

Final Paper:

Love, Gender and Anthropocentrism in *the Wandering Earth*, *Interstellar* and *Avarya*

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Abstract: This paper takes three films, *the Wandering Earth*(2019), *Interstellar*(2014) and *Avarya*(2020), as contexts. The former two films are under the perspective of anthropocentrism and contain patriarchy ideology, while the last film is a great counterattack by its great metaphor of robot as female.

Key words: Anthropocentrism; gender issues; patriarchy; ideology

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I. Introduction

a) Background

Space travel has always been one of the most common themes of science fiction films. It all began in the turn of the 20th century with the French short film, *Le Voyage Dans la Lune (A Trip to the Moon)*, later culminated in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* in the mid-century, which revolutionised science fiction films, (Sidney Perkowitz, 2007)¹ and the depiction of space travel. Space movies have entered a new era in the 21st century, as demonstrated by Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* in 2014. China has also joined in the space movie endeavour, by making *Wandering Earth* in 2019. Upon release, space travel movies went viral in China and has soon become one of the audience favourites. More recently, a short science fiction animation film entitled *Avarya*, directed by Gökalp Gönen, has garnered much attention in 2019. The film discussed Three Laws of Robotics in the context of space traveling. The three films share a common theme: our planet is under threat, humans are then compelled to establish settlements elsewhere in space. The key difference lies in the approach, which shall be discussed in the following.

b) Literature Review

There has been some existing research on *Interstellar* which puts forward that the film has adopted an anthropocentric point of view. Zheng Danfeng(2015) argued that humans were insensitive to the looking ecological crisis, suggesting a sense of denial.² Mario Liong(2017) put out some discontent on *Interstellar*, claiming the "super human" helped Cooper, the main character, is an anthropocentrism part. And this delivered us a message that rather than relying on "super human", we should "contemplating life in the post-human condition".³ MA Shabbir and N. Ibrahim(2016) took a postcolonial perspective on *Interstellar*, claiming "the film is a declaration of colonial desires", and "propagate the colonial hangover in a neo-colonial garb".⁴

The critics said the movie "*the Wandering Earth*", has added the essence of humanity in the film. A study group lead by Elizaveta G. Khomyakova(2019)

¹ Perkowitz, Sidney. "Introduction", *Hollywood Science: Movies, Science, and the End of the World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 1-16.

² 郑丹凤. "生态批评视野中的《星际穿越》." 电影文学, no. 1 (2015): 135-37.

³ Liong, M. (2017). The humanist *Interstellar* (2014) and its discontent. *Cultural Studies@Lingnan*, 57. Retrieved from <http://commons.ln.edu.hk/mcsln/vol57/iss1/4/>

⁴ Mohd. Ali Shabbir, Numana Ibrahim,(2016) "A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF INTERSTELLAR", An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal, Available at <http://www.indianscholar.co.in/downloads/24-mohd.-ali-shabbir.pdf>,

suggesting the film contains the concepts of “Humanity, collectiveness, people’s friendship, dream, family”.⁵ *The Post-human Imagination of Chinese Science Fiction in the Wandering Earth*, by author Li Hui(2019), suggests the concept of family hugely influenced the film and giving the film a “made in China” stick.⁶ Some other papers written in Chinese gave a conclusion that the film is a vivid example of Chinese humanity ideology.

Almost no study on *Avarya* has been made yet.

c) Question Raised

This paper questions the humanity shown in these three movies including how anthropocentrism is represented and the outcome of such anthropocentric perspective. Secondly, how love is represented under this anthropocentric perspective which includes the love between human (This might concentrate on the representation of gender.) and how human and non-human relation is portrayed.

II. Method

The proposed methodology is textual approaches, this includes close reading, narrative theory, and deconstruction. To use this methodology, I will regard the film as a sign, watch the film over and over very closely, and try to find blind-spots of the film⁷ (Chris Barker, 2016). Also, Posthumanism, anthropocentrism concepts will be used when doing research.

III. Anthropocentrism in the three films

Human essence is the main subject of these three films and planets as the other. What makes it more interesting is human also being othered in these three films as they othering planets.

a) Planets as the other

In *the Wandering Earth*, humans wander in space, but they also carry planet earth with us. Some claims this is a way of showing Chinese humanity. (Heng Sizhen, 2019)⁸ But, is it true? Wandering with earth was absolutely a gaze of human scale. In the film, they changed the surface of earth and made ten thousand earth engines on the planet’s surface. Human can change the surface’s temperature, put animals in danger, regard less of other species. The starting point of wandering is the interests of humankind. The decision was made out of preserving human, not earth, not other species. The planet earth was regarded as the other in this film, it was overlooked, dominated by human.

On *Interstellar*, things are the same with a little difference. This film conveyed a concept of planet earth is under seriously damaged, but people are still unaware to reset

⁵ Khomyakova, Elizaveta G., Alexandra L. Sevastianova, and Tatiana I. Petukhova. "Value Concepts in Contemporary Chinese Cinema Based on Anglophone Reviews and Commentaries on Films.",(2019)

⁶ 李慧.从《流浪地球》看中国科幻的后人类想象, 电影文学,(2019):104-106.

⁷ Barker, Chris; Emma A. Jane, Cultural Studies: theory and practice 5th edition(SAGE Publications Ltd., 2016), 39-41

⁸ 衡思珍. "《流浪地球》中中国人文精神的构建与艺术价值." 黑河学院学报 10, no. 9 (2019): 168-72.

the ecology, which to an irreversible damage of ecology. The narrative of this story was anthropocentric, because human kept developing without the concern of planet earth and its ecology. And human even did not think of how to repair the ecosystem. "We're not meant to save the world. We are meant to leave it." This quotation is from Professor Brand's conversation with Cooper at the first time they met which suggests that they would leave planet earth and its ecosystem alone, and to make a living through a human's perspective, which is anthropocentric. But the difference is, in *Interstellar*, the director was trying to show a dystopia through this endless destroy of ecosystem, thus gave a warning to the destroy of environment would lead to a dilemma. This means, the director told an anthropocentric story in order to warn human of the dilemma.

In *Avarya*, planet earth is also seen as the other. The man's spaceship was made after his own house on planet earth. It contained his eager to stay at earth, which was emphasized more on the part of the man assumed his dream planet is a planet like earth. In this example, earth is seen as the other which is the objective that is the man's dream. The whole part before the ending is from an anthropocentric perspective. The man assumed his planet earth being the way he wanted. But things are reversed in the ending part, which shall be expounded later in this paper.

In *the Wandering Earth*, some other planets are also seen as the other. Jupiter has taken the role as the "bad guy". Its gravity captured the earth and caused the crisis of human and earth. The movie is about human against Jupiter's Roche Limit. And what it wanted to show us is human power than nature. What caused the problem, and forced earth to wander, was sun's rapidly degenerating and expanding.

My personal idea is the movie talked few of human activities, but only blame the problem on sun. Thus in this story, sun and Jupiter were also being otherised. Which emphasized the anthropocentric perspective of the Wandering Earth.

b) All about love

All of the three films contain a main tune of love. All three stories can be explained by the reason of love. These loves are also in an anthropocentric context.

In *the Wandering Earth*, it's about the deep bonding and relationship between the father(Liu Peiqiang) and the son(Liu Qi). Such relationship can be reflected on today's Chinese family. The film is telling a modern society's crisis under the context of doomsday. Fathers are always busy with their business, thus sons are always overlooked. The two are always under misunderstanding. (Li Dandan, 2019)⁹

The subline of the film is a discussion on the love relation within family. The grandfather's dotting on grandson and granddaughter, the misunderstanding between father and son, the unforgettable and touching memory of a man who lost his girl in his old age. The complex plot between son-in-law and father-in-law reflect on today's

⁹ 李丹丹. "浅析科幻电影《流浪地球》的"情感结构"." 艺苑, no. 2 (2019): 32-34.

Chinese family.

Based on these family love relations, the story paid too lots of attention on this subline to convey the concept of everything origins and can be solved by family love. The reason why Liu Peiqiang found the space station is trying to “escape” is that he wanted to take a conversation with his son. The reason why Liu Qi and Han Duoduo agreed to stay with the rescue team after Han Ziang’s, there grandfather, death, is that they are moved by Han Ziang. At the end, Liu Peiqiang sacrificed himself, but before he dashed into the fire, he also gave a speech, saying how deeply he was in love with his son. All these scenes showed us how the love relation works in this film, and how the story was led by family love. The emphasize on human’s family relations is an anthropocentrism.

In *Interstellar*, it is also a story led by family love. It focused on the love between father and daughter, Dr. Brand and her father Professor Brand, Cooper and his daughter Murph. It was a story of abandon. Dr. Brand was afraid of her being forced to abandon her father and all human. Murph was afraid of her father abandon her.

The emotional line of the whole film is based on love. The love of father and daughter, the love of male and female, the love of father and son, etc.,. As Maaïke Hommes (2020) said,

The movie follows a movement of reproductive love that functions to maintain mankind. While this love is presented as a counterforce to the masculine, rationalist, imperialist impulse, it eventually comes to the fore as the very thing that maintains it. Human agency is reasserted and transcendence is mastered. (35)¹⁰

As had been studied by Hommes, love in the story has been set as a “counterforce to destruction of the world”. (36) “Love TARS, Love, it’s just like Brand said, my connection with Murph, it is quantifiable. It is the key!” This is perhaps the most important sentence in the whole film, yelled by Cooper in fifth dimension space. This sentence directly showed the main theme of the movie —— love between father and daughter.

The same as *the Wandering Earth*, *Interstellar* was still in the loop of anthropocentrism, this is a story based on human love, claiming that, through love we can solve anything, even rescue humankind!

However, in *Avarya*, though this is still a love story, the object had been changed. This is a short film about man in love with his homeland, to be more specific, his own house and planet earth. In the film, the loop showed that whatever the man do, he would finally go back to earth soullessly. This showed his love with planet earth, which is a

¹⁰ Hommes, Maaïke. "To Love and Not to Smother; Aliens, Love and Reproduction in Denis Villeneuve' s Arrival (2016) and Christopher Nolan' s Interstellar (2014)." *Diffractions 2* (2020): 24-46.

metaphor of human cannot abandon earth, and a complex of loving hometown. The ending part is a show of human trapped on earth. If the former part of the film is a sign of anthropocentrism, the ending part shall be a non-human turn, which is planet earth became the subject, the man became the other. The love of planet earth reversely trapped him, making him under the dominant of planet earth. This scene has made the film jumping out of the anthropocentrism way of narrative. This love with earth is also shown in *the Wandering Earth*. "Wandering with earth" is the concept in *the Wandering Earth*, which "in no doubt is influenced by oriental concept" (Li Hui, 2019)¹¹. But the difference is in *Avarya*, human is passively controlled by earth, while in *the Wandering Earth*, there is a human aggressively controlling earth concept.

As a conclusion, *Interstellar* and *the Wandering Earth*, are two films based on human family relations, their stories was led by love, while in *Avarya*, the film made a non-human turn, still in leading by love, but this time, it is man in love with planet earth, by which he was trapped.

This could say, *Interstellar* and *the Wandering Earth* are trapped in anthropocentrism, while *Avarya* is trying to jump out of the trap.

IV. Gender issues from anthropocentric perspective

As have been discussed in the former chapter, all of the three films are based under love. Love, as a concept, is deeply gendered. (Deevia Bhana, 2013)¹² To understand three films, we should understand the love representation in them. To understand love, we should get to know the gender representation in them. Thus, this chapter would take a look at gender relations through the anthropocentric perspective in all three films.

a) *The Wandering Earth*

In *the Wandering Earth*, masculinity and femininity played very different roles.

The masculinity is shown in almost every male character and it reflects in two aspects. The first is the relationship in the family which is Liu Peiqiang and his family. It is all about his love and his feeling of family/human prior to his personal-self. For family relations, a man is the leader of the family. We notice that Liu Peiqiang could decide the fate of his wife's by putting her to death. He also sent Han Ziang and Liu Qi to the underground city. The film does not mention any response of Liu Qi's mother (Han Duoduo I) suggesting she had no rights of discourse and she could only live under the domination of his son. Secondly, a father's responsibility. Liu Peiqiang, being the father, he has to take care of his children, and look after his father-in-law. Thus, during the first time that the earth is in danger, Liu Peiqiang has asked Mose, the AI computer of the space station, to contact his son because the first thing comes to Peiqiang's mind is the safety of family. Thirdly, whenever Liu Peiqiang is in contact with his son, the

¹¹ 李慧.从《流浪地球》看中国科幻的后人类想象, 电影文学,(2019):104-106.

¹² Bhana, Deevia. "Introducing love: gender, sexuality and power." *Agenda* 27, no. 2 (2013): 3-11.

conversation is all about his care to his son and how much he has missed him. Fourthly, for Han Ziang and Liu Qi, heir family members take precedence over anything. Even when Liu Qi's life is in danger, he is still trying to save lives of his family. In the ending, Liu Qi has almost sacrificed his life to save Han Duoduo.

Liu Peiqiang and other male family members have traditional Chinese way of thinking about "family". They show care for their own families, put aside their own selves, Male are also in a dominant position in their family, showing the patriarchy ideology.

We also find in the movie that almost all leaders of every rescue team are men. Men are in the dominant position of the society. Underground city's workers and gang leaders are also men. There are only five women in the character list. Han Duoduo and Zhou Qian/Yatou are the only two members of the rescue team. One is Han Duoduo's class monitor, who does not have much time. The other two female characters are doing gender-stereotyped jobs, a junior high school teacher and a nurse respectively. The movie also conveys the message that family is very important to anyone. In the movie, Wang Lei, the leader of the rescue team CN171-11, is very eager to deliver the fire stone to Hangzhou underground city. In order to accomplish the mission, he does not want to lose his team member, and he moves on to complete the mission despite the danger he is facing. It is the same to Liu Qi who has finished the fixing of the fire stone himself. Liu Peiqiang, has sacrificed his own life to rescue the whole earth.

These scenes have portrayed a hero (NOTE: , not heroine) that exposes himself in danger and sacrifice for collective spirit.

The femininity in the film is divided into two parts; most of its femininity is based on the character Han Duoduo, who is meticulously described in the film. However, some other female characters are described to be as irrational. But, overall, femininity is under described in the film.

The character of Han Duoduo where femininity most comes from She is a rebellious girl in her junior high school age. She is eager to go up to the surface to take a look which makes her look like a brave female to break the stereotype. After she gets to the surface, the director immediately creates for her an image of "foolish, naïve, timid". She has asked almost everything she sees on the surface, she has told Liu Qi she is scared. In the prison, Han Duoduo has kept crying, showing that she is weak. In the rescue team, she has always been under protection. Her "naiveness" has reached to the peak when she is delivering her speech to all rescue team members of the world. She has delivered the speech in a trembling voice, desperately looking for others' help. This is a way of showing weakness in femininity and seeking for male's help. Throughout the film, Han Duoduo has been described in a weak position, under the protection of others.

Other females in the film are mostly described as irrational. Han Duoduo's teacher

has a funny character. She is satisfied with class monitor's humorous yet official jargon, and has criticized the genuine feeling of Duoduo'. When Liu Qi breaks the electric system, the teacher is in a flurried emotion, saying unpreparedly "sit down". Another female character, Zhou Qian/Yatou, has used her gun to destroy the fire stone after they have found that Hangzhou underground city has been destroyed. Though it's a brief appearance, these two female characters have shown they are irrational .

Overall, the masculinity in this movie is the focus of collective spirit and patriarchy domination. Females are portrayed as irrational and they are objects of men under their protection. This is a male dominated film which reflects the patriarchy system of the society.

This patriarchy not only reflects on the domination on males, but also the domination of eco-system which reflects the anthropocentrism. "Women and nature have the same dominated status in the history, and patriarchal structure is the cultural origin which causes natural domination and gender domination" (CHEN Ling, 2014) The way that human treats our planet as mentioned earlier is a reflection on this patriarchy.

b) *Interstellar*

Things are not very different in *Interstellar*. We cannot find mother roles in the film, we cannot see Dr. Brand's mom and Murph's mom in the film. The father and daughter love relation discussed in the film had already kicked mother's love out.

The only mother part in the movie is Tom Cooper's, Cooper's son, wife Lois. She was represented as a mother who cared her own children. In the part Tom did not want to leave his house, Lois allowed Murph and his companion to examine her child's health. In this part, Tom has been represented as unreasonable, stubborn, while Lois has been represented as caring for children, which emphasized her motherhood. This is a way showing of the stereotype of mother caring for children, while masculine father caring for his property.

Besides this we cannot find another mother in the film. Actually, this thing happens through all Nolan's film. Rebecca Pahle(2014)¹³ in her famous essay *Christopher Nolan, We Need to Have a Talk About Your Obsession With Dead Wives* point out every Nolan's film had a thing about male being in pain with a loved female's death.

Whatever his reason to make such plot is, the lack of mother in *Interstellar* is a lack of love in the family relation. It only represented love between fathers and daughters, while paid few attention on mother and son. (Lois caring her son as mentioned.)

The focus on love lead the film to a dimension of paying too much patience inside human. Dr. Brand and Cooper's friendship part showed humanity in femininity as Dr.

¹³ Pahle, Rebecca. "Christopher Nolan, We Need to Have a Talk About Your Obsession With Dead Wives" https://www.pajiba.com/think_pieces/christopher-nolan-we-need-to-have-a-talk-about-your-obsession-with-dead-wives.php. 2014

Brand was always in support of find a livable planet, while Cooper was much less rational and more bravely as he jumped into the blackhole. This might be the same situation with Tom and Lois, as Tom was less rational, and Lois was more humanity. The same thing as Cooper and Murph. In the separation part, Murph tried to convince her father to “STAY” with the morse code in the shelf, which was humanity, while Murph was sticked to go to space, regardless of the uncertainty and the separation with his daughter, which was an irrational but brave thing.

We can see, in this movie, in the two family’s love relations and one friendship, who are three typical relations emphasized in the film, males were represented as an irrationally but more bravely people, while females were more humanity. This might be a outcome of the stereotype that impulse in masculinity and humanity in femininity. And the lack of mother in the film made it insufficient in narrative for motherhood was overlooked.

c) *Avaryia*

Despite the movie paid its attention on transcendent the anthropocentric narrative perspective., *Avarya* completed a leap in blurring the boundary between femininity and masculinity.

There are only two characters in the film, a robot and a man. We start off from the male character. The man, although having a male voice, has a neutral outlook; yet his apparel is masculine. He is soulless, without faith, does not have any hope. His masculinity has been declined. But he shows no femininity. The way he has been trapped in the loop of going back to earth and a group of “this man” going towards him at the ending part is a metaphor that the robot tries to take our lives away. This is still a male domineering story. Can we find any female characters in the movie?

Females characters are hided. The robot has actually taken the female position. The robot had a neutral appearance which has a human face but in a different form. The robot’s body is in cylinder shape without four limbs. its head is in sphere with one big round eye; its hair looks alike a peacock tail. The robot is a blur of boundary in android and machine. It does look alike an android, but it is more like a machine. This is a de-humanization of android.

What’s the relation between man and the robot? Apparently, man is the dominator in their relationship, he is the master, the “sir” in robot’s word. In a patriarchy system, man is on the dominant position. So, in this story the robot played the role as a non-human, as the other, as being dominated. And we can say, it played a role of “a second sex”, the other of male. It is a metaphor of female under dominant. This is a movie not only discussing about human and non-humans, but also a movie talking about patriarchy. The director took male as the only human character.

The question is what this patriarchy would lead us to?

A reverse on dominating relation. As is shown in the film, the man is totally under

the control of the robot. The proposed master became the actual servant, the proposed subject became the actual other.

On the surface, the patriarchy (man) is in control of the other (the robot, by three laws of robotics), but under the surface, it is reversed. Just as the three laws of robotic would finally backlash the man, the man are also under the imprisonment of patriarchy.

V. Conclusion

There are three movies being discussed in the film. They all tell the story of human finding new habitats as planet earth is in danger. *The Wandering Earth* and *Interstellar* are stories under anthropocentric perspective, while *Avarya* is trying to jump out of this.

From the anthropocentrism, this paper discussed gender issues in the three movies. *The Wandering Earth* conveys a very patriarchy and collective ideology. Though trying to include women into its main theme, the *Interstellar* still has ways to go, for the film still conveys stereotype and a lack of femininity narrative. For *Avarya*, the film used a metaphor to critic patriarchy system which is a great leap.

This paper tends to find the gender issues in these three films and make a comparison. Both of the *Wandering Earth* and *Interstellar* are trying to deliver their ideology, which is in no doubt based on patriarchy system. As a main theme movie invested by China Mainland, the *Wandering Earth* showed how “oriental concepts” (as Li Hui said) has been deeply influenced by patriarchy system. As a Hollywood blockbuster, *Interstellar* is a huge success. Nolan’s view on female is the essence of this movie. Also, the patriarchy and gender stereotype inevitably shown in the film as mentioned. An interesting turn can be found in the Turkish short animation film *Avarya*, a movie discussing relations between humans and non-humans. This film conveys the director’s rethinking on gender issues by its metaphor, which is a counterattack on the patriarchy, delivered by the former two movies.

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