

Cultural Imperialism

Morley, D. "Globalisation and Cultural Imperialism Reconsidered: Old Questions in New Guises" From Curran, J. and Morley, D. (Eds) Media and Cultural Theory. New York, Routledge, 2006, pgs. 30-43.

Technology has now created the possibility of a global culture. The Internet, fax machines, satellites, and cable TV are sweeping away cultural boundaries, and have increased the speed and reach of communication worldwide. In the reading, *Globalisation and cultural imperialism reconsidered*, David Morley examined the core problems of the cultural imperialism by questioning new disguises. The study aimed to reflect recent debate about globalisation in an older discourse, which explained the issues of media imperialism, the free flow of information, the possibilities for a 'New World Information Order' and the dangers of what used to be called as Americanisation. Morley approached to state his argument by tracing some of the themes of classical debate about cultural imperialism and the various critiques of this approach, and identify some problems with it. The study reveals four significant issues and limitations of cultural imperialism; the complexities of flows in international communication, the recent strategy of 'glocalisation', the effects of 'cultural protectionism' and the impact of 'active' audiences on media. Although those new recent criticisms recognised that the international communication and media flows became now more complex than the past, and seemed to bring the 'new' model of the cultural imperialism, Morley justified that the United States is primarily still the most powerful media provider in the complex society. He achieved to provide the several critiques of cultural imperialism, and clearly identified what the recent problems and limitations concerning cultural imperialism are. However, this paper will also argue that Morley's conclusive argument—the central power still remain in the United State—is far less convincing since there is lack of sufficient evidence, and some evidences will be provided to oppose his argument.

The critics have started to concern about the change of the original model of cultural imperialism due to the complex flow of media. Morley quoted the idea of Americanisation from Schiller: "*today's world market economy has evolved from, but retains the central characteristics of, the original American pattern*" (Morley, p33, 2006).

However, this one-way media, where America still dominates the international trade in media, has changed by the introduction of the counter-flow. For instance, the counter flows which describes the flows of products, culture and media such as films or TV programs are not only from the traditional way from the United States, but also from other parts of the world such as Indian films and Japa-

nese manga. This argument could be intensified by the additional research of culture. According to Mia Consalvo, in her book, *Console video games and global corporations: Creating a hybrid culture*, she stated that the culture does not flow down a one-way street, and the growing spread of pan-Asian culture is one indicator of how transnational culture can move in many directions even into the 'dominant' nation of the West, the USA (Consalvo, p118, 2006). At the same time, Tomlinson explained

'Culture reminds us, is mobile rather than static, and has always sought the influence of whatever is new, different, 'foreign', or strange...this is how culture continues to grow and adapt' (Tomlinson, p102, 1999).

In addition, my case study of the Japanese manga artist, Osamu Tezuka, illustrates how the media flow not only comes from the United States, but also from other parts of the world. Perhaps the most influential Japanese manga artist, Tezuka, admits that he was greatly inspired by the animation work of Walt Disney, which was introduced into Japan from the United States, and the Disney style is clearly reflected in his work. Japanese manga, which were further developed into anime, have now also found an audience with American children and young adults through such shows as *Pokemon* and *Spirited Away*. Therefore, this cultural exchange from one nation to another nation has been generated throughout the world, and this development has changed the traditional one-way media flows.

Morley clearly identified problems that follow the policies of 'cultural protectionism'. The term, 'cultural protectionism' is defined as *"designed to defend indigenous cultures against their corruption, pollution or destruction by foreign elements"* (Morley, p36, 2006). At this point, questions are raised; how do we define 'pure' culture? How far back in history do we have to go to find the pure elements to define 'culture'?. By looking at several past critiques, Morley reached to the point that there is threat of cultural identities, which describes that some countries are placed to make their own identities by demanding 'foreign' products or 'foreign' culture, especially from the United States (Morley, p37, 2006). He successfully demonstrated his argument by tracing some examples such as the international musicians like Youssou N'Dour and Orchestra Baobab. However, another study has shown that although the USA is the dominant exporter of television programs, these programs have been shown at late night and weekend (Toynbee, p200, 2000). Most importantly, *'71 percent of the top 10 programs in 60 countries were locally produced in 2001'* (Toynbee, p200, 2000).

These movements prompt to more complex consideration of how culture changes as it is caught up in global flows of commodities, and suggests how a seeming 'unstoppable' US culture can be stopped.

In addition, Morley discussed the original theory of media imperialism, which is the problem of 'active' audiences, yet further explanation must be undertaken. He again used the quote from Schiller, stating '*media necessary have straightforward, predictable and automatic effects on their audiences*' (Morley, p39, 2006). Since people have ability to interpret the text what they consume, for example from TV, they interpret the text differently. The producers of that TV program cannot extrapolate how the audiences interpret the TV program. It is important to aware that Morley used example of Aboriginal communities who reinterpret *Dallas* in terms of providing old question in new guises in successful way. Nevertheless, when he explained this problem by tracing two different discourses; 'consumer sovereignty' and 'glocalisation from below', introduced by Thomas Frank and Ulf Hannerz, he failed to provide adequate explanation of how those two discourses could be understood, which could lead the deeper understanding of his argument.

Moreover, in Morley's argument of glocalisation, several limitations and the lack of sufficient evidences should be considered when interpreting his core arguments in the reading. The further research of a Japanese game developer, in terms of providing how this developer could be successful in global market, should be one of the strong contradictions to his central argument. Morley pointed out that the one of the limitations of the original mode of cultural imperialism is the omission of 'glocalisation'. What 'glocalisation' means is the successful global transfer of products to different localities, by making modifications for such variable as culture, language, gender or ethnicity, rather than selling the standardized products (Morley, p35, 2006). Morley used the example of MacDonal'd's, questioning why different hamburgers are sold in Australia and America. However, he summed up his paragraph by stating that the varieties of products are still modeled from American products (Morley, p36, 2006). Nevertheless, the readers are not convinced by what Morley believes because there is not enough supporting arguments and sufficient evidence to clarify his argument. At the same time, his main argument could be opposed by using one of the most successful Japanese game developers as an example. Square Enix, along with other major Japanese game developing companies, has successfully created cross-cultural products. Concalvo empathized that the most important reason that Square Enix has been so successful in the American market and some other

foreign locales because of the sophisticated localization (Concalvo, p120, 2006). From these points, it can be observed that the localization process will continue to be necessary for products that cross nations, as long as the world remains multilingual and consist of various cultures. Also, it is important to note that the Square Enix, has become so widely welcomed in the United States because of the effect that Japanese culture has had on the American (Concalvo, p120, 2006). Therefore, while Morley argued that there is increasing number of products that are modeled on American ones, there are still successful companies such as the Japanese game developers in the American market, which has been providing 'Japanese' modeled products to the rest of the world.

In summary, it has to be admitted that the Morley's final justification in the reading; the United States is primarily still the dominant media provider in the complex media circulation, is still far from being convinced. This is because there is lack of sufficient information to support his argument, and the further explanation must be undertaken. Moreover, some evidenced were found to contradict his argument such as the successful Japanese game developer, which can clarify how other nations can provide non-American modeled products to the rest of the world. Despite some deficiencies, to the extent that the Morley attained to examine the recent problems and limitations of cultural imperialism by providing the various critiques, and the study has revealed four significant issues of cultural imperialism by asking the old questions in new guises.

Bibliography

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