

# ***Symbiosis and Feedback Mechanism Between Fantasy IPs and National Cultural Symbols***

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**Abstract.** Against the backdrop of globalization and the rapid development of new media technologies, the inheritance, promotion, and development of national cultural symbols face both challenges and new opportunities. As a widely accepted and beloved cultural form, fantasy IPs can be integrated with the dissemination of national cultural symbols, enabling more effective cultural transmission and value extension. This paper takes three major fantasy IPs—The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit, the Marvel Series, and Harry Potter—as research objects to analyze the symbiotic logic between these IPs and national cultural symbols. Employing case study and literature analysis methods, this paper explores how fantasy IPs act as disseminators of national cultural symbols by examining the role of IP content in carrying cultural symbols, their dissemination methods, and the value impact of derivative creation. It also illustrates how national cultural symbols inject unique charm into the corresponding IPs, ultimately forming a symbiotic closed loop of "content creation—cultural dissemination—industrial feedback." For example, the Marvel film series has achieved the global narrative of American individual heroism, while the creation of related derivatives has further realized the commercial value of Marvel films. The research conclusion points out that the symbiotic relationship between fantasy IPs and national cultural symbols can achieve the mutual reinforcement of cultural and commercial values, which provides insights for tapping the expressive potential of localized symbols and promoting the dissemination of cultural symbols.

**Keywords:** Fantasy IPs, national cultural symbols, symbiosis, feedback mechanism

## **1. Introduction**

This study focuses on the context of globalization and the advancement of the internet. In this era, the inheritance, innovation, and promotion of national cultural symbols not only embrace opportunities for widespread dissemination but also confront challenges such as intense competition and marginalization in the global cultural market. As a carrier for cultural communication, fantasy IPs—with their cross-media narrative capabilities, youth-oriented communication formats, and technologically enabled immersive experiences—have long been a crucial force in spreading national cultural symbols.

Fantasy IPs enjoy immense popularity among the public. For instance, the magical world crafted in Harry Potter subtly integrates British chivalry and public school systems, while expanding into

derivatives like games and theme parks. The Marvel film series has promoted superheroes to a global audience while propagating American individual heroism. The grand worldview of *The Lord of the Rings*, deeply rooted in Norse mythology and religious contexts, not only gained massive popularity but also transformed the natural landscapes of its filming location—New Zealand—into cultural symbols of "Middle-earth." Fantasy IPs are not merely media for cultural communication, but also carriers of national culture and traditions.

This review takes successful Western fantasy IPs as research samples, adopts the literature analysis method, and combines relevant literature to systematically sort out the manifestations and development paths of the symbiotic mechanism between fantasy IPs and national cultural symbols. By analyzing how the three major IPs achieve the content integration, cross-domain communication, and industrial value enhancement of cultural symbols, it reveals the internal logic of their mutual empowerment. This work aims to provide a theoretical reference for future research and offer case insights for the IP-based practice of local cultural symbols. To achieve this goal, the author has reviewed relevant domestic and foreign literature, analyzed and refined the logic of their mutually promoting development by integrating the creative backgrounds, characteristics of the three major fantasy IPs, and cases of related derivative industries, and also identified some existing shortcomings.

## 2. Literature review

Existing research on fantasy IPs and national cultural symbols covers a wide range of areas. When it comes to the connection between fantasy IPs and cultural symbols, many scholars have contributed findings. For example, scholar Wen Yue pointed out that the "enlightened death" of Gandalf is an artistic representation of Odin in Norse mythology, embedding the Norse mythological concept that "death is not the end." Additionally, Sofi Hultin explored the link between characters in *The Lord of the Rings* and the concept of "evil" from a Catholic perspective.

In studies focusing on fantasy IPs' impact on regional culture and local tourism development, Alfio Leotta highlighted the role of *The Lord of the Rings* series in boosting New Zealand's local tourism industry. Abby Waysdorf and Dr. Stijn Reijnders noted the appeal of *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* at Universal Orlando Resort—its immersive experience settings attract countless fans to visit, take photos, and spend money there.

Regarding the influence of fantasy IPs on consumer culture and business development, scholars Sevgi Pilgi and Selami Özsoy studied Marvel films' effect on consumer culture. They pointed out that Marvel superhero films shape popular culture, while derivatives like Marvel toys, games, and theme parks turn hero images into daily consumption symbols. These products bring huge profits to businesses and, at the same time, strengthen global audiences' understanding of American culture. Chen Yijun argued that Marvel characters are not only role models in modern society but also successful cases of cultural integration and market economy demonstration. They successfully integrate into local markets while spreading American values, striking an emotional chord with audiences.

From the above studies, it is clear that existing research has recognized the connection between fantasy IPs and cultural symbols, their cultural connotations, their impact on tourism, and the commercial value of derivatives. However, most studies focus on only one aspect and lack research on the overall symbiotic mechanism. This paper will synthesize research literature from various fields to explore the symbiotic and feedback mechanisms between fantasy IPs and national culture.

### 3. Case analysis

#### 3.1. The integration of Middle-earth cultural symbols and their binding with New Zealand's regional culture

The creation of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* series is deeply rooted in Norse mythological and religious systems. Their core settings—such as the racial classification of "Middle-earth" (elves, dwarves, humans), heroic epics derived from Norse mythology, religious spirits, and the design of the One Ring (which echoes metaphors like "original sin" in Catholicism)—all reflect this foundation.

Scholar Wen Yue noted that Gandalf's heroic sacrifice in his solo battle against the Balrog, followed by his return to Middle-earth as a higher-ranked wizard in white robes, is an artistic embodiment of Odin's "enlightened death." This scene conveys the Norse mythological belief that "death is not the end." Importantly, this integration of cultural symbols is not a simple copy; instead, it uses the film's delicate storytelling to evoke emotional resonance among audiences [1]. Religious elements add complexity and depth to the characters in the original *The Lord of the Rings* novels. Sofi Hultin pointed out that the original works reflect the concept of "evil" from a Catholic perspective—examples include Sauron's fierce vengeful anger, Gollum's greed, and the fact that even "good" characters may be tempted by "evil." [2]. Yet it is precisely this complexity that makes Frodo's arduous journey with the Ring, his struggle against inner demons, and the efforts and sacrifices of the Fellowship of the Ring so compelling, resulting in the creation of vivid, flesh-and-blood characters.

If Norse mythology and religion are the "soul" of the IP, then New Zealand's geographical landscapes are its "body." The films successfully transformed New Zealand's natural scenery into a tangible carrier of "Middle-earth," turning geographical symbols into cultural ones: the idyllic vistas of Hobbiton mirror the tranquility of the "Shire," while the glaciers and forests of the South Island served as prototypes for "Mordor." This binding of regional landscapes with the fantasy IP endows New Zealand's natural symbols with more than just geographical significance—they are no longer merely "scenery," but are infused with emotional "sentiment." After the films' release, New Zealand's filming locations became "pilgrimage sites" for fans worldwide.

Alfio Leotta mentioned in his research that the New Zealand government used the films as a marketing tool for tourism promotion. After *The Lord of the Rings* premiered, 95% of tourists in 2004 were aware that the country was the filming location, and 9% were motivated to visit specifically because of the films. Between 2012 and 2014, following the release of *The Hobbit*, international tourism spending in the region around Hobbiton—the core filming site—tripled. This not only boosted the tourism industry but also integrated the films into New Zealand's national identity [3]. This symbiotic relationship forms a closed loop: Norse mythology and religious beliefs provide the IP with a spiritual core; New Zealand's regional symbols offer a tangible geographical carrier for the IP; and the IP's global influence, in turn, promotes New Zealand's national geographical symbols, enhancing their visibility and driving local tourism growth. The New Zealand government has also actively leveraged the popular Middle-earth IP—launching themed tourist routes and Hobbit-themed aircraft—to transform this fictional fantasy IP into a national tourism brand, offering visitors an immersive travel experience. Clodagh Walsh argued that the "pilgrimage nature" of film tourism strengthens the emotional bond between the IP and tourists, turning "Middle-earth" from a fictional cultural symbol into an experiential tourism product and further boosting New Zealand's national branding and tourism economy [4]. Through this IP, New Zealand's regional

symbols have gained widespread recognition, forming a positive cycle of IP popularity, tourism consumption, and cultural dissemination.

However, Alfio Leotta also expressed concern: New Zealand relies too heavily on foreign IPs like *The Lord of the Rings*. While such IPs have promoted tourism, their cultural core does not originate from New Zealand itself, leading to the marginalization of local cultures such as Māori culture, which fails to gain effective promotion [5]. New Zealand should balance the use of successful foreign IPs with the preservation and promotion of its local culture. It needs to shift from relying on a single IP to creating IPs rooted in its own traditional culture—this is essential to ensure the stability of its tourism economy and the promotion of its national cultural symbols.

### 3.2. Global cultural communication of the Marvel film series

The Marvel series takes "superheroes" as its core vehicle to disseminate American cultural symbols. Elements like Captain America's star-spangled uniform, shield design, and passionate motivational speeches before every major battle directly tie to American patriotism and individual heroism. In *Iron Man*, the imaginative technology, innovative spirit, and Tony Stark's identity as a genius inventor and successful businessman all reflect America's technological progress and commercial culture.

While retaining its core values, Marvel also actively adapts to the global cultural market by integrating localized elements to reduce cultural barriers. For example, *Shang-Chi* features Chinese martial arts, Chinese actors, and Chinese-style elements throughout the film. Yet the American core of "personal struggle" and "saving the world" remains a key spiritual anchor for all Marvel IPs. However, this presentation of cultural diversity has its limitations. Danyu Peng pointed out that although Marvel's character lineup showcases diversity in race and gender—creating well-known heroes like *Black Panther* and *Black Widow*—such portrayals are often superficial. They seem more like a cultural strategy to meet audiences' demands for multicultural representation rather than genuine, in-depth depictions [6]. To truly resonate with viewers from different cultural backgrounds, Marvel still needs to make greater efforts in equitable storytelling and cultural integration.

Marvel has promoted American consumer culture globally and achieved multi-layered dissemination of cultural symbols through its industrial chain model of "parallel universe films + Disney parks + derivatives". In terms of films, Marvel has built a multiverse where different film series break free from the constraints of standalone movies, forming a vast superhero system. Heroes with varied value systems converge to form groups like the *Avengers* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*, creating a collective image of American heroes. This not only strikes a chord with audiences but also subtly strengthens their recognition of American culture.

In offline economy, Disney theme parks offer immersive experiences—such as recreating movie scenes and having actors portray superheroes—allowing audiences to "step into" the movie world and enhancing their visitor experience. Research by Sevgi Pilgi and Selami Özsoy shows that Marvel's superhero films have influenced popular culture; people of all ages around the world enjoy these films and dress up as the characters during events like Halloween. Meanwhile, Marvel-themed derivatives—including toys, games, and theme park attractions—turn superhero images into daily consumption symbols. These products bring huge profits to numerous businesses while reinforcing global audiences' understanding of American culture [7].

Chen Yijun argued that Marvel characters are not only role models in modern society but also a successful example of cultural integration and market economy demonstration. While promoting American values, they have managed to integrate into local markets worldwide and evoke emotional resonance among audiences [8]. Through diversified development of its superhero brand, Marvel

has integrated into the global market and achieved worldwide commercial expansion. It has also driven the growth of fan economy and realized commercial value by developing derivatives based on its classic characters. This approach transforms abstract cultural values into tangible consumer goods, achieving a win-win situation for both commercial value and cultural communication.

### 3.3. The integration of the Harry Potter series with British cultural symbols

The Harry Potter series weaves British traditional cultural symbols into its magical world, blending fantasy with reality. The house system at Hogwarts—Gryffindor, Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Hufflepuff—takes inspiration from Britain's traditional public school system. This approach not only preserves the cultural core of elite education and respect for individuality in British education but also uses magical elements to help global audiences quickly understand and develop an interest in Britain's traditional educational model. As a core part of British culture, "chivalry"—defined by bravery, loyalty, and a sense of duty—is not conveyed through simple preaching. Instead, it is vividly portrayed through scenes that resonate with audiences: Harry's courage, Snape's sacrifice, and Ron's voluntary sacrifice during the wizard's chess game to ensure the team's progress. British regional and architectural symbols—such as King's Cross Station's "Platform 9<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" and the Gothic architecture of the University of Oxford and Durham University—are transformed into fantasy settings, endowing ordinary spaces with special meaning. This allows tourists to experience British regional culture through the interaction between reality and fantasy. Maria Manola and Fotini Maniou noted that the film series connects real British landmarks (such as locations in London and Oxford) with the fictional magical world. Leveraging fans' emotional attachment to the narrative and their "childhood dreams," it turns ordinary spaces into unique tourist destinations, drives the development of related industries, and forms a complete cultural and creative ecosystem [9].

The Harry Potter series also excels in derivative creation, building a multi-dimensional, immersive cultural communication system. In terms of offline experiences, "Diagon Alley" at Universal Studios highly replicates scenes from the films. Fans can step into Ollivander's Wand Shop to pick their own wands and taste butterbeer at The Three Broomsticks, bringing the magical world from the screen to reality as an experiential space. Abby Waysdorf and Stijn Reijnders mentioned that The Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando Resort creates a multi-sensory experience—engaging sight, sound, smell, and taste—to let fans immerse themselves in the fictional world. Its clever layout makes fans feel as if they have stepped into the magical realm, and the merchandise sold in the park is seen by fans as "tools to enter the wizarding world." The positive consumer experience encourages fans to pay for authentic products [10].

In terms of online communities, the reinterpretation of "wand culture" and "Quidditch matches," along with fan-organized events, continuously breathes new life into the film and novel content, keeping it "fresh." Fans do more than just consume IP products; through cosplay and fan fiction creation, they become "disseminators" of British cultural symbols. Margaret-Ann Simonetta stated that fans travel across borders to attend film set events and join global fan communities. Offline fan gatherings enhance fans' sense of belonging, meet their emotional needs, and strengthen their cultural identification with Harry Potter through community interaction [11]. The IP influence of Harry Potter has transcended the entertainment industry, exerting a significant feedback effect on Britain's cultural industry and tourism sector. It has driven the development of Britain's publishing, film, and cultural and creative fields, becoming a key vehicle for promoting British culture to the world. This communication method transforms British traditional symbols into popular cultural consumer goods, opens up markets, and achieves the simultaneous growth of both cultural and commercial value.

## 4. Discussion

In terms of communication, all three fantasy IPs leverage cross-media dissemination—covering multiple carriers such as films, novels, theme parks, and derivatives—to reach different audience groups. They also take advantage of their appeal to younger generations: by virtue of the inherent fun and imagination of the fantasy genre, they transform traditional and profound cultural symbols into content that young audiences are willing to accept, thus promoting national cultural symbols globally. Films, on-site check-in spots, theme parks, and derivatives help cultural symbols break through geographical limitations and reach a wider audience. All three IPs have achieved the coordinated development of culture and commerce through the path of "content creation—industrial derivatives—symbol value-added feedback". This symbiotic relationship provides important inspirations for other similar cultural industries. Dig deeply into the expressive potential and uniqueness of local cultural symbols, and extract their spiritual core. Combine them with currently popular genres like fantasy for innovation, and through IP operation, turn them from "traditional symbols" into "popular cultural consumer goods". Finally, realize a situation where culture nurtures IP and IP feeds back to culture in global communication.

Of course, attention should not only be paid to the creation of IP content, but also to the development of offline scenarios and the maintenance of fan communities, to achieve the goal of sustainable communication. By attracting consumers with rich and unique content and providing good follow-up experiences, the win-win situation of cultural value and commercial value can be finally realized.

## 5. Conclusion

By analyzing *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit*, the Marvel film series, and the Harry Potter series, this study finds that the three major fantasy IPs share a similar logic in their symbiotic mechanism with national cultural symbols. Local characteristic culture provides a unique foundation for the IPs. For example, Marvel's American individual heroism and the chivalry and public school system in the Harry Potter series inject a differentiated cultural core into the IPs, enabling them to avoid homogeneous competition and stand out among numerous IPs. In turn, the IPs provide high-quality communication carriers and follow-up innovation for cultural symbols. For instance, *The Lord of the Rings* has elevated New Zealand's regional landscapes into cultural landmarks; Marvel has transformed values into cultural symbols common to the world; and Harry Potter has revitalized traditional heritage and systems. Furthermore, the development of the cultural industry must be based on local culture, and should not blindly imitate foreign cultures. It is necessary to explore the particularity of local symbols and combine them with currently popular genres for innovative expression. This study provides valuable references for future research, offering insights for the development of similar IPs in the future. Future research should focus on how similar IPs can expand their audience through new methods, further enhance their reputation, and achieve innovation with the development of technology and the advancement of communication methods.

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