

A Metaphorical Study of the Chinese Science Fiction Film "Journey to the West"

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Abstract. Under the current background, Chinese sci-fi film is experiencing a period of vigorous development. With the development of the Chinese film industry and the improvement of technology, more and more sci-fi films have emerged. China's scientific and technological strength and innovative ability also provide a wealth of sci-fi film themes and imagination space. At the same time, the Chinese audience's interest in sci-fi films is also growing, which further promotes the development of China's sci-fi film industry. Internationally, Chinese sci-fi films have also begun to attract more attention, with some works achieving international success. In a word, Chinese sci-fi film is in a period of vigorous development under the current background, and it has great development potential in the future. This article will mainly explain the metaphors in the movie Journey to the West and the details that appear when watching the movie. It will also introduce the background and award record of the movie, as well as the media's comments on the movie, and explain the application of some movie metaphors.

Keywords: Metaphor, Science Fiction Film, Chinese Film.

1. Introduction

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Chinese sci-fi films began to recover, with several innovative works, such as *The Super Dimension Fortress Macross* and *a Chinese Odyssey to the West* [1]. However, due to technical and financial constraints, the quality and quantity of sci-fi films are relatively limited. Until the early 21st century, with the development of China's film industry and the improvement of the level of science and Technology, science fiction film has gradually emerged [2]. Released in 2003, *Robotech* was considered the beginning of modern Chinese science fiction, and in the years that followed, a series of high-profile films emerged, such as "200 million Years Journey to the Earth" and "Wandering Earth" and so on In recent years, with the rapid growth of China's film market and the promotion of science and technology level, China's sci-fi film ushered in new development opportunities. More and more directors and production teams are experimenting with bold innovations, using advanced visual effects and technology to create an even more mind-blowing sci-fi world. At the same time, Chinese sci-fi films have also begun to attract international attention, and some of the works have achieved good box office results and word-of-mouth overseas, laying the foundation for the international development of Chinese sci-fi films [3].

Kong Dashan's *Journey to the West* is a film masterpiece that combines classic Chinese literature with modern science fiction elements. The film is based on the traditional literary work "Journey to the West" and combines it with science fiction exploration, presenting a wonderful journey of human exploration of the unknown. In the movie, the main character Tang Zhijun is the editor in chief of *Space Exploration* magazine, who is full of persistence and enthusiasm for searching for extraterrestrial intelligence. When the magazine was facing closure, they received signals that it might come from extraterrestrial life, so they embarked on a thrilling and thrilling journey to search for extraterrestrial life. This movie not only integrates traditional and modern elements in the storyline, but also showcases the director's unique talent in visual presentation and emotional expression. Through the perspective of characters such as Tang Zhijun, the film explores human curiosity and exploratory spirit towards the unknown, as well as the impact of technological progress on our lives and values. At the same time, it also presents the innovation and development of Chinese cinema in

the field of science fiction, injecting vitality and vigor into a new chapter of Chinese science fiction cinema.

The film won the Best Original Screenplay Award at the Three-Body Universe of China Science Fiction Convention in November 2019, the Best Film Award at the 5th Pingyao International Film Festival in October 2021, and the Most Eye-catching Film Award at the 12th Beijing International Film Festival in August 2022. In June 2023, it won the word-of-mouth film of the year in the 2023 Weibo Movie Night, won the best small and medium-sized budget feature film award in the 36th Chinese Film Golden Rooster Award in October 2023, was selected in the 2023 Hall of Fame Annual Humanities Film list in January 2024, and ranked sixth in the top ten influential films in 2023.

The director of the film, Kong Dashan, was born in 1990 in China. In 2011, he directed his first short film, "The Troubles of Young Ma Li Ao". This was followed by "The End of the Night" in 2014 and "Legal Future Time" in 2015, which he wrote, directed, and acted in. In 2017, he directed "Spring, the Teachers Are Gone". Finally, in 2023 Kong Dashan's original film "Journey to the West" was released and won the 36th Golden Rooster Award for Best Screenplay.

2. Literature Review

After "Journey to the West" was released, a lot of analysis appeared on the Internet, and the author think this movie is "A weird film in the guise of science fiction," the movie frequently used hand-held camera technology. This choice of style adds a raw, visceral quality to the visuals, immersing the audience in the character's journey and adding a sense of immediacy and tension throughout the narrative. While the sci-fi elements of the film provide a futuristic backdrop, the hand-held style gives an intimate and sometimes unsettling feel, blurring the line between reality and fantasy. This combination of traditional stories and modern cinematography has contributed to the uniqueness of the film and generated heated discussions among critics and viewers. so that the audience is more immersed in the story as if this is a documentary. There are also many media comments, such as the "Beijing News" suggesting that the main character Tang Zhijun's journey to find aliens in the film is more like a pilgrimage, Tang Zhijun's journey does not have a certain personal goal, whether he seeks answers to questions, or he's motivations, they all come with a strong pilgrimage color [4].

Online media "Nowness" commented on the film, as "a pseudo-documentary style sci-fi road movie mixed with Don Quixote's sensitivity and madness, seemingly overlapping with the real world and infinite separation" [5], China Youth Daily commented on the film, "the substance of the film is difficult to describe in words" [6].

Although there are many analyses of the film on the Internet, there are very few analyses of the various metaphors of the film. The writer believes that the film was named "Journey to the West" for a reason because everyone in the film has a corresponding role in the film, such as Tang Zhijun, corresponding to Tang Monk. Sun Yitong, corresponds to Sun Wukong, Na Risu corresponds to Sand Monk, Qin Cairong who is lazy corresponds to Pig Bajie, and volunteer Xiaoxiao is a white dragon horse.

3. Methodology

Metaphors are also often used in Chinese films, such as "Road Angel" (1937). At that time, film censorship was very strict, but the director wanted to use this film to reflect the darkness of reality, so the director used a lot of metaphors in this film. There are also a lot of metaphors in the movie Farewell My Concubine, which make the story more detailed and interesting [7]. Director Jiang Wen's "Let the Bullets Fly" is a movie full of symbols and metaphors. One of the main metaphors is the train, which symbolizes the power of modernization and progress. In the movie, the train is not only a means of transportation, but also a symbolic element that runs through the entire story. It represents the extension and control of political power, as well as the conflicts between money, power, and class in modern society [8].

Another important metaphor is flame, which represents power, destruction, and rebirth. In movies, flames often appear in scenes of battle, destruction, and chaos, implying the brutality and greed of human nature, as well as the courage and determination to fight against tyranny. Meanwhile, flames also symbolize hope and liberation, representing the power of people to resist oppression and pursue freedom.

In addition, the movie also contains profound explorations of society and human nature, such as thoughts on issues such as power, wealth, justice, morality, etc., which can be seen as part of metaphors, guiding the audience to think about the development of human society and the changes in values.

Although many scholars have studied many metaphors in movies, few scholars have studied the metaphor of the Chinese science fiction film *Journey to the West*, which hides many details and metaphors. The metaphor in this film is extremely important because the film is divided into bright lines and dark lines. Many details not discussed in the film are hidden in the lines, and some pictures shot by the director constitute another storyline. This paper will study the metaphor in the time order from the beginning to the end of the film.

4. Results

The study of metaphors in sci-fi movies has multiple meanings and values [9]. The metaphors in sci-fi movies are often not only the symbols behind the stories, it is also a deep reflection on contemporary society, human existence and the development of science and technology. By interpreting these metaphors, we can better understand the themes and meanings discussed in the films. Science fiction movies are often set in a fictional future or another world, but their metaphors are often observations and criticisms of the real world. The study of these metaphors can help us understand more clearly the problems and challenges of contemporary society, thus triggering the thinking of social change and development. Sci-fi film is a kind of cultural product, which integrates the creator's understanding and interpretation of culture, history and tradition. Through the analysis of metaphor, we can reveal the cultural symbols and symbols behind the movies, and better understand their significance in the cultural context. Metaphors in sci-fi movies are often creative and imaginative, and can inspire people to explore and imagine the future. The study of these metaphors can stimulate creativity and promote innovation in science, technology and culture.

To sum up, the study of metaphors in sci-fi movies can not only help us understand the themes and meanings of movies, but also help us observe society, interpret culture, and stimulate creativity and imagination, it has important academic and practical significance.

5. Discussion

Film is a sophisticated cultural product that encapsulates various cultural elements such as cognition, emotions, values, cultural psychology, and more [10]. In the first act of the film "Journey to the West", the young Yang Zhijun is interviewed, which forms a huge contrast with the 30 years after he appeared in the second act, and shows the various experiences he has gone through in the 30 years. In the middle of the film, we learn that his daughter died during the period, and the editorial department is about to go bankrupt, which dealt a huge blow to Tang Zhijun. It also explains why Tang was so insistent about finding possible alien traces.

In the second act of the film, "Apollo" company personnel come to the editorial office to seek cooperation, "Apollo" company stated that their company's philosophy is "Apollo sun God to all beings." In the next scene, Qin Cairong wants to show the space suit for the company and pulls back the curtain that blocks the space suit, but Tang Zhijun insists on closing the curtain, which means Tang Zhijun does not want to reveal his heart, and he blocks himself. Tang Zhijun was asked by Qin Cairong to wear a space suit, for the company to show, in the final installation of the helmet is, Tang Zhijun said his inner thoughts, he said "Apollo is not the Sun God, the real sun God is Hrix" This

sentence also implies the identity of the character Sun Yitong in the middle of the film, The Writer will be detailed in the back.

After wearing the helmet, the helmet stuck, Tang Zhijun cannot breathe in the helmet, which also suggests that Tang Zhijun in the past 30 years, after the death of his daughter because of pain, remorse, guilt, will be closed, pressure themselves out of breath.

In the next scene, Tang Zhijun is hoisted out of the window by a crane, this absurd scene implies Tang Zhijun's space dream, and the fireman in the next scene when he cuts open the spacesuit also implies that he is separated from his dream, and completely separated from his stubbornness all these years.

After Tang Zhijun was rescued, he said this sentence in front of the "camera" at home, "after the completion of the goal of human reproduction, all sexual desire is a disease, all sensual desires are a trap of consumerism." Through this sentence, we can learn that Tang Zhijun is a very mechanical materialist, and this is completely the opposite of Sun Yitong. But the two of them are very similar.

The film said that Tang Zhijun's daughter died of depression, the doctor said that the reason is genetic, from which we can infer that Tang Zhijun also has depression, we can hardly see any of his smiles throughout the film, only twice, once on the way up the mountain met the lost donkey, The Writer explained the metaphor of the donkey in detail in the article. The second time is at the end of the film, Tang Zhijun finally saw the alien he had been looking for many years, Sun YiTong, he was wrapped in a group of sparrows, turned into an atom, and flew to the universe, at that moment, Tang Zhijun was shocked, then he laughed again, and showed Tang Zhijun's dedication for many years was finally released at this moment.

The film continues to develop, the editorial department found a village suspected of alien traces, so they went to forget the village, in the village they learned that there was a missing donkey, the donkey ran away with the carrot on the head, in the later part of the film, when Tang Zhijun went up the mountain, he found the donkey, this donkey represents Tang Zhijun, is his implementation in life obsession and intention, The donkey cannot perceive the carrot in front of him, he only knows that he can eat the carrot, so he will be led by the carrot, a circle of pulling graphite, just like human beings, human beings do not care about who put the carrot in front of their eyes, but when they can eat the carrot, the appearance of the donkey and carrot in this movie is a metaphor for our entire human society.

In the village, Tang Zhijun meets Sun Yitong, two characters infinitely like each other, also very withdrawn, also lost a family member two years ago. Sun Yichang's father died in a quarry accident, the boss does not want to lose money, so sent two stone lions, in Chinese culture, stone lions are generally placed outward to deter evil outside, but in the film stone lions are indeed placed in the direction of the house, which means that in the house to deter some kind of peace, which is also implying Sun Yichang's unusual identity.

The film continues to develop, Tang Zhijun found just at home Sun Yichang do not know when to go to the radio station broadcast, the content or total solar eclipse is coming, after Tang Zhijun went to the radio station to find no results, he returned to Sun Yichang's home, found Sun Yichang standing in the middle of the yard, and then Sun Yichang opened his eyes, also said about his childhood to see the sun caused the eye almost blind story, So he told Tang Zhijun and his colleagues in the editorial department to close their eyes, and the next second, the dark sky changed back to day.

This scene hides a lot of information, one is the identity of Sun Yichang, the film began to discuss the Sun God may be suggesting the identity of Sun Yichang, he may be Apollo, in ancient Greek mythology, Apollo is regarded as the god in charge of literature and art, in charge of light, the sun, medicine, animal husbandry, music, these can be reflected in Sun Yichang, because he is in charge of light, That's why he's worried about a total solar eclipse and can turn night back into day in a few seconds, animal husbandry is reflected in Sun Yitong raising chickens at home, and he says he has a good relationship with the chickens in his family and he doesn't want to eat their eggs, music is reflected in his talent for poetry, and medicine is reflected in his encounter with Tang Zhijun in the mountains, who ate poisonous mushrooms but didn't get poisoned.

At the climax of the film, Sun YiTong and Tang Zhijun meet in a cave, Sun YiTong turns into an atom and flies away to the universe, just like *Journey to the West*, and finally only Tang Monk and Sun Wukong become Buddhas.

At the end of the film, Tang Zhijun said at a ceremony that he wrote a poem to his daughter, but he did not read it out, he cried, Tang Zhijun said a sentence at the beginning of the film, poetry is a tool for human beings to express their emotions, but when your emotions have been expressed, there is no need to read the poem, this is a wordless poem, containing Tang Zhijun's love for his daughter. He finally got over it, stopped running away, and accepted his daughter's departure.

6. Conclusion

In science fiction movies, the importance of metaphor is self-evident. Metaphor not only injects depth and complexity into the film, but also provides a multi-level interpretation, enabling the audience to think more deeply about human existence, social problems and the development of science and technology. By means of metaphor, sci-fi movies can reflect the problems and challenges of contemporary society in the fictional future world and arouse the audience's thinking and reflection on the real world. Metaphor also adds wisdom and interest to the film, making it not only an entertainment, but also a carrier of cultural products and ideas. Therefore, the use of metaphor in sci-fi movies not only enriches the connotation of movies, but also expands the audience's thinking space, and provides a new perspective and train of thought for exploring the future and meaning of human beings.

Indeed, delving into the myriad metaphors embedded within the film adds layers of depth and richness to the viewing experience. Each shot, dialogue, and narrative detail serves as a vessel for conveying nuanced messages and themes. By dissecting these elements, viewers can uncover profound insights into the human condition, societal dynamics, and existential questions explored by the filmmakers. The interplay of various elements—such as symbolism, imagery, and allegory—creates a tapestry of meaning that invites interpretation and reflection. Thus, examining these intricate details enhances the impact and resonance of the film, transforming it into a truly immersive and thought-provoking cinematic masterpiece.

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