The Self and the Others: A Study of Audiences' Cultural Identity towards Chinese Science Fiction Films

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Abstract: Since the founding of new China, the development of Chinese science fiction films has been sluggish. the emergence of the phenomenal film Wandering Earth in 2019 has brought Chinese science fiction films increasingly to the attention of a wide range of research scholars. From the perspective of cultural identity theory, This paper uses questionnaires to illustrate the relationship between Chinese science fiction films and cultural identification. It also verified that the quality of special effects production and the frequency of traditional cultural elements in Chinese science fiction films are important factors of affecting cultural identity, and the frequency of western cultural elements doesn't have a direct impact on the audience's cultural identity, which further influences the willingness of audience behaviour to watch Chinese science fiction films. On the basis of this conclusion, we propose some suggestions for the "localization" of the creation of Chinese science fiction films, which will inspire the future development of Chinese science fiction films.

Keywords: Chinese science fiction films, cultural identity, the quality of special effects production, traditional cultural elements

1 Introduction

At the beginning of 2022, the Corona Virus Disease 2019(COVID-19) in China shows a multi-point epidemic. The "opening" of offline cinemas also became extremely unstable with the recurrence of the COVID-19. In this situation, the Chinese science fiction film "Moon Man" still achieved a high box office result of $3.093 billion. At present, China's film industry system has taken shape, and Chinese science fiction films have entered a new period of development. We have observed that although Chinese science fiction films always committed to localization and nationalization, trying to come out of our own path of science fiction, there has been confusion between Chinese cultural elements and Western cultural elements in their creation, while the quality of special effects production has also been criticized by the nation, leading to a decline in the audience's recognition of local culture, and even a lack of interest in Chinese science fiction films. In this regard, we are curious: What are the factors that affect the cultural identity of

Chinese science fiction films? Will the decline of audience cultural identity affect the attention of Chinese science fiction films? How can we understand the connection between Chinese science fiction films and cultural identity to help localize the creation of Chinese science fiction films?

2 Literature Review

2.1 A Review of Chinese Science Fiction Film Research

At present, there are not many studies on Chinese science fiction films.I searched 57 papers by typing "domestic science fiction films" as the topic on the China National Knowledge Infrastructure.

Most scholars have made a clear analysis of the development of Chinese science fiction films, for example, in "A Study on the Flow of narrative Mode in Chinese Science Fiction Films (1938-2020)", scholar Jian Guan made a detailed analysis of the development process of the narrative mode of Chinese science fiction films from the perspective of narrative; in "A Study on the transmutation of domestic science fiction film creation", scholar Yutong Huang used "science as the premise and fantasy as the core" as a criterion for definition to analyze the historical stages of the theme of domestic science fiction film creation; scholar Jianghua Dang analyzed the current development status of Chinese science fiction films in "The Achievement and Development of Chinese Science Fiction Films from the Perspective of Chinese and Western Comparison".

Some of these scholars have conducted relevant studies from the perspective of the content narrative of Chinese science fiction films. For example, in "Anti-utopia image-making and spatial production in domestic science fiction films - a comparison based on Western anti-utopia films", scholar Xinyu Qiao provides an in-depth analysis on the theme of anti-utopia narratives. In "A Study of Spatial Narrative in Domestic Science Fiction Films: The Case of Wandering Earth", scholar Chuyan Li analyzed the spatial construction of the narrative form and content of Wandering Earth from the perspective of spatial narrative. In "Analyzing the Breakthrough of Narrative Style in Chinese Science Fiction Films", scholar Shujie Ding took "Crazy Aliens" and "Wandering Earth" as examples to sort out the characteristics of Chinese science fiction films in terms of dual narratives, the pursuit of hyper-realism and unique national expressions.

At the same time, some scholars have also studied the relevant issues from an ideological perspective. For example, in "The Construction and Dissemination of National Image in Chinese Science Fiction Films", scholar Shengqi Qu and scholar Fangzhou Liu analyzed the connection between Chinese science fiction films and the construction of national image and the current situation of the construction of national image based on the theory of cross-cultural communication; In "A Research on the Values Propagation in Chinese Science Fiction Films", the scholar Ye Wang analyzed the content of the values communicated in Chinese science fiction films, the audience and communication methods, and the effect of the communication of values

from the perspective of communication science, and offered corresponding communication strategies. In "The Construction and Dissemination of the National Image in Chinese Films in the Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective - The Example of the Chinese Science Fiction Film 'Wandering Earth' ", scholar Ruixu Zhao divided the construction of the national image into two aspects: characterization and the values communicated, based on which he analyzed the national image's communication dilemma and strategies.

2.2 Studies related to cultural identity theory

The author searched the CNKI using "cultural identity" as a keyword and found a total of 15,000 studies. Regarding the broad scope of the term "cultural identity", foreign scholars have conducted clear and unambiguous research. According to Jonathan Friedman, cultural identity is a characteristic attribute of a fixed group of people, a cultural identity that is " in the blood" of each individual, and which is innate and inherent in the person.At the same time, it's both a biological inheritance and a tradition, a cultural heritage that can be learned by all. Cultural identity is also the reality of the "social construction" of people based on historical, linguistic and ethnic factors.

In the Chinese research on "cultural identity", domestic scholars have mainly studied the concept, nature and process of cultural Identity, but the definition of many concepts has not yet been finalized.

In "China's National Cultural Security in the Construction of Cultural Identity in the Era of Globalization", Haoran Tu and Ligang Lu argue that cultural identity refers to a sense of identification with a group or cultural status, or an individual's recognition and approval of the group or culture to which he or she belongs as a result of the influence of that group or culture. Scholars such as Li Dong, Qing'an Li and Chongde Lin have explained the definition of cultural identity from two perspectives: the micro and the macro. From a macro perspective, cultural identity can be divided into national and ethnic identity; from a micro perspective, cultural identity is a process of internal psychological activities of individuals, including the emotions, attitudes and perceptions towards certain objects, cultures or people, and has multiple dimensions.

The author searched the Internet with "cultural identity" and "science fiction films" as topics and found only six studies. In "The Chinese Imagination and Cultural Identity in 'Imaginative Consumption' Films", scholar Xuguang Chen focused on whether the key to success in Chinese "imaginative consumption" films still lies in telling Chinese stories, expressing Chinese people's "Chinese dreams" and "Chinese imagination", and fulfilling the cultural identity of Chinese people today. The conclusion is that the secret of Chinese "imaginative consumption" films that resonate with audiences and achieve success at the box office lies precisely in the telling of a Chinese story with Chinese characteristics, the presentation of the "Chinese imagination" and the expression of the inherent desire for mainstream "cultural identity". The scholar Yishui Chen , in " 'Saving the Planet of the Mother': The Technological Logic, Spatial Constructs and

Cultural Values of Chinese and American Science Fiction Films", analyzed the technological view, the scientific view and space colonization in science fiction films, and took the Chinese science fiction hero identity as a small part of the spatial position and future order imagination of Chinese science fiction films. The remaining four articles are not directly related to science fiction films.

To sum up, in the relevant studies on Chinese science fiction films, no scholars have yet studied the relationship between Chinese science fiction films and cultural identity from the perspective of cultural identity theory, and therefore no questions have been answered about whether Chinese science fiction films affect audiences' cultural identity and whether audiences' cultural identity affects their willingness to watch Chinese science fiction films.

3 Research Methodology

Based on the above research review, the research questions in this paper focus on whether the quality of special effects production in Chinese science fiction films has an impact on the cultural identity of the audience? Whether the cultural elements of Chinese and Western cultures in Chinese science fiction films have an impact on the audience's cultural identity? Does the cultural identity of the audience have an impact on the willingness of the audience to act? The following research hypotheses are proposed in this respect.

H1: The quality of special effects production in Chinese science fiction films has a positive impact on viewers' cultural identity

H2: The more Chinese cultural elements in a Chinese science fiction film, the higher the cultural identity of the audience

H3: The more Western cultural elements in Chinese science fiction films, the lower the cultural identity of the audience

H4: The lower the audience's cultural identity, the lower the willingness to watch Chinese science fiction films

Among them, cultural identity is specified as traditional cultural identity.The national cultural elements are specified into four variables: traditional material folk cultural elements, traditional social folk cultural elements, traditional spiritual folk cultural elements, and traditional linguistic folk cultural elements.Western cultural elements are specified into three variables: Western fast food cultural elements, Western festival cultural elements, and Western technological cultural elements.To prove the hypothesis, the questionnaire method was used in this study. After creating the questionnaire, it was randomly distributed on two major platforms, namely WeChat and Weibo.

4 Research Findings

A total of 228 questionnaires were collected, of which 194 were valid data. Among the

sample, more than 70% of the respondents were female, accounting for 78.35%; the largest number of respondents were aged between 19 and 30, accounting for 78.35%; among the occupations, students made up more than half of the respondents, accounting for 53.6%.

From the data of the whole sample, 51.55% of people thought that the quality of special effects production of Chinese science fiction films was average and about 10% of people thought that the quality of Chinese science fiction films was bad or very bad, which indicates that audiences have a tendency to think that the quality of the special effects of Chinese science fiction films is not good and average. At the same time, audiences generally believe that the occurrence of Western cultural elements are much more frequent than the occurrence of traditional cultural elements in our country. This indicates that the integration of Chinese science fiction films with the traditional cultural elements of their own country was insufficient and inadequately expressed. Finally, regarding the viewers' cultural identity, only about 7% of them consider themselves to have a low cultural identity, while the majority consider themselves to have a high traditional cultural identity, which indicates that the higher frequency of Western cultural elements than their own traditional cultural elements does not directly affect the viewers' identification with their own traditional culture.

4.1 Visual spectacle: the quality of special effects production is rated moderate, with a significant contribution to cultural identity

For hypothesis 1, I set the independent variable "quality of special effects production" and the dependent variable "national pride and identity" and the final data analysis showed a positive correlation, indicating that the original hypothesis 1 is valid.

The quality of special effects production in Chinese science fiction films is an important factor in the cultural identity of the audience. "There is no other film genre that depends so heavily on the level of scientific development and the prosperity of science fiction as science fiction films." The quality of special effects production, as one of the concrete manifestations of the level of scientific and technological development, is most visually accepted by audiences as the result of scientific and technological development. For example, the release of Wandering Earth in 2019 gave audiences the most direct indication of the strides made in the quality of special effects production in Chinese science fiction films, earning 4.687 billion at the box office and being the first Chinese science fiction film to open up overseas markets, and the year was also known as the "first year of Chinese science fiction films". Although there is still a gap between the science fiction film production and that of the West, it is surprising that 75% of the special effects in Wandering Earth were produced by a Chinese team, which breaks the stereotype of viewers that the quality of special effects in Chinese science fiction films is lousy and has not improved significantly, and gives viewers hope for Chinese science fiction films. Since the founding of New China, China has always emphasized the development of science and technology innovation, and the process of rapid development has also been a process of maintaining and consolidating our cultural identity. The quality of the special effect production

of Chinese science fiction films is a reflection of the country's scientific and technological power, which is also an "important window" to enhance our technological and cultural identity.

4.2 Cultural representation: the effect of the difference in frequency between traditional Chinese cultural elements and Western cultural elements

4.2.1 Insufficient content of traditional cultural elements negatively affects the cultural identity of the audience

In order to test hypothesis 2, I set the independent variable "frequency of Chinese traditional culture elements" and the dependent variable "cultural identity" and did the relevant data analysis, the results show that they are positively correlated and H2 holds. This indicates that Chinese traditional culture is an important factor in the viewers' cultural identity.

Chinese traditional culture is very profound and has a far-reaching influence on the descendants of China. The presentation of traditional cultural elements in Chinese science fiction films is not only a cultural symbol in the visual spectacle, but also an implied "Chinese" expression of values and emotions and national spirit. It can demonstrate the charm of traditional Chinese culture . At the same time, it can also evoke the audience's historical memory and create emotional resonance, thus creating a sense of cultural identity.

In addition, the presence of traditional cultural elements in Chinese science fiction films can also become a medium for cultural exchange, breaking down the barriers between Chinese and Western cultures. China has always been committed to presenting a positive "image of China" to the world, and the presentation of traditional Chinese cultural elements through film is an important way to shape the "image of China". Against the historical background that Chinese science fiction films have been "suppressed" by Hollywood science fiction films, the presentation of traditional Chinese cultural elements shows the beauty of the East to the world, allowing more international friends to feel the fascination of traditional Chinese culture, gradually recognizing Chinese culture and helping them to build a "Chinese image" in their hearts. The international audience's recognition of Chinese traditional culture will satisfy the domestic audience's psychology of otherness, and at the same time make the domestic audience feel a deep sense of national pride and identity, thus increasing the audience's cultural identity and enhancing their cultural confidence.

4.2.2 The frequency of Western cultural elements has no direct effect on viewers' cultural identity

For hypothesis 3, I set the independent variable "frequency of Western cultural elements" and the dependent variable "cultural identity" and analyzed the data, the results showed that they were not significantly correlated. Hypothesis H3 is not valid.

The author divided the elements of Western culture into three aspects: Western fast food

culture, Western festival culture and Western technological culture. This indicates that among these three elements of Western culture, the audience's acceptance of Western cultural elements is not high and doesn't directly affect the audience's cultural identity with their own country. In contrast, it can reflect a certain degree of identification with Chinese food culture, traditional festival culture and technological development. The cultural identity of the local audience has been constructed over a long period of time through the immersion in traditional culture and has a relative stability. Science fiction films are originally from the West, so the high frequency of Western cultural elements is a conscious habit of domestic audiences. However, the excessive presence of Western cultural elements doesn't affect the audience's cultural identity with their own country, because from the beginning of their exposure to science fiction films, the domestic audience, based on a relatively stable cognitive schema of "self", tend to examine the Western cultural elements in science fiction films with an ethnocentric tendency, initially, it was rejected as an "other" culture, with a mode of self-protection. Meanwhile, this also reveals the problem that Chinese science fiction films are still restricted to a certain extent by Western culture in the process of creation. Although the frequency of Western cultural elements in Chinese science fiction films doesn't directly affect the audience's identity, when combining Western cultural elements with traditional Chinese cultural elements, we shouldn't pursue lumpy borrowing, but should pay attention to drawing on the essence of Western culture as a supplement, and work with traditional Chinese culture to shape a "Chinese style" science fiction film.

4.3 Market impact: audiences' cultural identity drives their willingness to watch Chinese science fiction films

For hypothesis 4, I set the independent variable "cultural identity" and the dependent variable "willingness to watch" and did the relevant data analysis, the results showed a positive correlation, and hypothesis 4 holds. This shows that cultural identity has an important influence on the attention and box office of Chinese science fiction films.

Cultural identity and Chinese science fiction films are complementary to each other. The quality of special effect production and the frequency of traditional Chinese cultural elements in Chinese science fiction films have a significant impact on the audience's cultural identity, while the audience's cultural identity also affects the audience size of Chinese science fiction films and the visual presentation of box office figures. From the perspective of cultural identity theory, it's multi-dimensional. From a macro perspective, cultural identity can be classified into national and state identity. The increasing comprehensive strength of the country and its international status will strengthen the national identity of the audience, and at the same time make the audience feel confident in Chinese science fiction films. The improvement of the country's technological strength will also drive the Chinese science fiction films to become more and more professional in terms of special effect production and visual communication effects, and the box office is a direct reflection of the audience's willingness to act, and an indirect reflection of their confidence in the progress of Chinese science fiction films.

5 Summary and Recommendations

In summary, this study identified the phenomenon of the influence of domestic science fiction films on the cultural identity of the audience and argued for a relationship between the two. The quality of special effects production and the presentation of traditional Chinese cultural elements in Chinese science fiction films have a positive impact on the cultural identity of the audience, while the cultural identity of the audience also has a significant impact on the market development of Chinese science fiction films. In this regard, this paper suggests a clearer path for the localization of Chinese science fiction films in both the modern Chinese and international contexts—the pursuit of professionalism in special effects production and the expression of diverse traditional Chinese cultural elements.

On the one hand, in terms of special effects production, the technical maturity of Hollywood sci-fi films should be an incentive for us to keep improving. At the same time, we should also build our own "special effects production factory" and "digital film and television station" on the basis of the existing national technological level, vigorously support the development of the special effects industry, and technological, economic and human resources should be pooled to achieve specialization, systematization and balance in special effects production. On the other hand, on the issue of diversified expressions of traditional Chinese cultural elements, how to skillfully combine Chinese science fiction films with traditional Chinese cultural elements without making the audience feel that it is a pile of elements is a test of the cultural literacy, scientific literacy, aesthetic expression and professional skills of the filmmakers, and the script writing is a visual manifestation of these requirements. The word "science fiction", without the support of science and technology, focuses on "fantasy", which requires the rich imagination and creativity of the filmmaker to build a stunning otherworldly world, and is also a space where traditional Chinese cultural elements can be brought into full play. The word "science fiction", without the support of science and technology, focuses on "fantasy", which requires the rich imagination and creativity of the filmmaker to build a stunning otherworldly world, and is also a space where traditional Chinese cultural elements can be brought into full play. In terms of script creation, filmmakers should continue to draw inspiration from the best works of science fiction literature, making breakthroughs and advances based on existing scientific knowledge and technology to achieve a transcendence of the real world imagination and expand the possibilities of characterization and plot narrative.At the same time, in this process, we must continue to improve our scientific and cultural literacy to contribute to the quality of script creation, and use traditional Chinese cultural elements as a new means to help domestic science fiction films show "Chinese characteristics", tell "Chinese stories" and convey "Chinese ideas".

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