

The Role of Hollywood Films in American Soft Power

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Abstract: With the development of the film industry, the commercial footprint of the Hollywood film industry has expanded to the world. This paper mainly explores the role and negative impact of Hollywood films on the soft power of the United States, in order to explore whether the Hollywood film industry undermines or enhances the U.S. soft power. This paper studies the influence of American values displayed in Hollywood movies on its soft power through documentary analysis, case study, comparison analysis and other research methods. This paper shows that although Hollywood movies have some negative effects, they mainly have a stimulating effect on the soft power of the United States and improve the national image of the United States.

Keywords: Hollywood films, Soft power, U.S.A., Values

1. Introduction

Hollywood film industry is a world-famous film center, and the films produced here account for a large share of the global market. In the past, academic research on Hollywood film industry has focused on the narrative of Hollywood films, but few scholars have discussed the relationship between Hollywood films and American soft power. As a mass medium, the film is an important carrier to show the image of the state to the world, and Hollywood films have made huge profits while spreading on a global scale and exporting the U.S. national culture. From the perspective of the U.S. soft power, this article uses documentary analysis and comparative analysis to study the comparison of soft power and hard power, focuses on the role of Hollywood films in the SOFT power of the United States, and expounds on the film value disseminated by Hollywood films and the interactive relationship between the Hollywood film industry and the U.S. government. In addition, this paper also explores the negative impact of Hollywood films on the image of the United States from the aspects of violence, consumerism, and the dualism of good and evil. This paper will provide reference significance to the study of the relationship between Hollywood and American soft power, and provide some references to the study of the construction of the U.S. image.

2. An Overview of American Soft Power

Soft power was created in the early 1990s after the end of the Cold War. At this time, international relations and their future direction show uncertainty, and a large number of theoretical trends related to international relations and order have emerged in the international community. Soft power combines the context of globalization, fully adapts to the pluralistic connections between state or non-state actors. It is aware of changes in the way countries interact with each other. The theory of soft

power was first proposed by Joseph Nye, who argued that national soft power derived primarily from culture, political ideals, and policies [1]. In fact, soft power has many theoretical origins. Thucydides had pointed out the importance of "the power of ideas". Gramsci Antonio believed that cultural leadership could let social members identify with the culture promoted by the ruling class, and the ruling class will win political and economic leadership through it. Therefore, ideology plays a pivotal role in consolidating state power. By the time of Hans Morgenthau, he believed that the factors of national character and national morale will influence the power of the state, and determine the place of a country in international politics. In addition, diplomacy can effectively combine these factors, which affect state power, and provide power to a country [2]. These were theorized by Joseph Nye and called them "soft power."

Compared with hard power, soft power pays more attention to "attractiveness". While hard power can also create influence, soft power is attracted in a persuasive way. However, the role of soft power is often based on hard power. The strong hard power of the United States has provided a strong material guarantee for the implementation of its soft power and maintained its attractiveness for a long term, becoming the strongest soft power country in the world today. Beyond that, the strong attraction of soft power can also promote the development of hard power. The attraction shaped by the exchanges between cultural organizations will attract talents from other countries, bringing economic and technological benefits to the United States, and enhancing its hard power.

3. The Role of Hollywood Films in American Soft Power

3.1. Value Shaping in Hollywood Films

Hollywood film originated in the early 20th century. It has both business and cultural attributes. At present, Hollywood film occupies an important position in the world film industry, not only gaining a large number of fans from all over the world, obtaining huge profits, but also spreading American culture to all of the world, which has played an important role in enhancing the soft power of the United States.

On the one hand, Hollywood films reconstruct the image of the United States and highlight the power of the United States. Hollywood films actively promote American values to the world as a carrier [3]. In Hollywood films, American culture is highlighted in two main ways. Firstly, the individual heroism is shown in the film. It often tends to create a brave and strong hero who sympathizes with the weak. He/She will save the world and become the idol of the people. This character is often set up to represent the values of American culture that pursue personal values. Unlike the hero image shaped by other countries' films, American heroes often possess a sense of high morality and extraordinary abilities in the initial stages of Hollywood films [4]. In the face of difficulties, they tend to rely on their own strength to defeat their opponents, rather than relying on anyone's help. They are accustomed to independent thinking and taking their fate into their own hands. With the development of society, the core of the American hero gradually changed to "salvation". They always save the states and mankind when the world is facing a crisis. Such American heroes show the values of American self-improvement. Secondly, Hollywood films show the American Dream vividly. America declared independence from Great Britain in 1776. Now it has become the superpower in the world. The United States has undergone a rapid transformation from rural urbanization to urban industrialization. A large number of self-made Americans have achieved their dreams relied on their struggle. The American Dream has also accompanied the development of American independence and become the best embodiment of American values. In Hollywood films, the realization of personal value has nothing to do with class, gender, or race, anyone can achieve their dreams through personal struggle. The pursuit of life beliefs in the American Dream is an important part of American culture.

On the other hand, Hollywood films have established a mass culture mechanism for American influence and provided mass-level support for the consolidation and promotion of soft power. The hero in the film will make the audience feel substituted and give them psychologically satisfied. The impact of the American Dream is universal, it has nothing to do with gender or race. The values conveyed by Hollywood films can enhance the image of the United States, which let people willing to pay for the box office of Hollywood film. In addition, American films have made film genres more diversified by absorbing the cultures of other countries in recent years, so that they could be accepted and recognized by people all over the world [5]. Hollywood films, such as "Mulan", "Kung Fu Panda", etc., which show Chinese elements and Chinese traditional stories, promoted the box office of the Chinese market. Popular support for Hollywood films has fostered the spread of American culture around the world and promoted American soft power.

3.2. The Interaction between Hollywood Film Industry and the U.S. Government

Hollywood's filmmaking was influenced by its policies and the international situation, despite it has certain freedom. In fact, there has been a long-term interaction between the Hollywood film industry and the U.S. government. On the one hand, the Hollywood film industry can obtain strong support from the US government, including but not limited to funding, scientific and technological support. On the other hand, the U.S. government can obtain a series of positive images from Hollywood movies for domestic and foreign policy and political decisions. The good interaction between them has made the development of Hollywood film industry more rapid.

The development of the Hollywood film industry is inseparable from the support of the US government. Whenever Hollywood needs to open up the global market, the US government will often adopt a series of policy, diplomatic, economic and other support. The Hollywood film industry's cooperation with the U.S. government dates back to World War I. In the early 20's, movies became one of the ways of mass entertainment. In 1915, President Wilson realized the potential of the film industry under the persuasion of Carl Laemmle, who is the founder of Universal Pictures in Hollywood. Therefore, he vigorously supported the Hollywood film industry, combined with Wilson's "pacifist" stance, and made anti-war films such as "I was a Male War Bride" [6]. In recent years, the events of the 9.11 attacks have made the United States aware of the importance of public diplomacy, and the U.S. government has tried to raise the national image of the United States through the media. As a cultural medium, the Hollywood film industry plays an important role in spreading American values. As a result, the U.S. government has since ramped up its investment in Hollywood films and tried to use them as a tool for the spread of America's national image and ideology [7].

With the strong support of the U.S. government to the Hollywood film industry, Hollywood films have combined the political intentions of the U.S. government with film stories through artistic transformation to promote American ideology and policies. In the First Blood series, the Hollywood film industry sparked sympathy and admiration for the soldiers involved in the Vietnam War by portraying their positive image. But it ignores the injustice of the Vietnam War. The praise of American political ideas and institutions in Hollywood movies invisibly promotes American ideology and defends American hegemonism [8].

In fact, Hollywood films have gradually become an export tool for American values, even ideology, in the interaction between government and the market. Obviously, Hollywood's enormous influence has also succeeded in promoting American soft power. Hollywood films will become an important extension of America's global strategy in the era of globalization.

4. Negative Impacts of Hollywood Films on American Soft Power

Hollywood movies provide an effective way to publicize the state image of the United States, but the display of several elements of violence, consumerism, and the dualism of good and evil shown in the film has a negative effect on the state image of the United States.

The aesthetic of violence is a popular artistic expression in Hollywood films. In the beginning, the film plot was skillfully combined with violence, so that the audience had a new viewing experience. But in recent years, in order to obtain higher profits, Hollywood movies became more exaggerated in their depictions of violent crimes to attract audiences. The presentation of these plots has triggered the desire of some young people to imitate, and these people have become a factor of social instability. It can be seen that the performance of the film plot on violence and the social effects caused by it are extremely negative. This has affected the public's perception of American culture, which can easily lead to public doubts about the legal policies of the United States, and has a series of negative impacts on the soft power of the United States.

Consumerism is another distinctive feature of Hollywood films. To pursue more impactful visual effects, Hollywood movies often use gorgeous special effects and scenes. In addition, due to the rapid development of American society, people's consumption level has increased, and the concept of timely and happy consumption has been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. In the movie "Legally Blonde", the items used in the heroine's life are all brand-name brands, all of which reveal luxury. In addition, sports cars and famous brands in Hollywood films have become the standard. Such values exaggerate the lives of the American people, resulting in the deviation of the public's perception of the American people's consumption behavior.

The dualism of good and evil is an obvious character relationship construct in Hollywood films. Use superhero series of films as an example, such movies often set up a clear theme of good and evil binary opposition, reflecting the contest between them. In the end, good will triumph over evil. Although such a movie plot satisfies the public psychology, to some extent, the mindset of dualism is integrated into the movie plot. This is reminiscent of the isolation of U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War [9]. Although Hollywood films played an extremely important role in the export of American ideology during the Cold War, the cold war mentality is no longer able to adapt to today's international situation [10].

5. Conclusion

This paper discusses the role of Hollywood film in the soft power of the United States, from both positive and negative aspects. The author believes that although the portrayal of the image of the United States in Hollywood films has a part of negative impact, in general, its role in the soft power of the United States is mainly positive. Due to the impact of the coronavirus on the film industry in recent years, this article does not show relevant data such as Hollywood's global commercial value in recent years. In the future, scholars can conduct in-depth research on how to better present the state image in films to improve the soft power in China.

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