

Assessment of the Master's Thesis

Author of thesis: Contemporary Chinese Art-house Cinema and Genre Wenyi Five case studies from 2015-2017

Title of thesis: Piaoyu Xie

Assessment of the opponent

Author of the assessment (first name, last name, workplace):

Jiří Flígl

Evaluation of the content and final form of the thesis (A/excellent – B/very good – C/good – D/good with objections – E/satisfactory – F/unsatisfactory – not recommended for defence)

Suitability of the selected objective and work approach.....D:

A really insightful approach would be if the author would not just present singular achievements, but would try to look at a broader context, mainly at the dozens and hundreds of films from the same budget-category which actually did not get to be successful in either travelling abroad or drawing audiences to see them.

Relative completeness of the literature used for the selected topic.....D:

Since one of the connecting characteristics of the selected films which the author discusses in the thesis, is their success at international film festivals, the thesis seriously lacks a reflection and analysis of how the films were perceived abroad and what attracted the selection committees, juries and foreign film critics to them. Even though the Chinese perspective and context are not less crucial, the international perspective is also important, especially since, as the author states, the international festivals can build the reputation of a film.

Not to mention there are a lot of books and articles dealing with the relationship between international film festivals and the development of a specific image of a certain country or region for an international audience, which might add some insight into the workings and politics of festival selections. None of those are used for reference here.

Ability to critically evaluate and use professional literature.....

I actually do not think I can evaluate this part. The author uses only interviews or web-based articles which mostly serve as trivia or background facts. There is not much of any "professional literature" to really speak of here and neither can one really try to critically evaluate it.

Logicity of the thesis structure, connection of its chapters.....D:

The thesis immediately strikes one with its seemingly thorough and obviously strict structure. But at a closer look one can not deny that the author uses this to just try to pretend a through approach to each film. First of all there is no real system in some of the categories with trivia and facts spilling vaguely between some categories, especially the Backstory, Production and even About the Director. Also there is a sharp contrast between the Review category and all the other ones, since there we get to know the author's personal opinion, or even impression of the discussed film, which actually does not say much in regards to the theme of the thesis.

Language and stylistic level of the thesis.....??:

Here lies one of the main hurdles of this thesis. The author is not a native English speaker and the limits of his vocabulary show extensively in the work. How much that should be considered a flaw I leave up to the committee. However, even though one must employ the help of deduction and reverse auto-translation in deciphering the text, it is actually quite understandable.

Compliance with citation norms (should the text repeatedly contain adopted passages without citing the source, the work cannot be recommended for defence).....A:

The author chose one citation norm and employs it consistently throughout the thesis. Also she does quote direct sources in the text.

Sufficient extent of image attachments, justifiability and suitability of attachments, graphic layout.....B:

The few screenshots have little to none real value in the text. One has to think they were included only as some sort of unnecessary obligation to some norm saying a thesis should include images. Not to mention that for whatever reason the last discussed film is left without a screenshot, which either feels like the author was in a rush and forgot to include one, or this is even more proof of the random and unreasonable nature of the images here. But on the other hand I guess it does not really hurt to include some images.

Originality of the thesis, contribution to the development of the field of study.....A-C:

Since the student stated that the aim of the thesis is to do a research of the ways which can lead to box-office success in China, I hope for her sake it will contribute her. Whether that will be true only time will show. However, the this thesis simply is a selective overview of the possible ways to success, or better to say of the few specific titles which actually did succeed. But that does not make it a sure-fire manual for success. In this regard it is not really original, since it just takes the same approach several international articles or reviews have tried before and will attempt many more times in the future – that is to guess or somehow retrace the steps which led to a success of some specific film. The thesis thanks to its Chinese perspective and sources can give an slight insight to people interested in the topic, but because of the language barrier limited to resources from outside of China.

Overall evaluation of the thesis.....C:

Verbal evaluation of the thesis including questions that the diplomate must address in his/her thesis defence:

To summ it up, on one hand for somebody interested in Asian cinema and the Chinese film market, the thesis features some interesting facts and figures thanks to its Chinese-language resources. However, the lack of reflection of international responses and reviews of the discussed films is a big drawback of the thesis. Especially given the fact that the author wanted to use this opportunity to dissect the success-stories of the selected films.

Do you think there is a sure way to succeed at the Chinese box-office for an arthouse filmmaker?

What have you learned from your research and which route of the ones discussed in your thesis will you attempt to take in your career?

Why do you think international audiences and festivals are interested in Chinese arthouse films? What image of China are they interested in? Do you think there is a sure-fire recipe for how to get into an international festival's selection?

Date: 10th September 2018

Signature: Jiří Fligl

