

Understanding of Cultural Imperialism under Media Globalization Context

Wan Su

Faculty of social science and humanities, Universiti Teknologi, Malaysia
dewcherry@qq.com

Abstract

The phenomenon of cultural imperialism has always been a subject of great concern in the field of communication. With the advent of the new media era, the phenomenon of cultural imperialism has not been alleviated, but has become more and more intense. This article will discuss the phenomenon of cultural imperialism under media globalization context, and critically explore the impact of cultural imperialism from the perspective of the world, developed countries and developing countries. Meanwhile analyze and understand the cultural imperialism from multiple standpoints.

Keywords

Cultural Imperialism; Media Globalization; National Culture; Media Market.

1. Introduction

With the proliferation of new media technology, audiences are gradually transferring to adapt to the increasingly emerging new media forms. More and more countries are accepting brand new foreign cultures from the whole world. When it comes to culture, it is always widely believed that media globalization has a link with cultural imperialism. People have been heatedly discussing if media globalization led to a deficiency of local culture and if cultural imperialism is a healthy phenomenon. Therefore, it is worthwhile to talk about the topic media globalization and imperialism. This essay will explain cultural imperialism and critically evaluate it with reference about media globalization. Effects of cultural imperialism for the world, the United States and the third world country will be discussed.

Media globalization is mainly shown in these following aspects, from which it can be seen how media globalization acts on cultural imperialism:

1. The globalization of media forms.

Through the new technology of media, more and more people in the world are connected and become global audiences. From a global perspective, the numbers of television rise from 192 million in 1965 to 873 million in 1992. Even in Amazon jungle, TV antenna can be found. In addition to TV, video cassette recorders also have played a role in media globalization. (Alvarado, 1988; Boyd, 1989). Not to mention the popularity of Internet technology and those new media forms. Audiences now can receive information all over the world by this various media forms easily. It is no longer difficult to know about an exotic culture even though the audience has never been abroad. This convenience also has its negative side. People from those relatively not well-developed countries might be affected deeply by strong cultures from strong countries. The inequality of countries' developing level may lead to cultural imperialism.

2. The globalization of the media companies.

The most obvious example is Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch's News Corporation owns 789 enterprises in 52 countries around the world, including television channels, newspapers, magazines, book publishing, movies, network companies, from the U.S. to Canada; Australia;

Europe; Latin America and Asia. Including dozens of 132 media outlets, 132 newspapers such as the newspapers British "The Times", American "The New York Times", Australia "The Australian", his radio waves have been covering 1/3 area and 2/3 population of the world (Curran, 2005). Since the headquarters of Murdoch moved to the United States, no one would be able to distinguish whether it belongs to Australia or the United States. If we say that the globalization of the 20th century is the era of economic globalization, then the globalization of the 21st century can be seen as the world of media moguls. The quick development of global media companies provides an advantage for the expansion of cultural imperialism. Because of the enormous profit and some other factors, most countries cannot decline the spread of foreign media companies in their countries.

3, The globalization of the media market.

The improvement of media technology has provided the technical possibility for the worldwide circulation of media contents. The globalization also is reflected in media resources. More specifically, cultural resources from various parts of the world have been excavated and transformed to cultural and recreational merchandises. For instance, the ancient Chinese legend "Mulan" and French story "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" appeared in Hollywood films and released all over the world. While people are talking about their own cultural characters, they might find some changes of their national heroes happen in the screen. This is a subtle means of cultural imperialism. The headstream of the new culture is secretly influencing people. From these points of view above, it is not difficult to find that media globalization promotes cultural imperialism because of the progress of technology. New technological revolution has considerably boosted the development of new media forms. The famous Canadian scholar Marshall McLuhan (2001) applied the idea of technological determinism to the social cultural analysis and raised the concept 'global village'. Invention and popularity of the TV makes any event that happens in any corner of the world can be quickly presented in front of the audience. Advances in technology and the emergence of the "global village" have made the dissemination of information achieved the fastest speed ever. The problem is, this "high-speed", and "large number" of information dissemination power are held in the Western powers - especially the hands of the United States. Cultural imperialism can actually be seen as an influenza that covers the whole world, and the pathogen is the United States. It seems that popular cultural forms can be thought came from the West, and, in fact from the United States (Moran and Keane 2006; Sparks 2007). The voice of the developing countries cannot reach Americans, yet the voice of the United States can spread all over the world. This will be concretely discuss later.

2. The Interpretation of Cultural Imperialism

The term cultural imperialism firstly emerged in the 1960s (Tomlinson, 1991) and then after 1970 people start to research it (Hamm and Smandych, 2005).

In terms of its definition, Porter (1997) believes that both of the terms "culture" and "imperialism," are notoriously difficult to define, not to mention they are tied together now. This term has an uncertain range. There are varies versions of definitions can be found. The following version is closer to the main idea of this essay.

Lee (1988) defines it as " the process in which the ownership and control over the hardware and software of mass media as well as other major forms of communication in one country are singly or together subjugated to the domination of another country with deleterious effects on the indigenous values, norms and culture."(P.69)

Although Criticisms of cultural imperialism theory is always believe that this phenomenon is worrying and media globalization has brought many drawbacks to local cultures, Tomlinson(1991) argues that using "media globalization" to express "cultural imperialism" is not right. He advocates that the media is neutral, which is not the core of modern culture, during

its dissemination process it does not have ideological characteristic. Those research that often criticize the perspective “media globalization lead to cultural imperialism” will eventually retreat to the political, economic and institutional aspects, rather than the research of culture itself. He thinks the audience is active, so that media will not passively dominate “active audience”.

3. The Evaluation of Cultural Imperialism

3.1. Negative Side

1. As for the world:

Mouzelis (1999) holds a perspective that views cultural change as the consequence of external force, which causes a conception of the modern world history, west already has a deep influence on global culture so that modernity can be seen as Westernization. More specifically, it is true that movie *The Titanic* is an American film which is not produced in Uganda or Vietnam, which means that Hollywood films always have more powerful influence than Vietnam and Uganda do. Therefore, it can be understood that culture such as film and television, usually emanates from strong cultural producers, which in particular means countries like United States (De Bens and de Smaele 2001). Cultural imperialism led to the result that strong cultural producers promote their cultures to the whole world, for example, American TV shows, Music, Hollywood movies are spread of every corner of the world. Western popular cultural mode has impacted on each nation’s traditional culture. Various damages happened to ethnic cultures in the world. Regarded cultural imperialism as a symbol of Western cultural hegemony is the main perspective of interpretations.

Cultural aggression is an important form of hegemonies and colonial aggression to many countries from developed Western countries. By their strong political, economic, scientific and technological strength, they convey the culture with potential ideology, in order to achieve their ambitions of cultural conquest; complete dominance to other countries – especially the third world countries in the spiritual realm. Cultural imperialism has powerful expansion and penetration, which brings a huge shock to the third world countries; erode the cultural identity and quality of the national culture of the Third World countries and ruin the internal value system of them. People in the Third World countries may lose their sense of cultural belonging and identity; as well as personality and quality of the national culture in the process of modernization. Cultural imperialism is a powerful tool of developed Western countries to promote their cultures, it makes many nations not only in economy, science and technology be dependent to foreign cultures, but also makes them vulnerable and short of right to speak in international communications. These characteristics and the negative impacts that hegemonic cultural imperialism presented should arouse a high degree of vigilance and preparedness by the third world countries people.

2. As for the United States.

As a main source of popular cultural products, the United States can be seen as the lead and the final beneficiary of cultural imperialism. However, there always are some disadvantages to this media overlord. Although the United States has successfully promoted its culture all over the world as they used to promote its fast food, the fast food culture propagation is a temporary phenomenon rather than immutable. It cannot leave a deep imprint in people's beliefs, values, or behaviors since most people care about the fundamental differ from the sense of national identity. People go to McDonald's, KFC to eat hamburgers or buy Levis jeans, or even watch Disney cartoons – all of these can be seen as a kind of cultural behaviors, but it is still limited to a particular tradition in mind and behaviors. People do not tend to see surface civilization of culture as a rival to the national identity, hardly can their mind be controlled by American fast food culture. An ultra example is the “9 .11 “ event, those fanatical terrorists who planed this

event also learnt English and Western technology, but this did not change the fact that they used these abilities as a means to carry out terrorist activities against the United States. Many short-lived fashions in the United States did not change the base of those culture recipients. A point that cannot be ignored is localization usually demonstrates in a comparatively formulaic fashion, which does not have a profound influence to people (Machin and Van Leeuwen 2004; Pieterse 2003). Machin and Van Leeuwen (2004) also raised an example that McDonald's might have a special menu in a certain country. The emphasis on localization on that menu are not obvious – food variety, speed, efficiency and delivery procedures – are essentially universal in everywhere, this lack of distinguishing feature cannot leave people a deep impression. Another example to illustrate this formulation is we now can see HSBC's advertising everywhere in Heathrow Airport. They call themselves “the world's local bank” – which fit its campaign slogan “never underestimate the importance of local knowledge”. They even make their loans' slogan “offered in accordance with Shariah [Law]” since there are a lot of Muslims live in the UK. However, these slogans were originally made in America and the formats are more important than contents (Morley, 2006). This can prove that some American cultures try to integrate in local culture, but they are just too superficial and formulary to shake the real local culture.

In fact, even a lot of Americans understand that there is a vast difference between American popular culture and their real lifestyle. Fast food culture also is an instrumental part of the culture, which can only generate a surface effect in a considerable extent. Another example happens between the United States and Canada. Because of the impact of the American recreational culture, these two countries with different historical experiences and cultural heritage seem to produce a surface similarity. However, these two countries still hold different views on the modernization and changes. Canada is built in coexistence of two different cultures - English-speaking Protestants' culture and French-speaking Roman Catholic culture. The latter is used to repel the adventurism of American culture. Canadians always are against the American foreign policy (Benedict, 1934), such as the war of Vietnam and Iraq. Although the cultural exchange between the United States and Canada is closer than which between the United States and other countries, the culture of the United States does not have a tremendous impact to Canadian traditional culture.

3. As for Third World countries:

Steven Roach (2005) argues that we should view cultural autonomy as an internal dimension of making international human rights norms. To develop the degree of human rights in a country, culture is a part that cannot be neglected. Therefore, as for those third world countries that are not strong enough to resist foreign culture, it is significant to find back their own civilization as the mainstream culture.

As Dunch (2002) points out, American cultural products deeply affect the masses. They have shown a sign of an emerging homogenized world culture of capitalist consumption, and the third world's revolutionary potential is controlled by Western media corporations. As for local culture, cultural colonialism does not change or hybridize culture, make the culture deficient (Achebe and Lindfors, 1997). For third world countries, Cultural imperialism can be seen as a penetration and control system of the cultural lives of the people who live under the role of Western culture, it can remodel the oppressed people's values, thoughts, systems and identity, make them obey the imperialist class's interests.

Usually in these countries, over the past few centuries, the church, the education system and public authorities in the name of God or theocratic principles of indigenous instill obedience and allegiance into people's mind. While these traditional means of cultural imperialism is still valid, the new modern technology-based tool for imperialist control has been increasingly noteworthy. Today, the media globalization plays a crucial role to control the third world people's mind. Cultural imperialism is like a kind of hypodermic needle which effect in the values reflected in cultural products, for example, in Hollywood films, Americans show

themselves into local and national cultures and effectively affect them (Morris 2002; Sepstrup 1989). In today's world, Hollywood, television station and Disneyland are much more effective than Vatican, the Bible and public speaking politicians. Therefore, cultural imperialism with the new media technology in the background of media globalization is like a strong, irresistible power for third world people, which controls people by a gentle but more effective method. Due to this reason, while the modern development of economy, politics happening in these third world countries, the real progress of ideology is still impeded.

Furthermore, cultural infiltration is closely linked with the political, military control and economic exploitation. According to Petras (1993): "United States cultural imperialism has two major goals, one economic and one political . . ." United States military supported the Central American politics in order to ensure their own economic interests. These behaviors are often accompanied by strong cultural infiltration. Escapist fantasy of television programs broadcast "another world" to the third world. People can be affected easily when they see a different cultural world on television. Cultural infiltration can change people's mind, repress them by a non-military means away of the war machine.

3.2. Positive Side

1. As for the world

The objective existence of cultural imperialism and the modern development of the ethnic culture is not decided by people's will, if the theoretical research just keep viewing the cultural imperialism as a form of Western cultural hegemony and simply criticize it, this interpretation is not critical.

Traditionally, the criticism of cultural imperialism has been described by the term "cultural domination". However, thinking about the problem by this way has shortcomings. First, a significant background of cultural imperialism is the situation of the cultural modern development, which makes some researchers' criticism of cultural imperialism easily transferred to the criticism of the cultural modernity. This thinking mode may make some reasonable elements of the cultural modern development be obscured, if not handled properly, this drawback will probably affect the modern process of ethnic culture. Secondly, this theoretical study mode has ignored that ethnic cultures can incorporate other cultures with diverse natures. There is no end in the development of ethnic culture.

In the history of the modern development process, it is necessary for cultures to actively integrate into the trend of modern development. Excluding their own development from the modern society and resting on their laurels are worthless. Media globalization has provided a convenient situation to people to explore the world. People nowadays can hear, can read and can see, they understand the world from a new perspective by media. Mass media brought a much less costly way of communications so that more people can participate in communications with foreign cultures (Sparks, 2007). In this new media age, no one can be thoroughly isolate from the outside. To participate in various cultural exchanges, media globalization plays a dominating role. For countries, the developing mode that is lack of communication cannot win the healthy development of the ethnic culture. This conclusion was proved by countless historical facts. Therefore media globalization has brought communications to people all over the world, and cultural imperialism has pushed them to face up to chances and challenges.

2. As for the United States

Although some certain countries are related to cultural imperialism, the United States is always the key country in this process. In fact, American entertainment commodities and cultural images - in which it aims to the dominant position of the whole world, keeps the main frame of reference of cultural imperialism (Emile G. McAnany and Kenton T. Wilkinson, 1992).

The United States has always been a country that pursuit of material and pay attention to the practicality. Cultural imperialism helps it to fulfill this "American dream" through a media way. After the 20th century, with the rise and prosperity of the United States, no matter jazz country music, rock music, Hollywood movies, TV programs or social websites, all of these proves the United States are leading the trend of world culture. For instance, as a symbol of global pop culture, music television (MTV) is known founded in the United States, as well as its formats, which are also first produced in the United States (Chalaby 2006; Jones 2005). It cannot be denied that the 20th century's most representative direction of the modern mass culture is the United States. According to Barnet and Cavanagh (1994)'s statistics, In Brazil, although people speak Portuguese, nearly 3/4 of the radio songs are sung in English. In German, approximately 80% of the songs radio stations played were English songs. In Japan, about half of the songs were in English. Furthermore, not only pop music has caught people's heart, another main way of the popular American culture's expansion is Hollywood movies. In European Union countries' cinemas, 54% - 92% movies were American movies in 2001, while European movies accounted for only 3% in the United States movie market (Barnet and Cavanagh, 1994). Hollywood movies not only coordinate with the American government's cultural diplomacy; propaganda of political civilization in the United States but provides the most vivid pictures of American modern life. It can be found that the United States has already successfully planted their cultural seed all over the world, and thanks to the rain of media globalization, they have achieved a plentiful harvest.

3. As for the third world countries,

Although traditionally cultural imperialism is seen as a huge threaten to third world countries, there still exist some arguments. Tomlinson (1991) argues that this theory has ignored the tension of the national culture. The effects of cultural imperialism to third world countries have double sides. It is true that the cultural imperialism caused a great shock to the development of ethnic culture in the third world countries, the negative impact is obvious; On the other hand, cultural imperialism plays a significant role in the historical process of ethnic culture's modern development in the third world countries. Facing with the powerful expansion and penetration of cultural imperialism, people in the third world countries have produced a strong anxiety towards ethnic cultural identity. It virtually inspired their love and cherishes of their own national cultures, as well as led to an introspection of their drawbacks and then people start to seek the modern development of their national culture. Each ethnic culture has its inherent developing logic of culture, modernity brings them a situation of cultural diversity and richness of history, so that they have more freedom to choose, to build their own cultural development. These more frequent, more intense, more symmetrical, more comprehensive interaction caused an increasingly rise of the national civilization's identity. More and more countries actively pay attention to their histories and traditions to seek their own cultural personalities. In this case, it can be understood that exotic cultures lead to a revival of local culture. For example, since the foreign fast food such as McDonald's and KFC from the U.S. entered Japan and India, the local traditional restaurants also set up their own fast-food sub branches, Japanese and Indian food found their vitality again by this chance. The American cultural export convened local residents together to protect their cultural continuity in non-Western societies. Said (1993) argues that there's resistance when there is oppression. Although nowadays cultural imperialism is eroding a lot of countries' national cultures - especially the third world countries, yet simply advocating to protest and ignore the fact of the gradual modernization; denying the historical process of globalization by an acrid view is also not a reasonable way. This kind of cultural strategy is a narrow ideological closure, which often advocates national cultural superiority and uniqueness of the national culture, excludes other foreign cultures, even the integration of the nation's own culture is regarded as the characterization of cultural colonialism. This is obviously not helpful for the construction of culture in the new century. Said

(1993) argues that As long as we do not stand on the end of history, as long as we have the ability to do something for the history of our present and future, no matter we live inside or outside of the world's political center, our future is full of hope.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, media globalization has brought the opportunity to each nation to show their own cultures, and enrich themselves in communications with other cultures. However, due to the inequality of each country's cultural power, there is always colonialism and imperialism. Only by exposing the national culture to the world can people expand their shares of development in the international flow into the globalization system. It can be seen from the essay that cultural imperialism does not only have disadvantages to no matter world or the United States or the third world, it is a double-edged sword, any country is well advised to make use of its merit and avoid its harmful side.

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