

面对行业寒冬 影院并非只能唉声叹气

Zhou Junsheng: Faced With a 'Bleak Winter', Movie Theatres Can't Just Sigh

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Image: Welcoming back cinema goers
Source: china.org.cn

As the state of the epidemic situation in the country turns from critical to normal, tightly shut amusement zones like movie theatres, gaming arcades, etc. are also set to open, albeit with conditions. On 13th May, the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) in its press conference indicated that the movie theatres in low-risk zones may open by adopting the mode of advance booking and running on limited capacity. It also advised the cinema halls in medium and high-risk zones to keep their doors shut for the time being.



Image: Curtain rise again in Chinese cinema
Source: globaltimes.cn

China's film and television industry, especially the movie theatres, have been inflicted with heavy losses caused by the long-term ramifications of COVID-19. It is true that amid

the epidemic, the revenue of the majority of the businesses suffered a setback. However, the number of businesses still struggling to get back to their feet, who are still in a "tight lockdown", such as the movie theatres, are only a few. A few days ago, the writer of this article who lives in Shanghai, while passing by a movie theatre saw a movie poster pasted on its doors, announcing a movie which came at the end of the last year.



Image: Mulan (2020 film)
Source: en.wikipedia.org

Lashed by the rain and scorched by the sun, the superstars looked washed out and sullied. It is thus not difficult to infer that this phase must have been extremely arduous for the employees and operators of movie theatres, and how eagerly they must be looking forward to the "conditional unlocking".

We must however reckon that even though the movie theatres want to resume operations, they are still encountering a series of very real issues. According to the requirements of the China CDC, the movie theatres in the low-risk zones planning to restart their business must prepare themselves in six aspects. It is worth

mentioning here that the requirements in each aspect are quite stringent. At present, even though the epidemic may have been controlled in China, but world over the situation is still severe. In the face of the latent risk of the spread of the disease, these requirements do not seem exaggerated at all. Nevertheless, carrying out these requirements to the letter will certainly require the movie theatres to increase their expenditure. It may also require them to make large-scale changes in their existing infrastructure. For many movie theatres, going forward on the path to resuming their business, this may prove to be a “threshold” quite difficult to cross.

An even more real issue which looms large as a question mark upon the movie theatres is that even if they brace themselves to return to work, will they be able to attract enough number of audiences and ensure a certain level of box-office income.

When compared to the pre-epidemic phase, today the majority of the consumers will be extremely cautious about entering a space where they will be in close proximity to others. This sense of being vigilant is certainly not going to fade away any time soon. After all, for many “anxious” consumers, going to a movie theatre to enjoy a movie is not an “essential” need like food and clothing. Therefore, after the movie theatres will reopen, they will have to inevitably wait for a long time for the

audience to return. On 22nd March, five hundred movie theatres across zones lightly affected by the epidemic resumed business. However, as per the data, the average income of these movie theatres stood at a mere seventy-nine yuan that day. These early figures do not paint an optimistic picture of the business prospects of the movie theatres post their reopening.

But, the movie theatre operators cannot just hide in a corner and sigh in despair. Faced with this “bleak winter”, the operators can most certainly carry out new measures to save themselves. In the opinion of the writer, if the movie theatres want to survive, they might as well try taking a new road, diverge from the conventional way and find innovative ways to make spending on films become a part of the lives of the masses once again.



Image: 2020 Chinese New Year films
Source: chinafilmsinsider.com

During the ordinary days, the biggest advantage of the movie theatres was their specially designed immersive movie-watching environment. But at present, this very closed-door environment has become the biggest limitation for the movie theatres. Encountered with this special situation, the movie theatres

might as well move out of this closed-door environment and create a new space of movie-watching experience for the masses. Earlier, a few big shopping malls having been badly hit in the epidemic, developed the “online business” model and started delivering goods at the consumers’ doorsteps, achieving very good results. The key to success for these malls was them breaking away from the limitation of being confined in the space of the shopping mall and actively going amid the consumers. It is true that the movie theatres may not be able to “deliver” the movies at the doorsteps of the consumers, but they can come out of the Cineplex’s and go among communities. Through setting up special open-air theatres (OAT), they can make the audience once again come close to the art of cinema. This will not only enrich the cultural life of the residential communities, but will also help the movie theatres make some extra money.

For a very long time, movies have been the art form with the strongest mass appeal in our country. Many Chinese people have beautiful memories associated with movies. The havoc wreaked by the epidemic has caused the development of the movie industry to come to a halt, and it has also sapped the vitality of

those engaged with the functioning of the movie theatres. However, for the movie theatres, to be able to get out of the cineplexes and make the movies re-enter the neighbourhoods is something feasible, the results of which will be a social as well as an economic gain.

Summer is coming, bringing with it the most conducive external conditions required for screening an open-air movie in the night. Following all the rules and regulations, the movie theatres might as well make a move to have the community residents experience afresh, through the OAT which has a vibe of its own, the joys of cinema. (End)



Image: Chinese theatre studio in Hollywood
Source: dreamtimes.com

Series Editor: Hemant Adlakha

The views expressed here are those of the original author and not necessarily of the translator or of the Institute of Chinese Studies

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