

Rubel Molla

POPULAR GEOPOLITICS: REFLECTIONS ON CELLULOID AND ITS STRATEGIC OUTREACH

Abstract

Celluloid plays a significant role in framing or constructing a popular understanding of the rapidly changing geopolitical world. As a geopolitical aesthetic, global films set the moral grammar of the geographic representation and construct personal, collective and national identity. This paper argues that popular geopolitics (re)directs a nation's perception of the changing international relations and pursues national interests by changing popular opinion and bringing justification of actions. In creating this perception, films contextualize national identity, protected characteristics of the changes in global and domestic affairs, superiority complex and hegemonic aspirations of nations. Celluloid creates several strategic outreaches, i.e., promoting national identity, norms and values, connecting people and shaping opinion, justifying actions and initiatives, branding nation, mobilizing migration and economy. Films can be an effective platform for emerging nations in nation branding and shaping global opinion that may increase bargaining power in global negotiations on economic and socio-political affairs.

Keywords: Popular Geopolitics, Celluloid, Strategic Outreach

1. Introduction

In modern times, one of the key topics of film studies is global cinema, which Fredric Jameson proposed to call the geopolitical aesthetic of cinema.¹ Films provide language, imaginary and reference points and ways enframing popular understandings of the drastically changing geopolitical world. In the Cold War and post-9/11 world, American film culture and politics became crucial in the 'geopolitical aesthetic'. For many, movies are to be watched and enjoyed without heeding to the storylines, and locations, or dialogue. If anyone reflects deeply on movies such as "Tears of the Sun" (2003), "Collateral Damage" (2001), "United 93" (2005) and

Rubel Molla is Research Officer at Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS). His e-mail address is: rubeldups12@gmail.com

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¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1992. The idea of geopolitical aesthetics denotes the capacity of the films to scan or map the landscape and forces of the complex and evolving global situations which can be accessible by individual experience.

their narratives, content and visual form, one would feel that he/she were in an ‘age of terror’. Some geopolitical codes are reflected in the cinematic representation or films like assessment (or construction) of external allies, enemies, and other risks or threats, potential strategies for dealing with those allies, enemies and threats and justification of foreign policies to domestic audiences. Now, for the scholars of international relations and political studies, these codes have significant meanings because they can be helpful to explore how a nation’s foreign policy finds expression in the popular geopolitics of Hollywood, Bollywood and so on. How geopolitics is represented and contextualized in the films? What type of message audience receive from the films? If films play a crucial part in informing and constructing personal and collective identity, what are strategic outreaches?

This paper seeks to answer these questions. It argues that as part of popular geopolitics, film (re)directs a nation’s perception of the changing international relations and pursues national interests by changing popular opinion and bringing justification of actions. It relies on secondary sources of information, i.e., books, journal articles, newspapers, movies, movie reviews. For the paper, celluloid refers to motion pictures, animated films, TV series and documentaries. It is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section discusses the conceptual discourses of geopolitics, while section three discusses the relationship between popular geopolitics and films and their different contexts. The fourth section discusses the strategic outreaches of films. The final section concludes the paper.

2. Popular Geopolitics as a Strategic Instrument

The history of geopolitical reasoning dates back to ancient Greece. Aristotle’s political system of Greek city-states was much involved with their neighbouring empires and tribes from climatic conditions.² Such ideas were also prominent during the Renaissance. Immanuel Kant linked the apparent features of the people to climatic influences. However, the idea of geopolitics received strong prominence in modern social sciences after becoming a dominant approach in international politics and international relations research. In a simple sense, as Klaus Dodds put, “geopolitics provides ways of looking at the world and is highly visual as a consequence, readily embracing maps, tables, and photographs”.³ Broadly, geopolitics pursues a realistic approach to international politics and emphasizes the role of territory and resources in shaping states’ foreign policies and perceptions, e.g., threats and national interests. Geopolitics as an intellectual practice has mixed reactions from scholars around the world. On the one hand, it is an excellent guide to the geographical study of strategic

² Sören Scholvin, “Geopolitics: An Overview of Concepts and Empirical Examples from International Relations”, *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, FIIA Working Paper, No. 91, April 2016, p. 8.

³ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2007, p. 4.

relations between states. On the other hand, it is highly criticized for being a tool for authoritarianism and fascism.⁴ For a better understanding of this statement, the origin and development of geopolitics need to be explained. The earliest classical geopolitical writings were informed by imperial preoccupations and social Darwinist anxieties about the survival of states and empires.

Table 1: Origin and Development of Geopolitics⁵

Phases	Background	Proponents	Theme
Struggle for Empire	German Empire under the leadership of Bismarck, World War I	Ratzel, Mackinder, Kjellen, Bowman, and Mahan	National Organism, World Island, Heartland, and Sea Power Theory
German Geopolitics	Rise of Germany after World War I	Haushofer, Maul, and Banser	Pan-continentalism
Geopolitics of the United States	Rise of US during and after World War II	Spykman, George Reina, and Sev-ersky	Rimland Theory
Geopolitics during the Cold War	US-Soviet confrontation	Kennan, Kissinger, Brzezinski, and Taylor	Containment Strategy and Balance of Power
Post-Cold War era	Iraq War, Afghanistan War, and Counter-terrorism	Fukuyama, Kaplan, Brzezinski, Nye, Huntington, and Cohen	Universalistic Geopolitics, Critical Geopolitics, State-centrism, and Clash of Civilizations

The idea of the organic theory of the state⁶ by Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer’s expansion of the infamous term ‘*lebensraum*’ (grow to survive) was criticized as an attempt at Nazi expansionism.⁷ On the other hand, the Anglo-American branch of classical geopolitics was primarily about understanding politics based on location and physical geographical considerations and providing advice to politicians accordingly. Alfred Mahan focussed on the irreplaceable role of sea power and choking points. Later, Nicholas J. Spykman elaborated upon and altered Mahan’s theories. He argued that a country’s geographical location and its relations to centres of military power define its problem(s) of security.⁸ Focusing on topography such as landlocked states and island states,

⁴ Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus and Joanne Sharp, *Introduction: Geopolitics and its Critics*, The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics, 2012, p. 1.

⁵ Compiled by author.

⁶ Friedrich Ratzel, *Politische Geographie*, München: Oldenbourg, 1897.

⁷ Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson, “Introduction: Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought”, in Klaus Dodds and David Atkinson (eds.), *Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp. 1–24.

⁸ Nicholas J. Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*,

he emphasized that states having land and sea borders pursue different national defence strategies.⁹

However, classical geopolitics was bound up with the discipline of geography. It was a statist, eurocentric, balance-of-power conception of world politics of the twentieth century that dominated it. Friedrich Ratzel's ideas of living space grew out of the widespread anxiety about Germany's position in European politics, and Halford Mackinder's heartland theory reflected similar anxieties in Britain.¹⁰ Sustained critique of mainstream geopolitical reasoning emerged at the end of the Cold War to challenge the strategic doctrines of that era. As a sub-field of human geography, critical geopolitics investigates the geographical assumptions and designations that enter into the making of world politics. Critical geopolitics seeks to offer richer accounts of space and power. This approach emphasizes discourses, post-structuralism and the inevitability of languages, culture, popular media and their reproduction of events to fully comprehend complex geopolitical relations.

Now, for the discussion, two different understanding of geopolitics is crucial. First, geopolitics provides a consistent guide of the global landscape using geographical descriptions, metaphors, and templates, e.g., 'iron curtain', 'Third World', and/or 'rogue state', etc.¹¹ These terms are solely geographical because places are identified and labelled as such. It then helps generating a simple model of the world, which can then be used to advise and inform foreign and security policymaking. This idea of geopolitics is by far the most important in terms of everyday usage in newspapers, radio, magazines, and television news.¹²

Second, it is crucial to focus on how geopolitics works as an academic and popular practice. Labels such as 'iron curtain' and 'axis of evil' have a certain empirical value, but it is critical to question how they generate particular understandings of places, communities, and accompanying identities.¹³ For example, the term 'Third World', not only served as a geographical description of many places in Africa, Asia, and Latin America but also meant registering their political and geographical difference from the Global North as well. This paper focuses on the second understanding explaining geopolitics from formal, practical and popular

New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 447.

⁹ Nicholas J. Spykman, "Geography and Foreign Policy II", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1938, pp. 213–36; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1978, p. 195.

¹⁰ Gerard Toal, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

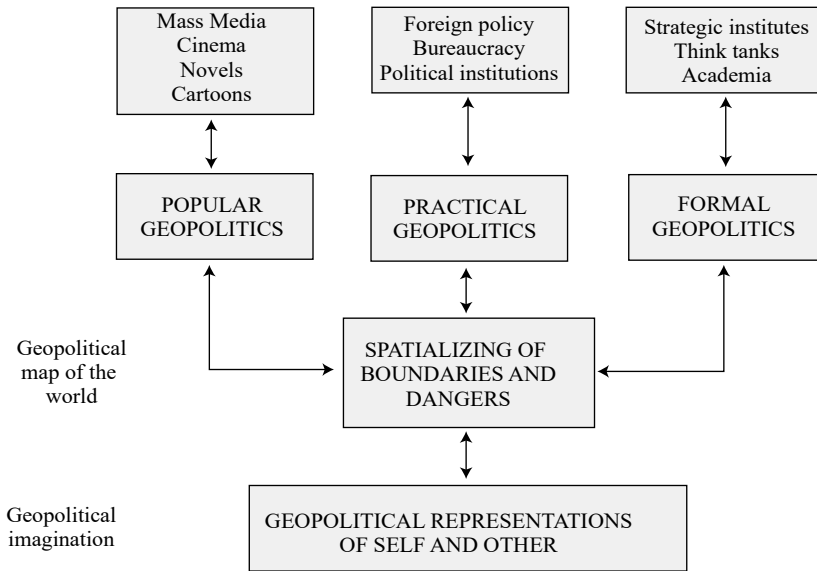
¹¹ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, New York: Oxford University Press Inc., 2007, p. 4.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Klaus Dodds, op. cit., p. 5.

aspects.

Figure 1: Formal, Practical and Popular Geopolitics¹⁴



The distinction between the three forms of geopolitical tradition is usually expressed in terms of the type of actors involved in reproducing geopolitical discourse (public, policy practitioners, and intellectuals); a forum for the discourse (mass media, policy practice, academia and think tanks).¹⁵

Popular geopolitics, as a sub-set of critical geopolitics, has received much attention since the early stage of the Cold War. It becomes an inevitable medium of dissemination of ideas and values amid the ideological dialectics between two blocs. Shaping cultural identity, i.e., values and opinions and attracting allies, became crucial during this period, where popular geopolitics emerged as an essential tool for pursuing respective agendas within the ideological conundrum. In the post-Cold War era, it remained a critical part of geopolitical representation, especially in shaping global opinion, identifying regional threats and opportunities and justification of foreign policy before the domestic people.

Popular geopolitics is an endeavour to discover the mutual relations, intertwining complexities between the traditional world of geopolitics and popular

¹⁴ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought*, London: Routledge, p. 46.

¹⁵ Joanna Szostek, "Popular Geopolitics in Russia and Post-Soviet Eastern Europe", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 69, No. 2, 2017, pp. 195-201.

media, especially through the scope of magazines, comic books, movies, music, and, news networks etc. Klaus Dodds defined popular geopolitics as the sensorial relationship between the power and the politics of images and sound. He also identified film and television as the crucial intervention in the making of geopolitical cultures.¹⁶

The geopolitical power of the media, therefore, lies not only in the broadcasting itself but also in how events, people, and places are ‘framed’. The latter is a term used in media studies to describe how a story is explained to viewers or listeners.¹⁷ Popular media can act as a provocation to governments, social movements, and others to demand political action. For example, in the case of the 2006 Israeli-Lebanese conflict, Western governments such as the United States, Britain, and France were forced to evacuate their citizens from the region and pressurized into exploring modes of securing a ceasefire and ensure the involvement of a United Nations peacekeeping force.¹⁸

Indeed, popular geopolitics is considered as an instrument for producing geopolitical knowledge. It argues that besides the state, intellectual elites and politicians, geopolitical ideas are shaped and communicated through popular culture and everyday practices. Thus, popular geopolitics considers films, magazines, television, the internet, and radio and how these contribute to the circulation of geopolitical images and representations of territory, resources, and identity. For example, in the post-9/11 cinema, screenplays and scripts embraced the politics of fear, hope, and anger. Again, a substantial popular geopolitics scholarship on the ‘war on terror’ had developed.

3. Connecting Geopolitics and Film

Soft power emerged as an efficient concept in the changing contemporary nature of geopolitics and provided a panorama on how relations work. As Wilson defined, soft power is the capacity to persuade others to do what one wants.¹⁹ Nye identified soft power as the ability to shape the preferences of others and to get others to want the outcome one wants because of one’s cultural or ideological appeal.²⁰ He argued that one’s preferred outcomes are attained through co-opted means of agenda-setting, persuasion and attraction.²¹ The film, being an element of popular

¹⁶ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, (3rd edition), 2019, p. 71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Ernest J. Wilson, “Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power”, *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, No. 616, 2008, p. 114.

²¹ Joseph S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, New York: Public Affairs, 2011, p. 16.

culture and art, can fit best for agenda-setting, persuasion and attraction within and beyond the national boundary. The relationship between art, culture, and politics is compelling and as George Orwell wrote, ‘all art is propaganda’, which means political and ideological impetuses lay behind the culture.²² Cinema has become an important instrument of foreign policy that can better communicate the values of one’s society to others rather than exerting military and diplomatic superiority. However,, here the issue of cultural imperialism comes. Critiques argued that the Hollywood film industry, being an American cultural instrument, is a kind of media imperialism that promotes the US hegemony worldwide as Benjamin R. Barber argued,

“What is the power of the Pentagon compared with Disneyland? Can the Sixth Fleet keep up with CNN? McDonald’s in Moscow and Coke in China will do more to create a global culture than military colonization ever could. It is less the goods than the brand names that do the work, for they convey life-style images that alter perceptions and challenge behaviour.”²³

Therefore, film has become one of the major genres within which the imaginaries, involved in mapping the geopolitical world, have been represented and reflected. In geopolitical understanding, film can generate symbiotic relationships between imaginaries and geopolitical realities. On the one hand, a film can be used both as a platform to provide a particular understanding of certain geography or state through shaping popular opinion. On the other hand, it can be a platform to justify the actions by the state to be done or have been done. For example, “Finding Mr Right” promoted Chinese people to migrate to the US, while “Rambo: First Blood” reflected the courage, dedication and boldness of a Vietnam War veteran, which further shaped the public opinion in favour of the American cause.

In the post-Cold War and post-9/11 world, American film culture and politics become crucial in ‘geopolitical aesthetic’. Klaus Dodds explained how Hollywood extensively engaged with state-sponsored enterprises since the Cold War period.²⁴ Interestingly, some geopolitical codes are reflected in the cinematic representation or film. Moreover, several operating codes of a government’s foreign policy are more or less reflected in the films:²⁵ the assessment (or construction) of external allies; enemies, and other risks or threats; potential strategies for dealing with those risks or threats; the identification of regional threats and opportunities; and the justification

²² Gary D. Rawnsley, “Cultural Outreach: Cinema and Soft Power”, *Journal of Chinese Film Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, March 2021, p. 187.

²³ Gary D. Rawnsley, op. cit., p. 190.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Colin Flint and Peter Taylor, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State, Locality*, New York: Routledge, 2011.

of foreign policies to domestic audiences.

For the last century, the US hardly experienced a ravage of war, except for the assault on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 and the 11 September attacks. However, American film companies, despite this absence of conflict on American territory, have been particularly upholding the aphorism that war is often fought twice – once on the battlefield and once on film.²⁶ For example, Hollywood generated a whole series of films, labelled “national security cinema”, which outlined threats facing by the United States particularly threats from the Soviet Union and other communist forces during the Cold War era, from the non-state actors, e.g., terrorist groups, uncontrollable natural forces and machines in the post-Cold war era. Nevertheless, there is a debate whether these outlining is a real or imaginative construct by the US since the country tries to establish itself as the hegemon and see world affairs from its perspective of interests.

Therefore, critics argued that the world is globalized but subtly Americanized.²⁷ Beyond entertainment, Hollywood is entering the business. It has started to invest in foreign films and companies. For example, “Sony” and “20th Century Fox” have established separate divisions that finance indigenous film-making. However, Hollywood exercises control by restricting these films to release in their countries with the same language, i.e., Sony’s co-financing of the Bollywood movie “*Saawariya*” and “Warner Bros” with the “*Chandni Chowk to China*”.²⁸ Moreover, Hollywood distributes films in many other languages not only to entertain people internationally but also to diversify the foreign markets and gain more market share.²⁹ Hollywood is turning into an export industry. China and India are becoming the larger movie market after Europe.³⁰ Besides, Hollywood responds to broader social trends and circumstances, i.e., human rights, women abuse, and sexual harassment. Since 1929, the US film industries have been influencing the reconstruction of American values and spreading them worldwide.³¹ It has successfully established the propaganda of ‘to be global is to be American’³² through media imperialism.

Moreover, Hollywood production companies closely align to various

²⁶ Klaus Dodds, op. cit., p. 150.

²⁷ Wanwarang Maisuwong, “The Promotion of American Culture through Hollywood Movies to the World”, *International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2012, p. 4.

²⁸ Stephen Galloway, “How Hollywood Conquered the World (All Over Again)”, *Foreign Policy*, 24 February 2012.

²⁹ Wanwarang Maisuwong, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ bid.

³² Gill Branston, *Cinema and Cultural Modernity*, Buckingham, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2000, p. 66.

organs of government departments such as the State and Defence Departments in Washington, DC. In 1948, the Pentagon established a special liaison office as part of the Assistant Secretary of Defence for Public Affairs, and it played a significant role in shaping storylines and determining whether cooperation would be extended to any production wishing to use the American military equipment or personnel.³³

Similarly, as a rising power in the global theatre, China is pursuing its ideology, culture and prowess through films that essentially brought China's exotic ambition before the people of the Western world. Contrasting Hollywood's "Disney Empire", China has successfully developed "Kung Fu industrial complex"- a multilayered and integrated industry comprised of writers, directors, producers, technical experts, and stars.³⁴ China has brought a shift in the contents of its movies. Once Chinese movies used to describe and portray a China struggling with a 20th-century sense of inferiority to the West. Furthermore, it moved toward an exploration of Chinese values and capabilities on their terms.³⁵ Chinese Kung Fu narratives often propound Chinese cultural superiority. China's orientation to Hollywood-style popular movies represents a new variant of foreign policy and international relations, better known as "wolf warrior diplomacy".³⁶ Chinese diplomats use this to defend China's national interests, sometimes aggressively if needed.³⁷ For China, such manner of foreign policy has two way implications: to gather domestic support for the Chinese Communist Party regime domestically and to defend interests abroad.³⁸ The "wolf warrior diplomacy" is named after a series of patriotic action films released in 2015 titled, "Wolf Warrior" and "Wolf Warrior 2". Those films were an attempt to emulate Hollywood-style fictional characters such as John Rambo, who first appeared in the "First Blood" released in 1982, where the courage, dedication and boldness of a Vietnam War veteran for the American cause were portrayed. Similarly, the "Wolf Warrior" portrayed a team of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers deployed in an African country with a mission to rescue Chinese civilians, and the storyline was "even though a thousand miles away, anyone who affronts China, will pay".

³³ Ibid., p. 152.

³⁴ Paul Foster, "The Geopolitics of Kung Fu Film", *Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF)*, 08 February 2007, p. 2.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁶ Kagusthan Ariaratnam, "A New Era for China's "Wolf Warrior Diplomacy", *The Geopolitics*, 25 June 2020, available at <https://thegeopolitics.com/a-new-era-for-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomacy/>, accessed on 05 March 2021.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Figure 2: Foundations and Elements of Cinematic Representation³⁹

<p style="text-align: center;">US</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Disney Empire and TNMCs</p> <p style="text-align: center;">State sponsorship</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Capitalism and free market</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Individualism</p> <p style="text-align: center;">American dream</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Military and technological prowess</p> <p style="text-align: center;">War on terror</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Chinese</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kung Fu Industrial complex</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Confucian teachings</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Communist social values</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kung Fu and cultural heritage</p> <p style="text-align: center;">China Story and its Prosperity</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Military prowess</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Idealistic fight between Authoritarianism and Individualism</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Indian</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Indian nationalism</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Identity politics (Indianness)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Communal violence and Harmony</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Colonial abuse and post- colonial politics</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Religion</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Terrorism</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Military prowess</p>	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Japanese</p> <p style="text-align: center;">based on state guided ideology (nation-as- family)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Changing discourses of national identity</p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p style="text-align: center;">Korean</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Nationalism and national identity</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Relationship between two Korea</p> <p style="text-align: center;">History of troubled politics</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p style="text-align: center;">Japanese</p> <p style="text-align: center;">based on state guided ideology (nation-as- family)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Changing discourses of national identity</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Korean</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Nationalism and national identity</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Relationship between two Korea</p> <p style="text-align: center;">History of troubled politics</p>
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On the other hand, Bollywood’s engagement at home and abroad, especially in the region, is remarkable. Indian films mainly highlight the feature of nationalism, religion, masculinity, terrorism, and violence, which simultaneously deliver messages to political elites and policymakers who design strategies for foreign policy and regional relations.⁴⁰ Different regional and domestic politics genres are

³⁹ Compiled by the authors

⁴⁰ Iqbal Shailo, “Bollywood in the Hollywood Era: Narratives of Ultra-nationalism, Terrorism and Violence”, *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2019, p. 43.

reflected in Indian movies, e.g., colonial abuse, post-colonial deprivation, identity crisis between communities and communal disharmony. Indian movies portray a common perspective on the Kashmir crisis depicting how ‘Kashmiri militants’ engage in terror activities, and Indian soldiers are fighting against the militants for the liberty of their soil.⁴¹ From the above discussions, relations between popular geopolitics and films can be seen from multiple angles. The following sub-sections will deal with those angles.

3.1 *National Identity*

One of the crucial genres of the films is focusing on the national identity. Values and norms are the key trademarks of the national identity of a nation. In the films, a trend of drawing a differentiating line between “us” versus “them” and “good” versus “bad” is always visible. Thus, reflecting “our” identity, values and norms are threatened by “them” and portraying “ours” one is good against the bad ones of the “others”. In the Cold War movies of Hollywood, communist values are portrayed as a threat to Western idealism and institutions, urging the US and its allies to uphold its values over the evils of Soviet enterprises. In the post-9/11 films, terrorism was appended as a threat in scripts and a major threat to the Western aspirations in screens, following the idea of “Clash of Civilizations”.

In upholding the national values, idealism and norms vis-à-vis defining “bad” others as a threat to “good” ours, movies became a common and more interactive platform for the countries. Hollywood films like “My Son John” (1952), with practical geopolitical reasoning of Truman administration, largely contributed to a particular geographical representation of the US and its sense of self-identity.⁴² In this movie, American values of openness and tolerance were shown to be both a threat and a virtue to its very existence. Because loyal and patriotic citizens should be watchful amid the free movement of people, ideas and goods throughout the US’s national territory. It portrayed that impressionistic young people are particularly vulnerable to such porosity and the malign influence of certain types of intellectuals.⁴³ On the other hand, the Soviet Union was depicted as geographically expansive, culturally monolithic, religiously suspect, and politically ceaseless in its desire to corrupt the body politic of America. During the 1940s and 1950s, US and USSR clashed over the future of Berlin and the Korean Peninsula, and Hollywood movies portrayed the Soviet Union and communism as a danger to the American way of life. After the confirmation of the Soviet’s nuclear power in 1949, movies like “My Son John” (1952), “Red Planet Mars” (1952), and “The Thing” (1951) had

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴² Klaus Dodds, op. cit., p. 153.

⁴³ Ibid.

brought the connection between threats and danger faced by the American citizens. The first one highlighted the power of communism to influence and undermine the moral extents of youths, the second and third movies focussed on the dangers posed by the aliens to the national security of the country.⁴⁴ After all, these movies suggest that the protection of American identity should be under vigilance and dangerous idealism regarding communism must be contained. Apart from these, movies like “Tears of the Sun” (2003) defended the American value of humanism, and Disney’s “Zootopia” (2016) depicted the liberal idea of individualism. In “Tears of the Sun”, Lt A K Waters (American soldiers) and his troops were sent to rescue Dr. Lena (American veteran doctor) from the jungles of a conflict-ridden Nigeria. However, she refuses to return with the rescue team unless they rescue her patients too. On the other hand, “Zootopia” left a message of the American Dream of individualism where the hero Hobbs declared that anyone could be anything in Zootopia (metaphor of America).

On the other hand, the Chinese way of upholding national identity is like, as President Xi Jinping expressed, ‘tell China’s story well’.⁴⁵ Chinese films depict its very identity of communist social values, Confucian teachings, and Kung Fu as an icon of nationalism and cultural heritage. Films, i.e., “Hero” (2002), “Springtime in a Small Town” (2002), “Kung Fu Hustle” (2004) highlighted the formation of Imperial China, its efforts to overcome the ravage of World War II and an idealistic fight between authoritarianism and individualism, desire for the supremacy of the physical over the technology that lies at the heart of Chinese cultural identity.⁴⁶ Japanese films uphold the national identity based on nationalism shaped by a state-guided ideology highlighting the importance of community and connections to fellow citizens. The issue of national identity is reflected in most Japanese horror movies like “Godzilla”. This movie highlighted the effects of World War II and the atomic bomb on city life, social development, and the environment.⁴⁷ Interestingly, Japanese horror movies evolved in response to changing discourse of national identity. In the late 19th Century, the Meiji government tried to structure Japanese identity revolving around the idea of “nation-as-family”. This idea demanded rerouting the individual interests for the betterment of the group or nation. However, in the early 1990s, due to the economic boom, neo-liberal values of individualism and self-

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Amy Qin and Audrey Carlsen, “How China Is Rewriting Its Own Script”, *New York Times*, 18 November 2018, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/18/world/asia/china-movies.html>, accessed on 07 July 2021.

⁴⁶ Carlo Celli, *National Identity in Global Cinema How Movies Explain the World*, US: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

⁴⁷ Caitlin Ladd, “Beyond Godzilla: Reflections of National Identity in Japanese Horror Films”, *Digital Commons*, 13 April 2018, available at <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/urc/2018/anthropology/1/>, accessed on 07 July 2021.

responsibility became key components of government policies and popular culture and media. Therefore, Japanese horror films from post-WWII to the present time try to depict existing individualism itself as horror while pulling themes of nostalgia and desire to return to traditions of the 20th Century as Japan is struggling to settle the fractured discourse of national identity.⁴⁸ South Korean films focus on nationalism, the relationship between two Korea which had weakened after the Korean War and attacked by Japan and China, i.e., “Tae Guk Gi: The Brotherhood of War” (2004) and “Hanbando” (2006). Hanbando criticized Japan’s exploitation.⁴⁹ Korean Films uphold Korean identity through dramatizing troubled politics, rapid development and roiled society of a country born back in 1948.⁵⁰

On the other hand, Indian films largely highlight Indian nationalism, which comprises cultural identity, the struggle for independence against the imperial power, and religious identity. Films like “Lagaan” (2001) reflected Indian nationalism and racial justice. The film depicted the situation and everyday life of Indians under British rule and how they fought against the British for justice (the cricket match was an allegory). The changing nature of Indian identity is also visible in the Indian films, the notion of ‘Indianness’. This is an attempt to assert Indian identity in the face of global consumerism.⁵¹ The ‘Indianness’ exposed in the movies generally focussed on the diaspora and transnational lifestyle, sportsmanship, urban tales, non-resident Indian, consumerist fantasies and middle class, which largely captured viewers in Indian and abroad. For example, “Raj Kapoor’s Shree 420” (1955) and “Mr. India” (1987) focussed on ‘Indianness’. “Shree 420” had a song that was praised in India and the Soviet Union, “My trousers English, the red hat on my head is Russian, but my heart remains Indian”.⁵²

Another genre of Indian films highlights both the religious plurality (Manmohan Desai’s 1977 blockbuster “Amar Akbar Anthony” and Rajkumar Hirani’s 2014 hit “PK”, which were highly praised) and religious exclusion (otherization of Muslims). Moreover, after the 9/11 and Mumbai attacks and the rise of Hindutva and populism in the landscape of Indian politics, there is a growing trend of depicting good “Hindus” of ours (Indian) than bad “Muslims” of others (Pakistani and Kashmiri militants etc.) and rewriting the history of Hindu cultural

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Kim Young-don, “Nationalism and Korean Movies”, *Korea Times*, 05 September 2009, available at http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/special/2009/08/173_49678.html, accessed on 13 September 2021.

⁵⁰ Andrew Salmon, “10 must-see films that tell South Korea’s story”, *Asia Times*, 19 February 2020, available at <https://asiatimes.com/2020/02/10-must-see-films-that-tell-south-koreas-story/>, accessed on 13 September 2021.

⁵¹ Shoma A Chatterji, “The culture that Bollywood creates”, *The Statesman*, 27 October 2017, available at <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/culture-bollywood-creates-1502518017.html>, accessed on 13 September 2021.

⁵² Ibid.

heritage and glory, even change the trajectory of history in the name of “restoring” Hindu nationalism. Otherization starts with juxtapositions of “Barbaric Muslim other” against the “good Hindu king”. For example, in “Padmaavat” (2018), Sultan Alauddin Khilji served as “Muslim other” against Raja Ratansen as a “good Hindu”. Both of them desired Rani Padmini for her beauty, but their desire in the movie was different. Khilji’s desires for Padmini were portrayed in line with the discourse of “Muslim invaders” uncontrolled appetite, sexual and otherwise.⁵³ On the contrary, Ratansen’s desire was described through the discourse of romance and courtship. Critics argued that the moral of the story demonstrates the political hysteria on the demographic threat to Hindu India posed by the Muslims through polygamy and so-called “love jihad”.⁵⁴ Similarly, “Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi” (2019) turned into a Hindu nationalist imagery through the lens of Rani Laksmi Bai around the religious worship and cow protection rather than focusing on the historical facts of Hindu-Muslim unity in fighting against the British and first war of independence in 1857.⁵⁵ Now, the whole cinematic culture of Indian films can be defined as a cinema that is Hindu by habit, secular by assertion and commercial by instinct.⁵⁶

3.2 *Protected Characteristics (National Stereotype)*

Sometimes films are designed to draw a line between good and evil, most movies portray a specific characteristic and/or personification to establish that line using specific symbols or behaviours, e.g., language, costume, religion and ideology. For example, in the Cold War Hollywood movies, communism and the Soviet Union were portrayed as the villain, while actors and their language were in a Russian accent. Similarly, in the post-9/11 movies, terrorism (mostly Islamic) is portrayed as a villain and threat to Western liberal values.

There is much resemblance between America’s real-world enemies and Hollywood’s villains, which is a historical trend.⁵⁷ In the late 1920s, German mad scientists and soldiers were characterized in the Hollywood movies and in the 1930s, where Nazis were featured in the movies. During World War II, for obvious reasons, Germans appeared as villains in US films – as did the Japanese.⁵⁸ At the height of the Cold War, the movies were hailed from behind the “Iron Curtain”. The transition in the villain character reminds the real-world geopolitics, which is considered as a handy

⁵³ Pranab Kohli and Pranab Dhawan, “Bollywood: ‘Othering’ the Muslim on screen”, *Frontline*, 27 March 2020.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Sohini Chattopadhyay, “Bollywood and the business of secularism”, *The Hindu*, 17 April 2017.

⁵⁷ Ella Donald, “From Russia, With Love: the Sudden Resurgence of the Soviet Villain”, *Vanity Fair*, 28 July 2017.

⁵⁸ Tom Brook, “Hollywood stereotypes: Why are Russians the bad guys?”, *BBC*, 05 November 2014.

way to generate tension and provoke emotional reactions.⁵⁹ There is a long history of depicting Russian characters as villains. Even before the Cold War, they were represented as geopolitical threats to the West.⁶⁰ However, stereotyping takes a particular aim during the Cold War, not at Russia but also the Soviet communism. During the dramatic and pressing times of the Cold War, like the Cuban Missile Crisis, a Russian villain on the screen (“Thirteen Days”) was more ominous because viewers knew that superpowers’ nuclear missiles launch control centres were composed of conducting war.⁶¹ In a good number of American movies, e.g., “Invasion U.S.A” (1985), “Rocky IV” (1985), “Golden Eye” (1995), and “Air Force One” (1997), Soviet and Russian characters assigned for the role of the villain having bold Russian accent, emotionless manner and cruel behaviour.⁶² In “Invasion U.S.A.”, Chuck Norris single-handedly defeated an invading army of communist fighters who came to terrorize Americans and destroy the American way of life. Most importantly, almost all movies of that time had anti-Soviet and anti-Communist rhetoric or message. In the post-Cold War and post-9/11 movies, like “Child 44” (2015), this trend of depiction continued. The venture of Warner Bros, Wonder Woman, also came back to fight the Soviets in the Cold War.

After the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet villain era, the Gulf War and 9/11 have promoted the trend of Middle Eastern villains in war movies and superhero franchises. Arabs and Muslims were demonized in those movies with a varying degree of intensity. For example, “The Sheik” (1921) depicted Arabs as questionable characters, i.e., thieves and murderers.⁶³ In the pre-9/11 movies, “Delta Force” (1986), “The Siege” (1998) and “Rules of Engagement” (2000) characterized Muslims as ‘bad men’. The critics argued that the trend of Hollywood’s depictions has been suffering from “3B Syndrome” where Arabs are portrayed as either belly dancers, billionaires, or bombers.⁶⁴ In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, concerns were raised among the Arab-Americans that they might be typecast as terrorists. The narrative of Islamic threat became a constant imagination of looming terrorism on the Hollywood silver screen. For example, “Into the Night” (1985) and “Iron Eagle” (1986) portrayed Arab Muslims as terrorists and ruthless killers threatening the American way of life.⁶⁵ Though positive Arab characters are found in Hollywood still, they are vilified in the films.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Elizaveta Vereykina, “5 Hollywood Villains That Prove Russian Stereotypes Are Hard to Kill”, *The Moscow Times*, 09 August 2015.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Rubina Ramji, “Examining the Critical Role American Popular Film Continues to Play in Maintaining the Muslim Terrorist Image, Post 9/11”, *Journal of Religion & Film*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2016, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Jack George Shaheen, “Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2003, pp. 171–93.

Interestingly, Chinese villains in the movies date back to the early cinema when Fu Manchu appeared as a suspicious Chinese character. However, when “The Mask of Fu Manchu” was released in 1932, the Chinese embassy in the US protested and handed over a formal complaint letter accusing that the title character was depicted with intense hostility.⁶⁷ In the 1990s, several Hollywood movies depicted oppression in Tibet, i.e., “Seven Years in Tibet” and “Red Corner”. Later, in 1977, Disney’s “Kundun” (sympathetic to the Tibetan cause) was highly criticized by China, and the CEO of Disney, Michael Eisner, apologized to the Chinese leadership.⁶⁸ After that, in a zombie movie, “World War Z” (2013), the location of the origin of the zombie outbreak was altered from China to North Korea. In “Doctor Strange” (2016), the character of “Ancient One”, a Tibetan character in the original comic book series, was changed to a white character. Interestingly, no major film has depicted China as a military foe of the United States for a decade. Again, in 2012, “Red Dawn” (original in 1984) remake was released, with a Chinese villain. The storyline pitted patriotic Americans against an invading Chinese Army.⁶⁹ Later the storyline was changed and pitted against North Korea. However, deleting the offending plot and character is not enough to surpass Chinese censorship, now China demands positive depictions, especially Chinese science and military capability.⁷⁰ This is reflected in “Transformers: Age of Extinction” (2014), where the Chinese military swoop the day and portrayed Chinese patriotism on the screen. Similarly, “The Martian” (2015) showed the significance of the Chinese space agency in rescuing stranded astronauts on mars. When NASA’s food carrier rocket for stranded astronauts was exploded, China’s agency came in NASA’s help.

Notably, Hollywood is unwilling to trace Chinese characters with evil intent because China has become an important market for the studio. In the case of “Red Dawn”, the Chinese villain was changed to North Korean in the post-production, from the concerns that otherwise, it might restrict entry to the Chinese movie market. It should be noted that American movies are not distributed in North Korea, and the producers feel safe that there could be no loss in the box office by alienating North Korea.⁷¹ It is the box office equation and Chinese investments which completely disappeared villain characters from Hollywood and brought Chinese in a positive light. China was the second-largest box office market in the world in 2019 with revenue of US\$ 9.3 billion, while the revenue of first ranked the US and Canada

⁶⁷ Rubina Ramji, op. cit., p. 3.

⁶⁸ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Hollywood Is Paying an ‘Abominable’ Price for China Access”, *Foreign Policy*, 23 October 2019.

⁶⁹ Ella Donald, “From Russia, With Love: the Sudden Resurgence of the Soviet Villain”, *Vanity Fair*, 28 July 2017.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Tom Brook, op. cit.

reduced to US\$ 11.4 from US\$ 11.9 in 2019.⁷² Moreover, China increased its influence in Hollywood by increasing investments. From 1997-2013, among the 100 highest-grossing films globally each year, China financed only 12 films. However, from 2013-2018, it financed 41 top-grossing Hollywood movies.⁷³

Sometimes, Russian politicians criticize the overt demonization of Russians in films and urge them to ban the distribution. Now, the question may arise: despite Russia being the fourth largest movie market globally, why do studios take the risk of antagonizing a significant portion of viewers and customers? One reason might be that Russia's complaints about Hollywood movies have public reaction impacts (psychological orientation that Russian are tends to be the villain) which play a positive role in favour of the studios. Instead, people feel glad for their interest and attention. Moreover, as Klaus Dodds argues, Hollywood is more concerned about the Chinese market.⁷⁴

Chinese movies are much aware and conservative in portraying any stereotype nationality as villains. Their intervention is very much symbolic or avoids hostility in choosing villains. For example, in the "Wolf Warrior" series, they depicted terrorist groups in Africa. Another interesting part is that China feels uncomfortable with the villain in movies having Russian origin. If there is such a character, China censors it before running in the theatre.⁷⁵ For example, the blockbuster movie sequel "Iron Man 2" was edited by the Chinese censor board. In this movie, hero Tony Stark fought Ivan Vanko, the son of a fallen Russian physicist who had many grievances on the Stark family that dated back to the Cold War. Interestingly, words like "Russia", "Russian" were distorted and inaudible during the utterance by the characters in the film, even these words were disappeared in the Chinese subtitles.⁷⁶ Critics explained that it happened because China might not want to see a negative portrayal of its diplomatic allies. Moreover, China clings to Russia against the West on the issue of sanctions on "rogue states" and human rights. Moreover, being a communist country, China feels embarrassment with the US's continuous nostalgia for the Cold War ideological skirmish, which is at the centre of the "Iron Man" comic series of the 1960s with Tony Stark, an anti-Communist defence contractor.⁷⁷

⁷² Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/243180/leading-box-office-markets-workdwide-by-revenue/>, accessed on 22 October 2020.

⁷³ Amy Qin and Audrey Carlsen, op. cit.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Aaron Back, "At the Movies in China, Can a Russian Be the Bad Guy?", *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 May 2010,

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

What next? So far, Hollywood left few nationalities to demonize.⁷⁸ Now, it needs fresh and new villains or evildoers in the films. After the rise of ISIS, it was thought that ISIS would be the key source of evil characters. However, in the case of IS, representational challenges come in. On the other hand, ISIS is made up of different nationalities picked from the Middle East, North America, the UK, and beyond, making it tough to define ISIS within a stereotype nationality. However, analysts and critics argued that a new trend of bad guys will be discovered shortly, resulting from polluters and climate deniers. For example, the blockbuster “Avatar” (2009) has portrayed environmental enemies as villains.⁷⁹ In the context of recent relations between the US and Russia during the Trump administration (known as Russia fever with the allegation of melting nose in US election and annexation of Crimea), evil characterization of Russia in the movies is going on, and a recent example is “Atomic Blonde” and “Glow” both of which focussed on the Crimea crisis.⁸⁰

The culture of hyper-nationalism is a dominant trend of expressing stereotype nationality in Bollywood films and depicting villainous characters. Movies like “Lagaan” (2001) used to depict imperialist powers against which India fought for its independence. After the Indo-Pakistan War, new agenda emerged in Bollywood where films started to use Pakistan as a dog⁸¹ and portrayed them as villains and their defeat brought Indian national pride. The representational scheme of depicting ‘Muslim other’ as the nation’s enemy started in the 1990s. However, after the 9/11, Mumbai attack and the rise of Hindutva in Indian politics, the representation scheme transported to the conflation of Muslims, terrorists and Pakistani (“Little Terrorist” released in 2004 and “Sarfaroosh” can be the best example of such kind of scheme). Characters of the minorities are mostly stereotypes. Muslims are either evil (criminal) or very good; either terrorists and dons or impossibly good patriots. For instance, movies like “Raaees” (2017), “Rangoon” (2017), and “Naam Shabana” (2017) are the best testimony of such characterization.⁸² However, questions may raise, why Chinese are not depicted as villains in Bollywood movies despite irritation in the border? Unlike Pakistan, China has little presence in Bollywood, especially as a villain. For example, which featured the Indo-China border war and an organic link between them was featured in “Haqeeqat” (1995) and “Dr. Kotnis Ki Amar Kahani” (1946) respectively.⁸³ Raaj Kapoor’s 1951 film “Awara” was enormously popular in China as it was close to communist ideology and propagated that people

⁷⁸ Tom Brook, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ella Donald, op. cit.

⁸¹ Pranab Kohli and Prannv Dhawan, op. cit.

⁸² Sohini Chattopadhyay, “Bollywood and the business of secularism”, *The Hindu*, 15 April 2017.

⁸³ Rana Siddiqi Zaman, “China in Bollywood”, *The Hindu*, 27 August 2009.

should be given equal opportunity. After the 1962 Sino-Indian War, when the Peace Treaty was signed, the censor board imposed restrictions in portraying China as the villain. Consequently, the portrayal of Chinese characters was changed. When Sikkim was in dispute between the two countries, the movie's backdrop, "Himalaya Ki Goad Mein" (1965), had a Chinese touch, and the villain was not a Chinese character but exist representation of the accusations in mirror. For example, in the Bollywood film "Prem Pujari" (1970), Chinese were shown as nasty people who shot a dog running across the North East Indian border laughing, and chanting "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai".⁸⁴ Another important reason for not portraying China as the villain in the Bollywood film is China's huge box office market (second largest US\$ 9.3 billion) because Chinese market has emerged as a profitable film market for the Indian movies in recent times. For example, "Dangal" and "Secret Superstar" earned a gross of US\$ 92 million and US\$ 13 million respectively in the Indian box office while it was gross US\$ 200 million and US\$ 118 million respectively in the Chinese box office.⁸⁵

3.3 *Superiority Complex and Hegemony*

Movies became a robust platform of showing cultural prominence comprising national chauvinism and achievements, national values and idealism, national prowess, both military and technological. Hollywood films portray the supremacy of American identity, values and ways of life. Masculinity, for example, in "Rambo" (Sylvester Stallone as Rambo single-handedly fought off and defeated a roster of American enemies), "Rocky IV" (taught the Soviets a good lesson by thrashing Ivan Drago) and "James Bond" series, is an excellent testimony of US's hegemony and supremacy. Moreover, Hollywood films ("Behind the Enemy Lines" and "Tears of the Sun") uphold American liberalism, individualism and human rights as the only way of protecting the world and humanity. In "Iron Man", Tony Stark made a new weaponized armour suit and flew back to Afghanistan, killed the terrorists, and saved the Afghani villagers. By depicting the US as the saviour of humanity, this film legitimized the cause of the US invasion of Afghanistan. Besides, Chinese films came up with the supremacy of masculinity in Kung Fu, ancient Chinese ideals of Confucianism and cultural heritage.

Apart from this, films become a platform to show the military and technological prowess of the nations. Nations try to portray their military as the most capable of defending their respective interests and people at any cost anywhere globally, even against the enemies from outer space (symbolic) like "Battleship"

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Parth Vohra, "Indian movies attract millions around the world — and that number looks set to grow", *CNBC*, 02 August 2018.

(2012). “Tears of the Sun” (American), “Wolf Warrior”, “Transformers: Age of Extinction” (Chinese) and “Uri: The Surgical Strike” (Indian) all those military films showed the military capability and prowess of their country to protect their national interest or (their people) and can operate themselves at any harsh situation. In the Indian cinema, Kashmir becomes a ravaged paradise or a scenic backdrop for the heroism of the Indian armed forces.⁸⁶

Besides, the prowess of the intelligence community like FBI, CIA, RAW is also highlighted in Hollywood and Bollywood movies. For example, “Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit” (2014) was a story of a young CIA analyst who uncovered a Russian plot to crash the US economy with a terrorist attack. The movie “16 December” (2002) was a story of a group of Indian spies who discovered a plot that Pakistanis were going to make a nuclear assault to destroy New Delhi on 16 December 2001 while, “D Day” (2013) was based on the dream of assassinating the Dawood Ibrahim in Pakistan by a secret Indian agent team.

Some movies also glorify the space mission and race of space development, i.e., “Rocketmen” (2009) depicted the courage, bravery and triumph of the US’s space program. “Spacewalk” (2017) glorified Soviet Union’s space race and preparedness, while “First Man” (2018) depicted Armstrong’s legendary space mission that led him to be the first man on the moon. The sci-fi “Countdown” (1967) described NASA’s desperate race to land a man on the moon before Russia does, while “The Mouse on the Moon” (1963) portrayed that the US and the Soviet will control the space programme and lead the other nations towards the space exploration. Moreover, the Chinese movie, “Wandering Earth” (2019) explained the saga of Chinese space mission and future hope where “Tik Tik Tik” (2018) was the first Indian space film that focussed on Indian capability to protect space programmes from any disruptions. On the other hand, technological advancement is reflected both as content and technical performance in productions like “Avatar”, “Transformer and Terminator” series, “Robot 2.0”, which are an attempt to qualify the technological advancement and superiority of the countries.

4. Strategic Outreach

As Power and Crampton argued, films provide a language, imaginary, reference points, and ways of framing popular understandings of the drastically changing geopolitical world.⁸⁷ Films as a part of popular geopolitics exert a significant strategic outreach by motivating popular thinking towards geographical

⁸⁶ Ipsita Chakravarty, “How Bajrangji Bhaijaan brought peace to the LoC and solved the Kashmir issue”, *Dawn*, 27 July 2015.

⁸⁷ Andrew Crampton and Marcus Power, *Cinema and Popular Geo-politics*, London: Routledge, 2007.

representation. Popular media, especially films, can establish cultural hegemony by cultivating people's minds and actions (through representational logics, emotion and affect, and intertextuality), promoting norms and values, connecting people and shaping opinion, justification of actions and initiatives, nation branding, mobilizing migration and economy.

Implications of cinema in geopolitical discourse can be understood from the perspective of cultural dominance and cultivation theory. Cultural imperialism means the dominance of a recognized culture over the other cultures when cultural products, e.g., values and norms, films, news, costumes, and foods, of the developed world step across the borderlines to the developing and 'undeveloped' countries and become triumphant over the local culture. Cultivation theory focuses on how people are nurtured and taught. In the films, this theory evaluates how people get exposed to the films and to what extent they absorb the values from the films. It is about watching films, feeling pseudo involvement, absorbing values and adapting the absorbed values to daily life. As a result, the nation's historical and cultural identity reflected in the films sees imitation in action. Modes of media imperialism are crucial to discuss cultural dominance without direct economic relations and how people get exposed to films. There are four modes- communication vehicle (i.e., films and documentaries), a set of industrial arrangements, i.e., transnational media corporations (TNMCs); the body of values, i.e., liberal capitalism and democracy, human rights; and media content, i.e., war on terror.⁸⁸

4.1 *Connecting People and Shaping Opinion*

Cinema serves the crucial role of representation. It primarily helps to connect people, generate the feelings of imagined community and educate them about the context and contents of the events and happenings. It generates spontaneous stimuli towards a common understanding and shaping opinion in both domestic and international affairs. It is also a crucial tool at the hands of state apparatus to justify any actions and initiatives. For example, in the "Why We Fight" series (1942-1945), Pentagon closely worked with producer Frank Capra and provided advice, equipment and personnel. The message of the series was to US soldiers to justify why their country was involved in WWII and to the US people to pursue support for US involvement in the war. This series required viewing for all of the US service members. In the Cold War era, the CIA and the US Information Agency accepted movies as vital tools for the public campaign to educate American people about the dangers posed by the Soviets and inform the

⁸⁸ UK Essays, "Analysis Of Cultural Imperialism With Hollywood Films Media Essay", November 2018, available at <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/media/analysis-of-cultural-imperialism-with-hollywood-films-media-essay.php>, accessed on 15 April 2021.

other nations as well.⁸⁹ As a result, most of the Cold War featured Hollywood films depicted the Soviet Union as a villain and communism as a threat. The animated film *Animal Farm* (1954) was funded by the CIA, which deemed George Orwell's allusion to the failed promises of the 1917 Russian Revolution. Propaganda becomes an important content of films. Film-based propaganda in Nazi Germany was the most notorious example of political space in the 20th Century. American propaganda film "*Casablanca*" promoted the message that America remained benevolent during WWII. Again, movies like "*Pearl Harbor*" and "*Pianist*" favoured America and depicted Germany and Japan as threats to the world.⁹⁰

Representation is significant, and representational logic can affect people's behaviour and shape their opinion. Ex-Hollywood actor Ronald Regan's appearance in Cold War geopolitics received some cinematic terms. When he described the Soviet Union as the "evil empire" in 1983, the Star Wars franchise came to the forefront. Then Strategic Defence Initiative (involving a space-based weapons system) was termed as the "Star Wars" to fit the presidential narrative regarding reference to "freedom", "forces of evil", and a "struggle" for the future of the world.⁹¹ Regan's manner, dress and speech became the reference of popular culture. He dressed and acted the part of statesman, cowboy, and commander in chief. Sometimes he quoted from films like "*Rambo: First Blood*" (1982), "*Missing in Action*" (1984) and "*Top Gun*" (1986) became a typical Regan movie fantasy in which heroes (American) flew sophisticated planes, shot enemy pilots and rescued missing Vietnam prisoners of war (POWs). Again, in May 2003, President G.W Bush piloted a plane and landed on an aircraft carrier just similar to that of the "*Top Gun*".⁹² It is believed that "*Top Gun*" was a geopolitical response to the humiliation of the failure of Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. In the movie, unable to defeat the Vietcong forces in a jungle of South East Asia, actors focussed on the rescuing role- a new dawn of fighting and overcoming enemies and adversaries in new places, e.g., Middle East, Central Asia, Indian Ocean and South East Asia. After the flying suit-pose, president Bush wore a dark suit and declared completion of combat operations in Iraq (Iraq invasion started in March 2003). To add extra enthusiasm, a banner with 'mission accomplished' from the control tower was hung on the aircraft.⁹³

Movies demanded to be a powerful tool to shape global audiences when the Chinese President focused on telling China's story well so that coherent,

⁸⁹ Klaus Doods; *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁹⁰ Wanwarang Maisuwong, "The Promotion of American Culture through Hollywood Movies to the World", *International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology (IJERT)*, Vol. 1, No. 4, June 2012, p. 4.

⁹¹ Klaus Dodds, "Popular Geopolitics and the 'War on Terror'", *E-IR*, 10 May 2015, available at <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/05/10/popular-geopolitics-and-war-on-terror/>, accessed on 04 May 2021.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

compelling and important Communist party-approved narratives of China's rise to power could reach global spectators properly. *Wolf Warrior* is such a venture of the Chinese government, while animated film *Abominable* (2019) included a map with the nine-dash line to shape popular opinion with their controversial claim of historic right over the South China Sea. *Valley of the Wolves—Iraq* (2006), a Turkish film was a counter-thesis to American media representation of the Iraq War and the Bush administration's 'war on terror' discourse in 'unstable regions'.⁹⁴ It gives a geopolitical imagination of Turkey in the Middle East and the world. The film is a political justification to express animosity toward the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq because Iraq and the surrounding region are too important for Turkey. The film effectively satisfied Turkish audiences when the super-Turk defeated American chaos and again brought (re)order to former Ottoman Baghdad. In a research, it was revealed that the movie became the voice of 57 per cent of Turkish people.⁹⁵ Indian films like *Uri: The Surgical Strike* convinced the people that Pakistani militants are destabilizing Kashmir and there needs special action to dominate militants like military operations and future extra-ordinary means to follow the Kashmir problem. Again, Pdmavaat raised a securitization agenda, shaping public support favouring controversial National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in India. Interestingly, "Kashmir: The Final Resolution" (2020) was an attempt to educate people that article 370 was the biggest obstacle to the development of Kashmir and help the Kashmiris to understand the benefits of the abrogation of the article.

4.2 *Promoting Norms, Values and Culture*

Films, as an art of *mimesis*, can imitate reality and represent nature. Cinemas repeat the stories and motifs that reveal the deep cultural and sociological essence of a nation and explain the world. It is a medium of expanding national ethos, norms and behaviour. Films played a significant role in shaping the US impression of the Soviet Union and the threat posed by communism inside and outside the country during the Cold War and post-Cold War world. Hollywood helped to consolidate the key sense of American values and identity which President Truman articulated in 1947- the land of the free, a beacon of democracy and a liberal way of life.⁹⁶ Films (i.e., "Tears of the Sun", "Zootopia") uphold the US as the defender of humanism worldwide and the saviour of liberal values and tolerance and promote the American dream which is based on liberalism and individualism. Likewise, Chinese, Japanese and Indian films also promote their cultural heritage, national identity and belief.

⁹⁴ Necati Anaz and Darren Purcell, "Geopolitics of Film: Valley of the Wolves—Iraq and Its Reception in Turkey and Beyond", *The Arab World Geographer*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2010, p. 35.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁹⁶ Klaus Dodds, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

Bollywood cinemas focus on the idea of “Incredible India” to shrine its image outside the world by attracting tourism. Moreover, Indian films provide religious and geopolitical messages to “promote peace”, uphold Indian identity as a secular, multi-fabricated nation living within an era of Hindutva such as “Bajrangi Bhaijan”. Similarly, Japanese films portray its value and national belief based on the idea of “nation-as-family”, while Chinese films promote traditional Chinese heritage and its socio-political (communist) ideas and agenda (value of mixed economy) based on which it is striving to fill the “China Dream”. South Korean films highlight their resilience to overcome exploitation and transform into a developed nation. They uphold the Korean brotherhood and repair roiled society destroyed by war. Korean films also promote a cosmopolitan world view on economic inequality in the world and the struggle against slacking the economy and unstable geopolitics (“Parasite”).⁹⁷

4.3 *Nation Branding/Promotion*

Nation Branding is an essential trademark of a nation’s soft power. In recent times, cinema has become an agent of cultural globalization and a powerful vector of cultural diplomacy. It has often been channelized by the nations or governments to expand their soft power as well. National identity is the key to creating a unique position in the global village. Films create culture, build identity and marketize that identity to the world. In popular geopolitics, nation branding means branding a place, a special geographic presentation and a way of life. Content of the branding comprises current values and assets of the nation and its future aspirations. Such kind of branding is highly involved with outputs like international tourism, cultural exchanges and movement of goods and services.

Being an aid to the US foreign policy, Hollywood films serve as a eulogy of the American vision and dream of the world. They also promote American values and products and construct or reinforce a favourable image of the country.⁹⁸ For example, “Titanic” and “Lord of the Rings” had significant impacts on the perceptions of international tourists America and New Zealand respectively. Peter Jackson’s trilogy, “The Lord of the Rings” (2001-2003) and “The Hobbit” series indirectly advertised New Zealand before the global audience, drawing the attention of tourists to the various shooting spot especially on the Hobbiton village. As a result, the southwestern Pacific dairy country turned into the world’s fourth most desired place to visit in 2006.⁹⁹ Thus, the “Lord of the Rings” phenomenon became

⁹⁷ Kelly Kasulis, “Oscar-nominated ‘Parasite’ speaks to a growing divide in South Korea”, *The World*, 06 February 2020.

⁹⁸ Floribert Patrick C. Endong, “Cinema, Globalization and Nation Branding: An Exploration of the Impact of Nollywood on the Nigerian Image Crisis”, *Journal of Globalization Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1, May 2018, p. 79.

⁹⁹ Jane Han, “New Zealand Picked as Model for National Branding”, *The Korea Times*, 09 October 2007.

a classical example of film-induced tourism. Similarly, “Titanic” pulled millions of fascinated international tourists to America. In a research, it was found that “Titanic” attracted more than 20 per cent of the world’s population to America in 1998.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, the movie “Crocodile Dundee” (1986) was a great phenomenon of tourist promotion and country image, which promoted the conventional image of Australia worldwide for a generation.¹⁰¹

Again, the movie becomes an influential platform of national culture and behaviour. For example, after the exposure of Korean films before the Thai people, they become obsessed with Korean cultural practices like Korean cosmetics, dance style, food and singers. They become addicted to Korean materialism because they accept Korean values and believe that it is the fanciest culture in the world.¹⁰² In Japan, the film becomes a unique cultural legacy of the nation. For instance, Kon Ichikawa’s “Tokyo Olympiad” (1964) became Japan’s subtle and sympathetic branding and a positive depiction of the nation. It was a mixture of Japanese national sentiment, a mixed story of Olympic history and rituals with Japanese culture to depict Japan as a modern nation that stood with dignity after WWII.¹⁰³ Moreover, science-fiction movies depict a nation’s thirst for science, research and technological sophistication, which also positively portray a nation before the global audience and add brand values. Space-related thrillers depicting space exploration efforts, and innovation increase positive image. For example, “AntMan” explored the US effort to quantum research (for humanity), which portrayed America’s drive for research and technological advancement.

4.4 *Economic Mobilization and Migration*

Movie industries also produce economic mobilization, an essential strategic outreach. Films promote economic mobilization in terms of the box office market, promoting tourism and the movement of goods and services. The globalization of film industries has created momentum in the Disney empire, Kung Fu industrial complex and Bollywood empire. Those empires control the global box office exerting economic and socio-cultural influence on people’s choices and way of life. For example, most American film companies located in California and Los Angeles but they have worldwide business operations that encircled the globe. Studios, distribution networks and exhibition platforms of Hollywood are controlled by six-US-based Transnational Media Conglomerates (TNMCs): the Walt Disney Company, Comcast-NBC-Universal, News Corporation, Viacom, Time-Warner and

¹⁰⁰ Floribert Patrick C. Endong, op. cit., p. 80.

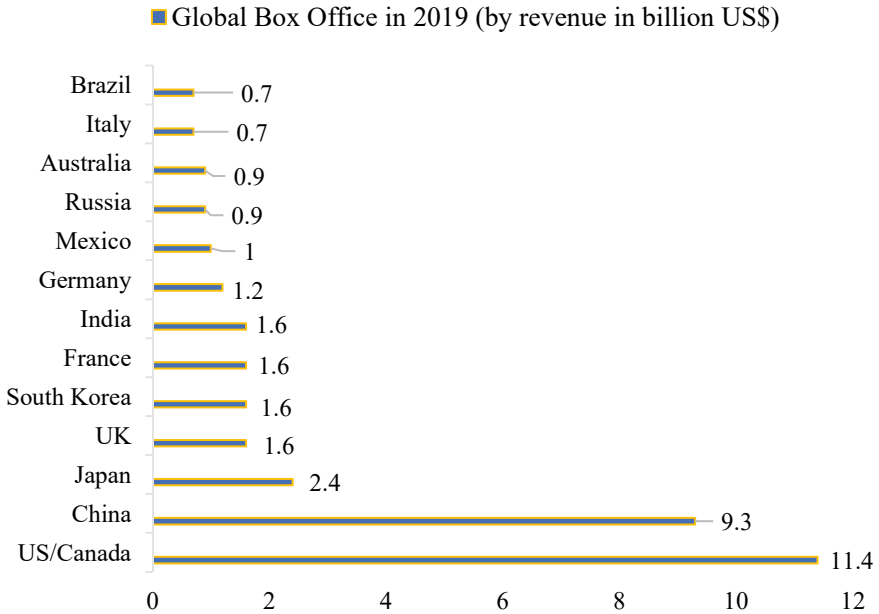
¹⁰¹ Julia Redwood, *Selling Australia: Part 2: The Brand*, Sydney, 2001.

¹⁰² Wanwarang Maisuwong, op. cit., p. 5

¹⁰³ Barry Natusch, “Nation Branding Through Film”, *Japan SPOTLIGHT*, 2019, p. 41.

Sony Entertainment of America. Interestingly, TNMC dominated Hollywood creates asymmetrical influence over the internal structure, ownership patterns, distribution and exhibition process.¹⁰⁴ They also try to standardize films of the other national film industries.

Figure 3: Global Box Office in 2019 (by Revenue in Billion US\$)¹⁰⁵



On the other hand, the US’s film industries promote three core features- the capitalist mode of production, the liberal democratic state form, and the consumerist way of life.¹⁰⁶ When it encourages consumerism among the global audience, obviously Hollywood movies have a role in economic mobilization. For example, the audience has become consumerist overnight after watching movies, i.e., the culture of eating low carb food in movies caused the popularity of McDonald’s, KFC, and Pizza Hut around the globe, which have economic implications too.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the geographic representation of a country draws the attention of the tourists which has economic value. For example, “Harry Potter” increased 50 per cent tourists to filming locations,

¹⁰⁴ Available at <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-357507714/the-economics-geopolitics-and-ideology-of-an-imperial>, accessed on 06 June 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Statista, available at <https://www.statista.com/topics/964/film/>, accessed on 03 May 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Wanwarang Maisuwong, op. cit., p. 2.

“Frozen” 37 per cent to Norway, “The Beach” 22 per cent to Thailand, “Braveheart” 300 per cent to Wallace Mountain, Scotland, “Mission Impossible 2” increased 200 per cent and “Troy” 73 per cent to Canakkale, Turkey.¹⁰⁸

Movies also promote migration whenever norms, values and identity are reflected as the best one. The young generation becomes fascinated when they find the Western world provides the best scope of research and innovation, technological facility, civil rights and human rights, which defends the individualism directly or indirectly mirrored in the movie platforms. Thus, a psychological impulse is created to be a dreamer. A channel of attracting the creams from the global brains is developed, and US and European countries are the best examples. For example, “Finding Mr. Right” (2013) is a story of ‘birth tourism’, a recent controversial form of tourism from China to the US. It portrayed a Chinese woman, the mistress of a wealthy businessman, sneaking into Seattle on a tourist visa to buy Gucci bags and have an American child.¹⁰⁹ It made more than US\$ 82 million in China and was the 9th highest earning domestic film of 2013. It is reported that in 2014, the number of Chinese births in the US was 60,000.¹¹⁰ Chinese women temporarily migrate to the US and give birth in American hospitals and practice *yuezi*, the month of recovery recommended to post-partum women in China. The key reason to travel to give birth is to obtain a US passport for their babies, some hoping that their child, once grown, can petition the US government for a visa for their parent(s) in return. Another reason for choosing the US for giving birth is to avoid high fines payable in China for violating the one-child policy. Despite Child policy relaxation in China, birth tourism is increasing.¹¹¹ Moreover, cinema has become a platform for talking about the success of the peace process around the world. Again, some movies represent the places of the world where people are suffering from poverty. The UN uses this platform to call for more concerns about children, human rights, displaced people, and immigrants. The key purpose of the UN-sponsored films is to raise funds and donations for the displaced and deprived people worldwide and seek acknowledgment for those people.

5. Conclusion

Popular geopolitics is an endeavour to explore the mutual relationships and intertwining intricacies between the traditional world of geopolitics and

¹⁰⁸ “Popular Movies Can Increase Tourism to the Film’s Location between 25%-300%”, available at <https://championtraveler.com/news/popular-movies-can-increase-tourism-to-the-films-location-between-25-300/>, accessed on 03 May 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Matt Sheehan, “Born In The USA: Why Chinese ‘Birth Tourism’ Is Booming In California”, *Huffington Post*, 06 December 2017.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Frank Shyong, “Why birth tourism from China persists even as U.S. officials crack down”, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 December 2016.

popular media, particularly through the scope of films, musics, and news networks etc. Celluloid becomes a powerful instrument for drawing sensorial connections among power, geographical imaginaries and geopolitical cultures. Film emerged as a critical tool of geopolitical representation especially in shaping global opinion, identifying regional threats and opportunities, and justifying foreign policy before the citizens. It exerts a significant strategic outreach by motivating popular thinking towards geographical representation. It becomes a strategic weapon to cultivate people's mind and actions through representational logic, emotional involvement and intertextuality. It helps in promoting and selling norms and values; facilitating people-to-people contact and shaping the popular opinion on the issues of national interests; justifying actions and initiatives before the citizens; branding the nation' and mobilizing migration and economy.

It essentially helps to connect people, generate the feelings of imagined community and educate people about the context and contents of the events and happenings. It generates spontaneous stimuli among the people towards a common understanding and shaping opinion in domestic and international affairs and facilitates the state apparatus to justify any actions and initiatives. The film is a medium of expanding national ethos, norms and behaviour. It played a significant role in shaping the US impression of the Soviet Union and the threat posed by communism inside and outside the country during the Cold War and post-Cold War world. Nation Branding is an important trademark soft power. Nations or governments have often been channelized cinema to expand their soft power and establish itself as cultural hegemon. Films create culture, build identity and market that identity to the world. Nation branding is highly involved with outputs like international tourism, cultural exchanges and movement of goods and services. Therefore, films play a unique role in branding the nation before the world. Globalization of film industries has provided huge momentum in production and distribution films. The term 'box office' becomes popular after the expansion of movie industry across the world which bears significant economic value. Moreover, as films provide a pseudo involvement of the audience with the geography appeared in the film and generate fantasy, it drives audience into action, ultimately helping in promoting tourism and facilitating in movement of goods and services. Therefore, film industry has become a significant sector of investment and leaves geoeconomic impacts as well. Bringing psychological impacts on the global audience, films can bring change in the nature of human migration. For example, young generations, as western movies directly or indirectly mirror their own values, ethos and way of life as the best, feels the western countries provides the best scope of research and innovation, technological facility, civil rights and human rights, defending individualism. Thus, it helps to attract the best brains worldwide to Western countries, especially in the USA.