

METRO in focus

Hollywood rolls out Red carpet

IT'S one of the most famous scenes in movie history. Hours before the Titanic sinks, Leonardo DiCaprio's Jack sketches his love Rose, played by Kate Winslet, in the nude, wearing only the Heart of the Ocean diamond. But when the film was re-released in 3D in China last year, viewers hoping to see a lot of Winslet were left disappointed. Chinese censors decided it was appropriate only to see the actress from the neck up. The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, the Chinese government branch which controls the content of all entertainment, deemed it harmful to 'building a harmonious ethical social environment'. While such judgments seem archaic to the West, the truth could be the opposite. As Hollywood is increasingly bowing to propa-

Hollywood is increasingly looking east in the search for bigger box office receipts but does the censorship which comes with Chinese cinema mean a compromise for artists and audiences? JENNI MARSH investigates...

ganda officials' tastes and codes. Already, 2013 has been a box office record breaker in China. You may not have seen Painted Skin: The Resurrection, but Wuershan's fantasy became the highest grossing Chinese film of all-time with the biggest domestic opening day gross ever. The record didn't last long, as comedy Lost In Thailand and action adventure Chinese Zodiac recently relegated the film to third place, while Stephen Chow's action comedy, Journey To The West: Conquering The Demons, took £8.2million in its first 24 hours and is on track to be China's most profitable film. And it's only February. In

China, multiplexes are mushrooming, with nine cinemas being built every day. There has been a tenfold increase in the number of screens in as many years (from 1,300 in 2002 to 13,000 by the end of 2012). There is still only one cinema for every 220,000 people in China, against 9,000 in the US. China has a population of 1.3 billion, with a burgeoning middle-class with money to spend on leisure activities. Hollywood has been quick to see the potential behind such numbers and is chasing the Chinese box office with great success.

13 minutes was cut from Men In Black 3 for Chinese audiences as it showed an alien disguised as a Chinese waitress

When James Cameron's film Titanic was released in 3D in China last year, censors cut part of the scene where Kate Winslet poses naked for Leonardo DiCaprio. Viewers only saw her from the neck up

A scene from James Bond movie Skyfall was cut in China because it showed the shooting of a Chinese security guard

China's movie box office increased by 31% last year to **£1.8bn**, making it a record year

Sources: China's State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, Chongqing Economic Times, Artisan Gateway

Last year, China's box office was dominated by foreign films after a February trade agreement was signed to allow more Hollywood movies to be screened there. But in order to get its films shown in

China, Hollywood studios must tweak storylines, sacrifice scenes and bypass any themes deemed potentially controversial for a Chinese audience, especially politics.

14 of these must be in 3D or IMAX

There are about **13,000** cinema screens in China. In 2002, there were 1,300

it was 40 minutes shorter after censors hacked out exposition sequences and 'passionate love scenes'. Even James Bond didn't avoid the cuts. In his latest outing, Skyfall, a scene in

which a French hitman shoots a Chinese security guard in the elevator of a Shanghai skyscraper lobby vanished. In addition, a conversation between Bond, played by Daniel Craig and a hostess (Bérénice Marlohe) in a Macau casino about prostitution is translated in Mandarin subtitles as a different, more sanitised, exchange.

In their bid to woo Chinese audiences, Hollywood studios are shooting scenes on location in China. Transporting their sets to Communist Party territory gives officials even more power over what directors can and cannot include in their films.

Rob Cain is a producer and consultant on cinema in China. Having once had a film in Shanghai temporarily closed down, he knows the importance of keeping censors in the loop. His crew had made a last-minute alteration to a scene, without realising someone on set was feeding information back to the Communist Party.

Despite the renewed interest in China from Hollywood, he says US film makers

still make movies for the West first and Asia is often an afterthought.

'Even though China is the second largest market in the world - and a very important one for Hollywood - studios still aren't getting a lot of money back there,' he said.

'The share they are granted from the box office is 25 per cent of the ticket price, rather than 50 per cent. So, even though China has big box office numbers, that equates to only half of what studios would get if it were another country paying the standard rates. As the market grows, that will change.'

One way studios can bypass the rough

ly stage, officials should be present on set and, preferably, favourable Chinese characters should be woven into the plot.

'There is a lot of frustration about the rules and censorship and hurdles and difficulties of getting a film made and distributed in China,' said Mr Cain. 'But there is also a fascination with the culture and the opportunity there.'

Just as Hollywood prowls on China's film business, the desire for financial gain seems mutual. Last year, Chinese property and entertainment group Dalian Wanda Group purchased the second largest theatre chain

in the US, AMC Entertainment, and announced plans to invest £6.6 billion in the company.

For Mr Cain, a Chinese company buying a US film studio would 'send shock waves through Hollywood'. He said:

rate for foreign films is gaining co-production status, which lets distributors yield 43 per cent of the ticket price. Kung Fu Panda 3, coming in 2016, has opted for this route, while Disney and Marvel went down a similar road for this year's Iron Man 3.

But co-production with a Chinese firm involves working in parallel with propaganda chiefs. Scripts must be submitted at an ear-

'It's feasible now that China Film Group, with its IPO [initial public offering], could be raising enough money to invest in a Hollywood studio.

'That would be a case where you have a company owned by the Communist Party having not just an influential role but a controlling role in a major cultural company in America. That raises a lot of questions.'

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Less than **5%** of Chinese films broke even in the first half of last year

303 movies were shown in China last year, 75% of which were domestic movies, accounting for 48% of total box office takings

Imax has **217** theatres which are open or will be open in China soon

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