

Analysis of the Use of the Yellow River in Chinese Movie

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Abstract

As a symbol of Chinese culture and history, the Yellow River plays an important role in movies. The Yellow River is not only a geographical landmark, but also has rich symbolic meanings and is often used to convey profound emotions, ideas and themes. In the movie, the audience can find that the different states of the Yellow River, the flow of the water, the presentation of the scenery as well as the audio-visual elements all contain multi-level symbolic meanings, and these symbols not only enhance the artistry of the movie, but also allow the audience to have a deeper experience in terms of emotion and thought. While exploring these symbols in depth, the rich connotation of Chinese culture can also be better understood.

Keywords: movie, Yellow River, symbols, Yellow River culture

1. The Significance of the Yellow River in Chinese Movies

The Yellow River, as the mother river of the Chinese nation, carries the great prosperity of the nation and the complex and diverse geographic environment, and also nurtures a rich and colorful history and culture. It originates from Qinghai and traverses nine provinces, including Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu, and flows through a vast territory and varied natural environment, crossing three major steps and becoming the natural demarcation line between north and south of China. For thousands of years, the Yellow River has been flowing in this land, bringing with it huge amounts of loess sediment, nourishing

many yellow-skinned Chinese children, and forging their resilient character and deep national sentiment. Covered by loess, this land is both magnificent and barren, and its inhabitants rely on nature to make a living, so they have deep knowledge and emotions about the land and their survival, and incorporate these emotions into their culture, forming the unique Yellow River Culture.

The fusion of the essence of the Yellow River culture with the magnificent landscape of the Loess Land provides unique materials for the art of movie. Movie creators focus on the Yellow River with passionate and profound vision, take the simple folk style, unique regional landscape and long cultural heritage as the inspiration and

foundation of creation, and integrate the regional aesthetics and national spirit nurtured by the Yellow River Basin into the life experience of the Yellow River people, reflecting the actual life, survival status, and national identity of the Yellow River Basin, and highlighting the traditional national spirit. In the geographical landscape, it embodies the distinctive ethnicity and locality through the unique and distinctive logo; In the aesthetic style and image weather, it presents the ancient and deep artistic qualities. What emerges with the story is the noble character of the Yellow River that moistens all things without contention, the pioneering spirit of the rolling river that goes forward without any hesitation and the broad mind that is fluid and open and inclusive, as well as the strong cultural vitality that bursts out of the river, which connects history, reality and the future tightly. By writing and recording the Yellow River through the lens, the movie not only allows the long-flowing national culture and regional characteristics of the Yellow River Basin to be preserved in the form of images, but also lays a solid foundation for the future generations to inherit and carry forward the culture of the Yellow River, and to dig deeper into the cultural connotations of the Yellow River materials in movies.

2. The Way the Yellow River Is Presented in Chinese Movies

As a natural landscape symbol in Chinese movies, the Yellow River is often presented in the director's camera as the water of the Yellow River, the loess land and the scenery along the river. These natural scenes are often intertwined with the fate of the characters and the development of the storyline. Sometimes the struggle of the main character is highlighted through the cultural imagery of the Yellow River; Sometimes the Yellow River is used as the background of the story development, closely connected with the fate of the characters; Sometimes it symbolizes the national spirit, emphasizing the cultural connotation and emotional expression of the Yellow River.

2.1 *The Endless Flow of the Yellow River*

The Yellow River, like a huge dragon in China, has been running continuously with indomitable spirit and majesty, providing a unique narrative element for the movie. As the French movie scholar Bazin once said, "Movie is essentially a play of nature, and there can be no

movie without an open structural space, because movie is not embedded in the world, but replaces it." (André Bazin, 1987) Chinese movies have objectively and faithfully recorded and presented the Yellow River through its unique audiovisual language.

But "the movie is not a communication tool, but an expression tool, i.e., an ideographic system". (Peng Jixiang, 2012) When the audience interprets the symbols in the movie, they will establish emotional resonance with the characters of the movie according to their own life experience and understanding of the symbols, thus forming a unique interactive connection between the director and the audience, which makes the movie have richer emotional resonance and connotation. For example, in the movie *A Son of the Yellow River*, it takes the Yellow River as the main background and shows the grandeur and passion of the Yellow River through vivid images and music. In the opening scene, the water of the Yellow River is surging like thousands of soldiers and horses, symbolizing courage and fighting spirit. When the Yellow River water suddenly encounters storms and deep valleys, it shows the river's menace and unpredictability. In the movie *Roar! The Yellow River*, the Yellow River is presented as a shocking force of nature through the music of the *Yellow River Chantey* and the simultaneous sound of the huge waves of the Yellow River. When the boatmen wrestle with the raging Yellow River, the movie screen is filled with the surging Yellow River water, showing the fierce confrontation between human beings and nature. While when the Yellow River flows through a flat area, the screen presents a subtle and introverted Yellow River water. In the movie *The Edge of the Yellow River*, the beginning of the movie presents the slowly flowing Yellow River, with the children's loud reading sound of "Yellow River water, yellow and yellow, the banks of the Yellow River is the hometown, the Yellow River rushes into the distance, the river is thousands of li long...", which emphasizes the silence and peacefulness of the Yellow River, and the wide river surface conveys a warmth of home. In Jia Zhangke's movie *Mountains May Depart*, the Yellow River, which appears many times, is an extremely symbolic symbol. The Yellow River not only represents the spiritual sustenance of the protagonist of the movie, but also carries the director's profound meaning to his hometown.

This movie closely intertwines the Yellow River symbol with the storyline, giving the image a richer and more profound connotation.

2.2 Endless Loess Land

The endless golden sand and dust, criss-crossed canyons and high slopes intertwine to create the most spectacular landscape of the Loess Plateau in the world, which is called the geological miracle of the world, and at the same time, it is the most distinctive natural symbol in the movies with Yellow River materials. In the movie works, the loess land, as an independent aesthetic value, also plays a unique ideological function. For example, in the movie *Yellow Earth*, the vast loess land is the main narrative scene, and the loess land is placed in the “foreground” of the picture. At this time, the unique geomorphic color of the Loess Plateau is both the narrative environment in a broad sense, and the realm of imagery blending, which is a strong modeling means of expression. The Loess Plateau repeatedly presented in the movie not only exists as an object, but also “reproduces” the natural land through the movement of the camera, which is always under the vision of being watched and scrutinized. Although this “gaze” has a sense of strangeness and distance, there is also a Chen Kaige-style understanding and warmth. (Zeng Zheng, 2012)

In addition, the loess is closely related to the industrious people who live here, who plow and sow with their hard-working hands, and write the story of growth and harvest in the cycle of seasons. No matter what the winds and rains do, they quietly stick to it, they are indomitable, always fighting against nature, and the loess land has become a symbol of the resilience, diligence and wisdom of the Chinese people. Therefore, the loess land has appeared many times in different movie works, and it also implies multiple meanings. For example, in movies with Yellow River materials, the widely spread yellow smoke and dust often carry natural omens. For example, in the movie *Yellow River Woman*, large vehicles always roll up yellow dust when crossing, highlighting the ecological environment. On the other hand, the vast loess land in Yellow River movies become the people’s support and hope. In the movie *Old Well*, the background of the movie is the cool Loess Plateau under the Taihang Mountains, and its main plot revolves around an ordinary but extremely important task — digging water wells, the vast and boundless Loess Plateau

shows its full picture, and the vicissitudes of the video images seem to tell of the unremitting struggle between human beings and the nature and the desire for survival. In the movie *The Great River Flows on*, the villagers of Tieniu Village sowed seeds of hope on the cracked loess, and eventually turned the barren land into a source of abundance; In *At the Bank of Yellow River*, the people of Bohai County worked hard on the loess and reaped the happiness of a good harvest; And in *The Women of Huangtupo Village*, the members of the contracting consortium scientifically cultivate fields on the loess land, changing people’s stereotypical image of “farming”. Whether it is the rolling dust of the loess or the fertile loess, they all share the fate of life and death with the people of this land.

2.3 Unique and Rich Riverside Scenery

The Yellow River is long and winding, flowing through a vast area with different sceneries. In addition to the Yellow River water and the loess land, the unique and rich scenery along the river in the Yellow River Basin is also shown to the public in Chinese movie productions.

The Yellow River Stone Forest is known for its spectacular natural landscape, with landforms characterized by towering pillars and stalagmites, peaks and valleys, complex and varied gullies and canyons, treacherous terrain and the flow of the Yellow River. The region’s landscapes are unique and diverse, as if they were sculptural masterpieces of nature. In the fierce fight scene at the beginning of the movie *The Myth*, the scene of the fight for Yushu between General Meng Yi and General Cui from North Korea not only highlights the contradictions and conflicts between the characters, but also shows the audience the natural wonders of the Yellow River Stone Forest. The Yellow River Stone Forest amazes the audience with its towering, majestic, and awe-inspiring momentum, which not only enriches the visual effect of the movie, but also skillfully blends the natural landscape with the fate of the characters, bringing a richer emotional and audio-visual experience to the movie.

In addition to the Yellow River Stone Forest, through the shaping of natural and man-made factors, the Yellow River Basin has also formed a famous Yellow River Old Course, also known as the Xianfeng Old Course. This old course originates from Lankao County, passes through

Minquan and Shangqiu, and finally flows into Dangshan in Anhui Province. The Yellow River Old Course is not only a natural river course, but also an amazing man-made project. In the movie *Ballad of the Yellow River*, this thousand-year-old course with a long history is presented to the audience in a landscape style. As the protagonist's footsteps rise and fall, the audience will be brought into the vast and boundless loess slopes and feel the boundless expansion of the loess sand and wind. The protagonist in the movie, in order to make a living, drifts on this winding and desolate Yellow River Old Course. Through the presentation of the ancient and majestic geographic space of the Yellow River Old Course, the audience is able to appreciate its magnificent scenery.

The loess cave dwelling are the living quarters of the people in the Yellow River Basin, and they are also important image symbols in movies with Yellow River materials. "The emergence of cave dwelling is directly related to the characteristics of loess on the Loess Plateau. The Loess Plateau has a deep loess cover, loose soil, crisscrossing gullies and cliffs, and is easy to excavate. Human beings in primitive society gradually recognized these characteristics, and they tried digging holes in the sunny slopes of the plateau, on the gully cliffs, and utilize the soft and vertical joint development characteristics of loess to form arched horizontal chambers." (Liu Dejiu & Zhang Ansai, 2001) The Yellow River cave dwelling that appeared in the movie *Yellow River Shoal* were not only the places where the ancestors of the protagonist lived, but also presented the simplicity and hardship of rural life at that time. This environmental background emphasizes the resilience of the people and their tenacious pursuit of life. However, with the construction of the Three Gorges Reservoir, the two Tian family brothers had to relocate and immigrate. At this time, the Yellow River cave dwelling also carries the emotional and collective memory of the two Tian family brothers and the people on the shoal, and the cave dwelling is a place of reminiscence for them, as well as an important node of the emotional line of the story. The movie reinforces the significance of the cave dwelling as a place of emotion through the scenes of sadness and joy, and these emotional conflicts and bonds of kinship.

3. Conclusion

The Yellow River, as the lifeblood and cultural cradle of the Chinese nation, carries the collective memory of the Chinese nation and witnesses the evolution of Chinese civilization. This great river in movie works has become a symbol widely accepted and recognized by the audience, which is constantly inherited and displayed. The symbolic system of the Yellow River has been perfected and constantly interpreted in movie and television creations, injecting a deep cultural heritage into Chinese movies. Movie creators can also draw on the theory of movie semiotics to continue to explore the connotation and depth of the Yellow River, so that the Yellow River can better convey emotions and values in Chinese movies, and inspire the audience's thinking and resonance.

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