

American Soft Power Spurred by American Dream

In Hollywood Movies

(Li, Yang From Xi'an International Studies University)

Abstract:

As the world has entered the information era, the status of hard power which bases on military and economic force drops relatively, whereas the status of soft power which bases on values, culture, policies and institutions is rising gradually. Nowadays, soft power not only plays a significant role in building up a country's comprehensive national strength, but also makes great contributions to boosting the national image, cultivating popularity and safeguarding the national interests.

The phrase---soft power was coined by Joseph Nye of Harvard University in *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, a book published in 1990. American popular entertainment, especially Hollywood movies, displays and propels the development of American soft power dramatically. This thesis probes into American soft power from the view of popular entertainment, with Hollywood movies served as the breakthrough point. In *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Nye defined soft power as “a country's cultural and ideological appeal” (31). According to Nye, the three resources of a country's soft power include its culture, its values and its policies. Hollywood movies never fail to demonstrate American values and ideology to the world in a positive way. Hollywood---an unofficial propellor of soft power---has made enormous contributions to American soft power through the American spirit or Americanism embodied in its movies.

The American dream is an American ideal of a happy and successful life desired by most Americans. The American dream embodied by Hollywood movies appeal to the people all over the world because everyone yearns for such a dream from the bottom of their hearts. As a result, the American dream gradually becomes a universal dream. This can partially explain the reason why Hollywood movies can transcend languages and cultures, and enjoy great popularity in every corner of the world, esp. in the Asia Pacific Context these years. By depicting the United States as

a land of infinite possibility and opportunity, Hollywood movies win the hearts and minds of global viewers with fascinating and motivational stories featured by self-improvement and self-fulfillment, thus greatly promoting American soft power.

A country can get its desired outcomes more easily if other countries admire and appreciate its values, emulate and imitate its example, and aspire to and long for its high level of prosperity (Nye, *Power in the Global Information Age*, 5). Hollywood movies contribute to American soft power and the achievement of American desired outcomes through the American dream it vigorously advocates.

“The Chinese Dream” called upon by the Chinese President is now becoming the common dream for more and more Chinese people. China’s film making industry should draw lessons from Hollywood, accurately establish its core values and ideology, and vigorously promote the spreading of the splendid Chinese culture to the whole world.

Key Words: soft power; American dream; values; Hollywood movies