" achieved a box office of 1.423 billion yuan, verifying the market feasibility of art films; "Twenty-two" set a documentary box office record through crowdfunding. The common prosperity of diverse film types helps expand the market size and release consumption potential.

2.3.3. Collaborative Development of the Industry Chain Enhances

Comprehensive Economic Effects

The film industry achieves economic amplification through the close collaboration of all links in the industry chain. In the content production and promotion stages, the "Changjin Lake" series of films achieved a cumulative box office of over 9.8 billion yuan with high-quality creation and integrated marketing. In terms of derivative value development, the peripheral products of "Nezha, the Demonic Child" continued to sell well, extending the industrial value chain. Taking the Hengduan Film Industry Experimental Zone as an example, with the core of the world's largest film and television shooting base, it has 50 large-scale shooting bases, over 130 professional studios, and more than 2,000 shooting scenes, combined with cutting-edge technologies such as virtual shooting, attracting a large number of film crews to settle there. The over 100,000 registered crowd actors, the full-chain professional services, and the legal service hub have jointly formed a "production + supporting services" synergy. In the distribution stage, through the national cinema network, the "local production + global distribution" model, and online film distribution, multiple channels of revenue sources have been expanded. Cross-border integration models such as derivative product development and film tourism effectively stimulated the growth of related industries such as catering and accommodation. The organic linkage of each link in the industrial chain not only activates the vitality of the film industry itself but also drives the coordinated development of related industries, forming a win-win situation for multiple industries.

The above three paths are interrelated and work together to jointly promote the film industry to achieve high-quality development while providing a continuous impetus for macroeconomic growth. [5] When economic growth momentum weakens, the cultural industry can stimulate new growth momentum through structural adjustments, achieving long-term economic benefits and highlighting its strong adaptability to the environment and economic resilience. At the macro level, the cultural industry plays a pivotal role in the economy. The deepening of cultural system reform and improvement of the government-enterprise coordination mechanism have further enhanced its economic contribution capacity. Driven by the dual forces of new technological innovation and new consumption patterns, the added value of the cultural industry continues to increase and has become the core engine of economic growth in China. Therefore, the cultural industry is not only an important carrier of cultural inheritance but also an indispensable component of the economic system. Its theoretical value and practical significance have been widely recognized by the academic and policy communities.

2.4. Empirical Analysis of the Economic Functions of China's Film Industry

The Chinese film industry has made significant economic contributions to the

country. Box office revenue increased from 17.073 billion yuan in 2012 to 64.266 billion yuan in 2019. Affected by the pandemic, it briefly declined in 2020 before rebounding rapidly in 2021 and ranking first globally, demonstrating its status as a pillar of the national economy and its strong recovery capacity. The continuous improvement in the market share of domestic films has effectively enhanced the industry's competitiveness. The film industry significantly stimulates employment growth, creating numerous jobs from production and distribution to screening, featuring a typical labor-intensive characteristic [6]. Its thriving derivatives market further expanded its economic reach. A typical example is "The Wandering Earth," which not only achieved high box office success but also promoted significant technological progress in the film industry, confirming the direct and indirect effects of this industry on economic development. In summary, the Chinese film industry plays a crucial role in economic growth, employment promotion, and technological innovation, providing strong support for the overall development of the cultural sector.

3. Analysis of the Current Situation of the Chinese Film Industry

Currently, the Chinese film industry is in a crucial stage of recovery and upgrading, gradually shifting from focusing on rapid growth in box office revenues to emphasizing quality and reputation for high-quality development, and becoming an extremely dynamic part of the cultural industry.

3.1. Market Size

In terms of market size, the recovery momentum of the Chinese film industry is very obvious. The total box office revenue of films across the country exceeded 51.8 billion yuan in 2025, with a year-on-year growth of over 21%, and the number of moviegoers reached 1.238 billion. Domestic films accounted for nearly 80% of the box office revenue, firmly occupying the dominant position in the market. [7] These data reflect the strong recovery of film consumption demand and confirm the continuous improvement of the production capacity of domestic film content. Currently, the aesthetic preferences of audiences have shifted, moving from simply pursuing visual effects to paying more attention to the narrative core and emotional resonance. The influence of the word-of-mouth effect has become a key factor affecting the market performance of films.

However, the Chinese film market has structural shortcomings and significant regional development imbalances. Constrained by the differences in regional economic development levels, the allocation of film resources presents a pattern of "strong in the east and weak in the west." The eastern coastal regions have concentrated half of the cinema facilities in the country, with Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and other places gathering most production, distribution, and marketing enterprises. In contrast, the number of cinemas in the central and

western regions is insufficient, the screen density is low, and they face the difficulties of a lack of high-quality creative teams and capital, resulting in their market potential not being fully realized.

3.2. Industrial Structure

The industrial structure of the Chinese film industry encompasses three core links: production, distribution, and screening. Each link plays a different role in the industrial ecosystem. In the production field, a diversified creative entity pattern of state-owned and private enterprises coexists. State-owned production units rely on their historical accumulation and resource advantages to play a leading role in the creation of major-themed films; private enterprises, with their flexible market mechanisms, actively perform in the commercial genre films sector. In the distribution field, with the advancement of internet technology, online distribution platforms have rapidly emerged, forming a complementary relationship with traditional cinema distribution channels. However, there are still several prominent problems in the industrial structure: The investment in the production link is overly concentrated on high-cost blockbusters, resulting in the market space for small-budget films being squeezed; The distribution link faces intense competition among similar cinemas and a decline in single-screen revenue, etc. [2] These issues have constrained the sustainable growth and economic contribution potential of the industry.

3.3. Technological Development

In terms of creation and technology, Chinese films exhibit a trend of content refinement and modernized technology application. Realistic theme creations are valued, such as "Alone and Betrayed," which focuses on telecommunications fraud, and "Keep You Safe," which explores online rumors and social justice, triggering public resonance through stories that are close to reality; Traditional culture themes continue to innovate, with animated works such as "Nezha, the Demonic Child" and "Chinese Tales" reinterpreting mythological narratives with excellent production, becoming market hotspots. Simultaneously, high-format screening technologies such as virtual shooting, artificial intelligence (AI) visual effects, and CINITY have been widely applied, significantly improving visual presentation quality and production efficiency, and promoting the industrialization of films. However, compared with developed countries in the film industry, China still has insufficient independent R&D capabilities in key core technologies, especially high-end digital production equipment and core software. Moreover, the shortage of professional technical talent is a constraint. To address this, the state has implemented policies such as tax incentives and technology incubation support to increase incentives for technological research and development in the film industry. Overall, technological development supports industrial upgrading, but further improvement of the

innovation policy system is needed to drive high-quality development.

3.4. Internationalization Trend

In the international dissemination dimension, Chinese films have a steady pace of "going global." Films such as "Ne Zha: The Demon Child's Adventure in the Sea" have successfully entered mainstream cinemas overseas and have participated in international film festivals. Through stories with universal emotions, they convey Chinese culture, which helps to reduce cultural distance. More and more works are attempting to integrate local narratives with a global perspective, gradually enhancing the international visibility and influence of Chinese culture.

In conclusion, the Chinese film industry has transcended the stage of extensive growth and entered a new development period centered on quality and efficiency. In the future, by continuously deepening content creation, strengthening technological empowerment, and leveraging policy regulation to alleviate regional development imbalances, the industry is expected to achieve a coordinated improvement in artistic and market value and make more profound progress in enhancing cultural confidence.

4. The direct promotion of economic development by the film industry

4.1. Contribution of Film Box Office Revenue to GDP

Film box office revenue, as one of the most crucial economic indicators of the film industry, cannot be ignored in terms of its contribution to China's gross domestic product (GDP). According to relevant research, the domestic film market will experience recovery and adjustment from 2020 to 2025, with an average annual compound growth rate of the overall box office of approximately 11.3%. In 2025, the total box office revenue rebounded to 49.67 billion yuan, accounting for approximately 0.035% of that year's national GDP. [8]

Year	Market Scale (Billion RMB)	Year-on-Year Growth Rate
2021	302.6	—
2022	341.5	12.86%
2023	379.2	11.04%
2024	427.9	12.84%
2025	482.3	12.72%
Average annual growth rate: 12.7%		

Table 1. Scale and Growth Trend of China's Film Derivatives Market (2021–2025)

4.2. Tax Contribution of the Film Industry

The film industry, as a key component of the cultural and creative economy, is also an important source of national fiscal revenue. Taking industry leaders such as Light Media, Huayi Brothers, and Wanda Cinemas as examples, their tax payment scales have maintained a relatively high growth rate in recent years. In 2024, Wanda

Cinemas' tax payment was 1.263 billion yuan, while Light Media's tax payment was 487 million yuan. This demonstrates the crucial position of leading film enterprises in the national fiscal revenue system. Additionally, the series of tax incentives implemented by the government to support the development of the film industry, such as VAT reduction for domestic film production and land use tax benefits for film base construction, have effectively reduced the operational costs of enterprises and promoted the efficient allocation of industry resources. Specifically, film bases can enjoy phased income tax reductions, and eligible film enterprises can also apply for additional deductions for research and development expenses, thereby reducing the overall tax burden of the industry. These policy measures not only facilitate the optimization and upgrading within the film industry but also drive the growth of tax revenue in related industries through the upstream and downstream linkage effect of the industry chain. In 2024, the total tax payment of the entire film industry across the country was close to 19 billion yuan, thereby exerting a positive promoting effect on macroeconomic development. [9]

4.3. Economic Driving Effect of Film Derivative Consumption

Film derivatives, as an important extension link in the film industry's value chain, have diverse categories and huge market potential, constituting a key factor driving economic growth. From traditional film-related peripheral products to new derivative forms such as games and theme parks based on intellectual property (IP), the film derivatives market is expanding with a diversified product matrix to meet the increasingly growing cultural consumption demands of consumers. According to statistics, from 2021 to 2025, the domestic film derivatives market size has shown a year-on-year upward trend, with an average annual growth rate of 12.7%. The specific market sizes for each year are as follows: 30.26 billion yuan (2021), 34.15 billion yuan (2022), 37.92 billion yuan (2023), 42.79 billion yuan (2024), and 48.23 billion yuan (2025). It is expected that this growth trend will continue to expand at a high speed in the coming years.

This growth trend reflects consumers' emotional attachment and value recognition of film content and highlights the unique role of derivative consumption in expanding domestic demand and optimizing the economic structure. With the evolution of digital technology, the rise of virtual derivatives and online consumption models has further expanded the market boundaries of film derivatives, making them an important supplement to the economic contribution of the film industry. For example, online derivatives such as digital collectibles and virtual IP skins accounted for 19.6% of the total revenue of derivatives in 2025. A typical case, the full-category joint-venture peripheral products of "The Wandering Earth 2" achieved a total sales volume of 2.8 billion yuan, effectively stimulating consumer demand and forming a virtuous cycle of "film content driving—derivative consumption feedback," injecting new momentum into economic growth. [10]

5. The driving effect of the film industry on related industries

5.1. The Driving Effect on the Tourism Industry

As a cultural communication medium with extensive influence, the release of films usually effectively enhances the popularity and attractiveness of related tourism destinations. Taking the film "My Altay" as an example, through the presentation of unique rural landscapes, this film successfully aroused the audience's attention to rural tourism resources, thereby promoting the development of all-round tourism in Altay. This reflects the crucial role played by films in the construction and promotion of the image of tourism destinations. Moreover, the reproduction of film scenes can stimulate emotional connections and local identification among the audience, thereby transforming them into potential motivations for traveling to the filming location. Data show that within one year after the broadcast of the TV series "My Altay," the number of tourists in Altay increased by 959,490. This "film content + tourism" integration model not only injects new growth momentum into the tourism industry but also gives rise to distinctive film and cultural tourism business forms, fully demonstrating the driving effect of the film industry on regional economic growth. This indicates that the deep integration of the film and tourism industries has created new growth points for local economic development. [11]

5.2. The Driving Effect on the Catering and Accommodation Industry

Film shooting activities and related film events have a significant driving effect on the customer flow and revenue of the catering and accommodation industries in the surrounding areas. During the filming period, a large number of crew members and tourists who come out of curiosity flood in, directly stimulating the demand for catering and accommodation services and promoting the growth of related service industries. After the popularity of the film, the filming location will continue to attract tourists to "visit and take photos." According to statistics, the average increase in catering customer flow around the filming location is 10% to 20%, and the occupancy rate of guesthouses increases by more than 35%. Taking Hengdian World Studios as an example, in 2025, it received over 400 film crews, directly driving the income of surrounding catering, accommodation, and other industries to 720 million yuan. In addition, many rural filming locations have newly added a large number of dining and accommodation operators, continuously revitalizing the local service economy. [12]

5.3. The Promoting Effect on the Advertising Industry

Advertising insertion in films presents diverse forms, including product display, brand exposure, and plot integration, providing diversified communication channels for advertisers. With the expansion of the film market size, the scale of the film advertising market also shows a stable growth trend. In 2025, the overall scale of domestic film advertising reached 8.76 billion yuan, and the revenue from plot

insertion advertisements was 2.18 billion yuan. Taking the film "Speeding Life 3" as an example, the total output value of all brand insertion advertisements in this film was 100 million yuan. [13]

6. Summary and Future Outlook

6.1. Summary

This study takes the Chinese film industry as the research object and systematically reviews the industry's public data and typical film cases in recent years to explore the driving effect of the film industry on China's economic development. After the impact of the pandemic, the domestic film market has achieved a comprehensive recovery. The total number of screens, annual box office scale, and market share of domestic films have continuously ranked at the forefront of the world, and a complete industrial chain covering film production, promotion, and distribution, cinema screening, and IP derivative product development has been established.

The film industry mainly releases its economic value through three paths. First, by integrating cultural creativity with film and television technology, relying on traditional mythological narratives and realistic themes to create high-quality content, and applying technologies such as IMAX and high-frame-rate shooting to enhance the audio-visual experience, many high-box-office films have been created, directly stimulating public movie-watching consumption. Second, market content shows a trend of refinement and segmentation, targeting different audience groups such as teenagers, families, and art lovers, launching various types of products such as animated films, heartwarming family films, reality-themed stories, and documentaries, fully activating diversified cultural consumption demands. Third, the synergy effect of each link in the industry chain is significant. Represented by large-scale film shooting bases such as Hengdian, a cluster of industries integrating production teams, supporting services, cinema distribution, and derivative product development has been formed, continuously enhancing the overall industry revenue.

The contribution of the film industry to economic development is mainly reflected at two levels: direct and indirect. In the direct contribution aspect, the increasing box office revenue year by year continuously stimulates domestic consumption, major film enterprises have paid considerable taxes, and the market scale of derivative products such as movie-related figurines, brand collaboration products, and digital collectibles has also steadily expanded. In the indirect contribution aspect, the film industry effectively drives the coordinated development of related industries: popular film works significantly enhance the popularity of filming locations, promoting the growth of local cultural tourism; the consumption activities of crew members and movie fans drive the income of catering, accommodation, and other service industries around the filming locations; the brand implantation in the films also expands new market spaces for the advertising industry. Moreover, the film

industry creates a large number of job positions, covering various professional fields such as screenwriting, post-production, cinema operation, and cultural tourism services, providing extensive employment channels for society. Thus, the film industry, with cultural innovation as its core driving force, not only carries out the function of disseminating local culture but also, through the linkage effect of the industry, becomes an important cultural engine to stimulate domestic demand and promote economic growth.

6.2. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

This study has several limitations in the process of analyzing the economic driving effect of the film industry. First, the geographical coverage of the collected data is limited, lacking complete data on the film markets in the central and western regions, making it difficult to deeply analyze the specific economic contributions of the film industry in these regions and insufficient regional comparative analysis. Second, the accessibility of industry-specific financial data is low, making it difficult to obtain and detail-deconstruct key information such as the cost structure of small and medium-sized film enterprises and the distribution mechanism of derivative product revenues. To a certain extent, this weakens the persuasiveness of the research conclusions. Finally, this study mainly relies on secondary public data and does not conduct on-site interviews with cinema operators and front-line practitioners in the film industry, thus lacking perspectives from the industry practice level.

Future research can address the above limitations in the following ways: through on-site surveys in the central and western regions of cinemas to obtain first-hand data and increase in-depth interviews with industry practitioners; it can also explore in-depth discussions on emerging development trends such as virtual production technology and the integration of film and tourism, making the research content more in line with the future evolution direction of the industry.

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