

From a Multimodal Perspective: Analyzing How Sci-Fi Films Construct National Image - A Case Study of *The Wandering Earth 2* and *Interstellar*

Bu,He Fang,Fang

Inner Mongolia Normal University, Hohhot, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, 010028, China

Abstract: As a medium with powerful cross-cultural communication capabilities, science fiction films play a crucial role in constructing national images and conveying cultural values. This study, through the annotation, collection, and analysis of visual, auditory, and linguistic modal elements in the films *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar*, aims to explore how Chinese science fiction film *The Wandering Earth II* and American science fiction film *Interstellar* utilize visual, auditory, and linguistic modalities to construct distinct national images. The study demonstrates that through carefully designed visual modes (such as scene settings, character images, and color usage), auditory modes (including music, sound effects, and language), and linguistic modes (such as lines), the two films respectively construct distinct national images for China and the United States. The synergistic interaction of these modalities not only strengthens the communication of a nation's technological prowess, cultural confidence, and social values but also presents the world with a renewed national image.

Keywords: Multimodal; *The Wandering Earth II*; *Interstellar*; National image

DOI: 10.62639/sspjiss27.20250203

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, national image construction is vital for shaping international perceptions and fostering cross-cultural understanding. Films, as a powerful cultural medium, play a key role in projecting national values, and identities to global audiences. Analyzing how films contribute to this process offers critical insights into the intersection of culture, politics, and global communication. It is essential to not only consider the artistic quality of the films themselves but also to pay attention to the diverse cultural information embedded within them. Lai (2022) examined the differences between the two films, focusing on how their distinct political and cultural contexts influenced their narrative approaches and how these films conveyed their unique thematic messages. Wang (2020) compared the differences in Chinese and Western values between *The Wandering Earth* and *Interstellar*, noting that the former reflects collectivism and familial values, while the latter emphasizes individualism and scientific exploration. Wang (2024) further compared the narrative structures and cultural expressions of *Interstellar* and *The Wandering Earth*, pointing out significant differences in their storytelling styles and cultural representations, and discussed how these differences influenced audience interpretation and reception. Xia (2023) analyzed the subtitle translation of *The Wandering Earth II* from a multimodal perspective, revealing how linguistic choices enhance its cross-cultural appeal. Chen (2023) examined how *The Wandering Earth II* addresses the shared crisis of humanity through "global imagination" and the "Chinese approach," showcasing China's leadership and sense of responsibility in global crises and showcasing China's role as a responsible major power in the global community. Yang (2019) investigated the narrative content and dissemination patterns of *Interstellar*, exploring the cultural impact and

(Manuscript NO.: JISS-25-3-62014)

About the Author

Bu,He (2000-), male, Mongolian, from Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia, holds a Master's degree from Inner Mongolia Normal University, research focus: applied linguistic.

Fang,Fang (1969-), female, Han ethnicity, Associate Professor, Master's degree, Inner Mongolia Normal University. Research interests: Functional Linguistics and Applied Linguistics.

dissemination strategies of Western science fiction films.

From this, it is evident that the current research landscape in science fiction films includes numerous comparative studies of Chinese and American science fiction films, as well as explorations of how such films construct national images and convey ideologies. However, research from a linguistic perspective remains relatively scarce, particularly in the area of comparing how Chinese and American films construct national images from a multimodal standpoint, which is nearly uncharted territory. This study aims to compare how these two films utilize multimodal resources to construct their respective national images and to summarize the similarities and differences in their approaches.

2. Visual Mode and the Construction of National Image

This section explores how films construct national images through visual modalities, such as scene design, character portrayal, and color usage. By conducting a comparative analysis of *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar*, the study focuses on how these two films utilize visual elements to reflect their respective cultural values and international standing. Through the interpretation of specific scenes and visual symbols, it reveals how films convey national images through visual language.

(1) Scene setting

Visual Grammar is a theoretical framework that analyzes how visual texts such as images and films convey meaning through elements like composition, color, perspective, and other visual components. In *The Wandering Earth II*, the film skillfully employs visual modes to highlight China's advancements in technological innovation and modernization. It features 15 countries, with Chinese landmarks such as the Oriental Pearl Tower and the CCTV Tower appearing more prominently than those of other nations, that demonstrates its salience. These iconic structures not only reflect China's achievements in modern construction but also symbolize its open and inclusive urban cultural image. In visual grammar, perspective determines the relationship between the viewer and the elements within the frame, with different perspectives capable of conveying power, emotion, or narrative intent. The film's futuristic scenes, including the planetary engine, space elevator, and Ark International Space Station, often employ low-angle photography, rendering them majestic and unshakable, symbolizing China's technological prowess and command over the future. These elements further reinforce China's international image as a leader in technology and innovation. These elements emphasize China's foresight in technological development and its sense of responsibility in addressing global challenges, showcasing its industrial strength and contributions to space exploration.



(China Central Television Headquarters)



(space elevator)

In contrast, *Interstellar* combines futuristic technology with the vastness of the universe to illustrate America's leadership in space exploration and scientific innovation. The film's depiction of space stations, spacecraft, and wormholes highlights the United States' technological prowess and its exploration of the unknown. Unlike *The Wandering Earth II*, which emphasizes collaboration and inclusiveness, *Interstellar* focuses on America's independent leadership, with NASA playing a central role in solving the global crisis. The film's grand visual effects, such as the intricate spacecraft designs and the desolate landscapes of the American Midwest, underscore the ecological crisis

and the resilience of American society. The protagonist Cooper's struggles and efforts embody the adventurous spirit and self-reliance that define American values. In visual grammar, framing refers to the use of borders, lines, or other visual elements to segment or focus the image, guiding the viewer's gaze or conveying specific meanings. Unlike *The Wandering Earth* // The shots of the protagonist Cooper inside the cockpit are often enclosed by narrow frames, symbolizing his solitude and sense of responsibility in the vast cosmos.



(A sense of confined space)

In summary, while both films use visual modes to showcase their respective nations' technological and innovative capabilities, they differ in their thematic focus. *The Wandering Earth* // emphasizes collective action, cultural confidence, and global cooperation, reflecting China's role as a collaborative and responsible global leader. On the other hand, *Interstellar* highlights individualism, independence, and resilience, portraying the United States as a pioneering and self-reliant force in the face of global challenges. These differences in visual storytelling reflect the distinct cultural values and national identities of the two countries.

(2) Characterization

In *The Wandering Earth* //, the characterization is deeply rooted in the dissemination of Chinese cultural values. Protagonists such as Liu Peiqiang, Zhou Zhezhi, and Tu Hengyu exemplify traits of courage, wisdom, and selflessness, which are emblematic of the collective spirit and resilience of the Chinese people in times of crisis. Liu Peiqiang's act of heroic self-sacrifice, Zhou Zhezhi's composed and rational leadership, and Tu Hengyu's unwavering commitment to scientific exploration collectively underscore the themes of collectivism, selflessness, and a profound sense of responsibility that are central to Chinese cultural identity. In contrast, *Interstellar* employs its protagonist, Cooper, as a vehicle for the expression of American national identity. Cooper is depicted not only as a scientist but also as a father, a leader, and a hero, embodying the quintessential American values of individualism and heroism. His dual role as a protector of his family and a guardian of humanity's future highlights the American cultural emphasis on personal responsibility and individual agency. Supporting characters, such as Professor Brand and other NASA leaders, further reinforce the narrative of American exceptionalism, showcasing leadership, scientific ingenuity, and the ability to navigate global crises.

While both films utilize characterization to reflect their respective cultural values, *The Wandering Earth* // prioritizes collectivism, self-sacrifice, and communal responsibility, aligning with Chinese cultural ideals. Conversely, *Interstellar* emphasizes individualism, heroism, and personal accountability, reflecting core tenets of American cultural identity. Despite these differences, both films employ their characters as narrative tools to reinforce national ideologies and cultural narratives, albeit through distinct thematic lenses.

(3) Use of color

In *The Wandering Earth* //, the color palette is dominated by bright blues and whites, which not only align with the aesthetic conventions of the science fiction genre but also evoke an uplifting and aspirational emotional tone. The film strategically employs warm tones to accentuate humanistic elements, particularly in scenes depicting the unity and resilience of the Chinese people in the face of disaster. Conversely, cooler tones are utilized during moments of crisis to heighten the sense of tension and urgency. Similarly, *Interstellar* employs a sophisticated use

of color to enhance its narrative and emotional depth. Space sequences are characterized by cool colors—primarily blues, blacks, and silvers—which evoke the vastness, mystery, and technological futurism of the cosmos. In contrast, scenes of Earth's desolation are rendered in muted, sandy tones, creating a stark visual dichotomy that underscores the fragility of humanity's existence. Warm tones, such as yellows and oranges, are reserved for intimate family moments, particularly in the portrayal of Cooper's relationship with his daughter Murphy. These warm hues serve to emphasize the American cultural valorization of familial bonds and individual emotional connections.

Both films demonstrate a deliberate and strategic use of color to convey emotional and thematic nuances. *The Wandering Earth II* employs bright and warm tones to underscore themes of unity, resilience, and humanism, while *Interstellar* utilizes cool tones to evoke the vastness and uncertainty of space, juxtaposed with warm tones to highlight familial and emotional ties. Despite their differing cultural contexts, both films leverage color as a visual language to enhance narrative cohesion, emotional resonance, and thematic depth, illustrating the universal power of color in cinematic storytelling.



(The warm color palette of *The Wandering Earth II* //)



(The cool color palette of *Interstellar*)

3. Auditory Modality and the Construction of National Identity

The sound modality in science fiction films constructs national image through the design of music and sound effects. Music conveys cultural identity and emotional tone through melody, rhythm, and style, while sound effects demonstrate national strength and uniqueness through a sense of technology, ambient sounds, and iconic audio elements. This section will analyze the music and sound effect design of two films, exploring how sound elements influence the construction of national image.

(1) Music

The auditory modality in *The Wandering Earth II* also carries profound symbolic significance. Through a clever combination of music, sound effects, and language, the film strongly supports the construction of a national image. The film's score, composed by the renowned musician Ah Kun, features 38 tracks. The soundtrack runs for 124 minutes, or 74% of the film's total running time (Liu, 2024). The score predominantly utilizes grand symphonic music, successfully creating an epic atmosphere (Liu, 2024). For instance, at 2:32:10, when the line "Our people will definitely complete the task" is spoken, the background music intensifies the audience's perception of China as a responsible global power. Similarly, at 2:13:00, when the line "Chinese Space Flight Squadron, those over fifty years old, step forward!" is heard, the accompanying music reinforces this image. The theme song, "Humans," integrates traditional Chinese instruments such as the guzheng and erhu, blending the modern with the traditional and reflecting the deep cultural heritage of China. More subtly, at several pivotal moments, the music provides substantial support to the film's structure. At the golden ratio point // refers to placing the climax or key musical segments of the score at the golden ratio point of the film's total duration // approximately 61.8% // the score for the digital lifeline is titled "Angel, Devil." This piece, featuring the warning sound of a "wooden fish" and utilizing oscillating intervals, aligns with Ma Zhao's line, "Is Yaya, who has lived a lifetime, an angel or a devil?" This raises the ethical question of digital life, which is precisely the most thought-provoking issue that "The Wandering Earth II" presents to its audience. (Liu, 2024)

In *Interstellar*, the soundtrack, composed by Hans Zimmer, is one of the key elements in constructing the film's national identity (Cao,2015). Zimmer's music is both epic and deeply emotional, enhancing the emotional depth of the film and the expression of its themes. The main theme, particularly the piece "Stay," uses powerful symphonic music to reinforce the determination and resilience of Americans in the face of disaster. The strong rhythm and melody in the music, heightened by the sci-fi elements, convey the United States' leadership and fearless responsibility in a global crisis. The incorporation of organ music symbolizes the core of American traditional culture, while its fusion with modern electronic sounds reflects the American pursuit and mastery of future technologies. This combination of musical styles showcases American cultural confidence and an innovative spirit that transcends eras.

(2) Sound design

Sound design plays a crucial role in enhancing the auditory impact of the film. For example, in *The Wandering Earth II*, the deafening roar of the planetary engine starting at 2:35:00, and the shockwave from the space explosion at 2:25:50, create an intense sense of technological awe and urgency, symbolizing China's strong capacity to tackle global challenges. The film's language use also highlights the diversity and inclusivity of the Chinese language. While the film primarily uses Mandarin, it also incorporates various dialects, English, and Russian, such as during the conversation between Liu Peiqiang, Han Duoduo, and others at 12:40, as well as the simultaneous translation at 39:10. This not only enhances the film's realism but also reflects China's cooperative attitude and sense of responsibility in global affairs, emphasizing the theme of international cooperation. This linguistic diversity not only adds an international context to the film but also demonstrates China's openness and inclusivity in the globalized world.

In terms of sound design, *Interstellar* employs similar methods to *The Wandering Earth II*. The roaring of the spaceship engines and the sound effects of the ship traversing space convey the advanced nature of American space technology and its exploratory potential. In the disaster scenes of the film, the sound effects depicting the collapse of the ecosystem, combined with atmospheric tension, heighten the audience's awareness of the crisis.

4. Linguistic Modalities and National Image Construction

This section examines how films utilize linguistic modalities, specifically dialogue design, to construct national images, with a particular focus on analyzing how iconic lines in *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar* convey the core values of their respective nations. Ten representative lines from each film were selected for discourse analysis, and through a comparative study of the dialogues, this research seeks to uncover the pivotal role of language in shaping national identity. By dissecting the linguistic strategies employed in these films, the study not only deepens the understanding of the functional dimensions of cinematic language but also provides novel perspectives for exploring the interplay between cultural dissemination and the construction of national images. This approach offers valuable insights into how language serves as a medium for ideological expression and cultural representation, contributing to the broader discourse on the role of film in reinforcing and projecting national narratives on a global scale.

(1) Lines design

1) Lines analysis of *The Wandering Earth II*

① "The fate of civilization depends on humanity's choices."

From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, this line employs modal verbs ("depends on") and collective nouns ("humanity") to construct a high-modality statement. The use of modal verbs conveys certainty, indicating that the future of civilization relies on collective human action. This expression falls

under declarative discourse, aiming to communicate authority and certainty, reflecting China's emphasis on global responsibility and its leading role in crisis management.

② "In the face of danger, only responsibility remains."

This line uses parallel structure and concise syntax to highlight the centrality of "responsibility." Functionally, it is an evaluative discourse, reinforcing collectivist values. Its linguistic form exhibits strong interpersonal function, expressing China's resolute stance in crises and shaping the image of a responsible global power.

③ "Remember, without humanity, civilization is meaningless."

Through negative syntax and contrastive structure, this line emphasizes the core value of human existence. Functionally, it is an evaluative discourse, aiming to evoke awareness of human dignity. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, constructing the core relationship between "humanity" and "civilization" through negation and contrast, showcasing China's humanistic values.

④ "Hope is as precious as diamonds! Hope is the only direction home."

This line employs metaphor (hope as diamonds) and repetition (the word "hope") to reinforce the theme of hope. Functionally, it is an emotive discourse, aiming to evoke emotional resonance. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, conveying China's belief in collective resilience and technological innovation through metaphor and repetition, embodying an optimistic spirit.

⑤ "China's spaceflight team, those over 50, step forward!"

This line uses imperative syntax and specificity ("over 50") to highlight collectivist spirit. Functionally, it is a directive discourse, aiming to mobilize collective effort. Its linguistic form reflects textual function, demonstrating China's organizational capability and spirit of sacrifice in crises through imperative syntax and specificity, reinforcing the national image.

⑥ "Humanity's courage and resilience will be engraved beneath the stars."

This line employs personification (courage and resilience "engraved") and grand narrative ("beneath the stars") to emphasize heroism in adversity. Functionally, it is a symbolic discourse, aiming to construct a sublime cultural imagery. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, showcasing collectivism and heroism in Chinese culture through personification and grand narrative.

⑦ "Only after experiencing the deepest despair will we have the firmest hope."

This line uses conditional syntax and contrastive structure (despair vs. hope) to convey optimism. Functionally, it is a hortatory discourse, aiming to inspire hope in adversity. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, demonstrating China's resilience and inclusivity in crises through conditional syntax and contrast.

⑧ "In the vast universe, Earth is just a tiny dot, but this tiny dot is everything to us."

This line employs contrast (the vastness of the universe vs. the smallness of Earth) and emphasis ("everything to us") to highlight Earth's importance. Functionally, it is a descriptive discourse, aiming to evoke a sense of responsibility for Earth. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, emphasizing China's commitment to global environmental governance through contrast and emphasis.

⑨ "The length of human civilization depends on the choices made by humanity."

This line uses modal verbs ("depends on") and repetition ("humanity") to emphasize global responsibility. Functionally, it is a declarative discourse, aiming to convey certainty. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, indicating China's dual focus on domestic development and global responsibility through high modality and repetition.

⑩ "No matter where the final result of human history leads us, we choose hope."

This line employs conditional syntax and emotive expression ("choose hope") to convey optimism. Functionally, it is a hortatory discourse, aiming to inspire hope amidst uncertainty. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, demonstrating China's steadfast values in global crises through conditional syntax and emotive expression.

2) Dialogue analysis of interstellar

① "We're not meant to save the world. We're meant to leave it."

This line uses contrastive structure (saving vs. leaving) and modal verbs ("meant to") to emphasize the mission of exploring the unknown. Functionally, it is a declarative discourse, aiming to convey the pioneering spirit in American culture. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, constructing a narrative of exploration and mission through contrast and modal verbs.

② "Love is the one thing that transcends time and space."

This line employs metaphor (love transcending time and space) and absolute expression ("the one thing") to highlight the importance of personal emotions. Functionally, it is an emotive discourse, aiming to evoke emotional resonance. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, showcasing individualism in American culture through metaphor and absolute expression.

③ "We must believe that we have the power to change all of this."

This line uses modal verbs ("must") and emphasis ("we") to convey confidence and action-oriented values. Functionally, it is a hortatory discourse, aiming to inspire action. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, demonstrating American confidence and problem-solving capabilities through high modality and emphasis.

④ "We're not running away. We're looking for a new home."

This line employs contrastive structure (running away vs. looking for) and metaphor ("new home") to reflect the spirit of exploration in American culture. Functionally, it is a symbolic discourse, aiming to construct a positive narrative. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, building a narrative of exploration and hope through contrast and metaphor.

⑤ "In the vastness of the universe, humanity is just a speck. But that's our home."

This line uses contrast (the vastness of the universe vs. the smallness of humanity) and emphasis ("our home") to highlight responsibility for Earth. Functionally, it is a descriptive discourse, aiming to evoke emotional resonance. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, emphasizing American identity and responsibility for Earth through contrast and emphasis.

⑥ "We can't give up. We can't stop now."

This line employs repetition ("we can't") and modal verbs ("can") to convey perseverance. Functionally, it is a hortatory discourse, aiming to inspire persistence. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, showcasing resilience in American culture through repetition and modal verbs.

⑦ "Time is the most precious resource we have."

This line uses absolute expression ("most precious") and metaphor (time as a resource) to emphasize efficiency and progress. Functionally, it is an evaluative discourse, aiming to convey utilitarian values. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, constructing the core relationship between time and efficiency through absolute expression and metaphor.

⑧ "Humanity's destiny is to leave Earth. That's our birthright."

This line employs modal verbs ("is") and absolute expression ("birthright") to emphasize the inevitability of

exploration. Functionally, it is a declarative discourse, aiming to convey the pioneering spirit in American culture. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, demonstrating American belief in exploration through high modality and absolute expression.

⑨ "We must choose action for our future, not wait for extinction."

This line uses contrastive structure (action vs. waiting) and modal verbs ("must") to convey action-oriented values. Functionally, it is a hortatory discourse, aiming to inspire proactive behavior. Its linguistic form reflects interpersonal function, showcasing the action-oriented spirit in American culture through contrast and modal verbs.

⑩ "We've always been here. But we're not meant to be here forever."

This line employs contrastive structure (always here vs. not forever) to reflect growing environmental awareness. Functionally, it is a descriptive discourse, aiming to evoke a sense of responsibility for Earth. Its linguistic form reflects ideational function, constructing a narrative of environmental responsibility through contrast and description.

From the perspective of Functional Discourse Analysis, *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar* employ distinct linguistic strategies to construct their respective cultural values and national images, reflecting divergent approaches to global responsibility and future-building. *The Wandering Earth II* emphasizes global responsibility, collective action, and humanistic values through high modality, collectivistic expressions, and emotive discourse, with its dialogues predominantly utilizing declarative and hortatory discourse to convey certainty (e.g., "depends on," "must") and inspiration (e.g., "choose hope"). This linguistic strategy underscores China's focus on global cooperation, technological progress, and the preservation of human dignity. In contrast, *Interstellar* emphasizes individualism, technological innovation, and the pioneering spirit through individualistic expressions, exploratory metaphors, and action-oriented language, with its dialogues predominantly employing symbolic and hortatory discourse to construct a positive narrative (e.g., "looking for a new home") and inspire action (e.g., "we can't give up"). This approach reflects America's emphasis on individual capability, exploration, and efficiency. While both films address global crises and humanity's future, *The Wandering Earth II* prioritizes collectivism and ethics-driven linguistic strategies, emphasizing unity and responsibility, whereas *Interstellar* focuses on individualism and action-driven linguistic strategies, emphasizing personal heroism and exploration. These differences highlight the contrasting cultural values and discursive strategies of China and the United States in shaping narratives of global responsibility and future-building.

5. Sci-Fi Films as Tools for Constructing National Images: Strategies and Mechanisms

The process of constructing national images on the global cultural stage has become a key focus for both traditional powers and emerging nations. In this context, science fiction films, with their global appeal, expansive narrative scope, and powerful aesthetic impact, have proven to be effective media for constructing national identities. Through the analysis of *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar*, we can observe how these films employ various cinematic strategies to build and reinforce their respective national identities. These strategies are grounded not only in the specific historical and cultural contexts of the countries producing the films but also in the global issues they seek to address, enabling these films to project distinct national images to international audiences. This section will explore how these films utilize specific strategies in visual, auditory, and linguistic modalities to construct their respective national images, highlighting the unique approaches each film takes to achieve its goals.

(1) Visual strategies: symbolism and iconography in scene design

The visual representation of a nation in film is one of the most direct and powerful tools for constructing national identity. Science fiction films, in particular, rely heavily on futuristic and imaginative depictions, which serve as

metaphors for technological progress, national strength, and ideological aspirations. Both *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar* use these visual strategies to convey their respective national identities.

In *The Wandering Earth II*, the visual modality plays a crucial role in constructing China's image as a technologically advanced and globally responsible power. The film integrates national symbols into its futuristic settings by showcasing China's technological infrastructure and urban landscapes. This not only conveys China's modernization but also emphasizes its cultural and architectural strengths. Additionally, the depiction of the "Mountain Moving Plan" and the "Wandering Earth" project suggests China's ambition to tackle global challenges and its leadership role in mitigating global crises. These scenes are not merely visual spectacles but also symbolic expressions of China's responsibility to the world, positioning China as a global participant at the forefront of innovation and international cooperation.

Similarly, *Interstellar* uses its visual modality to reinforce the image of the United States as a leader in space exploration and technological innovation. The film's depiction of NASA as the central institution emphasizes America's historical leadership in space science. The portrayals of spacecraft, wormholes, and vast outer space aim to evoke awe, highlighting America's continued dominance in space exploration. Unlike *The Wandering Earth II*, which uses urban and terrestrial landscapes to express China's global influence, *Interstellar* employs celestial landscapes to position the U.S. as a pioneer in the exploration of the unknown. This thematic contrast is also reflected in the color palette—*The Wandering Earth II* uses bright, optimistic tones to symbolize China's proactive and cooperative role, while *Interstellar* uses darker tones to represent the uncertainty of space and the resilience of American individualism. Thus, many scenes in these films serve not only to advance the plot but also as a form of "showcasing" national identity.

(2) Auditory strategies: music, sound effects, and national sentiments

The auditory elements in both films further strengthen the construction of national identities by creating emotional atmospheres that align with the values and sentiments of the respective nations. In science fiction films, music and sound design are not only used to enhance the narrative but also to convey the emotional and ideological direction of the film. *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar* both utilize these techniques to emphasize their respective national identities.

In *The Wandering Earth II*, the score by Ah Kun blends symphonic elements with traditional Chinese instruments such as the guzheng and erhu. This combination reinforces the image of a nation that is both modern and rooted in a deep cultural heritage. The musical design at key moments is intended to evoke a sense of collective determination and shared responsibility. This musical framework, combined with sound effects that amplify the technological awe of the film, creates a powerful auditory landscape that positions China as a nation capable of leading the world in addressing survival crises. The music in the film is not merely background; it serves as a crucial tool for conveying Chinese national pride, responsibility, and the spirit of unity.

In contrast, *Interstellar* uses a score by Hans Zimmer, blending classical orchestral elements with electronic music to create an epic emotional tone. The grandeur and often melancholic melodies reflect the resilience of humanity in the face of overwhelming adversity. The music underscores the American heroism in the film, highlighting American values of individualism, determination, and familial love. The use of the organ (often associated with American religious and cultural traditions) symbolizes a deep emotional connection to the land and the future of humanity. Additionally, the sound design of *Interstellar* amplifies the sense of awe and mystery in space, with the sounds of spacecraft engines and distant celestial bodies reinforcing America's technological superiority. Both films' auditory strategies are carefully designed to align with their national ideologies, reinforcing core themes of national responsibility, leadership, and resilience. Compared to the visual modality, sound often works more subtly, evoking emotional responses without being overtly noticeable. The right sound design can discreetly influence the audience's emotions, creating the perfect atmosphere in sync with the film's visuals and plot, thus making cultural

exportation more indirect and less perceptible.

(3) Linguistic strategies: lines

The linguistic modality in both films also plays a significant role in constructing national identities. Lines are not only used to drive the plot but also to convey the values, aspirations, and philosophical foundations of the nation the film represents. In *The Wandering Earth II*, the dialogue reflects core Chinese cultural values such as collectivism, responsibility, social harmony, and philosophical reflections on life and death. These are not only central tenets of Chinese identity but also raise questions about contemporary technological issues. The lines in the film convey a national spirit based on collective action and hope, emphasizing China's role as a responsible global actor willing to take bold measures to secure the future.

In *Interstellar*, the dialogue focuses more on personal sacrifice and the moral dilemmas faced by the protagonist. For example, the line "We're not meant to save ourselves. We're meant to save humanity" encapsulates the core theme of American heroism, where the survival of humanity is viewed as a reflection of personal responsibility and sacrifice. The protagonist Cooper, a father who must choose between saving his family and ensuring the survival of humanity, embodies American values of individualism, determination, and courage. The nonlinear narrative structure, involving time, space, and parallel dimensions, reflects America's faith in science and rationality as keys to overcoming existential threats. The fragmented portrayal of time mirrors America's confidence in scientific progress as the solution to both global and personal crises, positioning the U.S. as a rational and forward-thinking nation.

The use of dialogue not only tests the skill of filmmakers but also serves as a direct and persuasive means of cultural exportation. Filmmakers craft specific lines based on the values they wish to express, while for the audience, these lines subconsciously impart values that align with the national identity being portrayed.

(4) Global Appeal and Soft Power: National Image and Cultural Influence

Both films are not only reflections of their respective national cultures but also vehicles for global soft power. By strategically constructing national images that align with universal values such as technological progress, survival, and the desire for hope, these films transcend national borders and position their countries as global leaders. In *The Wandering Earth II*, the emphasis on collective action, international cooperation, and technological responsibility conveys China's desire to project a positive image on the global stage. Through visual depictions of the international community uniting under Chinese leadership, the film suggests that China is not only an emerging power but also a global force capable of uniting the world to tackle crises.

On the other hand, *Interstellar* portrays the United States as a leader in space exploration and as a moral guide for humanity during its darkest moments. The film's focus on personal sacrifice and scientific heroism caters to the universal human desire for survival and discovery, reinforcing America's role as a beacon of hope and innovation. The complex narrative structure, which combines human drama with scientific exploration, positions the U.S. as a nation capable of overcoming the most daunting challenges through technological innovation and personal determination.

6. Conclusion

By analyzing *The Wandering Earth II* and *Interstellar*, several patterns can be summarized regarding how science fiction films construct national images. First, the symbolism of visual elements serves as the foundation for building national images. Science fiction films utilize iconic scenes, futuristic technological facilities, and color schemes to associate national identity with global responsibility, technological leadership, or exploratory spirit, thereby forming a unique system of visual symbols. For instance, *The Wandering Earth II* employs symbols such as planetary engines and the Oriental Pearl Tower to showcase China's technological prowess and collective responsibility,

while *Interstellar* highlights America's spirit of exploration and leadership through cosmic landscapes and spacecraft designs. Second, the emotional resonance of auditory modalities enhances the impact of national images. Music and sound effects not only create the emotional atmosphere of the film but also convey the cultural heritage and innovative spirit of a nation by blending traditional and modern elements. For example, *The Wandering Earth II* integrates symphonic music with traditional Chinese instruments, emphasizing China's cultural confidence and modern innovation, whereas *Interstellar* reinforces America's mastery of technological exploration and pioneering spirit through epic scores and electronic sound effects. Finally, the ideological expression of linguistic modalities deepens the cultural connotations of national images. Dialogue and narrative structures convey core national values directly or indirectly through high-modality language or metaphorical expressions. For instance, *The Wandering Earth II* emphasizes China's collectivism and global responsibility through lines such as "In times of crisis, only responsibility remains," while *Interstellar* underscores America's individualism and exploratory spirit through dialogues like "We're not meant to save the world."

In conclusion, science fiction films effectively construct national images through the synergistic interplay of visual, auditory, and linguistic modalities. The symbolism of visual elements provides intuitive cultural symbols, the emotional resonance of auditory modalities enhances the impact of national images, and the ideological expression of linguistic modalities deepens the cultural connotations of national identity. This multimodal synergy not only reflects the diversity of national images but also offers global audiences a window into understanding different cultural values. In *The Wandering Earth II*, collectivism, a sense of responsibility, and technological innovation are organically integrated to portray China as a responsible global power, while in *Interstellar*, individualism, technological exploration, and leadership demonstrate America's global leadership and cultural confidence. These patterned strategies reveal the unique role of science fiction films in constructing national images and provide new perspectives for future research on cultural dissemination and national image building.

References

- [1] Cao, G. (2015). Exploring the use of background music in *Interstellar*. *Contemporary Cinema*, (04), 191-193.
- [2] Chen, X. (2023). "World's imagination" and "Chinese solution" for the common crisis of human destiny: Review of *The Wandering Earth 2*. *Contemporary Cinema*, (02), 26-29+184.
- [3] Chen, X., Chen, Y., Li, N., & Gao, Y. (2015). *Interstellar* and science fiction films: Genre, narrative, and cultural spirit. *Creation and Criticism*, (16), 112-128. <https://doi.org/10.14039/j.cnki.cn43-1515/i.2015.16.023>
- [4] Gu, X. (2015). Sound analysis and sound design discussion of *Interstellar*. *Journal of News Research*, (14), 93+101.
- [5] Hong, Y. (2018). On the film music of *Interstellar*. *Media Forum*, (19), 159-161.
- [6] Lai, X. (2022). The influence of ideology on films: A case study of *The Wandering Earth* and *Interstellar*. *Popular Literature and Art*, (03), 111-113.
- [7] Liu, Y. (2024). Symbols and metaphors: The narrative strategy of film music in *The Wandering Earth 2*. *Arts Criticism*, (05), 88-104. <https://doi.org/10.16364/j.cnki.cn11-4907/j.2024.05.013>
- [8] Ma, X., & He, L. (2024). Scene, structure, function, and metaphor: On the spatial narrative of *The Wandering Earth 2*. *Audio-Visual World*, (08), 54-57.
- [9] Shang, Y., & Zhao, L. (2023). The international dissemination of Chinese films and its implications from a cross-cultural perspective: A case study of *The Wandering Earth 2*. *International Communications*, (03), 24-26+47.
- [10] Wang, C. (2024). A comparative study of the narrative structure of sci-fi films and national culture: A case study of *Interstellar* and *The Wandering Earth*. *Journalism and Writing*, (05), 187-189.
- [11] Wang, C., & Fu, H. (2024). Spectacle construction and emotional resonance: An analysis of the cross-cultural communication of *The Wandering Earth 2*. *News Outpost*, (21), 65-66.
- [12] Wang, X. (2020). A comparative analysis of Chinese and Western values based on *The Wandering Earth* and *Interstellar*. *Home Drama*, (27), 174-175.
- [13] Xia, X. (2023). Subtitle translation of *The Wandering Earth 2* based on multimodal discourse analysis. *Journal of Science and Education Culture*, (14), 182-185. <https://doi.org/10.16871/j.cnki.kjwh.2023.14.045>
- [14] Xu, J. (2024). An analysis of the technological aesthetics and production philosophy of *The Wandering Earth 2*. *Today's Massmedia*, (11), 81-84.

- [15] Yan, J., & Xu, Y. (2024). Collaborative meaning construction of multimodal discourse in the food documentary *A Bite of China: Celebrating the Chinese New Year*. *Food Research*, (03), 32-37. <https://doi.org/10.19913/j.cnki.2095-8730msyj.2024.03.05>
- [16] Yang, X. (2019). Research on the content narrative and dissemination mode of Western sci-fi films: A case study of *Interstellar*. *Journal of News Research*, (22), 14+18.
- [17] Yin, H. (2023). Different solutions to the common crisis of human destiny from the perspective of sci-fi films: A case study of *The Wandering Earth* and *Interstellar*. *Journal of Nanjing Arts Institute (Music & Performance)*, (04), 132-135.
- [18] Yin, X. (2016). The humanistic nature of sci-fi films from the perspective of *Interstellar*. *Film Literature*, (16), 147-149.
- [19] Zhao, R. (2023). Reality and illusion: The narrative strategy and imaginative framework of *The Wandering Earth 2*. *Theory and Criticism of Literature and Art*, (03), 98-104. <https://doi.org/10.16532/j.cnki.1002-9583.2023.03.010>
- [20] Zhao, Y. (2023). Multimodal discourse analysis of the movie poster for *The Wandering Earth 2*. *Today's Creative Writing*, (34), 81-83. <https://doi.org/10.20024/j.cnki.CN42-1911/I.2023.34.026>
- [21] Zheng, D. (2015). *Interstellar* from the perspective of ecological criticism. *Film Literature*, (01), 135-137.
- [22] Zuo, L. (2021). An analysis of the narrative art of *Interstellar*. *Home Drama*, (25), 137-138.