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Soft Power, Film Culture and the BRICS

Paul Cooke

‘BRICS turn film market on its head’

Writing in the *Financial Times* in 2013, Andrew Edgecliffe-Johnson argued that the BRICS group of emerging nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) had now reached a point in their development where they had effectively “flipped” the film market, focusing US filmmakers and distributors on international opportunities and creating a bigger US market for foreign films’ (Edgecliffe-Johnson 2013). The main focus for Edgecliffe-Johnson, as well as several other commentators at the time, was in actual fact the rapid growth of the Chinese market, which in 2012 became the second largest film market after the USA, and which some commentators predicted would overtake the USA as soon as 2018 (Plowright 2015). Edgecliffe-Johnson suggests that this development might open up the world’s cinema to more international US co-productions that could, in turn, increase Hollywood’s appetite for the production of non-English-language films for international markets. However, the main opportunity in the sights of the Hollywood majors at the time was, without doubt, the chance to sell their mainstream, English-language, product in the Chinese market, a market that, moreover, seemed immune to the overall slowdown in the Chinese economy – proof it were needed, as Peter Shiao (CEO of Orb Media Group and Chair of the annual US-China Film Summit) observes, that ‘if history is any indicator when there is stress in the social fabric of society people rely on movies even more’ (Quoted in Carroll and Phillips 2015).

The growing importance of the Chinese market for Hollywood, as well as the broader shifts in the global geopolitical landscape, signalled by the rise of the wider

BRICS grouping, has had a range of knock-on effects for global film culture. Remaining for the moment with China, this has led, as Chris Homewood has noted, to the growing incorporation of Chinese elements into Hollywood blockbusters in order to win one of the coveted 34 places allocated a year to non-domestic productions (Homewood 2014). For example, it is noticeable the extent to which China has been presented as a 'deus ex machina' in recent Hollywood films, the country's apparently boundless resources and technological ingenuity being used to save the likes of John Cusack or Matt Damon from calamity in a host of epic blockbusters, be it via new-age 'arks' in the environmental disaster movie *2012* (2012), or the Chinese rocket booster deployed to help save a stranded astronaut in *The Martian* (2015). That said, how necessary, or even helpful, these elements really are is disputed by commentators. As Yuxing Zhou observes, while the Chinese censor might at times seem to use the accusation of an unfavourable depiction of China and Chinese culture as a way of preventing, or at least delaying, the release of a Hollywood film – *M:I-3* (2006), for example was ostensibly refused a screening permit due to the inclusion of a scene depicting laundry hanging on bamboo poles in a Shanghai street –, the real reason for such decisions is far more likely to be economic rather than political. Such decisions invariably involve films looking for a release during the summer, China's most popular film-going season, which the authorities tend to want to protect for domestic productions (Zhou 2015: 6). What is less in doubt is the importance of the increasing number of English-language US-Chinese co-productions facilitated by the China Film Co-Production Corporation (CFCC). CFCC productions such as *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014) and *Furious 7* (2015) not only count as 'domestic' releases and so fall outside the 34-film non-domestic quota, they also allow the Hollywood partner to

keep a larger percentage of the box-office receipts (Homewood 2014). It is this that has driven the major growth in Hollywood's engagement with China.

Hollywood's motivation for this engagement is straightforwardly financial. More complex, and for some Western commentators at least more controversial, has been China's motivation. 2012 also saw a series of Chinese-initiated events in the US domestic market that, on the one hand, seemed to complement developments in China but, on the other, appeared to some intent upon challenging Hollywood's cultural hegemony at home. In July of that year China's Dalian Wanda Group acquired AMC, the second largest movie theatre chain in the US. This was the beginning of a series of moves by Wanda that led in 2015 to its takeover of production and finance company Legendary Entertainment for \$3.5 billion, the largest deal of its kind by a Chinese company. Wanda moreover made it clear that the company still had a long way to go, its ultimate ambition being to become a major player in the global film industry, growing the number of culturally-Chinese, internationally-focused productions made in the country (Fritz and Burkitt 2016). At the same time, President Xi Jinping had been engaging in high level talks with several of the Hollywood majors aimed at further strengthening China's relationship with the US film industry. These developments provoked a good deal of attention amongst industry commentators, being seen by many as a worrying example of China's strategic focus on its global 'soft power', with the Chinese authorities ostensibly using the country's economic might to buy its way into the Hollywood 'Dream Factory' and in so doing gain the kind of cultural influence American governments have long sought to achieve via this particular industry (Nunns 2012; Homewood 2014). 'China buys soft power with hard cash in Hollywood', declared the French Associated Press in 2016, warning readers

that ‘there is no such thing as a free lunch’ and that China’s growing influence will have significant consequences for the industry (AFP 2016).

Defining Soft Power

The term ‘soft power’ was coined by the political analyst Joseph Nye in the 1990s to describe what he saw as the increasing emphasis put on the ‘power of attraction’ in international foreign relations, rather than the ‘hard power’ of ‘coercion or payments’, focusing in particular on the role of America, at the time the world’s only superpower (Nye 2004: ix). Since then, ‘soft power’ has been much discussed, migrating, as Nye has more recently noted, from being ‘an academic concept [...] to the front pages of newspapers’ and finally to the speeches of ‘top leaders’ around the world (Nye 2011: 81). There are any number of examples of the term’s usage by political elites to characterize their approach to international relations and, in particular, the role of culture as a soft power vehicle for public diplomacy. Xi Jinping might certainly agree with the commentators cited above that China’s engagement with Hollywood is indeed part of the state’s self-conscious aim to generate soft power through its cultural policy, if not with the concerns they share (The China Post 2014). Fellow BRICS’ premier Vladimir Putin also emphasizes the role of cultural soft power as part of Russia’s ‘comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives’, while simultaneously decrying what his government defines as the ‘unlawful use of “soft power” and human rights concepts to exert political pressure on sovereign states’ (Putin 2013). Similarly, in the UK one might mention the 2014 House of Lords select committee report on ‘Soft Power and the UK’s Influence’, which explored the way the country’s cultural assets should be leveraged to promote and protect the nation’s economic and wider political interests globally (House of Lords 2014). Or one could

point to the centrality of culture in the EU's 'Preparatory Action' report *Culture in EU External Relations*, which puts forward a series of suggestions for the ways in which member states' collective 'cultural power can [...] be *transformed* into soft power' through the more effective coordination of resources in order to support the circulation of cultural products (via, for example, European film festivals). Crucially the report highlights what it perceives to be the attractiveness of 'the European "narrative"', which it defines as a celebration of the fundamental 'European' values of 'cultural diversity' and 'freedom of expression' (Isar et al. 2014: 7-20, italics in original).

From this snapshot of some of the ways in which the soft power of culture is being instrumentalized by political elites, it is clear that soft power is a complex term. Indeed, for some commentators, Nye included, the increasingly varied contexts in which it is being used can run the danger of making the term so elastic as to be of little analytical use (Nye 2011: 81). Nonetheless, the manner in which it is used around the world highlights the variety of ways national governments understand the role of national and transnational 'narratives' – to return to the EU report for a moment – in helping to shape global interactions, and the role that culture generally, and film and media in particular, has to play in this context. For China, the country's enormous financial resources have supported a whole host of cultural initiatives, from the Confucius Institutes it has set up around the world in order to promote Chinese culture and the learning of the Chinese language to the expansion of China Central Television (CCTV) into a global media network and, of course, its ever closer engagement with Hollywood. In the UK, the relationship between economics and soft power assets works in the opposite direction, the nation's cultural capital (its language, the global recognition of certain British cultural 'brands', from the Premier

League to the BBC) being leveraged to support economic growth. With regard to film, here one might mention film-director Danny Boyle's opening ceremony for the 2012 Olympics, which was frequently cited as a key reason for the UK topping the soft-power league table that year and contributing to the £9.9bn boost to the economy the games ostensibly generated (Gillespie and O'Loughlin 2015: 388-9). Similarly, the British film industry was a key partner in VisitBritain's 2014 campaign, which featured Bond, Wallace and Gromit and was timed to coincide with the release of a new Paddington Bear movie. The 'Paddington is GREAT Britain' campaign is said to have generated over £1.2bn in extra tourism, trade and investment (Sweney 2015). In Putin's foreign policy statement, soft power is conflated with questions of propaganda and the way governments have sought to (mis)represent Russia's national mission through its culture. Film, once again, provides a useful way to illustrate this. As is discussed in this special edition of *New Cinemas* by Vlad Strukov, the nomination of Andrey Zvyagintsev's 2014 film *Leviathan* for the foreign-language Oscar was hugely controversial. The nomination of a film that offered a critical image of contemporary Russian institutions outraged the Kremlin, which saw this as a deliberately provocative act by the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Although, as Strukov argues, the film has a far more ambivalent relationship with the state than the headlines in the Western press about the Oscar nomination suggest. The production of the film was in fact supported financially by the state and, Strukov suggests, the debate it generated was ultimately instrumentalized by the government to increase the international visibility of Russian culture, for all its criticism of the film's content. At the same time, Putin's statement challenges the fundamental principle of soft power as a means of gaining influence

precisely *not* through exerting pressure but by highlighting the attractiveness of a country's culture in order to suggest the attractiveness of its wider value system.

It is this principle which is at the centre of the EU's conceptualization of the role of soft power in its external relations, suggesting a model of interaction – however utopian this might appear – of mutuality and shared responsibility between nations in order to promote a collective understanding of '*global cultural citizenship* that recognizes shared cultural rights as well as shared responsibilities' (Isar et al. 2014: 8). Of course, as the UK's rejection of the EU in 2016 showed, this is far easier said than done, since it ultimately involves ceding control of the 'national narrative', allowing it to be co-created in partnership with others. This process of co-creation becomes both more complicated still, and more necessary, in the digital age, when it is increasingly difficult for an individual, or even a government, to control the way any single source of information will be distributed and interpreted by end users on the internet. Now more than ever, as Nye suggests, 'global politics involves "verbal fighting" among competing narratives' (Nye 2011: 87). And, as we can see from our discussion of China above, it is a contest where the role of the traditionally dominant 'combatants', not least the US, is increasingly challenged.

The BRICS and the Role of Film Culture

Like the concept of soft power, the 'BRICS' was originally an academic term that now has the kind of political purchase the economist Jim O'Neill could never have envisaged when he coined the acronym BRIC in 2001 to describe a group of rapidly emerging economies (O'Neill 2001). The BRIC countries represent 40% of the world's population and, in the first decade of the 21st Century were widely predicted to overtake the G7 economies in the next 20 years or so, with China and India (or

‘Chindia’ as they are often referred to in the literature), in particular, functioning as its engine (Engardio 2007; Foroohar 2010). It was never envisaged by O’Neill that this grouping would become a political entity holding regular international summits or that, in 2014, it would create its own financial structure – the New Development Bank – aimed at providing an alternative to the US-dominated International Monetary Fund and World Bank (The Economist 2009). In 2010 the group expanded to include South Africa, then the continent’s largest economy, and in the process signalled a further move away from O’Neill’s initial economic definition of the group. Now the group seemed to be asserting a political position as a collective mouthpiece for the developing world, and specifically for the rising importance of the ‘Global South’, which, along with Russia, might have the potential to challenge the political and economic hegemony of the Western world in the 21st Century (Puri 2010).

Within discussions of both soft power and the role of the BRICS in global politics, cinema plays an important role. At least since Griffiths, film has, of course, been recognized as an important medium for the communication of a nation’s values to the rest of the world. And again, at least since Griffiths, the terms of engagement with this form of communication have largely been dictated by Hollywood. This is most clearly evidenced in the continued economic dominance of Hollywood films which consistently achieve the biggest worldwide grosses (Cooke 2007: 1-2). The dominance of Hollywood in much of the world is attributable to a wide variety of factors, not least to the consistent efforts US Governments have put into gaining global dominance in the areas of distribution and exhibition. It is Hollywood that largely controls which films audiences get to see wherever they may be. With most cinema screens in large parts of the world showing Hollywood product, it is with such films that spectators are most familiar. It is often very difficult for non-US films to

gain international distribution, particularly in the US. Even films from outside North America that do well at the major film festivals such as Venice, Berlin or Cannes generally remain confined to the periphery, unable to gain the screen space that would allow them to secure a bigger share of the audience. Little wonder, then, that it is by Hollywood's standards that we define what we mean by 'mainstream' filmmaking in much of the world. The US is also fiercely protective of its distribution dominance, lobbying for increasing global deregulation during the GATT and subsequent World Trade Organization talks so that it could further increase its market share in parts of the world that continue to protect domestic film production and distribution (Miller et. al., 2004). Having said that, one cannot deny the extraordinary pull of Hollywood, even in some places where its films are harder to find. As Geoffrey Nowell-Smith puts it:

Sometimes the banal truths are the valuable ones and the fact is that the much-mouthed banalities about Hollywood as dream factory are not only true but important. [...] Hollywood is the biggest fabricator of fantasy, and that is its enormous unchallenged strength. (Nowell-Smith 1998: 12)

Compare, for example the failure of *Confucius* (2010), a large-budget Chinese historical biopic which was the product of a Chinese cultural policy intended to showcase to the world the potential of the Chinese film industry. The film famously flopped, even at home, being unable to compete with James Cameron's global hit *Avatar* (2009), despite the Hollywood film receiving only very limited distribution in China. *Avatar* grossed \$4.8M on the first day of its release, while *Confucius* only \$1.8M week and this despite a much wider release (AFP 2010).

Hollywood has long been a key US soft power asset, regularly deployed by the nation to support its drive to communicate the benefits of its value system, of

democracy and the potential of the 'American Dream'. Here one might mention the post 9/11 discussions between the White House and Bryce Zabel, then chairman of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences about how Hollywood 'could help the government formulate its message to the rest of the world about who Americans are, and what they believe' (Miller and Rampton 2001). The rationale behind this was that if more (specifically the Muslim part) of the world understood the benefits of American democracy it would help protect the country against further terrorist attacks. This is an approach that also recalls US cultural policy towards Germany post-World War Two, when Hollywood was similarly seen as a tool for spreading democracy. As Jennifer Fay has shown, however, the power of Hollywood to present a universally understandable message of democracy was challenged in the specific reading of its films by audiences in Germany at the time. The success of soft power is always rooted in a process of co-creation. Far from seeing Hollywood movies as straightforward depictions of the 'American Dream', Fay highlights how they were often taken to parallel the spectacle of Nazi cinema, and in so doing seemed to reveal, for many in Germany, the racist foundations of the American nation. This was particularly common in the reception of the Westerns that were a staple of the films supplied by the US occupation force at the time, their depiction of native Americans as violent savages who must be controlled by the white settlers being read as reminiscent of the Nazi presentation of Jews (Fay 2008: 81). More successful was West Germany's own form of cultural diplomacy in the 1970s, when it promoted the self-critical films of the New German Cinema abroad via its cultural organization the Goethe Institute. Produced by a generation of filmmakers who were accusing the nation of not having come to terms with its culpability for the crimes of National Socialism, the state's active promotion of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder,

Margarethe von Trotta, Volker Schlöndorff and others conversely showed to the world that the nation was indeed attempting to face its past and that its democratic structures were strong enough to engage in dialogue with its detractors (Knight 2004: 28-30).

That said, for all its critics, Hollywood remains very attractive to audiences around the world and, as is evidenced in both the much cited annual *Monocle* soft power survey as well as Ernst&Young's 'Soft Power Index', it continues to function as a key plank in the ongoing success of America as one of the world's leading exponents of soft power, despite the role the nation played in generating the global financial crisis in 2008 as well as in the destabilization of Middle Eastern states in the wake of George W. Bush's 'War on Terror' (Bloomfield 2013; Ernst & Young 2012). Nonetheless, as suggested in Edgecliffe-Johnson's article for the *FT*, things would appear to be shifting. Or at least it would seem that other parts of the world are seeking either to emulate – or indeed, as in the case of China, to co-opt – Hollywood to support their soft-power strategy.

This is particularly visible in India. The Hindi film industry, known around the world as Bollywood, produces around 1000 feature films annually, attracting in excess of a billion spectators at home and across the Indian diaspora. This diasporic audience is hugely significant not only for the success of the film industry but the entire Indian economy, 'Non Resident Indians' (NRI) invest around \$70 billion annually (4% of India's GDP) in the country (Bellman 2015). The growing importance of NRIs has had a particularly noticeable impact on the image of the Indian migrant in Bollywood. As Ingrid Therwath puts it, 'Once unloved and portrayed as the epitome of moral corruption, [the NRI has become] the embodiment of the national ethos as well as of a triumphant capitalism' (Therwath 2010: 4). Since

the 1990s, the NRI has frequently been presented as a ‘Brand Ambassador’ for India, reflecting a cosmopolitan version of modernity that embraces global capitalism while preserving traditional Indian (patriarchal) values (Therwath 2010: 4). *Ek Tha Tiger* (Once There was a Tiger, Kabir Khan, 2012), for example, a musical spy adventure partially set in Dublin, presents its protagonists as cosmopolitan travellers, comfortable in the most exotic of settings – specifically in this case a ‘Bollywoodized’ version of the Irish capital, replete with leprechaun hats and a Bhangra-dancing Hurling team. This is the Ireland of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ that is distinct from, but sits comfortably with, the Indian ‘Tiger’, the film’s eponymous hero (Barton 2016: 176-8). There is no official compulsion in India for filmmakers to support an official soft power strategy. The Indian industry is notoriously unregulated and receives very little in the way of financial state support that might incentivize its official collaboration with governmental initiatives. The use of Dublin as a location was due to Ireland’s generous tax-credit system for film productions. However, within the Indian industry there is also support for the country’s overall aim of using its soft power assets to present the nation favourably to the NRI community. The producer and director Yash Chopra, for example, insists that the industry has a ‘moral responsibility [to] depict India at its best. We’re the historians of India [...]. The Indian Diaspora must maintain its identity, its roots’ (Quoted in Therwath 2010: 9). And, this has been strongly welcomed by the government, as the former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made clear in 2008:

the soft power of India in some ways can be a very important instrument of foreign policy. Cultural relations, India’s film industry – Bollywood – I find wherever I go in the Middle-East, in Africa – people talk about Indian films. So

that is a new way of influencing the world about the growing importance of India. (Quoted in Therwath 2010:10)

Bollywood is a key component of 'Brand India', its increasingly globally recognized stars such as Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone helping to drive the international visibility of the nation. The Indian film industry, as well as the size of the global audience that wishes to see the films produced, are hugely significant for the nation's soft power appeal. And, as we have seen above, although the Chinese film industry does not consistently achieve the level of success attained by Indian films, there is, to a degree, a similar dynamic at work within China. Since 2000 there have been some very successful Chinese films, such as Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (2002) and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004), which suggest the potential global appeal of the nation's cinema. With the growth of Wanda, one might imagine that this potential could gradually be realized.

While 'Chindia' is a case apart from the rest of the BRICS, the role of the Brazilian, Russian and South African film industries, along with the economic pull of their markets, also plays an important role in these nation's soft power strategies, not least as they, at times, seek to present the BRICS as a coherent political bloc. Chinese commentators, for example, point to the need for the BRICS to work more effectively together in order to use the media in a coordinated way to realize the groups potential for the whole of the Global South. Reporting on the 2014 BRICS summit held in Brazil, timed to coincide with the start of the Football World Cup, Li Congju argues that while the economic power of the group is growing, its collective voice, along with that of rest of the developing world continues to be 'drowned out by the much louder media of the West' (Congju, 2014). However, as already noted, this is changing. China (CCTV), Russia (RT) and Brazil (Rede Globo) all support media

organizations with an international reach. This is part of a global trend that, Jeremy Tunstall notes, has in fact been visible at least since the late 1980s, pointing to the fact that the US has now become ‘a large-scale media importer’, suggesting that while the US mass media is still dominant, its influence is declining (Tunstall 2008: xiv). Yet more importantly in terms of the overall argument of this present volume, it begs the question Daya Kishan Thussu and Kaarle Nordenstreng ask: ‘Does the impressive growth of media in the BRICS countries and their greater visibility across the globe indicate the end of globalization as Westernization?’ (Thussu and Nordenstreng 2015: 13). There is little evidence that the likes of RT and Globo will heed Li Congj’s call to coordinate their efforts. It is difficult to see how CCTV could engage with Brazil’s hugely successful *telenovela* industry, for example, one of the country’s key cultural exports. However, with regard to film production specifically, the relationship between BRICS member states is becoming more intertwined. 2015 saw the first BRICS media summit in Beijing. This was followed in 2016 by the launch of the BRICS film festival in India. Although quite small scale, it was seen as a significant development for the group, aimed to promote a sense of cultural, as well as political coherence. More significantly, one sees an increasing number of international co-production deals being signed across the group, allowing mutual access to this huge global market, which already outstrips the US and is continuing to grow. In the process, member states are given the opportunity to generate, and leverage the potential of, cultural soft power through mutual cultural exchange (Pham 2012). That said, the ability of these nations to take advantage of this opportunity remains contingent on their relative economic position within what is still a very diverse group, as well as the particular strength of their film industry and the economic model which shapes it. Russia and South Africa, for example, are in very different positions,

in terms of their film economies, to India or China. Moreover, the BRICS can often be simply one grouping amongst many in which member states might wish to place themselves. While Brazil might at times present itself as part of the BRICS, as Stephanie Dennison and Alessandra Meleiro note, at other times this is far less important to the country than its Latin American identity, or its relationship with Portugal. Nonetheless as we shall see in this volume, to a lesser or greater extent all the BRICS see a strategic value in membership of the group. Moreover, all are concerned to utilize the potential of soft power, keen to present the value, in particular it should be noted, of their *national* 'narrative' both to the rest of the world and their own people at home. Film has a key role to play in this regard.

Across the BRICS, the group's success in increasing its global profile ultimately remains contingent on each of its constituent nation's ability to embrace the need for the 'co-creation' of soft power, as identified by the EU, that is, the need for political elites to cede authority in the generation of soft power to others. If we return to China, and as Yanling Yang discusses in her contribution to this volume, while the country and its growing media industry wishes to increase the number and success of culturally Chinese films internationally – as indicated in its so-called 'go abroad' strategy – the government's repeated efforts to control the types of films that are shown internationally and at home is stifling the creativity of the industry. At home there is, it should be noted, some space for experimental, even critical, low-budget film production, generally distributed straight to DVD. However, these films do not tend to find their way to the big screen, a far more rigidly controlled medium of exhibition (Zhou 2015: 240). Thus, they have limited impact on the mainstream industry and certainly do little to support the generation of the type of soft power we saw generated, for example, in the West German government's support for the

socially-critical New German Cinema in the 1970s. As Lauren Rivers asks in her analysis of the 2013 *Monocle* soft power rankings:

does all this monetary investment matter, when the global public need to accept your values and legitimacy? In the case of China, many argue that the crackdown on modern and radical expressions of Chinese art and free speech, muddled with the inability for countries to trust their values with communist overtones are posing serious obstacles to their influence, no matter how much they spend. (Rivers 2013)

Nonetheless, as we have seen, the influence of China *is* increasing, as is its impact on global film culture. And while in the West, and on the pages of *Monocle*, there is often discussion of the need for China to address human rights issues, in other parts of the world, particularly Africa, China has a great deal of influence, with the public's view of the country frequently aligning with the version of China found in recent Hollywood films. The nation's ability to support the development of the world's technical infrastructure is frequently seen as a collective good (Cooke 2009).

Of course, given the ever weakening economies of Russia, Brazil and South Africa, the slowdown in the growth of China was well as the political turmoil provoked by charges of corruption at the highest level in Brazil and South Africa, only time will tell if – or how long – the BRICS will remain a significant political grouping. Nonetheless, however global geopolitics continues to develop, and indeed however consumption patterns of audio-visual culture continue to shift as the technologies of distribution and exhibition continue to develop in the digital age, film culture, for the moment, remains a key asset as national governments and transnational groups vie for visibility and influence on the global stage.

This Special Edition of New Cinemas

This present volume has emerged from a project developed by the Centre for World Cinemas and Digital Cultures at the University of Leeds, funded by the Worldwide Universities Network and the AHRC and offers the first detailed exploration of the relationship between soft power and film culture across the BRICS, broadening the dominant focus in the current scholarly literature on the role of film as a soft power asset in China and India. We also seek to broaden the methodological approach to the discussion of soft power and film adopted by other scholars. This has, to date, been dominated by quantitative analysis and a focus on policy. Here one might mention, for example, the excellent work of Kaarle Nordenstreng and Daya Kishan Thussu (2015) or Hongmei Li and Leslie L. Marsh (2016). This work also tends to examine the wider media landscape of the BRICS, with only limited discussion of film culture specifically. In the articles collected together here, the authors, too, explore the impact of a policy focus on soft power across the BRICS. However, they are keen to go beyond this dimension, to examine three sets of interrelated questions:

- 1) How do the BRICS understand the role of film as a soft power asset and how is this reflected in the size, and shape, of their support for the industry?
- 2) How is public policy around soft power reflected in the types of films that are produced by, and in, BRICS member states? What does soft power ‘look like’? Do the film’s produced help to support the ‘national narratives’ the BRICS ostensibly wish to communicate? How do these film negotiate, or how are they shaped by, the competing imperatives of the global film industry?
- 3) How do BRICS films find an audience? What are the mechanisms of their consumption in the digital age? How do these mechanisms provide new

opportunities, as well as challenges, for both governments and individual citizens to reflect upon the nation's soft power potential?

In their analysis of Brazil, Stephanie Dennison and Alessandra Meleiro historicize the idea of BRICS, suggesting that we are now moving towards a post-BRICS moment. The authors highlight the multiple ways in which the country has sought to develop its international profile through film, discussing the competing networks within which the country is positioned beyond the BRICS. They then go on to examine the national elite's attempt to raise the country's profile internationally through its failed campaign to secure an Oscar nomination for the hagiographic biopic of the Brazil's former president Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva, *Lula: Son of Brazil* (Fabio Barreto, 2009). The Oscars also play a key role in Vlad Strukov's discussion of soft power and film culture in the Russian Federation. In a detailed account of the national and international reception of the film *Leviathan* (Andrey Zvyagintsev, 2014) Strukov explores what he defines as the national elite's construction of 'Manipulative Smart Power', through which the country seeks to raise its international profile, and authority, even as it is attacked by the Western media. In the process, Strukov explores how soft power operates differently at home and abroad, as well as the complex nature of soft-power generation in the digital age, focusing in particular on the ways in which internet pirates played a pivotal role in the debate generated by Zvyagintsev's film. The multifaceted nature of soft power, and particularly the tension between the ways in which it can play out at home and abroad is an important aspect of the argument of Ashvin I. Devasundaram's study of soft power and Indian film culture. Devasundaram highlights the huge diversity of Indian film culture beyond Bollywood, looking at the constructed nature of Bollywood as the international face of the nation on screen. Instead, he explores the growing

significance of small-scale ‘indie’ productions that are beginning to challenge the hegemonic position of Bollywood at home, even as they are often presented internationally *as* examples of Bollywood. Yanling Yang moves the discussion to China. She examines the contradictions at the heart of the country’s international film strategy, arguing for increased creative freedom at home in order to improve the attractiveness of Chinese films on the international market. Finally, Paul Cooke investigates the relationship of South African film to the national soft power narrative. Like many of the other contributors to this volume, Cooke highlights the tension between the role soft power plays domestically, as a tool for nation building, and the way it is used to position the country internationally. Again, the case of South Africa reveals the need for national elites to be willing to cede authority in the construction of the national narrative to cultural producers, if genuine soft power is to be generated. Cooke discusses, for example, the controversy surrounding the banning of Jahmil X.T. Qubeka’s thriller *Of Good Report* at the 2013 Durban International Film Festival as child pornography, which it clearly is not. In sum, it is the aim of this volume to investigate the competing pressures across the BRICS that shape the ways its members understand film as vehicle of soft power generation, exploring the role soft power plays along the industry’s entire value chain, from production to consumption, as well as the way it influences the types of films audiences around the world get to see.

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