

# Ecological Concerns and Insights in Science Fiction Films — A Case Study of *The Wandering Earth*

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## Abstract

Science fiction films, as an artistic expression highlighting the relationship between future technology and human survival, often utilize grand story settings and fictional futuristic worlds to explore the connection between humanity and the environment. This paper takes the Chinese science fiction film *The Wandering Earth* as a case study, examining its focus on ecological issues and the presentation of ecological awareness within the narrative. The aim is to use science fiction cinema as a medium to provide audiences with insights into Earth's ecology, guiding humanity towards profound reflections on environmental issues.

**Keywords:** science fiction films, *The Wandering Earth*, ecological concerns, ecological insights

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of technology and the expanding scope of human activities, the Earth is facing an increasingly severe ecological crisis. Science fiction films, as a unique form of cultural expression, often reflect human concerns about environmental issues through the portrayal of fictional future scenarios. *The Wandering Earth* directed by Chinese filmmaker Frant Gwo, is a notable science fiction film that unfolds against the backdrop of the imminent destruction of the sun, leading humanity on a journey in search of a new home for Earth. This paper takes this film as an example to explore how science fiction films address and depict ecological issues, as well as the insights such portrayals offer to the audience.

## 2. Ecological Concern in the Film

*The Wandering Earth* effectively highlights the science fiction genre's attention to ecological issues through its unique narrative and visual presentation, particularly employing distinctive methods in ecological aesthetics.

The film portrays scenes of ecological disasters, depicting Earth's wandering journey for survival. In a race against the impending destruction of the sun, humanity endeavors to fill the Earth with engines, propelling it in search of a new home. The movie emphasizes the insignificance and vulnerability of humanity in the face of nature, attributing the colossal catastrophe to a lack of awareness of ecological civilization. Through the perspective of the protagonist, Han Zi'ang, audiences witness the devastation of what was once their home, prompting emotional resonance as he laments society's past emphasis on money over the

well-being of the sun. The film ingeniously weaves ecological concepts into its narrative, elevating the value of artistic creation to a reflection of real-world implications, urging viewers to pay attention to ecological issues.

*The Wandering Earth* captivates audiences with its distinctive visual presentation, showcasing visual spectacles such as the frozen world, scorched homelands, and the escape from Earth. These visual wonders vividly set the tone for the film. From the outset, scenes depicting wildfires, drought disasters, disappearing cities, and species illustrate the movie's central theme of "ecological catastrophe, Earth's wandering." The Earth's "wandering" is portrayed as an ecological disaster rooted in humanity's lack of awareness of ecological civilization. Through the disaster scenes and narrative in the film, viewers are prompted to engage in profound reflections on ecological issues.

Furthermore, the film employs a unique approach to visual presentation using ecological aesthetics. Utilizing digital technology to showcase Earth's natural environment, audiences are immersed in the grandeur and fragility of nature, enhancing the authenticity of the viewing experience. The application of ecological aesthetics not only heightens the realism of the cinematic experience but also underscores the importance of attention to and conservation of the natural environment.

In summary, *The Wandering Earth* successfully integrates ecological issues into its science fiction narrative through unique storytelling and visual presentation. Employing ecological aesthetics effectively raises awareness of the ecological crisis, injecting new elements into science fiction films and guiding audiences to contemplate the delicate balance between technology and ecology. This distinctive expression not only enriches the genre but also contributes to the dissemination of environmental conservation principles.

### **3. Presentation of Ecological Awareness**

Film, as the art of audio-visual language, serves as the audience's first sensory experience, transmitting visual and auditory impressions directly to the brain. In *The Wandering Earth*, a plethora of scenes and sound effects with disaster undertones depict the repercussions of ecological devastation, showcasing the cascade of events following Earth's ecological breakdown.

#### **3.1 Visual Presentation**

In the film, a frigid world of ice and snow is prominently featured. Due to Earth's departure from the solar system into an unfamiliar galaxy, surface temperatures plummet. The majority of the Earth is covered in ice and snow, creating a cold and desolate landscape. This imagery is effectively conveyed through scenes and special effects in the movie, presenting an extreme and unfamiliar atmosphere. Additionally, there are sandstorms and extreme weather events. The film showcases frequent sandstorms and extreme weather phenomena occurring on the Earth's surface. These weather changes result from Earth drifting through interstellar space, experiencing gravitational forces from external celestial bodies and other adverse factors, leading to drastic climate fluctuations. In underground cities, massive structures have been constructed by humans to survive and evade extreme weather conditions. These cities exhibit a closed, high-tech, and futuristic design in stark contrast to the desolation on the surface. Abandoned cities on the surface depict the aftermath of environmental disasters. Many cities on Earth become deserted, with buildings covered in ice and snow, creating an atmosphere of desolation and barrenness on the streets. The presentation of these ecological scenes, through the film's visual effects and special techniques, showcases to the audience a future world filled with challenges and uncertainties. This underscores the film's profound reflections on humanity's impact on the environment and its imaginative vision of the future.

For humanity, any planet cannot be considered a home without a beautiful and habitable ecological environment. In the film, the reason humans embark on the "wandering" journey with Earth is not merely due to the aging sun about to engulf the planet; rather, it is the catastrophic destruction of Earth's ecological environment. Humanity urgently needs to find a suitable galaxy to rebuild the ecological environment necessary for survival, as Earth becomes a devastated and uninhabitable wasteland. The aging sun is not the sole factor endangering a suitable habitat for humans. Unbridled pollution and destruction caused by human activities can also lead to the rapid collapse of fragile ecosystems. Regardless of the feasibility of relocating to other planets or wandering with Earth, allowing pollution to destroy the ecological environment might lead

to humanity's extinction long before acquiring the necessary technological capabilities. A line from the film goes, "I used to think home was behind me, now I realize it's in front of me." Cherishing Earth and constructing and protecting a beautiful and habitable ecological environment may be the only choice for us at present, a decision that perhaps doesn't require the computational abilities of a "MOSS computer" to reach.

### 3.2 Auditory Presentation

In the film *The Wandering Earth*, auditory elements play a crucial role in presenting ecological scenes. Numerous global news broadcasts and radio reports signal the imminent crisis of Earth's destruction, with half of the engines ceasing to operate globally, and the climax approaching as Earth is about to collide with Jupiter, marking humanity's countdown to death. The sound of mechanical devices, designed to address Earth's gradual cooling, showcases the construction of massive engines and equipment to propel Earth's movement. The operating sounds of these mechanical devices in the film create a high-tech and industrial auditory atmosphere. The howling winds on the frozen surfaces of Beijing, Jinan, and Shanghai, as characters stand on the ground, embody the calamity and desolation on Earth's surface. The cacophony of sounds in underground cities, where humans are forced to reside due to extreme climatic conditions, includes unique life sounds such as conversations, the operation of mechanical devices, and the honking of city traffic. These sounds immerse the audience in the distinctive and enclosed atmosphere of life in underground cities. The sounds of meteorological anomalies, resulting from Earth entering interstellar space and encountering unknown celestial forces, lead to extreme weather changes. In the movie, viewers can hear strong winds, thunderous lightning, and the howling of sandstorms. These sounds create a tense and dangerous atmosphere, emphasizing the environmental deterioration Earth is undergoing.

Constructing a beautiful ecological environment requires continuous efforts across generations. In the film, humanity embarks on a journey to escape the solar system, a venture that will take 2500 years and span 100 generations before reaching the Proxima Centauri, showcasing the resilient spirit of humanity. It illustrates that as long as the direction is correct and the

commitment persists, one can reach the bright shore. Similarly, ecological governance is not a task that can be completed overnight; it requires a lengthy process. Protecting the ecological environment necessitates continuous efforts across generations. A classic line from the film captures this sentiment, "At first, no one cared about this disaster. It was just a wildfire, a drought, the extinction of a species, the disappearance of a city, until this disaster became intimately connected to everyone." This reflects past human disregard for environmental concerns, a sentiment and attitude echoed globally as societies rally together in their common concern and call for addressing large-scale environmental destruction.

## 4. Insights into the Ecological Environment

In recent years, extreme and abnormal weather conditions have triggered public fears of ecological disasters. Within the film industry, creative minds have used this as inspiration, prompting humanity to reassess its relationship with the environment. Leveraging emerging technologies such as virtual reality and digital advancements, artists have expanded the boundaries of imagination, transcending the limits of human eyes and bodies. This progress enables us to soar higher and see further, fostering a renewed understanding of the intricate connection between humanity and the environment.

### 4.1 The Return of Ecological Ideals

In the science fiction film *The Wandering Earth*, we witness the resurgence and profound exploration of ecological ideals. The creators seamlessly integrate the natural ecological essence with artistic connotations, constructing a grand narrative that deeply delves into the core theme of "the relationship between humans and nature." Using the thread of "the sun's destruction and Earth's wandering," the film ingeniously transforms the arduous journey of Earth seeking a "new home" into a profound reflection on ecological issues, leaving an emotionally resonant imprint on the audience's souls. Through the unique visual language of science fiction, the film delves into the correct relationship between humans and nature in a new environment, sparking a fresh understanding of ecological ideals among viewers. The film's expression of ecological civilization and the importance of cherishing the Earth transcends surface-level awareness,

becoming deeply ingrained in people's emotions and reflections. The success of *The Wandering Earth* lies in its ability to lead the audience into profound discussions on ecological relationships through thought-provoking storytelling, signifying the return of ecological ideals in film creation and offering us a profound contemplation of the relationship between nature and humanity.

#### 4.2 The Development of Ecological Ideals

With the rise of science fiction films, the expression of ecological ideals has entered a new stage of development in the hands of creators. In the film *The Wandering Earth*, the creators seamlessly blend the natural ecological essence with artistic connotations, introducing ecological ideals into a realistic dimension. The film goes beyond depicting futuristic science fiction scenarios; it ingeniously incorporates real ecological issues, organically combining human care with ecological consciousness, vividly transitioning from surface-level problems to real-world enlightenment. By cleverly leveraging the boundless time and imaginative settings of science fiction, *The Wandering Earth* conveys the spirit of preserving nature and caring for the environment. The development of ecological ideals transcends traditional humanistic advocacy or artistic display; it organically combines film creation with real-world issues. This integration allows the audience to deeply perceive the real implications of "ecological civilization" within the visual landscape of science fiction. This creative approach injects ecological ideals into a broader and more profound social discourse, prompting audiences to contemplate the urgency of ecological issues while immersed in the cinematic experience. Therefore, the emergence of ecological films is not only an innovation in the realm of science fiction but also a significant catalyst for the development of ecological ideals, providing a fresh perspective for contemplation and fostering deep emotional resonance.

#### 5. Conclusion

Film, as a powerful communication tool, plays an indispensable role in advocating ecological civilization, promoting economic development, and conveying a perspective of ecological, humanistic, and green growth. Filmmakers adeptly use the creative techniques of cinematic art, processing real-life natural materials to

provide an insightful interpretation of current ecological issues and convey a vibrant ecological perspective. Taking *The Wandering Earth* as an example, the film frames its narrative with science fiction scenarios, employing a grand perspective of the cosmic space to depict humanity's development and changes in the face of significant disasters. By constructing virtual and futuristic storylines, the film not only broadens the audience's experience and real perception of ecological issues but also dynamically integrates humanistic care with science fiction plots. Through the use of advanced technology, it connects science fiction scenes with the audience's real-life implications, achieving a diverse narrative of ecological ideals and a comprehensive transcendence. This filmmaking approach immerses people in profound contemplation and emotional resonance, providing robust support for fostering societal attention and reflection on ecological issues. The audio-visual artistry of film, with its compelling storylines and thought-provoking scenes, effectively conveys ecological ideals to the audience, urging collective participation, construction, and enjoyment. It contributes to the collective effort to prevent Earth from "wandering" and humanity from being adrift, leaving a lasting impact on the journey toward a sustainable and ecologically conscious future.

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