

# The History and Development of American Tv Series in China

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**Abstract:** This research examines the dissemination history and strategies of American TV series in China through text analysis of relevant Chinese and English literature. As an important carrier of American culture, American TV series have been increasingly influential in global communication. This paper aims to research the communication and development of American TV series in China in the past 42 years since the 1980s and the changes of American TV series audience. It analyzes and summarizes the three important stages of dubbed film stage, DVD stage and Internet stage. In addition, the popularity of American TV series as the most influential and widely distributed overseas series in China is analyzed from four different strategies of content narrative, audience demands, marketing and culture. In addition to the well-produced content of American TV series and the dissemination strategies for the Chinese context, American TV series also contain the universal cultural values. American TV series under different genres cover as many common cultural topics as possible, which can get the maximum value recognition among different cultural groups and form a certain degree of cultural identity construction and cross-cultural communication demands.

**Keywords:** American TV series, history, development, Chinese audience

## 1. Introduction

Mass culture is a daily cultural form that takes mass media as the means and operates according to the law of commodity market, aiming to make a large number of ordinary citizens get pleasure. Any cultural and artistic form is a certain reflection of society, and TV series also belong to the category of mass culture (Ma, 2011). The development of TV series can not only reflect the changes of politics, culture and economy, but also affect the fashion, values and sociocultural trends.

The United States is a major power in production and consumption of TV series, which occupies a large share of the international TV series market. With excellent means of production and dissemination, it has set off a huge boom of watching TV series around the world. Integrating social culture into their stories, which bears the popularity, fashion and consumption of modern society, American TV series is a typical representative of cultural communication (Zhang, 2014). In the context of globalization, American TV series, with its unique advantages, continue to transcend the constraints of context, region and culture and spread widely, becoming a unique landscape in cultural communication.

Since the 1980s, American TV series has become a popular cultural phenomenon. As a non-local TV series, it has been introduced to China and exerted a profound influence on some local Chinese film and television creations and audiences' aesthetic interest. Since the introduction of American TV series into China, it has spread and developed rapidly. This period of cultural transmission of American TV series in China is hard to ignore (Dai, 2012).

After 2000, when the Internet era came with an irresistible posture and became the main channel for people to spread and receive information, more and more audiences began to watch American TV series through this new media, which greatly expanded the way for audiences to watch American TV series. Therefore, American TV series can further spread rapidly in China and amass a large number of American TV series fans.

However, the communication process of American TV series in China is not smooth sailing. With the changes of China's national conditions, times and technological innovation, the communication process of American TV series in China is also undergoing great changes. Then the composition and changes of the audience of American TV series will also change with the spread of American TV series in China. Therefore, it is necessary to review the development history and strategies of American TV series in China, as well as the cultural influences and audience changes brought to Chinese audiences in different stages.

## 2. Methods

The dissemination of foreign media content, particularly American television series, in China has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past decades. The evolution of American TV series in the Chinese media landscape cannot be separated from the broader historical, political, and cultural dynamics between China and the United States. As Keane (2015) notes, the global circulation of media products reflects a complex interplay of cultural soft power, media policy, and audience reception. American TV series, with their high production quality, narrative depth, and global appeal, have long found receptive audiences in China, despite regulatory restrictions and shifting ideological boundaries.

China's engagement with American television can be traced back to the reform and opening-up period in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when international content slowly began to re-enter the domestic media environment. Early series like *Man from Atlantis* and *Growing Pains* marked the beginning of this wave, introducing Chinese audiences to Western family life, youth culture, and social dynamics distinct from domestic narratives (Zhu, 2013). Over time, the proliferation of digital platforms, including piracy websites and later official streaming platforms like iQIYI and Tencent Video, has accelerated access to American content and transformed viewing behaviors (Lobato, 2019).

This research focuses on the dissemination of American TV series in China. This research adopts the content analysis method under the qualitative research method, and investigates the history and development of American TV series in China based on relevant Chinese and English bibliographies. Firstly, the keywords like "the United States, American TV series, history of development, and China" is searched on Google Scholar. Next, cluster analysis is used to classify the literature according to different topics. Finally, the literature narrative analysis of the same theme is formed, and the results are obtained. This paper aims to review the history and development strategies of American TV series communication by evaluating the important historical stages of American TV series communication in China.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The 1970s and 1980s were an important period in Chinese history. In 1979, China launched reform and opening-up and established diplomatic relations with the United States. Subsequently, China normalized international exchanges with European countries, as well as the process of reform and opening up gradually advanced, brought new changes to China's political environment at home and abroad, and provided new opportunities and improvements to China's economy and trade. At the same time, it also laid a cultural foundation for China to introduce American TV series. In order to keep pace with the rapid economic and social development at that time, China began to introduce various kinds of cultural products in the aspect of culture. Among the many cultural exchange programs, the Chinese government has introduced and broadcast American films and television productions since 1980. However, the popularity of American TV series in China does not happen overnight, but has a lot of political and cultural foundations. For example, American TV series are introduced into the Chinese market under the background of reform and opening up and the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States. On the other hand, since the end of the 1970s, China's television equipment has shown a trend of rapid development with the increase of the number of television imports and the introduction of television production line. From the end of 1976 to the beginning of 1977, according to preliminary statistics, the coverage rate of the national television population reached 36%. Nearly 300 million people in China can watch TV, and the TV coverage rate in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Liaoning and other places is over 50% (Yu, 1993). These preconditions have created the early spread of American TV series in China. However, the spread of American TV series in China is not smooth. Since American TV series carry different ideologies and cultural values, their dissemination in different social spaces will be hindered to a certain extent.

### 3.1 Mid-1980s to early 1990s -- dubbed film stage

In the 1980s, there was a huge contrast between a large number of viewers and the lack of TV programs, and the demand for TV programs in China was in short supply. Faced with the cultural needs of a large number of audiences and for effectively alleviating the crisis encountered by China's television industry in the development process, it was the best choice to introduce foreign film and television programs, and broadcast them after translating (Chang, 2018).

The first stage was in the 1980s and 1990s, when American TV series were introduced and spread in China as translated productions. The *Man from Atlantis* and *Garrison's Gorillas* were successively broadcast in the China Central Television (CCTV), which quickly aroused the pursuit and discussion of the Chinese audience. Although the number and types of American TV series introduced and broadcasted in China during this period were not abundant, its influence could not be underestimated. In the Chinese context at that time, the introduction of science fiction films and action-adventure TV series for the first time not only enabled Chinese audiences to see the story themes and contents that were totally different from Chinese TV series but also made people feel the surprise and shock brought by different culture. Chinese people begin to receive new culture, new wave through television.

In 1980, from January 5 to April 19, China Central Television (CCTV) broadcasts an American science fiction series called "The Man from Atlantis" every Saturday night. This American TV series was first introduced in China by the translation department of China Central Television and became the first American TV series formally introduced in China. It marked the beginning of Chinese people to receive new culture and new trends through TV.

Garrison's *Gorillas* has been broadcast every Saturday night at 8 p.m. since October 1980. It tells a story of the Lieutenant Garrison selected some liars, thieves, and robbers from prison to form the expendables in the late World War II. In the story, everyone participates in the team task with a will of redemption. Each hero has his distinct personalities, courageous and prudent. Even if they have shortcomings and have complained about arduous tasks, the humorous plot and the real performance of each person's shortcomings in the TV series actually make the character images more authentic and credible. At that time, young people in China were used to watching Soviet 1918. When they were first encountered this kind of alternative heroism TV series, it brought them a new experience, and were impressed deeply especially by the words "expendables".

However, American TV series such as Garrison's *Gorillas*, which spread the theme of alternative heroism, caused a bit of turmoil in the social background of China at that time. (Wang, 2008). On the one hand, China was at the dawn of the reform process, and there was a huge gap between the values expressed in the film and China's national conditions. On the other hand, 1979 was at the condition of the maximum of unemployed people since the founding of New China. Employment became the main pressure for urban youth at that time, and economic pressure also made them feel desperate (Wang, 2008). At this time, Garrison's *Gorillas* seemed to make some young people find their spiritual comfort, but it also made some people begin to imitate the plots in the TV series, such as playing knife-throwing, theft, smoking, drinking and so on, which caused not only some negative effects on the thinking of young people but also some social security problems (Wang, 2012). As a result, the TV series with a total of only 26 episodes had to be suspended when it came to the episode 16. However, this has not stopped the progress of American TV series in China. Although it seemed to have stagnated, American TV series were still spreading on a small scale on some local TV stations.

The American sitcom, *My Favorite Martian* was introduced and broadcast in China in 1982 and became the first American sitcom watched by Chinese viewers. After that, American TV series *Hunter* was introduced in 1988, *Beauty and the Beast* was first broadcast by Zheng Da Theater in 1990, and *Growing Pains* was introduced in 1991. Many American TV series have been released in China in succession, which was quite eye opening for millions of Chinese viewers. The series of indoor sitcom *Growing Pains*, which was translated and broadcast by Shanghai TV Station for the first time, once again aroused people's interest and attention (Cai, 2013) being a great vogue for a time. Each episode of *Growing Pains* has independent plot with a series of funny moments and recorded laughs to enliven the atmosphere. The sitcom illustrated the attitudes of American families towards their children's lives and education based on humorous plots, which not only brought a new American-style family education concept to the Chinese audience, but also left a deep impression on the audience of the great contrast between the educational concept conveyed in this sitcom and the current Chinese educational thought. This also made many Chinese parents think deeply about the concept of education. Therefore, this sitcom can be regarded as one of the milestones in the dissemination of American TV series in China. It not only becomes a childhood memory with the growth of a generation, but also brings important enlightenment to the development of Chinese education and Chinese television in the production of sitcom.

The other American TV series that has had an important impact on Chinese audiences is *Dallas*, a series launched by the American Broadcasting Company in 1978 and introduced to China in 1990, which follows the fortunes of a wealthy family. This play contains the elite culture of the United States and the emotional changes of the characters, as well as various worldviews, intrigues and interest competitions, and shows the upper class that is not easy for ordinary people to contact, which greatly satisfy the audience's curiosity about the rich class. In the early 1990s, when the *Dallas* was first time released on Chinese TV screens, it attracted many Chinese people to watch it, especially some young and middle-aged people who have a dream of wealth. They even regarded this TV series as a treasure.

The 1980s was a period of exploration for the spread of American TV series as dubbed film in China. Meanwhile, domestic TV series were also recovering. The popularity of TV sets and the beginning of some overseas TV series to broadcast in China and cultivate a certain number of audiences provided certain convenience for the dissemination of American TV series. In general, the influence of American TV series was far less than that of the warm and inspirational TV series in Hong Kong and Japan. Perhaps the culture carried by American TV series was significantly different from that of Chinese traditional culture, and the audience cannot accept or identify with it in a short period of time. Although TV sets had become common, the Chinese audience in this period was still mainly in groups of people when watching TV. They often gathered in a family house to watch programs that had been strictly reviewed by the TV station. For some cultural products that did not conform to the current mainstream thought, they would be suspended or rectified. The suspension of Garrison's *Gorillas* was a good example.

In addition, during this period, only a small number of TV stations, such as CCTV and Shanghai TV Station, were translating and broadcasting American TV series, and the number of families with TV sets was limited, which limited the number and space of dissemination of American scripts to a certain extent. It was passive for many audiences to watch American TV series, because the control of TV and TV programs was not in their hands. Although the channels for audiences to watch American TV series were limited and there were not many kinds of American TV series, almost all had brought great influence to Chinese audiences with their distinctive characteristics. However, for most audiences, watching American TV series was just a way to get new things. Only a small number of American TV series fans could really feel the American culture contained in American TV series at that time. The inherent cultural gene of most audiences is hard to resonate with a foreign cultural product in a short time. The inherent cultural identity of Chinese audiences is Chinese traditional culture such as collective culture and dedication spirit, while American culture such as

individualism and heroism promoted in American dramas often antagonizes Chinese audiences' psychology. Therefore, most people just focus on the novelty of what American TV shows offer. For example, as mentioned before, When The Man from Atlantis was broadcast, the sunglasses worn by the protagonist Mike, which Chinese audiences called "Mike Glasses", quickly became popular as a fashion accessory.

During this period, the cultural thoughts that Chinese audiences had been shackled for a long time were released largely, and they seemed to have a strong yearning for foreign cultures. As a cultural carrier, American TV series, which began to enter China at this time, happened to meet the needs of a large number of audiences. Due to the monopoly of TV stations and the small number of programs broadcast, as long as an American TV series was recognized by people, it would quickly spread through word of mouth, which is easy to cause a scene of the whole town turning out to watch American TV series. In fact, people were more attracted by the foreign culture carried by American TV series. Because these foreign cultures are far from Chinese traditional culture and thought. Therefore, the cultural influence of American TV series on Chinese audiences seems to remain on the surface and has not gone deep into their cultural and ideological roots.

### 3.2 In the 1990s -- DVD transmission stage

From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, in the context of world multi-polarization, economic globalization, cultural diversification and China's reform and opening up and modernization, China's domestic TV series developed rapidly. CCTV, as the largest television station in China, broadcast dubbed film from one program to nine programs during this period, and often broadcast dubbed film for at least 13 hours a week. More American TV series began to be put on domestic TV and enter the lives of the general public. However, although the imported dubbed film were richer and more diversified in terms of source countries and types, television was still the only communication medium for Chinese audiences to contact American TV series, and the audience could only passively receive the TV programs broadcast through television. Moreover, due to the wide spread of television media and the great spread effect, in addition to some negative effects caused by Garrison's Gorillas before. Subsequently, Chinese TV stations became cautious in introducing American TV series, and also controlled the content and duration of TV series (Liu, 2014, Pan, 2014). In that period, foreign TV series only accounted for 25% of TV series broadcasts (Wen, 2009), and in order to meet the strict censorship standards, auditors could also conduct secondary editing and adjust the story line, etc. (Zhi, 2012).

In the mid-1990s, the condition that Chinese mainland audiences could receive American TV series only through television changed. In September 1993, Wanyan Company, jointly funded and registered by Jiang Wanmeng and Chinese American Sun Yan, successfully trial-produced China's first VCD (Video Compact Disk) (Yang, 2007). In the following years, VCD rapidly gained popularity in China by virtue of its advantages such as clear imaging and simple video format conversion, and became a popular media carrier, providing a new channel for the dissemination of American TV series. However, the capacity of VCD player was too small to satisfy the playback requirements of a whole American TV series with only 650M (about 74 minutes), while a whole American TV series needed at least 4G-5G. Therefore, it was difficult to use it to store multiple episodes of continuous watching American TV series and VCD was basically used to listen to songs at that time.

However, the invention of VCD laid a technical foundation for the subsequent invention and development of DVD (Digital Video Disk) (Yang, 2007). Based on the development of VCD, technicians had developed a machine with higher pixel quality and larger memory capacity, namely DVD. This new media platform promoted the dissemination of American TV series in China to enter the era of DVD dissemination. DVD offered many advantages over the old days of watching American TV series on television. The audience no longer passively watched the fixed TV program broadcast by the TV set, and the audience had more choice and autonomy. Firstly, viewers would be able to buy TV series on DVD according to their preferences and would no longer be limited by the TV series introduced by TV stations. Meanwhile, the audience could choose the original English or Chinese dubbing edition according to their own viewing habits. What's more, viewers could watch their favorite series repeatedly or fast forward the plot to enjoy better viewing effect. More importantly, if the audience thought some American TV series was particularly wonderful and recommended it to their friends, they could borrow the DVDs from each other, which made it easier to get the TV series resources.

In 1995, Friends, with its English pronunciation and Chinese subtitles, was broadcast on Pearl TV in Hong Kong, gaining a large number of loyal fans of American TV series. Friends is one of the early American TV series to be introduced to DVD enthusiasts in mainland China, and then watching American TV series on DVD had become a mainstream, and people were exposed to more American TV series through DVD. The media characteristics of DVD had changed the transmission mode of American TV series in China to a certain extent, and also greatly promoted the transmission scope and speed of American TV series. Therefore, at that time, in addition to watching the American TV series broadcast on TV, most audiences watched them by buying their favorite American TV series DVDS after learning about the popular American TV series through the word of mouth of others.

Compared with the content censor of American TV series broadcast on TV, the content censor of DVD is not so strict (Cai, 2013). Then, in the early days of Internet popularization, the pirated DVD also provided convenience to the audience who had no access to the Internet at that time. As this method bypassed the approval of SARFT (State Administration of Radio, Film and Television), Chinese audiences had been exposed to more types of American TV series. However, with the slow-release rate of DVD, Chinese audiences had to wait a long time to get the latest content

of American TV series. Although the spread of American TV series in China still faced many difficulties, the initial advent of DVD and Internet had provided more channels for the spread of American TV series in China, which also gave audiences access to more American TV series. As the transmission of American TV series was mostly controlled by the distributor, the transmission in China was a one-way communication mode.

As American TV series spreading more and more widely in China, in addition to the exotic customs which were quite different from traditional Chinese culture, people's curiosity and yearning for as an economic power all made American TV series more attractive to audiences and have cultural capital. With the development of technology, the people who had access to American TV series were also expanding. Besides curiosity, Chinese audiences' needs were also changing. In China, there was a number of people who were curious about the western world and had a high knowledge reserve. They were full of desire to learn about the United States and its culture. Therefore, this part of the audience would choose to watch American TV series on DVD as a channel to obtain information for themselves. In addition, with the development of internationalization, English, as an important international communication language, was sought after by more and more people. Therefore, American TV series had been the first choice for many audiences to learn English and became a tool for them to improve their English ability. Since American TV series broadcast on TV were translated and processed, audiences preferred the unprocessed original DVD of American TV series. For example, in the mid-1990s, the American TV series *Friends* was not only popular with the audience through DVD, but also a treasure for many English lovers because of its easy dialogue for English learning.

Among the audience groups of American TV series in the 1990s, the main audience groups were middle-aged and young people with relatively high education level. American TV series became a bridge for them to improve themselves, pursue fashion, learn about America and communicate with the world. From the initial dispersion of domestic audiences to the formation of audience groups in the 1990s, the spread of American TV series in China had achieved a great leap with the help of DVD as a media and the change of audience demand.

### 3.3 The 21st Century --- Internet Communication Stage

SARFT had a complicated process from the introduction and review to the broadcast of overseas TV series, and it took a lot of time for the DVD to be burned and distributed. Therefore, American TV series in China once again suffered from the cold shoulder of the audience, and such an environment could not meet the increasing needs of the audience. But this did not mean that American TV series had lost their market in China. With the development of the Internet, the broadcast of American TV series on the Internet had gradually replaced television broadcasting. (Guan, 2009).

The first decade of the 21st century can be seen as a transition period from watching American TV shows on DVD to watching them on the Internet. For example, the American TV series *24 Hours* released by FOX company in the United States had witnessed this change. In 2002, viewers had to watch the first season around the DVD, while by 2006, viewers could experience almost "no time difference" in watching American TV series via the Internet. The gradual popularization of the Internet made American TV series more and more popular in China, which enabled people to obtain more resources and watch them according to their preferences. However, due to copyright issues and China's Internet control system, most of the resources that people had access to through network technology were pirated resources (Yang&Tao, 2010; Zeng&Wei, 2013). Although these resource sites believe that they were not for profit, but just providing technical support (French, 2006). In spite of this, SARFT subsequently closed down many such websites (Wu, 2009).

During the same period, CCTV (China Central Television) also took the opportunity to introduce three TV series with high ratings in the United States, *Band of Brothers*, *Desperate Housewives* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*, but their ratings in China were dismal. Compared with the Internet, the broadcast of American TV series on TV did not arouse great response from the audience, and people still focused their attention on the Internet (Hu, 2007). The reason may be that CCTV had strict approval standards and requirements. In order to reach the level of broadcast on TV, some original content of American TV series would be cut and splice after vetting, or some textbook style dubbing and subtitle will appear, all of which made the audience confused (Wang, 2010). It was not hard to explain why Chinese audiences were more enthusiastic about the Internet.

With the continuous improvement of relevant laws on Internet copyright and intellectual property rights in China, the piracy transmission mode of American TV series had gradually entered the trough, and the transmission mode of American TV series based on normal copyright purchase and introduction had gradually become the mainstream.

In 2004, Chinese online-video companies began buying stream media licenses from American television companies. In 2010, Youku video website was the first to buy the copyright and set up an American TV series channel. The *Vampire Diaries* series of the CW Television Network was shown and promoted as a key product, becoming the first video website of the Chinese Internet to establish a channel of American TV series. Subsequently, Sohu video, Tencent video and other websites also set up American TV series channels. According to the information of China's five major video websites, before April 1, 2014, LetV Video and IQiyi Video respectively purchased 34 American TV series, Tencent Video purchased 36, Youku Video purchased 58, and Sohu Video purchased 76 American TV series. The United States produced 200 new TV series a year, and Chinese video sites imported nearly half of them in 2014. Nowadays, American TV series have appeared on major video websites and social media in China as a cultural symbol, presenting a diversified network communication state.

In China, in addition to the proper way of the introduction of American TV series, endless broadcasting software has also come into being, as well as the audience base laid by the long spread of American TV series in China, all of which contributed to the growing scale and influence of American TV series in China. At the same time, the development of the Internet cannot be underestimated. The convenience of Internet resources themselves, the maturity and popularity of download technology, more importantly, the virtual social platform being able to be created in the Internet, these factors not only made the communication of various American TV series more standardized, but also provided a platform for Chinese audiences of American TV series to exchange stories, enhance emotions and learn English (Huang, 2016, Jiang & Leung, 2012; Wu, 2015). The audience's discussion on the culture and value of American TV series has become increasingly heated on various media platforms.

In China, at the beginning of the 21st century, various platforms for the exchange of American TV series have come into being. At first, the F6 American TV Series Discussion Forum established by Friends fans had 80,000 members, and then forums for popular American TV series were also established one after another, which became the network gathering place for fans of American TV series in China. For instance, the "Eden" forum with a million members, "Xin ling feng ruan" film and television forum, and the largest forum in China - "Baidu Post bar", these network platforms provide the audience with opportunities for resource sharing and interaction.

### **3.4 The development strategy of American TV series in China**

With the social situation of China in different periods, the communication mode of American TV series in China is also changing. The popularity of American TV series in China cannot be separated from the development of information technology. However, in China's increasingly fierce cultural market, American TV series standing out and attracting a large number of influential audience groups can be achieved not only by a single technical condition or the development of media, but also by many factors. For instance, the narrative charm of American TV series, mature communication mode, the development of audience demand and the cultural values contained in American TV series, these factors have all become the competitive capital for American TV series to gain a foothold in China's imported film and television market. Next, the dissemination and development strategy of American series in China will be analyzed specifically from different perspectives.

#### **3.4.1 Narrative strategy**

The narrative strategy of a TV series refers to the methods and techniques that the producers use to deal with the series material. To be specific, it is a technique that the producer uses various film and television performance elements, such as plot, picture, language, etc., to present the TV series in the form of attracting the audience.

Creation of suspense and conflict is the main form of expression, for which the narrative strategy is increasingly prominent in all kinds of American TV series, whether they are sitcoms or soaps. As the mainstay of the American TV series market in China, the TV series, in particular, holds the concept of plot is regarded as king as the most precious. In episodic series, suspense and conflict is interspersed throughout the characters and the plot of a common narrative strategy, which creates a constant dramatic narrative style. Sometimes, several threads unfold and cross over simultaneously, the mind of audiences are kept on edge during watching. At the end of each conflict, a new suspense and conflict is introduced, which introduces unlimited expectations to audiences.

Secondly, the rhythm of American TV series is distinct, and the theme is prominent. Even though the multiple suspense and conflicts are usually set up in American TV series, audiences never feel lost in the complex plot, which should be attributed to the good pacing control as well as concise and clear narrative style in the American TV series. The straightforward presentation style from the title is used in American TV series. For example, it could find out that from the name of American TV series, Garrison's Gorillas should be a theme related to the subject of war, while Desperate Housewives may narrate with the theme of family relationships as well as the world of women. Subsequently, when the plot unfolds along with the brief and clear entire pacing, combined with the cross-narrative and other narrative strategies, audiences could appreciate the complex plot of designer or fate of characters about the reasonable and unexpected scenes by adhering tightly to one main line.

#### **3.4.2 Audience strategy**

After summarizing previous relevant literature, the researcher concluded that Chinese audiences' demand for American TV series can be divided into the following aspects. The first is audiences' demand for information cognition and social interaction. TV series can be regarded as the epitome of a country's culture (Huang, 2016). American TV series will convey some American culture, such as values, codes of conduct and their way of life (Rosen, 2003). For instance, Chinese viewers think that what they see in Desperate Housewives is a middle-class American lifestyle and what they see in Friends is urban life. They believe they are approaching American culture and values (Lin, 2014). What's more, the fans of American TV series are mostly young viewers, who are more active and open minded. They are not only curious about the content in American TV series, but also become one of the topics of conversation among them.

Secondly, with the development of information and the improvement of living standards, people's requirements for entertainment also rise (Sunwei, 2013). When China's local TV series are not enough to meet people's entertainment needs, American TV series have become an alternative to meet people's entertainment needs. As a kind of mass culture,

TV series are intended for public entertainment, so their entertainment function should not be underestimated (Wang Yan, 2005). Taking sitcoms as an example, an episode is usually about 20 minutes. American TV series meet the needs of modern urbanite with the fast pace of Hollywood and cater to modern people's fast-food style cultural consumption. American TV series are entertaining Chinese audiences with their wonderful plots, humorous language, fashionable clothes, distinctive characters and the unique American culture contained in them (Wen, 2008).

The third is the need for English learning. According to China Daily, one third of people in China were learning English in 2000. Therefore, the desire of American TV series audiences in China to learn English also promotes this trend (Jiang, 2014; Zhu, 2014). Absorbing American culture through learning English has laid a solid cultural foundation for understanding American TV series (Wen, 2008). Finally, some scholars point out that watching American TV series is an escape from reality (Jiang & Leung, 2012). They think it means that people watch American TV series to immerse themselves in another world or another culture, which may help people escape their responsibilities in reality, because it is shaping and maintaining the lifestyle that many audiences desire and want to feel (Chan & Ma, 1996). Therefore, when Chinese audiences watch American TV series, they seem to enter a cultural time and space journey, living in a different cultural space and enjoying diverse cultural experiences.

### 3.4.3 Marketing strategy

The process of the birth and development of American television industry can be regarded as a commercial behavior. After the TV industry builds the content form of American TV series, the commercial TV industry environment endows American TV series with other attributes, such as the commodity attributes of American TV series. Therefore, when American TV series are sold and disseminated as commodities, the most appropriate marketing strategies must be adopted to maximize the benefits of their products.

In China, there are some obvious marketing strategies for American TV series in China. The first is digital marketing via the Internet. In foreign websites, the propaganda and titbits of American TV series will be publicized on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social platforms, but there are not many users of these social platforms under China's policy control. However, this does not hinder the propaganda and interaction of American TV series in China. American TV series conduct digital marketing on Weibo and Wechat, the unique and most popular social platforms in China, as well as on various major video websites. With the help of the Internet, a communication medium different from traditional media, it breaks through the limitations of time and space and exerts great communication power and influence. Secondly, American TV series have fully exploited all kinds of large IP, playing a significant linking power and derivative power. In addition, they actively seek the transnational operation between American TV series and China, which is also one of the important strategies in the communication process of American TV series to China.

Besides, the long-term development must be inseparable from stable brand operation and good reputation. For most Chinese audiences, since American TV series have been introduced into China for a long time, despite some twists and turns in the communication process, the communication of American TV series in China shows an increasing state, and some popular American TV series have established a good reputation in the public mind which will bring good publicity effects for the marketing of the surrounding derivatives of the American TV series and the dissemination of similar American series.

### 3.4.4 Cultural strategy

As a form of artistic expression, the core of American TV series is a cultural product carrying American culture and American spirit. In addition to the most mainstream and core values in American stories, American TV series also contain cultural concepts with consensus, so as to realize the construction of cross-cultural consensus and achieve the cross-cultural communication of American TV series.

Edward Hall proposed to divide culture into high-context culture and low-context culture. The United States is a country with a low-context culture, which does not place high requirements on people from other cultures. American culture is a mixture of diverse cultures. It is a culture that is constantly fused in conflicts and compromises, and what are bound to remain in the end are some generally acceptable cultural factors. At present, American TV series have made a huge impact not only in China but also around the world.

From the cultural level, it is not difficult to find that most American TV series contain some conflicts reflecting the liberation of human nature and the centralization of society, as well as the conflict between personal interests and public interests. Aiming at the world market, the themes of American TV series try to start from the perspective of human nature. And various thoughts on human nature, virtue and justice have become indispensable elements. This kind of theme culture enables audiences from other countries with different cultural backgrounds to set aside their cultural differences and social backgrounds and gain a kind of commonality and resonance based on the basic proposition of life. For instance, the maintenance and yearning for freedom and peace, respect and love for human life, responsibility for courage, praise of heroes and so on, these are the common themes pursued by human beings, so they will inevitably lead to the corresponding recognition of the audience, and then they can accept part of the culture and values transmitted by American TV series. Therefore, finding common cultural factors that fit with the psychology of the audience and meeting the consumer needs of the widest range of people as far as possible are the keys for American TV series to gain cultural identity of more foreign audiences.



#### 4. Conclusion

The spread of American TV series in China is not accidental. The reform and opening up provide a rare opportunity for American TV series to be introduced into China. The DVD burning function and the emergence and development of the Internet provide channel support for the spread of American TV series. It is an inevitable cultural phenomenon under the overall trend of global integration, driven by the development of communication technology and the demand of multi-cultural interaction.

American TV series can be widely spread and accepted in a non-local environment. In addition to the audience, it is also closely related to its own content production and communication methods. The variety of American TV series not only requires high-quality content, but also requires strict regulations in the process of production and broadcasting and carries out profitable commercial marketing activities. At the same time, there are many types of American TV series, which provide as many common topics as possible for the needs of the audience and gain recognition from a wider range of social groups. This is also the essential appeal of American TV series to continuously seek cross-cultural and trans-regional communication. In addition, the development of new media such as the Internet has provided richer media resources for the communication of American TV series, enhanced the comprehensiveness of information communication, and made it possible for the global communication of American TV series. TV series is the media with the widest coverage, while the Internet is the media with the best development prospects. The future development of TV series needs to find a balance between the two media.

The dissemination of American TV series in China has indeed brought valuable communication experience and enlightenment. On the other hand, the introduction and broadcast of American TV series also contains a series of cultural reflections worthy of attention. Both the Chinese television industry and the audience need to further consider how to critically select and identify American TV series in the process of accepting them. This approach will promote the development of China's TV industry. It is beneficial to the introduction of overseas TV series and the development of domestic TV series, as well as the influence on the audience.

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#### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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