

# Analysis on the Impact of the Ideology Differences on Films

## — Take *The Captain and Sully* as examples

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**Abstract**—China and the United States share significant differences in social ideology and cultural backgrounds, resulting in many differences in narrative, humanistic expression, communication and target market positioning of films with the similar theme. This essay takes *The Captain and Sully* as examples. Through analysis and summary, the writer finds that the differences in social ideology and cultural background have an impact on the narrative tactic, target market, the production, and the circulation strategy of films. For example, at the narrative theme level, *The Captain* is country-centered, while *Sully* pays more attention to the inner changes of the characters. In terms of production, *The Captain* pays more attention to the excitement brought to the audience watching the movie, while *Sully* pays more attention to the movie story itself. In the choice of target market, the target market of *The Captain* is positioned in China, while *Sully* is positioned in the world. The distinctive choices of plot and theme of the two films reflect the differences in cultures and ideologies of the two countries. The purpose of this essay is to provide film workers with new creative ideas through analysis, and to lead readers to think.

**Index Terms**—Ideology, film narrative, collectivism, individualistic heroism, target market.

### I. INTRODUCTION

*The Captain* is based on the true story of Sichuan Airlines 3U8633, the right windshield of which fell off at an altitude of 10,000 meters on May 14, 2018. The cabin pressure of the plane was released. The plane landed through the effective cooperation of the captain, the crew, and the ground staffs. *Sully* is adapted from a real story: on January 15, 2009, US Airways was attacked by the Canadian Brent geese shortly after the plane took off, causing the engines to stop. Finally, the captain successfully forced the plane to land on the Hudson River. Both two films are adapted from real events, but due to different ideologies, the films show different characteristics in narrative tactic, circulation and production and so forth.

French philosopher and political scientist Tu. de Tracy created the new concept of "ideology". He pointed out that ideology is a study of the origin and reliability of knowledge, a worldview and methodology that is essentially a collection of all concepts [1]. Different countries have different ideologies due to different social systems. The Western countries represented by the United States are capitalist societies, while some developing countries represented by China belong to socialist societies. According to the

exploration of several films, the writer finds that American movies embody the American dream, and the film is full of the idea that "ordinary little people can create extraordinary lives and become heroes", which reflects the individualistic heroism. In comparison, China tends to portray the hero image of collectivism in film and television works, which reflects the principle of "collective interests above individual interests". Both collectivism and individual heroism are one of the ideologies. Different cultural ideas affect the arrangement and selection of the film narrative content by the production team and the director, the determination of the cultural expression and publicity theme of the film, the choice of the mode of promotion and the target market, etc. Factors such as culture and ideology are having a deeper and wider impact on films. The writer noticed this trend and decided to explore this phenomenon in depth. Therefore, this essay selects two films adapted from real events - *The Captain* and *Sully* as examples for analysis. Based on differences in ideology and cultural background of different countries, the writer takes a further look into their impact of these factors' effect on the narrative tactic, target market, the production, and the circulation strategy of films.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The difference between this article and other articles is that it explores the differences between the two films from an ideological point of view.

After searching on CNKI (a web search engine of thesis in China), the author found a total of 27 papers on "*The Captain*" and "*Sully*". After research and classification, the author found that the themes of these 27 papers mainly revolve around the narrative tactic, and culture of the two films. About film narrative, there is "*Comparison of the Narrative between Chinese and American Thrill Films The Captain and Sully*" and "*A Comparative Study on the Narrative Strategies in Chinese and American Air Crash Films*", etc. Meanwhile, "*From Hollywood Films to See American Individualistic Heroism Values*" and "*Analysis on the Phenomenon of patriotic films Hits in the National Holiday*", etc is about the culture behind the movie. However, there is no article about the influence of different ideologies on those two films. The author notices this blank and decides to analyze this topic based on the experience and foundation of predecessors.

### III. IMPACT ON THE NARRATIVE OF FILMS

*The Captain* and *Sully* are both films with the captain as

Manuscript received April 30, 2021; revised June 20, 2021.

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doi:10.18178/ijssh.2021.11.4.1052

the core character in their narration. For the portrayal of the captains' heroic image, the two films demonstrate the different understandings of "heroes" of different cultural backgrounds, as well as divergence in Chinese (family-and-nation-centered) and American (individual-centered) cultures and ideologies [2].

#### A. Narrative Theme: Family-and-Nation Centered or Individual Centered

According to the Archetype Theory proposed by Carl Gustav Jung, Archetypes are universal symbols and images that have existed since ancient times and are manifestations of the unperceived collective unconsciousness throughout human history. In another way, Archetypes are the collective memories of human beings [3]. Both films, *The Captain* and *Sully*, shaped the heroic archetype of Captain in their narratives. The shaping of the archetype of the hero captain can resonate with the audience, arouse the deep shock of the audience, and to a large extent determine the success of the film's narrative [4]. The difference in characterization also reflects the different themes of the two films.

Chinese air crash films pay attention to the shaping of collective heroism. The film portrays the heroes of a certain group, who often give priority to the safety of the masses and the country, showing a characteristic of sacrificing oneself for the collective interest.

In the film *The Captain*, the spirit of collective heroism can be seen in many aspects. Lines such as "I must bring the 119 passengers safely back to the land" and "Please trust the captain, we will go home together" embody this spirit. At the same time, in order to make the image of the captain more in line with the requirements of collective heroism, the director focuses on the emergency actions taken by the flight attendants on the plane and the staff on the ground and the process of the captain and the crew working together to overcome difficulties, aiming to show that the successful landing is the result of the concerted efforts of all people. This narrative is a typical Chinese expression of the theme "Unity is strength". The emotional portrayal of gratitude to the passengers after the successful landing also highlights the hero's value. Through the depiction of a group of heroes, the film expresses the light of humanity. The narrative theme of *The Captain* is deeply influenced by the collectivistic values that emphasize the spirit of dedication in the mainstream Chinese ideology [5]. This is also the embodiment of the typical "family-and-nation centered" narrative mode.

Unlike *The Captain*, *Sully* is about a loss of self-worth and a search for it. This is the expectation for heroes in the context of individualism. First, the director chose to spend a lot of time shaping Sully's inner world. As a result, the audience can see his confusion and helplessness after becoming a hero, and his self-doubt when playing games with the committee. Showing the real psychology of the hero and making the hero ordinary can narrow the distance with the audience [2].

Second, the use of the layer structure revealed the captain's excellent performance as a trainee and paved the way for the captain's successful emergency landing. The conflicts between the safety board and Captain Sully also proved that he made the wisest decisions in crisis, and this

reverse trial highlighted his personal hero image [2].

Third, compared to the depictions of heroes in *The Captain*, *Sully* tells the story by focusing on the main character and chooses to downplay the efforts of the other characters and focus on the feelings and efforts of the main character to make the character more alive and full. *Sully* focuses on the individual as the center of the narrative.

Heroes are always there to save people in the face of disaster. The shaping of hero images in Chinese and American films also presents different characteristics due to different ideologies. The different emphasis of narrative subjects also affects the theme expression of film narrative.

#### B. Narrative Structure: Linear Structure and Nonlinear Structure

*The Captain* uses a linear structure. This time-oriented narrative focuses on the external morphological changes of events and pursues the interlocking of plots and the completion of endings [5]. *The Captain* tells the story in a time-oriented manner, ensuring the integrity of the story.

From the beginning, the film shows the daily routine of Sichuan Airlines staff and a series of preparatory work done by the crew before boarding the plane. Their skillful movements indicate their good professionalism. As the plane takes off, the film moves into the key plot. The right windshield fell off, releasing pressure in the cabin and putting the lives of passengers and crew at risk. Finally, with the captain's flying ability and excellent physical quality, and the crew and ground staff's full cooperation, the plane successfully makes a forced landing. The narrative sequence of the whole film is neat and orderly with clear clues. Meanwhile, the linear narrative structure of the film is consistent with the actual process of events, highly restoring the scene of events, and giving the audience a sense of reality while helping them understand the full picture of the story.

Instead, *Sully* uses a nonlinear layer structure. The core of the layer structure is no longer to present the contradictions and conflicts of the story itself but to focus on the narrative tension [5], such as the contrast and polysemy formed by different levels of narrative. *Sully*'s surface narrative structure is that the National Transportation Safety Board is investigating the ditching of US Airways Flight 1549 in the Hudson River, and the captain is under enormous psychological pressure from the praise in the media and the board's skepticism. As the story unfolds, accompanied by the conversation between Sully and his wife, the whole emergency landing of the plane on the water is restored by footage. Meanwhile, the film also depicts the image of Sully's love of flying and rich experience to the audience through the narrative layer of Sully's perspective, which lays the foundation for the successful crash landing. At the end of the investigation, the committee finally acknowledged that the crash landing was justified. The whole film does not deliberately pursue the interlocking of causes and consequences. However, it adopts the way of including events within events [5]. So that the course of events was relegated to the back burner. The exquisite weaving of narrative and the misdirection of time form a sense of uncertainty, and thus stimulate the reader's thinking.

There is no better or worse between the two narrative

modes, but different techniques are used to achieve different effects under different cultural backgrounds. *The Captain* focuses more on the process of the story and praises the spirit of the crew to overcome difficulties together, so the director uses a linear narrative to keep the story intact. Conversely, *Sully* is more concerned with describing the captain's feelings, so the director adopts non-linear narrative to restore the real thoughts of the characters to the maximum extent. By virtue of using a variety of techniques, film breaks the inherent limitations of time and space and create a tense plot, which leads to further thinking.

#### IV. IMPACT ON PRODUCTION

Ideology also has a certain impact on the production of *The Captain* and *Sully*.

The real incident of *The Captain* occurred on May 14, 2018. Three months later, Bona Pictures filed *The Captain* with the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television. Behind this quick decision is a strong purpose. From the very beginning, the positioning of *The Captain* was aimed at presenting the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Therefore, the time between the occurrence of the incident and the filing is not long. Even the audiences could feel the director's urgent mentality to catch up with the National Day schedule in 2019. The film was more like a political mission, and the crew didn't have to worry too much about box office because of a lot of companies that would organize their employees to watch that film. Therefore, during the entire shooting and production process, *The Captain* paid more attention to the transmission of the film's thoughts and strives to bring the audience excitement when watching the film, rather than creating a good story. To achieve the effect of excitement, the director restored the real event to the greatest extent and brought a sense of reality to the audience. For example, the crew spent a huge amount of money to build a model airplane. Two-thirds of the movie used virtual scenes, using green screen matting technology and other special effect to restore the entire process of the incident. At the same time, in the film, the dialogue of the captain and the Southwest Air Traffic Management Bureau staff was fully reproduced from the original dialogue between Captain Liu and the ground staffs in the real event. The crew selected the audio information in the original recording files to make the character's lines as close to the truth as possible; Besides, the creative team of the film also conducted in-depth interviews with the Sichuan Airline crew members and adapted the story based on their review and description of the incident.

The prototype story of *Sully* was called the "Hudson River Miracle" by the public. The incident took place on January 15, 2009. It was 7 years after the incident that the story was adapted to the film *Sully* by Warner Bros. Pictures. As a cultural product, it naturally shouldered the important task of promoting the American spirit and culture. Different from *The Captain*, *Sully* was half politics, half marketing. The director paid more attention to the audience's evaluation of the film, for this film, the director had plenty of time to work on it. So, from the incident to the filming and release

of the entire process, it was not difficult for the audience to see that the focus of the production team is more on the screen—to tell good stories in an unconventional way. Unlike *The Captain*, *Sully* used special effects technology as an auxiliary method to restore the incident. Along with the original incident, this part only appeared as a secondary plot, serving the main plot of the film. At the same time, the director added some fictional plot. By exaggerating the extent that how the *National Transportation Safety Board* deliberately makes things difficult for the captain, the main character's inner contradiction is achieved to the extreme. The "villain" role members of the National Transportation Safety Board played, therefore, sets off the main character's heroic image. In the production process, the director integrates the fictional plot into the real event, making the film's narrative fulfilled with ups and downs and with twists and turns.

#### V. INFLUENCE ON CULTURAL EXPRESSION AND FILM CIRCULATION

##### A. Culture Expression

As a fitting tribute to the National Day of China, *The Captain* is charged with the important task of realizing patriotic education, awakening Chinese identity, and social memory, building cultural confidence, and providing new strategies for the output of ideology [6]. Making a comprehensive survey of films released in China recent years, the reason why *The Captain* is so different in a series of patriotic films is that it is based on ordinary people in ordinary life and use their stories as the entry point to tell the story of our time. The film tells the story of an ordinary man who becomes a hero, is respected by the masses, and finally returns to work. This reflects the ideological core of "coming from the masses and going to the masses". In and after the air accident, the police and medical personnel who immediately dispatch under the deployment of the heads of Aviation Administration and the people all over the country who pay common attention to the landing situation of the plane also reflected the people-oriented idea and the socialist essence that the people are the masters of the country.

According to the ritual view of communication proposed by scholar James, when audiences watch movies and find that they share the same emotions with the characters, a sense of closeness and belonging will arise spontaneously [7].

With the true and rich content, *The Captain* satisfied the psychological needs of the audience with patriotism. Every Chinese shares the same excitement and pride that move their emotions and inspire a strong sense of cultural confidence, closeness, as well as belonging and pride.

*Sully* empathizes with the audience through the portrayal of the image and psychology of the captain. The film was released in the US on September 9, 2016. It also depicts the story of how ordinary people become heroes, but differently than *The Captain*. *Sully*'s focus is to depict the feelings and changes in his heart after he becomes a hero. The emotions of the audience are also driven by the captain's emotions, so watching the film is more like listening to an old friend to

tell his story. Through emotional communication, which benefits the delivery of the film's theme, the characters establish a psychological connection with the audiences.

The importance attached to the psychology of the characters is also caused by the mainstream ideology of the United States. America has always preached individualistic heroism. Mao Jinhua believes that the American values of individualistic heroism are based on western liberal values. It places more emphasis on individual freedom and the realization of values [8]. So in *Sully*, the director chose to play down the incident by focusing the spotlight on the captain alone. American heroes are divided into war gods and commoners, based on their origins and life experiences. The captain, as a commoner, has to worry about his livelihood as ordinary people. When he is questioned by the committee and almost loses his job, he also feels confused and scared. Such a hero is more in line with the psychological expectations of the audience. An approachable hero is more likely to arouse the audience's imagination and immerse them in their own hero dream. It is this kind of heroic complex that filmmakers in America have deeply alluded to the film utopia that they created, so that we can take a glimpse of the theme of individuals and heroes from the stagger lights and shadows. Hollywood films have successfully embedded the sentiment in the films. As a result, audiences can be entertained as well as enjoy pride from the inside out - that is, the satisfaction of value [9].

#### B. Film Circulation

Cultural ideology will not only affect the content of the film, but also have a certain impact on the selection of the circulation theme.

Looking at the circulation of *The Captain*, it is not hard to tell that, from the posters to trailers, the production team has been communicating 3 main themes of the film to potential audiences: respect for duties, respect for life, and respect for rules. Using Sina Weibo, the promotion team released a series of topics related to the theme of the film such as "Great comes from the ordinary, every ordinary job is worthy of respect", "Thank you for every ordinary professional who sticks to his or her job". Those topic words such as "Ordinary", "Dedicated", and "Respect" are highly consistent with the theme of the film. At the same time, videos behind the scenes were released using short video platforms such as Tiktok, which aroused widespread comments and emotional participation from a large number of netizens.

*Sully*, under the influence of individualistic heroism, demonstrated this mainstream value in its trailers. As one can tell from the multiple versions of trailers of *Sully*, those trailers are all based on the concept of "I". The line "I've delivered a million passengers over the forty years, but in the end I'm gonna be judged in the two hundred and eight seconds." told by Tom Hanks appeared in all trailers. This line means that everyone can make mistakes, but we cannot deny our previous efforts because of one mistake, and that we should pay more attention to the gains and losses of ourselves and the realization of value. The meaning behind this line is highly consistent with the concept of individualistic heroism conveyed in the film. Therefore,

differences in cultural backgrounds also impacted the themes of film circulation.

## VI. IMPACT ON THE TARGET MARKET, COMMUNICATION AND ITS PERFORMANCE

### A. Target Market

In order to maximize the effectiveness of the target market, the producers will use market segmentation to select the target market for the film. That is, the producer will subdivide consumer markets into segments based on the geography, demographics, psychology and behavior habits of the consumers, and ultimately choose the most suitable market according to the attributes of the film to reach its target audience [10]. Each segmenting is composed of consumers with similar needs. For example, most children like cartoons, young people like romantic films or science fictions, and most middle-aged or elderly people like historical films or war films, etc. *The Captain* and *Sully*, which are both based on similar real events, chose different target markets due to the differences in the geographical and cultural backgrounds.

*The Captain* mainly targets the Chinese market. As the patriotic film dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, it shoulders the responsibility of conveying the mainstream Chinese ideology and promoting the spirit of the times. The director integrates these ideas into the film. The infusion of ideology and culture has invisibly raised the bar for audiences to watch the film. To truly understand the cultural core of the film, the audience must understand Chinese history and culture so that the audience can be emotionally resonated. However, the establishment of emotional resonance does not happen overnight, especially for audiences under different cultural backgrounds. It generally takes a long time for those audiences to empathize with the culture of another country. It can be inferred from the fiasco of the overseas box office of *The Captain* that, under the collision of Chinese and Western cultures, socialist culture is difficult to be accepted by most Western countries. One of the key elements for the success of the film is to distribute the film to an audience that can resonate with the ideas conveyed by the film. Therefore, the positioning of *The Captain* is based on the Chinese domestic market.

As a film featuring American individualistic heroism, *Sully* targets the worldwide market. In recent years, American films, especially the superhero series by Marvel and DC, have been loved by audiences from all over the world. They are deeply influenced by the American individualistic heroism, especially for some youth groups, who fantasize about becoming superheroes who save the world like *Iron Man* and *Captain America*. Compared with the Chinese collectivism conveyed in *The Captain*, American personal heroism seems to be more easily accepted by audiences from different cultural backgrounds. There are three main reasons. The first reason is that American movies occupy a dominant position in the film markets worldwide, making its culture occupy an important position in the world; secondly, Hollywood continuously exports movies with the theme of individualistic heroism to

the world film market, making it possible that the audience accept this culture. Finally, most countries, like the United States, pay more attention to the realization and freedom of personal values, so such films are more likely to have cultural intimacy with such audiences.

### B. Communication Strategy and Effect

In 1948, Laswell first proposed the five basic elements that constitute the communication process in his essay *The Structure and Function of Communication in Society*. Those elements are: Who, Says What, in Which Channel, to Whom, and with What Effect [11].

Although the subjects of the two films are similar, the target markets and the communication strategies adopted are different. Hence, the effects produced are different. But now, with the rapid development of information technology and the Internet, no matter the form of information presentation, the channels for obtaining information, or the way of communication has tremendously changed. And this change provides film marketing a new perspective - new media marketing.

From the perspective of the Chinese domestic market alone, *The Captain* adopted a double-line method that combines online and offline channels to promote the film. Firstly, when *The Captain* was promoted on Weibo (one of the most widely used social platforms in China), the theme of promotion was closely related to the theme of the film. Secondly, the promotion team selected a time node that was conducive to the release of the film, with high frequency to bomb the audience with information. On September 9th, the official Weibo released 8 Weibo posts during the pre-sale, 5 during the advance screening on the 28th, 62 Weibo posts on the day of the official release on the 30th, and 167 Weibo posts during the National holiday. The official Weibo of *The Captain* selected the highest point of people's viewing psychology and viewing time for concentrated publicity, to maximize the publicity effect [12]. At the same time, *The Captain* also used traditional promotion channels to promote the film, choosing Chongqing and Chengdu as its very first cities for offline publicity events. The crew held their premieres in Chongqing and Chengdu on September 20 and 21 respectively. Also, the crew held a 10,000-meter high-altitude premiere. The main creative team all dressed as airplane crew members to serve the flight passengers, giving people an immersive experience of the film scene [13]. The traditional marketing model was therefore innovated. Finally, the film carried out multi-regional publicity events. The producers promoted the film through multiple dimensions and layers, which aroused considerable repercussions in China. After watching the film, many viewers posted their feelings on Weibo in text or pictures. The positive feedbacks from the audience created the word-of-mouth effect and shows that the strategy and contents of the communication are effective. The official Weibo account of the film has turned the audience into the main subject of communication by forwarding the feedback of watching films, forming a word-of-mouth atmosphere; this "bottom-up" approach has become a very effective marketing method. The most intuitive effect brought by a good communication strategy is that *The Captain* has achieved a box office of \$400 million in 65 days. However, the means of communication adopted in the release process of *Sully* are slightly less effective.

Besides, *Sully* was released in September 2016. Short videos and new media technologies are much more matured in 2019 than in 2016. Hence, the communication advantage is not obvious. *Sully* dropped trailers in its communication and marketing, and publicized through main crew members of the film. The strategy of *Sully* has also achieved weaker effects, compared with the communication and marketing strategies and performances of *The Captain*.

## VII. CONCLUSION

*The Captain* and *Sully* were produced by China and the United States respectively. China, under the socialist system, emphasizes that collective interests are above individual interests, while the United States under the capitalist system advocates individual freedom and value realization. Differences in social systems and ideological connotations between two countries directly impact people's way of thinking and perspectives of viewing problems. These differences directly affect the director or screenwriter's narrative tactics, target market, production, and communication and circulation strategy of films. To be specific, in the film narrative strategy, one uses linear narrative to highlight collectivism, the other uses non-linear narrative to highlight individual heroism, and from production to circulation, the producers take different approaches according to different ideologies.

*The Captain* portrays a collective hero which demonstrates the idea of collectivism, while *Sully* pays more attention to the changes in the inner world of the hero which reflects individualistic heroism. Different cultural backgrounds have a noticeable impact on the circulation, production and content of films. These differences, in fact, are the conflicts we will inevitably encounter in cross-cultural communication. As a new generation of growing filmmakers, we should embrace artworks under different cultural systems with more comprehensive knowledge and a more tolerant attitude. However, how to communicate with and learn from other countries while protecting the essence of our own culture? In what way should we accept literary artworks of different cultural ideological systems? Those questions are worthy to be explored and answered in further studies.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to show my gratitude to my teachers and professors who have provided me with valuable guidance in every stage of the writing of this thesis. Further, I would like to thank all my parents and friends for their encouragement and support. Without all their enlightening instruction and impressive kindness, I could not have completed my thesis.

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During campus, Weiyi accepts excellent education and takes part in many kinds of activities or organizations hold by the university such as News Centre in CTBU. She played an active part during staying in this organization. For example, she presented some news on the official website of school and at least 50 articles and reports in the newspaper of CTBU. In her class, Weiyi is the top student as well which can be proofed by her high marks during every term.

At the same time, during summer vacation in 2019, Weiyi became an intern in China Central Television which is the official and the most authorized TV station in China. She helped the director and producers organize order on site and check the subtitles as a director assistant as well.

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