

Exploring the Development of Soft Science Fiction Films in the Chinese Film Market: Taking Dune 2 as an Example

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Abstract: Following the cessation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese film industry has experienced a resurgence, leading to fresh prospects for the Chinese science fiction film market. On March 8, 2024, the Chinese mainland will host the release of *Dune 2*, which has garnered significant popularity in the Chinese science fiction cinema market. The goal of this study was to investigate whether the popularity of the *Dune* series of movies in the Chinese film market persists. The objective of this study was to investigate the potential influence of the *Dune* series of movies on the Chinese science fiction film industry. This article provided an in-depth examination of the film "*Dune 2*" as a specific example. This analysis utilized the distinctive attributes of the "*Dune 2*" film series, as well as the commercial performance and value demonstrated in the Chinese film market. It combined fundamental business theory and cinematic art knowledge to conduct a thorough examination and observation. The study yields three key outcomes: the successful adaptation of movies based on popular intellectual properties, achieved by appropriately innovating the original IP; the advancement in filming technology, which propels the growth of science fiction movies by establishing a dedicated technology park for the film industry; the influence of film music on the coherence of movie narratives, through the creation of music that aligns with the unique style of each film. This study aimed to investigate the attributes of the Chinese science fiction film market and offers recommendations for the advancement of Chinese science fiction films.

Keywords: Film *Dune 2*, Soft Science Fiction Film, Chinese Science Fiction Film

1. Introduction

People's movie preferences have gotten increasingly diverse as the economy has grown and science and technology have advanced. Science fiction films have also gained a lot of attention. People have often adapted science fiction literature into old films over the last century, allowing their strong and wild imaginations to flourish. The cinema industry has also advanced the visual effects and artwork of science fiction novels. Science fiction films have already established themselves in the cinema industry. With the triumph of "*Wandering Earth*," China's science fiction film market appears to be entering a golden age. The growth of China's film industry has also created a number of opportunities for science fiction film production. With the COVID-19 outbreak over, people can now watch movies in theaters. The Chinese film market is also gradually returning. However, several local science-fiction films appear to lack appeal and influence. Around this time, *Sand Dune 2* made its debut in

the Chinese film market to a warm reception. Douban earned more than 300 million yuan at the box office two weeks after its Chinese mainland premiere, while also receiving 8.3 points.

Due to the impact of *Dune II* and its predecessors, an increasing number of experts started to take notice of *Dune II* and the entire film series. Academics are interested in the factors contributing to *Dune II*'s widespread popularity, as well as its implications for the Chinese cinema industry and the genre of Chinese soft science fiction films. Prior to that, relevant scholars had studied Chinese science fiction films, Chinese soft science fiction films, and the Chinese science fiction film business. For instance, certain research has examined Chinese science fiction films through the lens of individuals [1]. Additionally, it focuses on the historical aspects of the Chinese science fiction film industry [2]. Furthermore, scholarly articles have examined the substantial impact of Hollywood science fiction films on the Chinese film industry's expansion [3]. Furthermore, a discourse is taking place on the pertinent subjects of the Chinese cinema market investigation [4].

Although some research has been conducted on the Chinese science fiction film market and the humanistic development of science fiction films, there is still a gap in understanding how soft science fiction films will develop in China in the future and what value they will bring to the Chinese film market. To fill this research gap, this article will propose a study subject relating to whether the success of the *Dune* series films in the Chinese market is a long-term success: Is the *Dune* trilogy's success in the Chinese film business sustainable? The goal of this study report is to investigate the actual demand in the Chinese science fiction film business. So, why conduct such research? Currently, the Chinese science fiction cinema market is mainly untapped, demanding the rapid development of hidden commercial values. With the success of some Chinese science fiction films, the Chinese science fiction film market is increasingly in need of science fiction films that suit public aesthetics while also providing economic vitality to the industry. This article uses a series of investigations to acquire an understanding of the impact of soft science fiction films on the Chinese cinema market.

To address the aforementioned research issues, this paper first examines the status and commercial value of the *Dune* series in the Chinese film market as a case study to present relevant information phenomena. Then, it analyzes the reasons for these phenomena's existence and combines them to demonstrate their impact. Finally, based on the analyzed reasons, provide suggestions on how future science fiction movies can have better long-term development in the Chinese market. These suggestions have the potential to enhance the development of the Chinese science fiction film market and contribute to its overall commercial value.

2. Case Description

The movie *Dune 2* belongs to the soft science fiction genre of movies, which inherently focuses on philosophy, sociology, and other aspects of film expression. The movie *Dune 2* presents scientific laws and technological achievements relatively late, emphasizing the importance of the creator's imagination. The movie *Dune 2* also has many special features. The science fiction film *Dune*, starring directors Denis Villeneuve and Timothy Chalamet, tells the sci-fi story of an Eritrean family. After experiencing internal betrayal, the heir, Paul, accepts fate's guidance and completes revenge.

This movie blends science fiction themes with the real world and collides them. By adopting a series of hot social topics such as family games, desertification, water scarcity, and personal fate, it is based on narrative and employs surrealistic performance techniques to tell a mysterious and "touching" hero story.

The movie "*Dune 2*" currently has a box office of 347 million yuan in mainland China, ranking first among imported films in 2024 (China) and far ahead of the 264-million-yuan box office of "*Dune*" in mainland China. The first-day box office was 42.987 million yuan, and the first-week box office was 141 million yuan. Meanwhile, the movie broke through 300 million yuan at the box office in 15 days. As of March 24 (starting March 1), the global box office had exceeded 500 million US

dollars, far higher than the previous record of 431.7 million US dollars. In terms of word-of-mouth, rotten tomatoes currently have a freshness rating of 93 (with the highest reaching 98), an IMDb score of 8.8, and a Douban score of 8.3. This has achieved a double harvest of box office word-of-mouth (all three items are higher than the previous work, "Dune," with corresponding scores of Rotten Tomatoes 83, IMDb 8.0, and Douban 7.7).

3. Analysis on Problems

3.1. Reasons on Application of the Novel "Dune"

John Ficks argues that building a fan base is crucial for acquiring symbolic capital [5]. Supporters dismiss the subjective categorization of individuals as "consumers" in order to maintain their status as cultural authority [5]. Within this participatory culture, enthusiasts engage in the examination and observation of the development of mainstream culture, tracing its roots back to the cultural principles of the business-driven entertainment sector. Before the debut of the film adaptation, these rankings gained a substantial degree of symbolic value, with most readers and fans being the film's main audience. This significantly streamlines the process of creating and distributing films.

Due to the increasing popularity of novel adaptations, the film industry has also begun to adapt novels or comics into movies. This process is alternatively referred to as "IP" adaption. There is already a film adaptation of the novel "Sand Dune". The novel "Sand Dune" has an extensive tale that spans thousands of years of history. The text exhibits a complex and intricate storyline, skillfully addresses societal issues, showcases well-developed characters, and presents a daring and logical blend of science and technology with elements of fantasy. Hence, the film "Sand Dunes" possesses a substantial potential viewership. These enthusiasts will provide their support to the cinematic adaptation of the novel "Dunes."

3.2. Reasons on the Impact of Scientific and Technological Development on Movies

The advancement of film technology has created opportunities for successful filming of the movie Dune. The movie used infrared cameras to capture the fighting scenes of the Harkonnen family. This filming method helped us see the black-and-white scenes of the Harkonnen family in the movie, which was very shocking. The black-and-white characters in this lens have a semi-translucent, milky texture on their skin, allowing them to see blood vessels through it. Their eyes are also sharp, and they look like reptiles.

When discussing montage and film art, McBride, P. C., talked about how, while the image on the canvas remains the same, the image on the film screen changes. The picture invites contemplation; in the interim, the observer is free to surrender to his stream of associations [6]. He is unable to do so in front of a film image [6]. Xue's study on the profound impact of digital media technology on animation production revealed that the widespread use of mobile internet, mobile terminals, and digital network technology has led to the production of an increasing number of animated films and television shows using the Internet and other media [7]. All these show the important role of technology in filmmaking.

3.3. Reasons on Film Score

In the Dune series, the soundtrack adds a lot of color to the film. When the protagonist first sees a huge sand dune, the music has a grand and low rhythm, echoing the small situation of human beings in the vast sand. When the sorority ship arrives, the chants on the film soundtrack gradually become louder and clearer as it descends, revealing the mystery of sorority power.

Music, as an important part of the film, not only tells the film's story but also reflects the deeper narrative purpose. In addition to language expression, it is a kind of spatial association and extension. In his study of the relationship between music and montage films, Fabrien argued that "musical scoring is the process of selecting and arranging auditory elements into visual forms [8]. A score can add the necessary nuance to a film's scene by using appropriate tonal placement techniques, making it more emotional [8]. This proves that film music is an integral part of the whole film.

Avramidis, while studying the effects of music and visual expression, also noted that professionally produced official versions of music videos capture these qualities, carefully crafted to elicit a specific response from the audience [9]. For example, the music in the movie matches and reinforces the theme of the visual scene, while the party song's music video depicts the scene's underlying mood [9]. This also shows that film music can drive the audience's emotions in the movie and has a close relationship with the movie.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Suggestion on Application of the Novel "Dune"

A film that adapts an IP with a larger fan base is more likely to generate higher revenue at the box office. "Dune 2" incorporated multiple sections that showcased the female protagonist, Cheney, presenting her as a composed and logical character, significantly enhancing her portrayal in the original piece. TV superhero series such as Gotham and Smallville derive satisfaction from deliberately challenging or overturning viewers' expectations based on their knowledge of the interconnected storylines of DC Comics characters in movies and comic books [5].

In order to promote its growth, the Chinese market for soft science fiction films should prioritize the adaptation of relevant science fiction novels and other materials while also making necessary adjustments during the adaptation process. Slight modifications to the characters do not contradict the original text but significantly enhance their personalities. The original work's compelling character descriptions captivate the audience while also allowing them to uncover the intriguing qualities of the supporting characters. If a character exhibits continuity between preceding and subsequent films in an extensive narrative series, this form of hidden reference will also entice the audience to the cinema.

4.2. Suggestion on the Impact of Scientific and Technological Development on Movies

The Chinese science fiction film market still needs the development of appropriate film technology and the continuous progress of the film industry in order to achieve high box office success. Therefore, Chinese soft science fiction films still need to continuously promote the development of film industry technology.

Taking Qingdao's film industrialization as an example. It is necessary to build a film and television base, establish a film and television development industrial park, attract project investment through external promotion, and establish activity platforms such as film and television weeks and audiovisual summits. The park focuses on attracting production teams, particularly large ones, and has attracted companies like Shina Mofu Film and Television Company to join. Qingdao Haifa State-owned Capital Investment and Operation Group Co., Ltd. is responsible for building a film and television supply chain system, including film and television industry parks, outdoor locations, industry education integration bases, "1+N" film and television listed companies, film and television technology platforms, 5G high-tech video parks, film and television industry funds, etc., and fully participates in support from funding, technology, distribution, talent cultivation, and other aspects [10]. Such an industrial base should be established more commonly and be optimized and supported by more institutions and governments.

4.3. Suggestion on the Film Score

The excellent and pleasant film music can significantly contribute to the development of Chinese soft science fiction films. As a result, it is needed to insert movie music that matches the story logic and aesthetics of the film. Simultaneously, it should create music for Chinese soft science fiction films, drawing on a blend of local Chinese culture and Chinese music.

Using Hayao Miyazaki's films as a model, his cinematic music effectively conveys the style, theme, characters, and other elements of the film, accurately expressing the film's theme and enhancing its creative image. Aside from the theme song, every other soundtrack in the movie "Totoro" reflects the essence of traditional Japanese music, capturing the distinct qualities of Japanese ethnic music [11]. The movie "Totoro" uses various musical elements, such as piano, strings, timpani, and orchestral instruments, to portray character images in various scenes. These elements not only tell a sweet and straightforward tale but also express the harmony and beauty between people, animals, and the natural world, reflecting the muted yet ethereal hues of Eastern culture. The music has a big impact on Mall's post-release success [11].

5. Conclusion

The tremendous potential of China's science fiction film market has been explored, and COVID-19 has ended. This study investigates the successful performance of the film Dune 2 in China's science fiction film industry and poses the question, "Is the success of the Dune series films in China's film market a lasting success?" This article looks at three facets of the film Dune 2's success: the significance of film adaptation sources, the impact of developments in photography technology in film production, and the auxiliary role of film music in the film itself. This leads to the conclusion that the film Dune 2's success in the Chinese science fiction film market was not coincidental, and it has an enlightening effect on the future development of Chinese science fiction films.

The distinctiveness of Dune 2 serves as a point of reference for future Chinese science fiction films. This article presents two ideas based on the benefits of IP adaptation in films and the driving effect of music on movie content. To begin, the adaptation should plausibly contain supporting role innovations. Second, there are two recommendations for incorporating the film's substance into a Chinese-style aesthetic. This is reflected in Dune 2's characterization of its female protagonist, Cheney, as well as the striking impact of its big score. This enables filmmakers to create works that are consistent with the market conditions for Chinese science fiction films. This article is based on the author's summary and analysis, which are subjective and reflect personal opinions and evaluations. Furthermore, the short theatrical run of "Dune 2" had a limited impact on the development of Chinese science fiction films.

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