Q. How had Hollywood achieved international dominance for its products in the years since the Second World War?

‘Hollywood is a place you can’t geographically define. We don’t know where it is’ (Bordwell et all, p111, 1985).

Today, Hollywood is seen as a world dominant film industry. Hollywood films are everywhere as people from any parts of the world can easily access Hollywood films in their local cinemas or movie rental shops. Toward the end of century, this cultural phenomenon becomes truer than ever. This essay aims to discuss how Hollywood had achieved international dominance for its products in the years since the Second World War. An encouragement of reorganization of film industry just after the Second World War made Hollywood possible to collaborate with television, which was the start of expansion of their product to the world. Followed by this, the extension of their vertical integration into new media markets on to global scale was the effective strategy for Hollywood film industry to occupy the dominant position in the world. Another significant issue of the Hollywood dominance is the emergency of globalisation where cultural ideas can flow freely across nations. Under such free flow of cultural ideas, Hollywood cultural imperialism is built on an effective appropriation or copyright of transnational ideas. Therefore, this essay will argue that Hollywood has been developing its dominance by succession on the innovation of television as well as the emergency of globalisation, particularly from the effect of the free flow of cultural ideas across the nation.

Hollywood entered recession after the Second World War, and this is the time to reorganize their film industry. The causes of the decline of the Hollywood film industry are due to dramatic changes on demographic and consumer tastes. For instance, the increased number of people moved to suburbs, which resulted in a drop of movie attendance in metropolitan areas where most of the cinemas were concentrated (Balio, 1990). Since baby boom was one of the most dynamic social changes after the Second World War, consumers needed to spend on household consumer goods rather than attend
cinemas (Balio, 1990). More importantly, the introduction of television to mass audiences greatly influenced the decline of the Hollywood film industry. Statistics has shown that between 1948 and 1952, domestic ownership of Television raised from 1.2 million to 15 million, which lead to the dynamic slump of Hollywood (Michelle Langford, lecture: ‘Decline and Adaptation’). Thus, this was the time that Hollywood needed to be reorganized in order to enjoying sustained prosperity.

Although the innovation of television brought detrimental effect on movie attendance, this rise of television certainly encouraged Hollywood to be reorganized, and thus gave it a possibility to collaborate with television. Through their reestablishment, Hollywood attempted to provide different products from television. For example, ‘the wider screen revolution’ (Balio, p238, 1990), which Hollywood experimented with screen size and depth illusion. Another example was 3-D cinema that provided audiences a three-dimensional experience (Balio, 1990). The new film technologies such as 3-D and wider screen processes could only improve domestic distribution, and boost the overall financial condition of the Hollywood film industry (Balio, 1990). As a result, it can be strongly argued that those new type of cinematic experiences was prosperous among American audiences; however, the expansion of their distribution did not reach to the global audiences.

More precisely, the collaboration with television was the most successful strategy to rebuild Hollywood which unexpectedly resulted in an expansion of their distribution to the global context. This collaboration was an initial expansion of Hollywood products to the world. It is stated that the major motion picture companies entered telefilm production, which refers to the release of their old films to television as well as broadcasting their original programs (Balio, 1990). There is a fact that Hollywood slowly came to dominate broadcast schedules of television as well as the foreign television industry. Study has shown that Hollywood produced close to 20 percent of the prime-time programs and close to 40 percent of the average television station’s daily schedule
(Guider and Williams, 1999). It means that Hollywood produced ten times as much film for television as it did for theatrical motion picture exhibition (Guider and Williams, 1999). By the 1960s when the increased number of countries escalated domestic ownership of television, the United States owned television programs had expanded to outside of America, especially to European networks (Balio, 1990). It is assumed that foreign markets would account for 40 percent of total revenues for telefilms that were produced by American industries (Henning and Alpar, 2005). It is strongly claimed that most of the money in international television is made by the Hollywood majors (Guider and Williams, 1999). Therefore, the introduction of television to mass-audiences seemed to bring detrimental effects on the Hollywood financial condition even though the prosperity of collaboration with television was a trigger of Hollywood embarkation upon global scale.

The extension of their vertical integration into new media markets on to global scale was the effective strategy for the Hollywood film industry to occupy the dominant position in the global context. Vertical integration refers to a style of ownership and control where companies are united through a hierarchy and share a common owner (Darrell Davis, lecture: Establishing Hollywood Nationally). To achieve the global dominance, Hollywood vertically integrated into new media markets. This new strategy enabled Hollywood to produce not only films and television programs, but also to manufacture cameras, TV sets and video players. It is said that this vertical integration into new media industries are increasingly operating on a worldwide scale: the power of size over multimedia is carried out globally (Aksoy and Robins, 1992). In addition, Balio (2000) pointed out that the expansion of their distribution into new media markets made Hollywood possible to be more flexible and effective in controlling the production and exhibition of a diversified range of films and entertainment outputs. His research also indicates that some of the Hollywood major industries are among the biggest global entertainment companies. For example, Time Warner is the world’s second largest magazine publishers, cable television operator and record company, and the largest pay-television company and marketer of books, as well as being one of the largest film
studies (Balio, 2000). Therefore, it can be argued that the extension of vertical integration into new media markets has influential effects on Hollywood to be multi-media conglomerate, where their social status is globally accepted.

Another significant issue of Hollywood domination into global market is the emergency of globalisation where cultural ideas can flow freely across nations. Globalisation can be defined as:

“The compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Tomlison, 1994).

Croteau David also argued that the globalisation of mass media particularly refers to the content —the cultural products— available globally (2003). One of the examples of the cultural products is film that would not normally have traveled beyond a particular culture. The films are now more accessible and duplicable to different culture, especially due to the high technological innovation under globalisation. For example, Japanese horror films such as The Ring are acknowledged as remarkable horror films globally. Filmmakers are now able to reuse its distinctive techniques such as sounds effects or lighting techniques in their own films. Some of the scenes used in, for example, Japanese films, can also be duplicated by the filmmakers for their film production. Therefore, this global spread of cultures caused a necessity for a legislation of copyright law for the sake of restricting the unauthorized circulation of culture across nations.

Under such free flow of cultural ideas, Hollywood cultural imperialism is built on an effective appropriation or copyright of transnational ideas. Victoria Smith Ekstrand, an assisted professor of media law and public relation, defines copyright as:

“Copyright assures authors the right to their original expression, but encourages others to build freely upon the ideas… it is the means by which copyright advances the progress of science and art” (Ekstrand, p5, 2005).

What it means is that copyright discourse maintains the universal right to freely recycle and access ideas, yet it interferes with anyone who is using creative expressions without the consent of the copyright holders. However, since the differentiation between ‘ideas’
and ‘expressions’ is not always clear, today’s copyright discourse cannot differentiate what is copyright ‘infringement’ and copyright ‘appropriation’ (Pang, 2005). As a result, copyright law can not police the cultural boundaries between nations, and thus the outcomes of this discourse is that the distance between cultures has been compressed. This cultural phenomenon enables filmmakers now to easily copy ideas from other films. In fact, Laikwan Pang empathised that Hollywood succession of maintenance of annual output and global dominance is the copying ideas and expression from other cinemas (2005). To illustrate, in the film *Kill Bill*, some of the ideas such as the depiction of violence and action sequences have been appropriated. The action style reflects the Hong Kong kung fu films or Japanese action films. Nevertheless, these practices were not considered illegally, and Hollywood in this case, has freely use ideas of other cinematic tradition. The film like *Kill Bill*, therefore, exhibits a creative combination of many transnational ‘information flows’, yet it is acknowledged as one of the world remarkable Hollywood films (Pang, 2005). One can argue that the eternal problem of Hollywood is running out of ideas for their film production (Bordwell, 1985). Therefore, it can be argued that Hollywood cannot be ‘original’; however, this free flow of culture under globalisation actually helped Hollywood to produce annual output and dominate the global film industry.

In conclusion, the innovation of television after the Second World War seemed to bring detrimental effect on Hollywood financial condition; however, the rise of television to mass-audiences encouraged Hollywood to reorganize their film production. Importantly, this encouragement enabled Hollywood to collaborate with television, which was the start of expansion of their product to the global context. Followed by this, the new strategy of vertical integration into new media markets on to global scale was the effective for Hollywood film industry to occupy the dominant position in the world. Moreover, the emergency of globalisation brought more free flow of cultural products across nations. Under such free flow of culture, Hollywood cultural imperialism is built on an effective appropriation or copyright of transnational ideas. As a result, Hollywood cannot be
‘original’, yet the free flow of culture under globalisation actually helped Hollywood to produce annual output and dominate the global film industry. Therefore, Hollywood has not only subsumed national film industries, but it has also become integral part of national cinema of most countries where cinema is an established entertainment.
Bibliography


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