

# A Study on the Cultural Output Effect of Film Media from an International Communication Perspective

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## Abstract

As globalization deepens, competition for cultural soft power among nations intensifies. Film, a medium with both artistic appeal and widespread reach, has become a core vehicle for national cultural exports. Drawing on theories of international communication, this article utilizes a combination of literature research, case analysis, and cross-cultural comparison to explore the practical effectiveness, constraints, and improvement paths of film in cultural export. The study finds that the cultural export effect of film is primarily manifested in three key areas: the subtle permeation of values, the widespread dissemination of cultural symbols, and the promotion of cross-border collaboration in related industries. However, these effects are influenced by cultural differences, the coverage of communication channels, and the suitability of content for international audiences. By comparing the film export experiences of various countries, including Hollywood's industrialization system, South Korea's policy support, and India's balance between local culture and international expression, and drawing on the overseas dissemination practices of Chinese films such as "The Wandering Earth" and "Nezha," this article proposes that to enhance the precision and sustainability of Chinese film exports, Chinese films must balance local cultural characteristics with the shared values of global audiences in their creations, expand diverse international communication channels, and improve the film industry's industrialized operational system. This study aims to provide ideas with both theoretical reference and practical significance for Chinese films to more effectively participate in international cultural exchanges and enhance their cultural influence.

## Keywords

International communication, film media, cultural output, cross-cultural communication, cultural soft power.

## 1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, culture has become a crucial dimension in measuring a country's comprehensive strength, and cultural output is a key path to enhancing a country's international voice and breaking down cultural barriers. As the "seventh art," film, with its concrete visual language, immersive storytelling, and wide audience reach, can transcend language barriers and convey a country's cultural core—its history, traditions, values, and lifestyle—to the global market. It is one of the most influential media for cultural output. From Hollywood films dominating the global market to South Korean films winning Oscars for "Parasite" and the international resonance of the Indian film "Dangal," the cultural output potential of film has been fully demonstrated. However, while my country's film industry has achieved breakthroughs in domestic market size, it still faces significant "cultural discounts" and uneven output in international communication. Some films, despite being released in overseas markets, lack sustained influence due to stiff cultural expression and narrative logic that doesn't align with international audiences' cognitive habits. Furthermore, insufficient control over international communication channels prevents high-quality works from reaching

core overseas audiences. Existing research often focuses on the communication analysis of single film cases or macro-strategies for cultural export, lacking a multi-dimensional analysis of the effectiveness of film cultural export and a systematic exploration of the factors influencing it. Based on this, this article, from an international communication perspective, combines cross-cultural communication theory with real-world film communication cases to systematically analyze the dimensions and constraints of film media's cultural export effectiveness. By comparing international experience, it proposes targeted optimization paths, hoping to provide reference for improving the international communication effectiveness of Chinese films and contributing to the development of a culturally strong nation.

## 2. Core Concepts and Theoretical Basis of Film Media Cultural Export

### 2.1. Definition of Core Concepts

From an international communication perspective, film "cultural export" is not simply about promoting a work overseas. Rather, it involves using film as a medium to convey cultural elements of a specific country or region, influencing audience cognition, attitudes, and behavior, thereby building cultural identity and enhancing influence. The core of this process lies in "effective communication"—not only ensuring that a film enters the international market, but also ensuring that its cultural core is understood and accepted by the audience. The effectiveness of cultural export should be evaluated from two perspectives: the breadth of dissemination, which is determined by the number of countries covered and the size of the audience; and the depth of dissemination, which is determined by the audience's understanding and recognition of the cultural elements, as well as whether behavioral conversion occurs. For example, after the global release of the Japanese film "Spirited Away," audiences, through elements like "kakushi" and "hot springs," understood the traditional Japanese concept of "symbiosis between man and nature." This also boosted the development of Japan's anime and tourism industries, a prime example of both breadth and depth.

### 2.2. Theoretical Support

First, there's the cultural discount theory (proposed by Hoskins and Milhouse): Due to cultural differences in values, historical background, and other factors, international audiences face an increased cost in understanding content from a different culture, resulting in a decreased appeal. To improve the impact of content, it's important to reduce this "cultural discount," for example by incorporating universal values like "family warmth" and "the pursuit of justice," or by simplifying complex cultural explanations. Hollywood films often employ this approach, using "heroism" as their core and standardized narratives to make them easily accessible to global audiences. This is key to their dominance in the international market. Second, there's the soft power theory (proposed by Joseph Nye): it refers to the ability to attract other countries through non-coercive means, such as culture and ideology. As a cultural medium, the impact of film on a country's soft power is directly linked to its growth. When audiences develop a fondness for a country's culture through film, they actively embrace its values and ideals, creating a lasting influence. South Korean films are a good example. The social care and humanistic spirit conveyed by works like "Hope" and "The Attorney" have earned global recognition for Korean culture and boosted the soft power of the "Korean Wave." Third, consider the high-context and low-context culture theory (proposed by Hall): high-context cultures emphasize implicit expression, while low-context cultures prioritize directness and clarity. This difference can affect the effectiveness of film dissemination. For example, a high-context film entering a low-context market can easily be incomprehensible due to overly implicit expression. The Chinese film "The Wedding Banquet," using the conflicting narrative of "same-sex marriage and family ethics," strikes a balance between Chinese implicitness and

Western directness, lowering barriers to understanding and becoming a classic example of early international dissemination[1].

### **3. The Effectiveness Dimension of Film Media Cultural Output in International Communication**

The cultural export of film is never as simple as simply "sending films overseas." Instead, it relies on a complete closed loop of "transmitting cultural core" and "industrial linkage and feedback"—from educating international audiences about a country's cultural values to driving the development of related industries, effectively transforming the abstract cultural influence into reality.

#### **3.1. Cross-Cultural Transmission of Cultural Core**

Values and cultural symbols are the "twin cores" of film export. Only when the story naturally blends them together can they truly connect with international audiences. Regarding values, good films never preach, but rather embed culture within their plots. For example, "Forrest Gump" doesn't deliberately promote the "American Dream"; it simply follows Forrest Gump's footsteps—from a small town in Alabama to a nation-wide journey, from shrimp boat captain to accompanying a friend on his final journey, weaving optimism and perseverance into every detail. Audiences around the world remembered this somewhat eccentric character and quietly adopted this spirit of American culture. Similarly, "The Wandering Earth" didn't mention "collectivism," but instead used plotlines like "Chinese and Russian rescue teams working together to repair an engine and African engineers working late into the night to crunch data" to break the Western trope of "one-man hero saving the world." Not only did it gross over \$50 million overseas, but it also prompted a special discussion in The New York Times about "a new narrative of Chinese science fiction," effectively spreading these values. Cultural symbols serve as anchors for remembering culture and can't be forced. The saris and Holi in "Dangal" aren't "cultural labels," but rather the sweat-soaked saris of a daughter practicing wrestling and the smiling faces of a family daubed with colored powder during the festival. As the audience follows the plot, these details naturally embody the essence of Indian life. The Hun Tian Ling and Wind Fire Wheels in "Nezha" aren't forced "Chinese elements"; they're the props Nezha uses to save his companions and to defy prejudice. When it was released in 13 countries, foreign audiences asked, "Where can I buy the Hun Tian Ling?" Related figurines sold out in Europe and the United States. The transition from "remembering the symbol" to "willingness to spend money" has been successful[2].

#### **3.2. Industrial Interconnection and Economic Feedback**

Cultural output not only has a "cultural" impact but also an "economic" impact, forming a cycle of "transmitting culture, earning profits, and then feeding back into culture." In terms of direct revenue, box office revenue and derivative products are substantial. Hollywood consistently generates over 70% of the global box office. In 2023, "Barbie" took in \$1.443 billion, tying "female independence" with box office sales, generating both profits and cultural dissemination. The "Nezha" series of derivative products has sold over 100 million yuan, and after being released on streaming platforms, it has also secured licenses for games and stationery, with the profits being reinvested in the next film. The value of cross-industry expansion is even more tangible. After "Parasite" won an Oscar, a semi-basement in Seoul became a popular spot for tourists worldwide to take "influencer" photos, boosting local tourism revenue by 30%. "Youth" released in Vietnam, and the film's retro military uniforms and floral dresses went viral. Vietnamese netizens searched for "same style as Youth," and sales of related clothing doubled. "Nezha" even created a themed scenic area, recreating the "Chentang Pass" and "Lotus Secret Realm," attracting over 8,000 visitors per day, many specifically for the film's scenes. By this

point, film had become more than just a tool for cultural dissemination; it had become an economic engine driving tourism, e-commerce, and cultural tourism[3].

#### **4. Key Factors Influencing the Cultural Output of Film Media**

The effectiveness of film cultural output is influenced by multiple factors, among which audience acceptance and the effectiveness of distribution channels are two key factors that directly determine whether a film can "go global" and be "recognized."

##### **4.1. Audience Compatibility: The Dual Test of Cultural Difference and Content Balance**

Cultural differences are the root cause of "cultural discounting" and the primary obstacle to audience acceptance. These differences manifest themselves in aspects such as values and historical background. If a film's cultural elements significantly deviate from international audiences' perceptions and lack universal values or contextual explanations, understanding can be difficult. For example, while "Farewell My Concubine" won the Palme d'Or at Cannes, its Peking Opera formulas and Cultural Revolution setting made it difficult for Western audiences to empathize, limiting its mass communication effectiveness. Meanwhile, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" combined martial arts visual symbols with universal values like "love and freedom," lowering the barrier to understanding and earning over \$200 million at the global box office, becoming a benchmark for martial arts films going global. Furthermore, differences in aesthetic preferences must be considered: Easterners prefer "subtle narratives," while Westerners prefer "fast-paced" ones. A slow-paced period film, critically acclaimed in China, failed to meet expectations abroad due to its neglect of these characteristics. Content compatibility, on the other hand, involves striking a balance between "local" and "international" appeal. Many successful examples have found a balance: "Parasite," using the local theme of "income inequality in South Korea" as its own, resonated globally through its narrative of class conflict; "Dangal," using the story of Indian women's wrestling to convey the universal value of female independence, became a surprise hit at the overseas box office for Indian films. Conversely, inadequate adaptation can backfire: a Chinese film deliberately incorporating stereotypes like "dragon" and "kung fu" without logical resonance was criticized as "shallow"; another film, which imitated Hollywood narratives but lost its local identity, became a "soulless imitation" and struggled to make a cultural impact[4].

##### **4.2. Effectiveness of Communication Channels: The Critical Gap Between Reach and Control**

Communication channels directly determine a film's reach, and the key lies in their reach and control. Hollywood's global dominance relies on a comprehensive global distribution network. Disney, Warner Bros., and others, through their overseas subsidiaries, cover over 90% of mainstream theaters. They can also adjust their film schedules by region, leveraging a closed-loop marketing strategy from film festivals to theaters to ensure effective distribution. Chinese films, on the other hand, face a channel shortage: most rely on third-party distribution, and the lack of independent networks results in limited screenings and short release cycles. Despite partnerships with companies like Netflix, their content is often limited to Chinese-speaking audiences, making it difficult to reach mainstream Western audiences. More importantly, the potential of emerging channels remains untapped. While the South Korean film "Squid Game" achieved viral success through TikTok's "Sugar Challenge," Chinese films on short video platforms still rely primarily on trailer releases, lacking interactive topics and weakening their reach.

## 5. International Experience and Chinese Practice in Film and Media Cultural Export

Different countries, leveraging their cultural characteristics and industrial foundations, have developed distinct approaches to film and cultural export. These experiences offer important lessons for Chinese films, and China's recent practices also need to clarify their direction by summarizing their successes and failures.

### 5.1. Typical International Export Models

**Hollywood:** An industrialized system supports global penetration. With major studios like Disney and Warner Bros. at its core, Hollywood has built a comprehensive industry chain encompassing financing, production, distribution, and derivatives. Over 50% of funding comes from outside investors like hedge funds, ensuring high-quality production. Standardized narratives like the "hero's journey" reduce cultural discounts, while leveraging global distribution networks like United International Pictures to cover 90% of the mainstream market. Works like "Avatar" and "The Avengers"—the motion capture technology team behind "Avatar" has also driven the global upgrade of the special effects industry, with derivative product revenue even exceeding box office revenue—integrating American values into global issues like environmental protection and salvation, achieving both box office success and cultural export benefits.

**South Korea:** Policies are empowering genre films to break through. In the 1990s, the Film Promotion Act established a special fund to support emerging directors and low-budget genre films. For example, Lee Joon-ik, the director of "Hope," received support from the fund early on. A 146-day annual quota for domestic films was also implemented, providing a protective barrier for the industry. With this policy support, South Korean cinema has deepened its innovation in genres such as social realism and crime thrillers. "Hope" and "The Crucible" resonated globally with their local social issues, and "Parasite," with its black comedy, became the first non-English language film to win an Oscar for Best Picture. Furthermore, the "Korean Wave" of "film + K-pop" has amplified the impact of Korean cultural exports.

**India:** Balancing local symbols with universal values. Bollywood upholds cultural characteristics such as song, dance, and family values while transcending niches through the translation of these values. "Dangal" retains Indian song and dance elements while adapting them to international audiences with the universal theme of female independence. "3 Idiots" incorporates educational criticism into an inspirational narrative, grossing \$60 million worldwide. A multilingual distribution strategy encompasses Tamil, Bengali, and English. The English version of "Dangal" alone has screened over 200 times in European and American arthouse theaters, further expanding its reach and forming a unique "local culture + global issues" output model[5].

### 5.2. Achievements and Optimization Directions in China's Practice

In recent years, the international reach of Chinese films has begun to show results: overseas box office revenue is expected to exceed 770 million yuan by 2025. "The Wandering Earth" became the first Chinese science fiction film to rank among the top ten in the North American weekend box office. Cultural symbols such as "Planetary Engine" and the "Nezha IP" have gained international recognition. "Nezha: The Devil Child Comes into the World" grossed over \$30 million in 13 countries, and related action figures sold over 100,000 units on European and American e-commerce platforms. Works such as "Farewell My Concubine" continue to win international awards, solidifying their artistic recognition. However, shortcomings remain prominent: the industry lacks an independent distribution network, and overseas releases rely on third parties, resulting in insufficient screenings. Regarding content, some works suffer from a "symbol-stacked" problem, with period dramas overly focused on palace intrigue and

neglecting cross-cultural resonance. Distribution channels remain primarily theaters and film festivals, with insufficient streaming media utilization. Despite collaborating with Netflix to release "The Wandering Earth," only Chinese subtitles and English dubbing were provided, with no adjustments to the narrative rhythm for Western audiences. Meanwhile, "Squid Game" broke through on TikTok. Chinese films still primarily rely on trailers for short-form video marketing, lacking interactivity. Future efforts require strengthening industrial systems, such as establishing nationally standardized script evaluation standards and training centers for film and television special effects talent, balancing local characteristics with international expression, and building a multi-dimensional distribution matrix across theaters, streaming media, and social platforms.

## **6. Optimizing Paths to Enhance the Effectiveness of Film and Media Cultural Output**

Combining the core logic of film cultural output with the shortcomings of Chinese practice, we must focus on two key dimensions: optimizing core communication and building a supporting system to establish a precise and sustainable output path.

### **6.1. Core Communication Optimization: Synergizing Content Innovation and Channel Expansion**

Content and channels are the core vehicles for cultural output, requiring a two-pronged approach to overcome communication bottlenecks. On the content side, it is necessary to balance "localism" and "internationalism": on the one hand, explore diverse themes, break out of the limitations of "ancient costume kung fu", and develop integrated themes such as "intangible cultural heritage + fantasy" and "rural + environmental protection". For example, learn from the "science fiction + family and country feelings" model of "The Wandering Earth" to allow traditional and modern cultures to coexist, like incorporating Kunqu elements into the fantasy film "White Snake: Origin", which not only shows the charm of intangible cultural heritage but also fits the aesthetic taste of young audiences; on the other hand, incorporate universal values, combine concepts such as "a community with a shared future for mankind" with global issues such as environmental protection and science and technology ethics. For example, "The Wandering Earth 2" resonates with viewers through the narrative of "building a space elevator around the world", while optimizing the narrative - while retaining the beauty of oriental artistic conception, use subtitles and short narration to reduce the cost of cultural understanding. For example, when showing traditional solar term scenes, use lightweight subtitles to explain the connotation of the farming culture behind them. On the channel side, a "self-reliance + diversity" network needs to be built: Strengthen independent distribution capabilities. Wanda's acquisition of AMC can be used as a reference. Capital operations can be used to acquire overseas cinema resources to address limited screenings and short release cycles. At the same time, localized distribution teams should be established in key markets to precisely meet the needs of local theater chains. Deepen streaming partnerships, not just by licensing content from platforms like Netflix, but also by participating in co-productions and tailoring content to audience preferences. Support should also be provided for domestic platforms like Tencent Video to expand overseas. For example, Tencent Video's overseas version has launched a "Chinese Stories" section, showcasing films tailored to regional cultural characteristics[6]. Explore the potential of short videos, emulating the interactive TikTok model of "Squid Game." Design challenges targeting symbolic topics like the "Hun Tian Ling" and "Planetary Engine." For example, a creative call for "Recreating Nezha's Hun Tian Ling Special Effects" was launched, creating a closed loop of "short video traffic generation - cinema/streaming conversion."

## 6.2. Support System Development: Linking Industrial Upgrading with Policy Support

Industrial strength and policy support are the long-term guarantee for cultural output. The industry needs to promote "industrialization + internationalization": establish standardized processes such as script evaluation and budget control, rely on the science fiction production experience accumulated by "The Wandering Earth", build professional bases to cultivate special effects and props talents, such as setting up a "Science Fiction Special Effects Training Center" at the Qingdao Film and Television Base to narrow the gap with Hollywood; cultivate international talents, through Sino-foreign co-productions and overseas exchange projects, to create a team that understands local culture and has an international perspective, such as cooperating with Hollywood Film Academy to open a joint training program, while attracting overseas talents to participate in creation, and inviting internationally renowned screenwriters to participate in the polishing of domestic film scripts; develop the entire IP industry chain, learn from the Disney model, and make series of movies, theme parks, and derivatives around high-quality IPs such as "Nezha", such as the Nezha theme park that incorporates traditional mythological scenes and interactive experience projects to form a "cultural communication-economic feedback" cycle. The policy side needs to build an "incentive + service" system: establish a special fund for international communication, subsidize films with good overseas distribution effects, use tax incentives to attract social capital, and the fund can also provide targeted funding for small and medium-cost films to participate in international film festivals; build a cooperation platform, hold the Cannes Chinese Film Festival, and promote Sino-foreign co-productions, such as using "The Great Wall"-style cooperation to integrate the cultures of both sides and reduce cultural discounts. At the same time, establish a "Chinese and Foreign Filmmakers Exchange Alliance" to promote the collision of creative ideas; strengthen intellectual property protection, improve laws and regulations to combat piracy, launch a "Film IP Rights Protection Service Platform", and at the same time promote international property rights cooperation, sign film and television copyright mutual recognition agreements with Southeast Asian countries, and escort the development of overseas markets.

## 7. Conclusion

In international communication, film is a core vehicle for cultural output. Its output is primarily reflected in the penetration of values, the dissemination of cultural symbols, and the integration of industry and economy. It is also a key indicator of a country's cultural soft power. However, the effectiveness of film cultural output is influenced by cultural differences, distribution channels, and content adaptability. Different countries have explored different successful models—Hollywood relies on its industrialized system, South Korea relies on policies to support genre films, and India balances local culture with international adaptability, providing a reference for global film output. In recent years, Chinese films have achieved significant breakthroughs in international communication. Works like "The Wandering Earth" and "Nezha" have brought cultural elements such as "Chinese science fiction" and "Chinese mythology" to the world. However, they still face challenges such as significant cultural compromise, limited distribution channels, and an incomplete industrial system. Four key areas of improvement are needed: balancing local characteristics with universal values in content to reduce barriers to understanding; building a diverse and independent distribution network to enhance audience reach; improving the industrialization system and cultivating international talent; and providing financial and platform support to safeguard industrial development. With the deepening of globalization and digitalization, the export of film culture presents both opportunities and challenges. Chinese films must prioritize cultural confidence and adopt an international perspective[7]. Through continuous innovation, they can enhance the precision

and sustainability of their cultural exports, allowing more international audiences to understand and embrace Chinese culture, contributing to strengthening cultural soft power and building a community with a shared future for mankind. This study also has limitations: the case studies focus primarily on films from major countries, with insufficient attention paid to the export models of small and medium-sized countries; and the evaluation of results lacks quantitative data. Future research could expand the case studies and incorporate quantitative research methods to more accurately assess the impact of export, providing more targeted guidance for practice.

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