On the New Forms of Cultural Imperialism in the Information Age

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Abstract. The rapid development of information network has pushed mankind into a “digitalized” and “virtualized” era that information is ubiquitous, and the cultural form of the world has undergone significant changes and has brought new possibilities for the expansion of cultural imperialism. In the information era, the imperialistic cultural transmission is more convenient, the form is more diverse, the nature is more secretive, and the imperceptible influence is increasingly dangerous. In the face of the new challenging situation, China should continue to strengthen its own cultural security system, elevate the cultural soft power, improve the culture utterance right, and enhance the cultural self-confidence.

1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, the rapid development of the internet has completely changed human behavior patterns around the world. In particular, in the twenty-first century, information technology has become the most dynamic productive force, a new round of social change is being bred by the new generation of information technology and innovative applications of emerging industries, in which mobile internet, cloud computing, Internet of Things are the representatives. According to the “Statistics report on China's Internet development” as you see in the image below, Chinese society has entered into the information age. The transformation of information technology not only has a profound impact on politics, economy and social life, but also brings great shocks to the cultural field. In the information network era characterized by the digitization and intelligence, it has become a social norm to communicate, collide and fuse among different cultures. At the same time, it also provides a hotbed and convenient way for the erosion and expansion of western cultural imperialism. What are the new features of cultural imperialism in the information era? How does China positively respond to the new cultural situation? This article will explore the issues.

Table 1. Situation about the Chinese Netizens in 2015 and 2016.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chinese Netizens</th>
<th>Internet Penetration</th>
<th>the mobile phone users</th>
<th>CN Domain Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>0.688 billion</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>0.62 billion</td>
<td>1636 hundred thousand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0.71 billion</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
<td>0.695 billion</td>
<td>2061 hundred thousand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The impact of the information age on cultural field

The upgrading of communication technology and the full use of network technology greatly shorten the time and space distance of human interaction, the wave of information promotes human into a digitized, virtualized and intelligentized survival state. Traditional life frames, structural styles, power structures have undergone drastic changes, and people’s modes of thinking, outlooks on life, values and world outlooks have also changed significantly. Information network era, ICT technology and the spread of information globalization have brought a huge impact to the development of human culture.

2.1 New cultural transmission carriers and channels have been generated

Whether it is traditional culture or modern culture, in its formation and development process, carriers and channels are needed to transmit. Before the information age, in addition to oral language, the transmissions of ideology are mainly by means of newspapers, books, radio and other
media, the use of awareness information is less selective and lack of initiative, there are also time
limits in some channels. The information revolution has produced a mass of new media, both in the
form or the content [1]. The information dissemination channels represented by the computer and
the internet have the characteristics of no time and space constraints, large circulation, high opening
degree and strong interactivity compared with the traditional media, which makes the development
of the internet become important and emerging “the fourth force” [4]. With the development of
information technology, the internet is gradually replacing the traditional media such as radios and
newspapers, or putting them in, setting up their functions into one, and then developing into a
unified information platform, becoming a new means, a new front and a new channel of cultural
transmission, bringing newer and more effective tools for the spread of ideology. In recent years,
smart phones and other mobile phones and mobile internet are new breakthroughs, information can
be sent and received at anytime and anywhere, and further shorten the time and space restrictions of
information transmission, which has become the most mainstream media front.

2.2 The exchange, collision and integration of culture have been promoted.
The development of information network not only brings new channels of cultural
communication, but also promotes the exchange, collision and integration among different cultures.
The diversities and differences of culture are the prerequisites of the existence and development of
mankind. The interchanges seeking common grounds while shelving differences and the
complementarities learning from others’ strong points and closing the gap of different cultures
promote the mutual improvement of human culture. The progress of ICT technology, the
popularization of the internet and the global high-speed circulation of capital have accelerated the
transmission of culture and thus promoted the cultural exchange and integration of different
countries and nations. As Bill Gates said, “the information superhighway will break the borders and
may push the development of a world culture, or at least promote a cultural activity, the sharing of
cultural values.” [3] In the era of information network, culture has presented a new state, a new
level and a new state in the global exchange process, and has promoted the absorption and reference
of world civilization achievements. But everything has its double sides, and information technology
also creates collisions of different cultures. The confrontations and collisions are getting more and
more fierce between cultural diversity and cultural homogeneity (or cultural unification), cultural
globalization and cultural conventionality.

2.3 The new social culture pattern has been formed.
The popularity of information technology has spawned a new social culture pattern, namely,
“network culture”, “mobile phone culture”, “network addiction”, “microblog control”, “WeChat
control” and so on. “The new cultural pattern centering internet survival as the core content is not
only a reflection and a review of the traditional cultural value criteria, but it has also greatly
expanded the depth and scope of people’s cultural life in modern society, and is shaping a new
cultural value criteria system.” [4] This is the inevitable result of the development of human society
to a certain historical stage. These special cultural patterns are characterized by time and region, and
have the features of circulation, diversification, interchangeability, virtualization, openness,
digitization, and so on.

3. A new manifestation of cultural imperialism
Cultural imperialism generally refers to the imposition behavior of cultural values between the
states, and between the nations. This concept is based on the theory of cultural hegemony put
forward by the Italian Communist Party leader Gramsci in Prison Notes. He believes that in a
certain historical stage, the dominant class has to persuade the ruled class to accept its moral,
political and cultural values in order to ensure their social and cultural leadership.
The information age as the boundary, the former cultural imperialism is called as the traditional
cultural imperialism, its main manifestations are using televisions, movies, books and magazines,
pop music, clothing and other mass culture products met people’s spiritual needs and material
enjoyments to have culture infiltration, and using radios, radio stations, televisions and other
advanced media channels to accelerate cultural transmission. In the new historical period, cultural
imperialism, with the help of the characteristics of information technology, including spanning time and space, visualization, reproduction, virtualization, large capacity, autonomy, development, etc., continuously goes stronger and stronger by the new form and visage. The form is more secretive, the effect is more subtle, the harm is difficult to estimate, and we call it the cultural imperialism in the information age. Its manifestations are:

3.1 Seeking information hegemony in the name of freedom

Information is an important carrier of cultural transmission, and the amount of information determines the influence of culture. Into the information age, the data is expanding at an increase of einmal in 20 months, presenting a geometric growth. However, we are not facing with a fair information society, and at present, the developed countries that account for 20% of the global total population have 80% of amount of the world’s information, while the majority of developing countries account for only 20% of the amount of information (Global Internet penetration as you see in the image below). In the developed countries, the United States is far more than Europe and Japan in the number and size of information, and then result in a worldwide “cultural homogeneity” phenomenon, damaging the diversity of world culture. Theoretically, the globalized development of ICT technology and the internet can provide a platform for “disadvantaged” groups to equally and freely express their culture to the world. At the Harvard University International Conference on Internet and Society, participants in the United States insisted that the internet would not promote cultural imperialism and would only eliminate cultural imperialism. Nathan Gardels argued that the internet is counter-cultural imperialism, because the internet can make the communicator to communicate with whom he or she wants. Such remarks ignore or deliberately circumvent the Matthew effect in the dissemination of information, namely, the more information the country has, the more information it can get, on the contrary, the less information the country has, the less information it can get. In the process of information globalization, the exchange and communication between different cultures, while breaking the technical barriers of different cultural exchanges and communications, also broke through the boundaries of local culture. The internet also increases wealth and poverty, improves productivity and intensifies social isolation, and its influence is distributed in different regions and different social groups, forming a new information hegemony.

3.2 Cultural aggression under the suppression of information technology

Information technology itself is a “neutral” product, without any color, but the technical design and theoretical structure imply the developers’ thinking structure, value orientation, technical idea and other characteristics, and this fact can’t be avoided. As the information technology is originated and flourished in the United States, so in its development process, it has showed strong US-centered features, which has resulted in a huge “digital divide” in the development of information technology between the vast number of developing countries including China and western developed countries. Similarly, the international ICT framework, system, internet technology, and the trend of future internet culture to a large extent depend on the western ideology, code of conduct and thinking system represented by the United States. Now the world network system from hardware to software to various standards are basically formulated and controlled by the developed countries, invisibly,

Figure 1. Countries with the Highest and Lowest Percentage of Using the Internet in 2015.
the backward and underdeveloped countries have been under all sorts of controls. This control allows developed countries to strongly output their cultures and values to developing countries with strong economic strength and advanced science and technology by use of network resources, leading to the “gene mutation” of culture in vulnerable countries.

3.3 Controlling the speaking right of new media

In today’s society, cultural communication is still largely dependent on the media. Information technology development of visualization technology, mobile terminal technology and the widespread use of social networking services of Facebook, Twitter, microblogging, WeChat have gradually forming a new media model. Compared to the traditional media, new media are cheaper, more easily to be spread and accepted by the public. Moreover, the many-to-many popularizing form and catering the fragmentation entertainment time and other characteristics turn everyone into a media spokesman, so that people can entertain, communicate and transmit information in any time and any place. As the “fifth media”, new media are playing an increasingly unquantifiable role in today’s globalization context, and in the meanwhile, the spread of cultural imperialism is more convenient and fast.

3.4 Silent erosion and transformation on traditional culture

China has 5,000 years of splendid civilization. With the development of globalization in the field of culture, the traditional Chinese culture has spread to the world, playing a very good broadcasting role, but also becoming the object and theme utilized by the cultural imperialism. Especially, after the transformation of information technology, it has become the important weapon for them to propagandize “universal thinking” and other ideologies, and they borrowed our familiar images and stories to subvert the domestic, especially young people’s traditional culture cognition. For example: Japan registered and developed China’s four classical masterpieces into comics and game products, such as “true Three Kingdoms” and so on, being popular in the country, and even becoming the basis for part of the young people to understand the culture of the three kingdoms.

3.5 Accelerated erosion of language culture with network

The rise and fall of a country or nation, is often accompanied by the rise and fall of its language and characters. Language and characters is the most basic and most important cultural characteristic in a nation. According to statistics, there are about 200 independent countries in the world, but there are about 1000 different ethnic groups based on language differences [7]. Historically, the ruling group often dominated and assimilated ethnic minorities through the suppression of the development of certain national languages and characters and the use of language policy.

4. Policy recommendations to deal with cultural imperialism

As the world’s largest socialist and developing country, China has many differences and divergences with western countries in the values, social systems, thinking structures, ideologies, national interests and many other aspects. Into the information age, China faces such a rigorous development situation, and several suggestions will be put forward hereinafter.

4.1 Strengthening ideological and political education, carrying out China’s excellent traditional culture, and building cultural security system

The main target of cultural imperialist infiltration is the masses, therefore, cyber netizens become the main carrier for the western powers to infiltrate values and ideologies and control cultural thinking system of China, especially the adolescent netizens, and the internet has become an indispensable tool in their growing process. Therefore, the popular publicity and education should be firstly strengthened to improve the level of ideology and culture of the masses, and to enhance their sense of responsibility and identity to the traditional national culture and the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity in the process of cultural construction. Then, high-quality cultural talent team with fine technology, good management, excellent operation and familiar with the law of the development of the market economy should be cultivated, to occupy high point of cultural transmission in the future. Thirdly, the outstanding traditional culture should be vigorously carried forward to enhance the appeal of socialist culture, and to build a solid cultural security barrier.
4.2 Be vigilant and careful screen new forms of cultural imperialism

In the information age, cultural imperialism pokes into every nook and corner, the form is more diverse, the performance is more secretive, so we should always be vigilant to protect the national cultural security. The first is to pay attention to the supervision of information network security, which is not just a technical problem, and it has now risen to political issues of national network sovereignty and national security. The second is to strengthen the monitoring of network information, make full use of firewall technology and encryption technique, at the premise of without affecting the normal network communication, the supervision of network communication and information dissemination should be strengthened, rapidly responding and timely excluding those with obvious cultural aggression, cultural denial and cultural attack, enhancing the ability to prevent cultural penetration and assault. The third is to strengthen the legal construction in the cultural field of information age, and actively create a harmonious network culture environment, so that the network culture can grow steadily in the context of the law, providing the vast space and effective platform of healthy development for the network culture. The fourth is to actively promote a high degree of self-discipline of internet industry through the social welfare organizations, strengthen public’s supervision of network behavior, give full play to the power of moral rule and code of conduct, and jointly prevent, govern and maintain communication security, network security and network social order.

4.3 Grasping the situation and making full use of information channels to promote cooperation

Information is not a dreadful monster, and the advantages of its role for the cultural field are also greater than the disadvantages. We should make good use of the existing information technology conditions to improve network publicity, strengthen foreign cooperation, and take the initiative to deal with cultural imperialism with a more positive attitude. At first, we should improve the product productivity and product quality of the mass culture of information age, constantly rely on the profound Chinese traditional culture to enrich network culture content, and improve the supply capacity of excellent cultural products and services. Second, we should actively use a variety of large sites, such as Peoples Network, Xinhua, etc., as well as WeChat, microblogging and other social networking applications, to spread value idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the party and the country’s major policies, the correct positive world outlook, life outlook and value system. Third, we should carry forward the basic national policy of opening to the outside world, and actively exert the “going out” strategy. More network cultural products embodied the Chinese characteristics, the times characteristics and the national characteristics should be created to broadcast Chinese advanced ideas and values, and enhance the speaking right of Chinese culture in the world. Fourth, South-South cooperation should be carried out to establish a new world information order. Maintaining the cultural diversity and equal development should be regarded as a basic principle to actively promote the formation of a more consistent network ethics and a reasonable “international practice”.

5. Conclusion

The essence of cultural imperialism is backed by the strong economic strength. With the cultural advantage, the world cultural market is expanded and occupied vigorously. It utilizes advanced science and technology and developed national education to make their culture to continuously lead a leading position in the world, and attempts to change this kind of one country’s cultural advantage into a worldwide cultural advantage. In today’s ever-changing development, the struggle for values, thinking systems and ideologies have never stopped or can’t stop. The advent of the information age, not only brings power and vitality to the development of the cultural field, but also breeds a hotbed for the development of cultural imperialism. In virtue of information technology, cultural imperialism is constantly reviving in a new form, and is more secret and powerful. Consequently, we must take a more active attitude to strengthen our own cultural security construction, improve the information technology capacity, build the security fortress of information era, and make full use of the internet to flourish China’s remarkable traditional culture, gradually going to the world.
6. References


