



An Exploration of Hong Kong Movie Screenings In the United States in the 1980s and 1990s



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Introduction

- The research is a part of a big project about Chinatown Movie Theaters in North America. Theaters in North America screened Chinese-language films for diaspora audiences as early as the 1920s, yet the peak of Chinese-language movie theaters extended from the 1960s through the 1980s, as Hong Kong distributors disseminated Cantonese and Mandarin films on circuits through dozens of dedicated theaters in different cities of North America.
- Where previous research on the same topic mainly focused on theaters, this project focuses on visualizing the potential trends of films that were screened in those Chinese language theaters. We specifically examine four theaters in LA and NYC (Garfield, Sing Lee, Sun Sing, and Music Palace).
- With previous information and data about each theater and demographic region, the main objectives of this project are to identify the differences in film genres, as well as the release window for each film to provide further support or implications.

Research Questions

- Are there any differences in the genres of films screened in each theater?
- What is the release window for each film (between when a film is released in Hong Kong and when it was released in NYC/LA)? Is there a general trend or does it differ by region?

Methods

Data

- The dataset is collected from different Chinese language theaters that displayed hand-written records of each film screened and the information about each screening. After entering data using *Nodegoat*, the final dataset contained 645 entries of films in all four theaters.

Data Management and Procedure

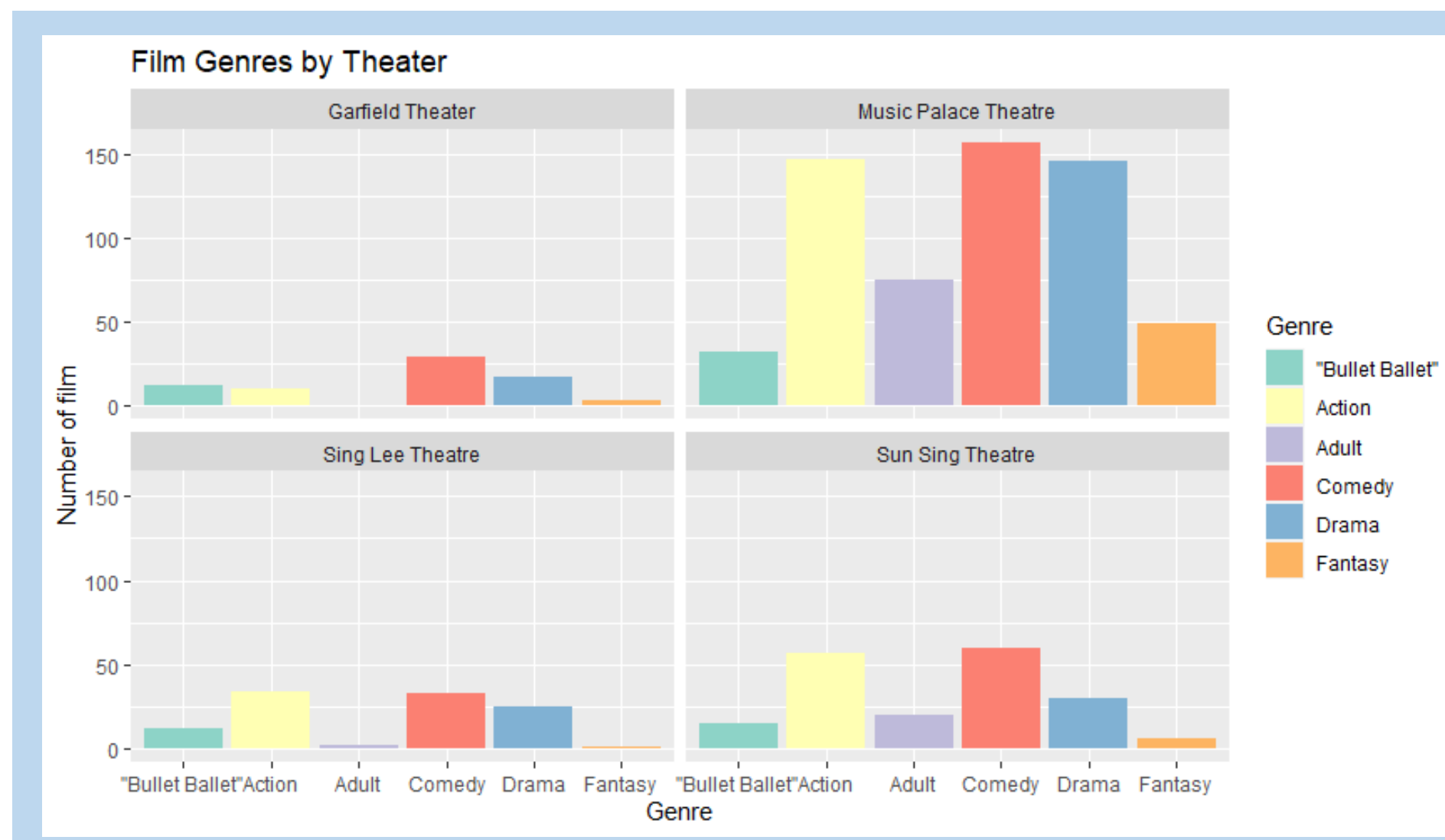
- Since the record of each theater varies and some variables may not be included for some theaters, I picked and dropped certain variables and generated summary graphics using *R*.
- By using *Google Looker Studio*, I converted my data into an informative interactive dashboard that allows data visualization.

Results

Link to Interactive Dashboard:

<https://lookerstudio.google.com/reporting/bc8178d8-2b79-4836-ba7f-8acc1000d1a5>

Figure 1. Selected genres of films screened by theater



- According to figure 1, with the exception of the **Sing Lee Theater** in LA which had slightly more **action** film screenings, **comedies** were screened the most. There is also a common pattern for all the genres selected in the graph.

- Figures 2 and 3 illustrate **trends** in release windows. The horizontal axis (`days_since_jan1_1988`) records the first screening date in the United States relative to Jan. 1, 1988, when the US screenings dates begin. The vertical axis (`date_diff`) records the number of days between the initial Hong Kong release date and the initial screening date in the United States.

Figure 2. Scatter plot of number of days between initial Hong Kong release date and initial screening date in LA

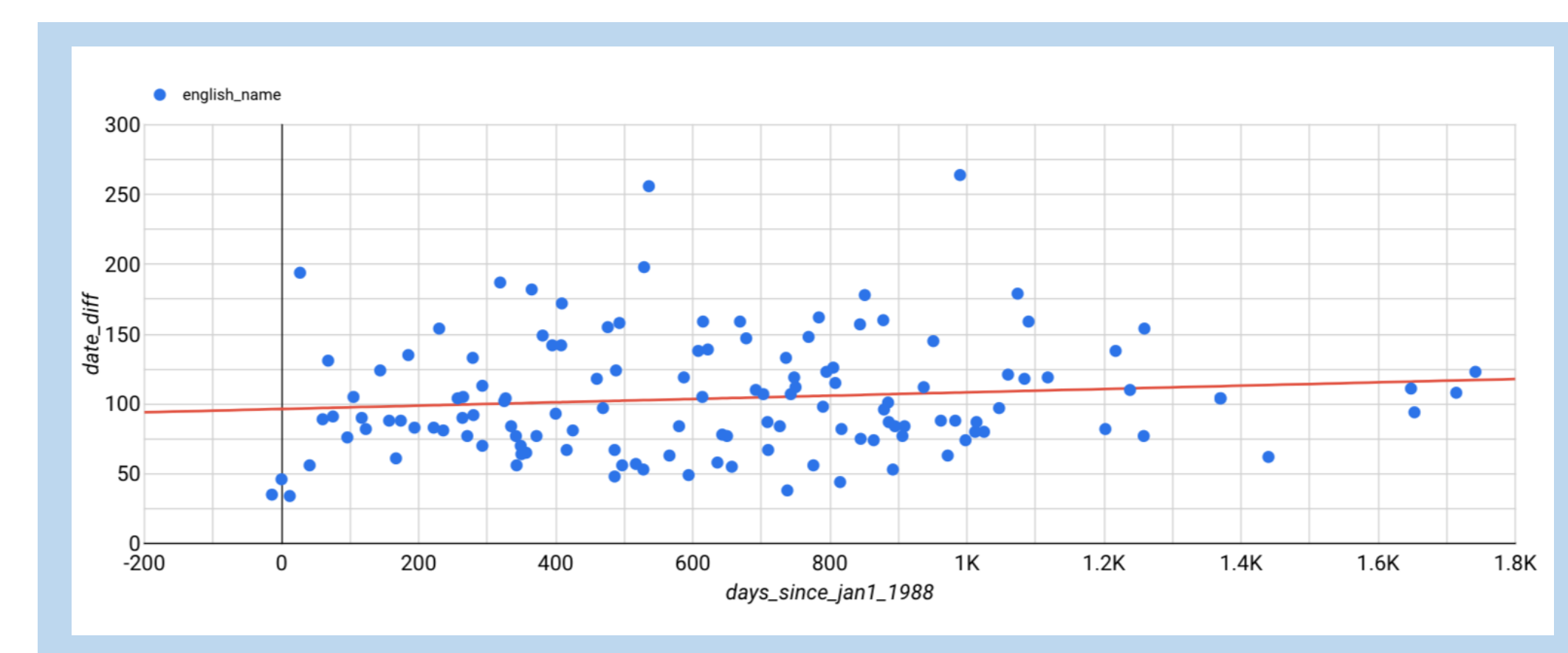
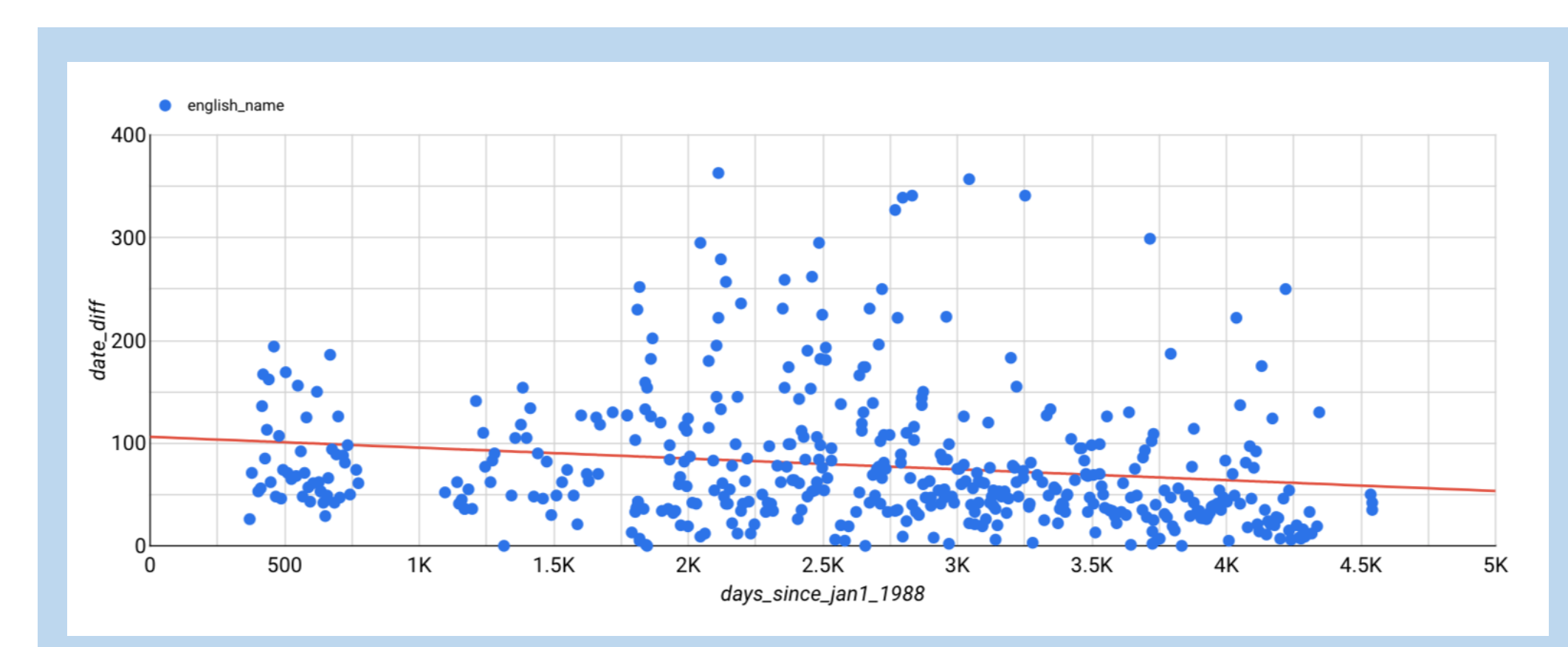


Figure 3. Scatter plot of number of days between initial Hong Kong release date and initial screening date in NYC



- Overall, most of the films screened in NYC had a release window of less than 100 days, whereas films screened in LA had a wider release window.
- For LA theaters, there is a **upward trend** which suggests that there is a larger gap for a film between first screening in Hong Kong and first screening in LA. Conversely, the NYC theaters exhibit the **opposite trend** in release windows.

Discussion

- The prevalence of comedies being screened and the consistent pattern among theaters is quite surprising, especially when considering the prevailing image of "martial arts" and "action" associated with Hong Kong films during that time period. However, one potential reason for the popularity of comedies could be their unique position within the film market, where many blockbuster films are comedies specifically chosen for holiday screenings. Furthermore, comedies often appeal to a broader target audience compared to many other genres, which contributes to their widespread popularity.
- While most films screened in NYC tend to have small release windows compared to LA screenings, this phenomenon can be attributed to NYC's role as the distribution hub for the film industry. Additionally, there might be instances where films are screened again after their initial release in the US, which could impact the resulting graph.
- Further research is required to fully understand the implications of these trends in the release windows between the two cities. It is essential to acknowledge limitations such as the relatively smaller number of theaters and missing data. To enhance the research's reliability, future investigations should consider incorporating more comprehensive data and information.