

## A Study on Heroes in Hollywood Movies

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### ABSTRACT

*One of the most important characteristics in Hollywood movies is that Hollywood movies have created heroes. But, the meaning of heroes in Hollywood movies is different from proto-typical heroes. America has such a short history, so it doesn't have the mythology. It is also consist of multi-race, culture. Thus, America people, especially governor need something that tie up governed people spiritually. Hollywood film industry has responded about this expectation since 1920's. Hollywood film producers have created mythology and hero like the western genre and Rambo. Now days, America, as only super power, wants to spread it's mythology and heroes over the world. That is cultural Imperialism.*

**Keyword:** Hero, Hollywood, Imperialism, Chauvinistic, Star system.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, when most people call movies, it probably means Hollywood movie. Even though people live different region and speak different language, they watch same movie and love same heroes. Thus, people over the world are all influenced by America's culture.

The meaning of hero in Hollywood movies is different from that of Proto-typical meaning. First difference between them is that the hero in Hollywood movies is not destroyed at the end of movie. Second one is that the hero decides a movie's narrative structure. Third one is that the hero in Hollywood movies is created by social demands. Fourth one is that the hero in Hollywood movies always needs his enemies.

This paper's main goal is to study the meaning of hero in Hollywood movies to people on the earth. For it, I need to start from the process of making hero concept through western genre. After then, the heroes in Hollywood movies who are close to the genuine meaning of heroes will be mentioned and I want to discuss about the relationship between hero in Hollywood movies and cultural imperialism at the end.

### 2. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.1 Establishing the concept of hero

When people talk about hero in Hollywood movies, they might bring up the western movies and stars. The reason people think this way is that the concept of hero in Hollywood movies was established through this genre.

A conventional story line in the western genre is something like this:

1. Movie begins at small and peaceful town.
2. Bad gun fighters or Native Americans come out at the town.
3. People in the town are depressed under their ruling.
4. A new sheriff or Good gunfighter arrive there.
5. The new sheriff appeals people to fight against the enemy.
6. The new sheriff and people kick out the enemy together.
7. Finally, people in the town recover order and peace.

In 1930's, America is characterized the era of the big financial panic and the New Deal. This meant depression, strike and hopeless for the each person. However, it was the era of recovery America's tradition and the confirmation of America's identity and the construction by government at same time[1].

1930's are very important era for Hollywood film industry. After *Jazz Singer* (1927), talkie movie became major trend. However, because the instrument for talkie was very expensive,

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the expense of producing movies went up highly. Thus, a few major big film companies could survive. These big companies needed to have stable producing system, so studio system was set up. A studio system is the system that came from the Ford car factory. Each worker does his own duty on producing line and this producing line is designed to make stable products[2].

Hollywood film producers recognized that they needed stable script and stars. They didn't want complicated story lines and the end of movie should be clear. They also figured out movie star's effectiveness to people. People wanted to watch beautiful, nice and strong figures on screen in order to forget their difficulty. Hollywood film producers could get back the huge expense with those. This is the birth background of western genre and hero. Americans were wildly excited at when they saw that their ancestor had fought against the Native American to survive. So, they refilled their energy for work.

The narrative structure in western genre suggests clear comparison between the good and the Bad. This clear comparison between those needs hero inevitably. Through this narrative structure, I could have one conclusion in western genre. The hero is someone who has superior attributes and makes people unite against an enemy whom he regards to.



Fig. 1. John Wayne is the representative hero in the western genre.

## 2.2 Hero in Capitalism and Puritanism

“A capitalistic hero's story is the most popular pattern in Hollywood movies. Some who was born at poor family, later, works hard, surmounts sufferings, and finally, succeeds in his life[3].”

The development of capitalism has a close relationship to Christianity through European's history. In America, a Puritan took this role in the beginning of America's history. The main ideas of Puritanism like diligence, industry, and sincerity have inevitably been connected to the capitalism as important ideas in America. In fact, since capitalists installed a capitalistic mass-producing system like the Ford system, they have required someone who is suitable for this system. Keeping pace with this requirement, Hero in Hollywood movies was required to have

these kinds of morals. The main principle of capitalism is equal opportunity, they say: if someone tries to get something, he can get it. However, when the class structure of capitalistic society becomes fixed, this principle does not work anymore. Nevertheless, governors in the society, wants to give governed people the dream of capitalism so that they are able to control people easily.

Movie is one of the most effective mass media, so governor try to use its power. We already knew how Hitler in German and Lenin in Russia played with it through history. Hollywood film industry also began to corporate at governor's goal in America. It produced the movies that have this principle and have spread this fake dream so far.

The image of hero in movies represents the yardsticks of the society. Hero in Hollywood movies has the feature of capitalistic self-made men that is based on Puritanism. In case someone does not follow these rules, he is regarded as enemy or abnormal.

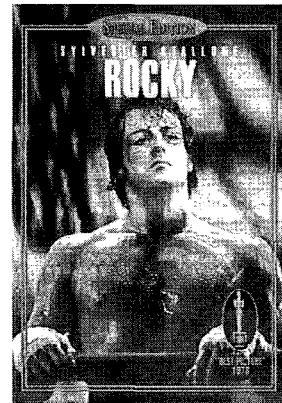


Fig. 2. Rocky represents a capitalistic hero in Hollywood movies.

## 3. HOLLYWOOD MOVIES THAT REPRESENTS THE GENUINE MEANING OF HERO.

“The genuine meaning of hero is the person who is the chief of a clan society and the chief of a clan society is someone who has certain attributes like honesty, bravery, and wisdom. When a clan society change into a modern society, he can not adjust to a modern society and is demolished because this society does not promote honesty, bravery, and justice[4].”

Martin Scorsese, American director, created the person who was similar to the genuine meaning of hero in his movie, *Raging bull*(1980). Jack La mota, a male principle, was born in Italian family. The Italian family emphasizes relationships. As a member of family he also wants to keep these traditional values. However, the Mafia and his new young wife who reflect the value of a new society try to make him as they wish. The Mafia people tell Jack in the movie that they will give him money and another chance to be a champion if he loses a match purposefully. But, Jack rejects

their proposal because he wants to fight against counter partner fairly in the ring. When Jack fails to win the match because of unfair judgment, Jack recognizes that he can't be a champion without the Mafia' support. However, Jake doesn't want to ask them, so he becomes destroyed. His new young wife wants to keep her liberal and independent life style. However, Jack can not adjust himself to this new life style, so he conflict with his wife continuously, and she finally leaves. In the end of movie, director show us that Jack, who lost everything, plays standing comedy in small bar. As Jack usually says, Life is like a show. Through this movie, the reason why Jack is demolished is not the fact that he has bad temper but that he can not accept the rule of a new society.

Another great American director, Francis Ford Coppola's movie, *The God Father: par t II* (1974), also has the same narrative structure as *Raging Bull* regarding to the genuine meaning of hero. Godfather's being shot to death and his son's replacement reflect the change of society. In another words, why Godfather should pass away is that the new society does not want his old business any more[5].

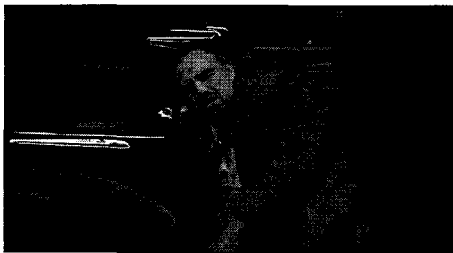


Fig. 3. , *The God Father: par t II* (1974 is the film which has the genuine meaning of hero.)

#### 4. A CHAUVINISTIC HERO'S COMING OUT AND HIS ENEMIES.

Chauvinistic hero has been created in Hollywood movies because of political, economic demands. For example, when the president Ronald Reagan took the reins of government in 1980's, he emphasized on the recovery of a strong America. There were two main reasons why he claimed the strong America as his political principle. One was to recover the depressed economy and the other was to unite people's attention. In order to achieve his goal, he claimed the danger of communism, again and an America's interruption in small regional wars as world police. Thus, he could sell America's weapons and drove people in patriot way.

Hollywood film industry was forced to keep pace with these political demands. The chauvinistic movies were produced like *Independence day* (1996). The mission of chauvinistic hero was very typical; he convenes people, fights against enemies together, and demolishes enemy and solves the problem. It was just same as the western genre. As I mentioned before, because of clear

comparison between the good character and the bad in this kind of movies, enemies as well as heroes were required.

The most interesting thing among the features of enemies is the fact that the enemy represents the political demands of America's each period. In the beginning of 20th century, America needed mythology about the foundation of country, so Hollywood film industry brought in Native Americans as enemy in western movies. After then, in the Cold War period, communists and a communist country were mainly described as enemies in the Hollywood movies. Since the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was demolished in 1991, new enemies have appeared in Hollywood movies. They are external monsters from the universe, disasters like Tornado, Volcano. Currently, terrorist and terrorist country have been described as main enemies.

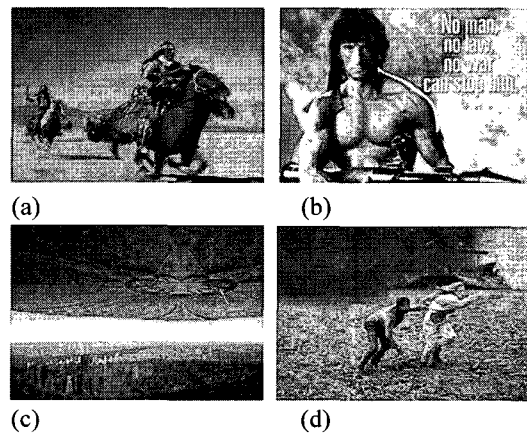


Fig. 4. (a) Native Americans (b) Communists (c) Aliens (d) Disasters.

#### 5. AMERICA'S CULTURAL IMPERIALISM AND A HERO.

When I was young, my hero was John Wayne. He was always strong and brave enough. He fought against mean Native Americans to save beautiful women and weak people in movies. In the adolescent, my lovers in imagination were someone who had blond hair and large breast in Hollywood movies. I tried to imitate John Wayne, James Dean, and Clint Estwood, so I smoked cigarettes and wore blue jean just like them. I believe that it is not only my experience. It is general phenomena all over the world. In Europe, Asia, South America, people grow up watching Hollywood movies, try to imitate Hollywood star's hair, costume styles and want to have same life style.

In industrial aspects, Hollywood film industry has conquered film markets over the world. In many countries, it provokes big problems, so these countries have made devices to keep their movies from Hollywood. A screen quarter system is one of them. However, those devices didn't work as they thought except a few countries like South Korea, France. The most important reason

why those devices didn't work is because movies are cultural goods. The features of cultural goods are to have other effects by conquering consumer's minds. America government and Hollywood producers already knew this characteristic of movies as cultural good. Thus, when America movie Companies try to sell their movies to other countries; they make a consortium together, and America government helps them to sell their movies to other countries.

Since Imperialist's wars for having colonies from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, imperialists haven't tried to conquer colonies as the same old manner because they got a lot of problems like colony's independent movements, revolutions and competition with other imperialists. Therefore, they tried to find another way. That was Neo- colonist. Compared to the old colonial style, the feature of neo- colonist is the Subordination of economy and culture. [6] Especially, through cultural goods, neo-imperialists have achieved what they want. They know that a movie is the most effective weapon among those.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The making process of hero in Hollywood movies has been directly connected with America's history, social demands and the development of film industry. In 1920's, economic crisis like the big financial panic brought up the recognition that Americans needed fundamental spirit like mythology. However, America's history is too short to have a mythology. There are a variety of races, cultures in an America. It was also a critical defect for governors who should control governed people. Therefore, they tried to make an alternative plane to unite people. In the beginning of 1930's, Hollywood film industry was faced with the huge change that came from the invention of talkie film. The use of talkie for film producers meant that the expense of film producing went up highly. Thus, They needed a stable producing system. It was the studio system. The studio system was the stable producing method like the Ford car factory for producers. They knew that stars were the most important parts in the factory because people liked to watch beautiful, great, strong one on screen to forget their difficulty for a while. These are the background of the making process of hero in Hollywood movie.

Heroes in Hollywood movies need their enemies and these enemies represent America's political, social demands. For instance, when America needed a myth about country's foundation in 1930's, enemy in movies was a native American. In the Cold War era, communists and communist country were shown as enemies. Since Soviet Union was collapsed in 1990, monsters from space, disaster and terrorists have been described as enemies.

There are the genuine meanings of heroes among Hollywoodmovies. Martin Scorsese's *Raging bull*(1980) and

Francis Ford Coppola's *God Father: PART II*(1974) are good examples. They can't adjust themselves to new industrial society because this new society doesn't need noble dignity like bravery, honesty and justice any more.

Since Imperialist's wars for having colonies from the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, imperialists haven't tried to conquer colonies as the same old manner. They tried to find other ways. One of those is cultural imperialism. Compared to the old colonial style, the feature of cultural imperialism is indirect and effective. America spreads it's cultural goods all over the world from pop song, fashion, sports to movies. America's imperialists know that a movie is the most powerful weapon among those because people, who watch the movie, look up to Hollywood movie star's life style, thought.

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