

*American Film
American Culture*

透过电影看美国 美国文化研究

史虹涛 著



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Preface 前言

语言是文化的基础，又是文化的结晶。想要学好一种语言，就必须了解使用这种语言的民族及其文化背景。只有对文化有了一定的了解，才能进行有效的沟通与交流。而电影则是社会文化的最好反映。电影与文化相互影响，共同发展：一方面，电影一定程度上引导大众文化的走向；另一方面，电影也是文化的组成部分之一，以直观、震撼的方式传达人们的思想感情和主流文化的价值观。因此，每一时期的电影都反映了当时的社会状态、人们的思想状况以及文化氛围。

自从爱迪生1894年用活动电影放映机播放第一幅胶片，美国电影已经走过120年的历程。在这100多年间，美国电影迅速发展，不断变迁，记录了美国的社会变革，人们生活方式的转变和价值观、意识形态的发展。美国电影是美国文化重要表达方式之一。美国电影中融入了美国文化视野，蕴涵着深层的文化价值立场，传播着文化价值观，影响着全世界电影观众文化价值观的形成。

撰写本书的目的是通过分析美国各时期经典电影，向读者介绍美国的性别角色、种族、价值观、阶级等发展演变过程，进而使读者对美国文化的根源与实质有一个深入的了解。

本书分为七个章节。第一章综述了文化的定义、特征与内涵；第二章全面介绍了美国电影发展历程及主要类型；第三章阐述了文化与电

影、文化与语言习得的关系；第四章分析了美国社会性别角色变化的特点，记述了两性形象发展变化的过程，阐述了其背后的社会根源；第五章分析了美国各种族的生存现状和在美国的发展历史；第六章介绍了美国价值观的主要内涵和在电影中的体现；第七章分析了美国阶级状况，重点论述了美国电影中劳动阶级的形象和阶级冲突的体现。

然而，美国电影同时也是商业运作下的商品，不能完全客观、真实地反映社会实质。另外，美国是个多民族、多种族、多宗教的国家，不同社会阶层、性别、宗教、种族分歧共生共存，盘根错杂，社会文化复杂多样，并不断发展变化，不可能在电影中得到全面体现，这些就构成了本书的局限性。另外，笔者自身的认识也有局限性，在论述过程中有不足之处还请读者批评指正。

编者

2014年9月



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Chapter One

Culture and Cultural Studies

◆ 1.1 Definition of Culture

Culture is a pervasive and complex concept. Defining culture into a single definition is very complicated, particularly in an increasingly international world. Even anthropology, the field that concerns itself with the study of different cultures, cannot yet properly define what culture is. Up to now, there are at least 450 different definitions of the word or concept of culture available in literature. To a certain extent, this finding underlines the difficulty and scope of the issues involved in study about culture.

There is no common agreement on its definition nor on the way it is operationalized. The word culture apparently originates with the Latin *cultura*, which is related to *cultus*, which can be translated as “cult” or “worship”. Members of a cult believe in specific ways of doing things, and thus develop a culture that enshrines those beliefs. The Roman orator Cicero first used the term of culture in classical antiquity. In the 17th century culture referred to the betterment or refinement of individuals, especially through education.

During the 18th and 19th century it came to refer more frequently to the common reference points of whole peoples, and some scientists used the term “culture” to refer to a universal human capacity. Most definitions used currently in the social sciences are modifications of the definition of Tylor (1871), who is considered to be the founder of anthropology. Over one hundred years ago he defined culture in this way:

“culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

The definition denotes that language is an aspect of culture because language is basically learned and shared by man as a member of society. And, in relation to foreign language learning, strictly speaking, these definitions imply that when somebody learns a foreign language, he participates to some extent in the culture of the native speaker of the language being learned.

In 20th century, culture has been defined widely by different authors. At the end of the 1930s, Margaret Mead put in contrast “culture” with “a culture”. According to Margaret, culture means the whole complex of traditional behavior which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation. However, specificity of the notion of culture with respect to a given human society was needed in order to study other societies. So the same citation goes on as: “A culture is less precise. It can mean the forms of traditional behavior which are characteristic of a given society or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of certain area, or of a certain period of time”.

Kluckhohn and Kelly (1945) reviewed 164 articles on concept and definition of culture and suggested the following familiar definition:

“Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.”

A very popular definition of culture is derived from Hofstede (1991) who maintains that every person carries within himself or herself patterns of thinking, feeling and potential acting which were learned throughout

his/her lifetime. He defines culture as “the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a group’s response to its environment”. Using the analogy of the way in which computers are programmed, Hofstede calls such patterns mental programs, or “software of the mind.” Accordingly, it is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Culture, as defined by Hofstede (1991) and other authors is a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment where it is learned.

Similarly, Ting-Toomey (1985) offers a working definition of culture as: “patterned ways of thinking, acting, feeling, and interpreting of particular groups”. This definition suggests an interpreting dimension to culture as well.

A definition by Terpstra and David (1985) serves to delineate what is meant by culture in this context:

“Culture is learned, shared, compelling, interrelated set of symbols whose meaning provides a set of orientations for members of a society. These orientations, taken together, provide solutions to problems that all societies must solve if they are to remain viable.”

According to Linton (1936), the culture of any society consists of the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior which the members of that society have acquired through instruction or imitation and which they share to a greater or less degree.

According to Spradley and McCurdy (1987) culture is “learned, and shared. In addition, culture is adaptive. Human beings cope with their natural and social environment by means of their traditional knowledge”. In other words, as something inherited, “traditional” cultural knowledge developed within a particular spatial and temporal “context” or “environment”. But as a dynamic process culture continues to change as people cope with new

challenges and adapt to changing conditions.

Harris (1995) defines culture as “the total socially acquired life-way or life-style of a group of people”. It consists of the patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are characteristic of the members of a particular society or segment of a society.

Carrol (1982) describes culture as: (a) something that is shared by all or almost all members of a social group, (b) something that the older members of a group try to pass on to the younger ones, and (c) something that shapes behavior or structures one’s perception of the world.

Another common way of defining culture is to conceive it as a (particular) way of life. For example, Barnouw (1987) maintains that a culture is a way of life of a group of people, the configuration of all of the more or less stereotyped patterns of learned behavior, which are handed down from one generation to the next through the means of language and imitation.

Similarly, Nanda (1991) refers to culture as the way of life characteristics of a particular human society. The way a people live includes what they do, what they have as behavioral patterns and what they think and believe. What do, have, think and believe can incorporate religious preferences, rituals, symbols, myths, dress codes, food habits, social interactions, shared values, family relationships etc. Similar interesting definition is presented by Ferraro (1990) who says “Culture is everything that people have, think, and do as members of their society.”

Argyle (1982) included technology and material culture in a definition of culture describing it as:

“... whole way of life ...language, ways of perceiving, categorizing and thinking about the world, forms of non-verbal communication and social interaction, rules and conventions about behavior, moral values and ideas, technology and material culture, art, science, literature and history.”

A useful definition of culture is given by Varner and Beamer (2001), who define culture as the coherent, learned, shared view a group of people has about life's concerns that ranks what is important, instills attitudes about what things are appropriate, and prescribes behavior, given that some things have more significance than others.

Adaskou, Britten & Fahsi (1990) help us define culture on a more specific level by outlining four meanings of culture. Their aesthetic sense includes cinema, literature, music, and media, while their sociological one refers to the organization and nature of family, interpersonal relations, customs, material conditions, and so on. Their semantic sense encompasses the whole conceptualization system which conditions perceptions and thought processes, and their pragmatic or sociolinguistic sense refers to the background knowledge, social and paralinguistic skills, and language code which are necessary for successful communication. While not necessarily all-inclusive or mutually exclusive, these aspects of culture provide more substance to the general definition above and reflect culture's many dimensions.

Another broad definition of culture is presented by Samovar and Porter (2001). Accordingly, culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.

Many earlier writers have extensively argued the importance of socially shared meanings as culture-specific (Hofstede 1991, Markus & Kitayama 1991, Mesquita & Frijda 1992, Russell 1994). In view of that, the socially shared meanings could be grounded in language, geographical closeness, and history at the boundaries of the nation-state shared by people who live or have lived within the same social environment (Hall 1976,

Hofstede 1980). These shared qualities may include common language, history, norms, beliefs, and values as well as particular ways of sharing experiences.

Different from the former definitions, which pay greater attention to concrete elements, recent definitions tend to emphasize the abstract element that underlies observable behavior. Brown (1994), for instance, defines culture as “a system of integrated patterns, most of which remain below the threshold of consciousness, yet all of which govern human behavior just as surely as the manipulated strings of a puppet control its motions”. Thompson (1990) views culture as the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions and beliefs. In a more detailed version, Larson and Smalley (1972) describe culture as a “blue print” that:

“guides the behavior of people in a community and is incubated in family life. It governs our behavior in groups, makes us sensitive to matters of status, and help us know what other expect of us and what will happen if we do not live up to their expectations. Culture helps us to know how far we can go as individuals and what our responsibility is to the group. Different cultures are the underlying structures which make Round community round and Square community square.”

As we can see, all these definitions share some common points. First, definitions agree on the fact that culture is learned, it is associated with groups of people and its content includes a wide range of phenomena including norms, values, shared meanings, and patterned ways of behaving. Second, culture is shared by a society. Members of the society agree about the meanings of things. They agree about what's important and what's not. Third, culture is complex and multidimensional. It is in fact too complex to define in simple terms. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified over 160 different definitions of culture. Up to now, one of the most widely

cited definitions by Tylor (1871) defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” In other words, culture is a patterned way of life shared by a group of people. Culture encompasses all that human beings have and do to produce, relate to each other and adapt to the physical environment.

Culture is also that aspect of our existence which makes us similar to some people, yet different from the majority of the people in the world. It is the way of life common to a group of people, a collection of beliefs and attitudes, shared understandings and patterns of behavior that allow those people to live together in relative harmony, but set them apart from other peoples.

To sum up the above definitions, first, culture is the context within which a member of a society exists, behaves, thinks, feels and relates to other. It is the shared value system of the members of a society. Second, as a system, culture has patterns, which an outsider can understand. Third, developed based on symbols manifested in abstract ways of referring to and understanding ideas, culture is communicated through language. Fourth, culture is shared by people in the same society. Finally, culture is learned. People are not genetically endowed by a particular culture. Children develop their value system and the rules of society by interacting with their surroundings, especially with their family. A society’s culture provides its members with solutions to problems of external adaptation and internal integration.

❖ 1.2 Characteristics of Culture

Culture is the collection of values, beliefs, behaviors, customs, and attitudes that distinguish one society from another. According to Haviland

(2002), cultures around the world share five basic characteristics: It is learned, shared, based on symbols, integrated, and dynamic.

● 1.2.1 Culture Is Learned

Culture is learned, it is not biological; we do not inherit it. Much of learning culture is unconscious. It is acquired by people over time through their membership in a group that transmits culture from generation to generation. Children begin learning about their culture at home with their immediate family and how they interact with each other, how they dress, and the rituals they perform. When the children are older and venture out into the community, their cultural education is advanced by watching social interactions, taking part in cultural activities and rituals in the community, and forming their own relationships and taking their place in the culture.

Culture is also taught by the explanations people receive for the natural and human events around them. The people with whom the children interact will praise and encourage particular kinds of behaviors, such as crying or not crying, being quiet or being talkative. Certainly there are variations in what a child is taught from family to family in any given culture. However, our interest is not in these variations but in the similarities across most or all families that form the basis of a culture.

● 1.2.2 Culture Is Dynamic

Culture is not static it is dynamic. No culture remains on the permanent state. It evolves according to changing social, political, economic and technical environment. Culture is changing constantly as new ideas and new techniques are added as time passes modifying or changing the old ways. This is the characteristics of culture that stems from the culture's cumulative quality. Because most cultures are in contact with other cultures, they exchange ideas and symbols. All cultures change, otherwise, they