


Research on the artistic innovation of Chinese adventure films based on Robert Stam's genre theory - centered on Where Nothing Grows

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Abstract: *Background:* the recovery of the adventure genre has been relatively slow. This subtle change in the market promotes the artistic innovation of traditional genre films. Robert Stamm's film genre theory provides an important reference. As a typical adventure film, "Where Nothing Grows" provides a case to explore artistic innovation. *Purpose:* This paper will sort the development status of Chinese adventure films based on Robert's genre film theory. "Where Nothing Grows" as the research object, this paper discusses promoting artistic innovation of domestic adventure films from three aspects: narrative expression, character construction, and visual image. *Methods:* In the first stage, through literature research, this paper analyzes and summarizes the development status of adventure films. The second stage discusses Chinese adventure films' problems and innovative means through cases based on Robert Stamm's genre theory. In the third stage, through comparative research, the film "Where Nothing Grows" is used as a yardstick/control/base film for comparison against other adventure films since 2015. Then, the differences in artistic innovation of their genre characteristics are discussed. *Results:* The research found that developing Chinese adventure films in the post-epidemic era faces some difficulties and challenges. However, these films' narrative expression, character construction, and visual impact can be improved/needs improvement. *Conclusion:* Domestic adventure films can complete the innovation of plot structure through 1. Narrative expression; 2. Construct characters that challenge established concepts of traditional roles; 3. Visual images to break the aesthetic fatigue of "visual wonders". These three aspects open up a diversified path for the artistic innovation of domestic adventure films and achieve the result of expanding the artistic innovation space of domestic genre films.

Keywords: Genre film, Domestic film, Chinese adventure films, Where Nothing Grows, Robert Stamm

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Post-pandemic, adventure genre films have been slow to recover. Moviegoers' demands and expectations have also changed, and adventure films face new opportunities and challenges. Domestic, commercial genre films use genre fusion and visual spectacle as gimmicks to attract audiences. For the film "The Climber" a Taking the box office data of the National Day in 2023 as an example, a film earned 770 million yuan in box office revenue during this period, but its score on Douban was only 6.1 points due to poor word-of-mouth. Such box office results and word-of-mouth performance did not meet the general expectations of the industry and audiences. In sharp contrast, two high-profile films released during the same period, "My People, My Country" and "The Captain", showed more impressive results with National Day box

office receipts of 2.2 billion yuan and 2 billion yuan, respectively, and scores of 7.8 and 6.7 points on Douban. In this context, the performance of the aforementioned film pales in comparison. In the end, the box office of the film was fixed at 1.097 billion yuan, although this achievement is considerable, it is difficult to meet the high expectations of the creators and producers(Liu, 2021)." This phenomenon reflects that in the current competitive film market, high investment and large production alone cannot fully guarantee the success of the film, and the audience has higher requirements for the quality and depth of the work.

"Stam's film genre theory not only provides a new perspective for the classification of genre films, but also plays a crucial role in the progress and development of the current Chinese film industry (He, 2008)". This reveals the importance of Robert Stam's genre theory in studying film genres, challenges the traditional film genre theory, and provides a new perspective. He stated, "In film art, the narrative technique of the main type and the expression form of the sub-type can be closely integrated, and this interwoven combination helps us to deeply explore and analyze the deep meaning of the genre film(Robert, 1992)". This classification theory provides a new way of thinking for the academic circle to analyze and distinguish genre films and a new perspective for studying Chinese genre films. Through this theory, we can more accurately understand and evaluate the characteristics of various types of films and further explore Chinese genre films' development and status quo.

1.2 Research Purpose

The main objectives of this study are as follows: 1)Analyze the development status of Chinese adventure films in the post-epidemic era, including market response, audience demand, and genre characteristics. 2)Explore the applicability of Robert Stam's film genre theory to Chinese adventure films based on their development status and study the relationship between "genre dilemma" and artistic innovation. 3)Through comparative study, this paper analyzes the artistic innovation characteristics of "Where Nothing Grows" as an atypical adventure film. It discusses the expansion of the artistic innovation space of domestic genre films in terms of narrative expression, character construction, and visual image.

1.3 Research Methods

The research methods of this paper include literature research, case analysis, and comparative research. In the first stage, through literature research and historical analysis, this paper analyzes and summarizes the development status of post-epidemic Chinese adventure films from the perspective of genre characteristics as the basis for discussion. In the second stage, based on Robert Stam's genre theory, this paper analyzes the post-epidemic domestic adventure genre films through case studies and summarizes the "genre dilemma" and artistic innovation in Chinese adventure genre films. The third stage, through comparative research, with the film "Where Nothing Grows" as the center, is compared to the other four adventure films. Then, the differences in artistic innovation of their genre characteristics are discussed.

1.4 Research Limitations

First, this study focuses on the development status and innovation characteristics of Chinese adventure films in the post-epidemic era. However, it does not discuss their market performance and commercial value in detail. Therefore, further research is still needed on this film type's specific performance and commercial value in the market. Secondly, the sample size of this study is small, and only a few films, such as "Where Nothing Grows" etc are selected as research objects. Therefore, follow-up studies can increase the sample size to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the

development and innovation of the genre. Finally, this study is based on the Chinese film market and cultural context, so regional and cultural differences may affect the applicability of its conclusions and recommendations. Therefore, their specific market and cultural contexts must be considered when conducting similar studies in other countries or regions.

2. Literature Review

As one of the classic Hollywood genre films, the adventure genre has received extensive attention in the industry. Among the top 20 films in the world box office, adventure films account for half. (See Table 1). At the same time, this study interprets Robert Stam's genre theory and discusses its effect on genre films. Andrew Tudor helpfully complements Stam's view that "Genres exist in any specific and individual social context, and genre classifications are primarily created to facilitate the aesthetic choices of the audience rather than for theoretical development. (Tudor, 1982).

Table 1: box office mojo is in the top 10 box office for adventure films

Film Title	Type	Box Office	Release Date
Avatar	Action Adventure Fantasy Sci-Fi	The \$2923706026	2009
Avengers: Endgame	Action Adventure Drama Sci-Fi	The \$2799439100	2019
Avatar: The Way of Water	Action Adventure Fantasy Sci-Fi	The \$2320250281	2022
Star Wars: Episode VII-The Force Awakens	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	The \$2071310218	2015
Avengers: Infinity War	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	The \$2052415039	2018
Spider-Man: No Way Home	Action Adventure Fantasy Sci-Fi	The \$1921847111	2021
Jurassic World	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	The \$1671537444	2015
Avengers: Age of Ultron	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	The \$1405018048	2015
Black Panther	Action Adventure Sci-Fi	The \$1349926083	2018
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2	Adventure Family Fantasy Mystery	The \$1342360114	2011

Source: <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/>

The research on adventure genre films in China started relatively late. In the early monographs, the research on genre theory mainly focused on "genre classification", and no specific opinions were presented for domestic adventure genre films. The book "Genre Film Tutorial" edited by Hao Jian, takes a perspective on/of genre films and provides insightful analysis of classic American genre films while focusing on new research findings on genre films from domestic and international perspectives. "Genre films form a complex and diversified artistic ecology, each with its own distinctive style and characteristics, showing its own different aesthetic value and narrative structure. Although there are significant differences between them, they can also blend and inspire each other, and promote the continuous innovation and development of film art." (Hao, 2011). The book by Hao includes analyses of eleven limited genres using film case studies but does not specifically explore the adventure genre <citation required>. The recent research on domestic contemplates and analyzes the development and context of films in mainland China <Genre and Author - Contemporary Chinese Film Commercial Aesthetics Research>. It discusses several cultural trends and textual differences of genre films in the Chinese film market. Around 2016, many valuable articles on this topic appeared with the success of the initial attempt of the domestic adventure film "Mojin: The Lost Legend".

In the field of Chinese adventure films, there are 79 articles related to "adventure films". However, only 14 of them are relevant to this research. The research directions of Chinese adventure films are as follows:

Among them, one kind of research focuses on the theme and connotation of the film as the carrier. This kind of film pays attention to the main theme of the adventure film. It

discusses showing family and national feelings through the film through media communication and narrative expression. "The story revolves around climbing Mount Chomolungma. The film presents the construction of national feelings and individual spirit while strengthening the communication effect with the help of the star effect." (Zhang & Liu, 2020). "The Chinese freehand style expression of mountaineering adventure films in China is closely related to the background of the third cultural transformation of Chinese films and the business model of Everest mountaineering" (Zhang, 2023).

Another type of research uses film as a vehicle to explore film innovation regarding visual spectacle and the aesthetics of the film industry. For example, how to complete the type innovation by combining visual spectacle and the virtual shooting system in the early stage. In "A Writer's Odyssey", more than 1,700 visual effects shots were used, of which 90% show the different world scenes achieved through digital special effects. In addition, about 70 percent of the shots throughout the film include visually-constructed digital character performances (Yang, 2021).

Another research is based on genre criticism, discussing various film categories and adventure films from different periods and countries. The differences in the narrative and structure of these films are summarized.

In recent years, adventure films have become a mainstream genre in China's film market. According to the statistics of cinema films in related fields, only two adventure films (except animated and unrated films) were released in 2022, and only three adventure films (except animated and unrated films) will be released in 2023. Compared with the 12 adventure films (except animated and unrated films) in 2018 before the epidemic, the 6 adventure films (except animated and unrated films) in 2019 are far different. The historical reasons behind this subtle change in the market are crucial for China's film market, which is eager to recover in the post-epidemic era.

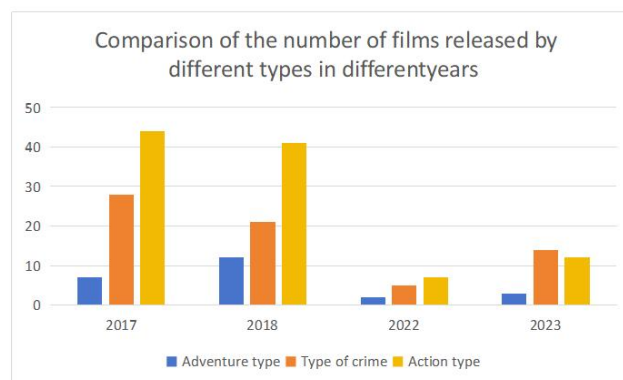


Figure 1 Comparison of the number of films released by different types in different years

Source: <https://www.maoyan.com/>

According to Mao Yan, for the 2016-2023 mainland adventure movie box office statistics, the top ten films are the mode of genre integration. For the last 20 years, the mainland adventure type of high box office films have been visual effect blockbusters like "The Wandering Earth 2". "There is the whole Earth United Government (UEG) base landform, the whole base from design to the final asset completion. It took 10 artists 4 months to build over 90 million scene elements. It is precisely because of the production of high-quality digital assets that it provides many close-range display possibilities for the film. (Chen, 2023). Through the analysis of relevant literature, it can be seen that the current Chinese adventure films have achieved a good box office performance in the market, which is largely due to their impressive visual effects, which successfully attract

the attention of the vast audience. However, at the same time, this kind of film also faces some challenges, especially in the depth of narrative and character development, which leads to the weak story telling and the lack of fullness of character images. "Taking "The Climber" as an example, according to the audience rating, the film has outstanding performance in aspects of ideological, visual effects, actor performance, musical effects and type innovation, and has won high praise from the audience. In particular, the two indicators of "performance of the main actors" and "visual effects" scored high in several evaluation dimensions. In contrast, "great dialogue" and "reasonable plot", two metrics closely related to narrative quality, were widely panned by audiences and professionals and received the lowest scores. This clearly reflects the deficiencies in the narrative structure and logical advancement of the Climber, which reveals the realistic problems that Chinese adventure films need to strengthen the story and character depth construction while pursuing visual shock" (Liu, 2021).

Table2: Mao Yan Network's box office statistics on mainland adventure films from 2016 to 2023 (Top 10)

Film Title	Type	Box Office	Release Date
The Wandering Earth	Science Fiction/Adventure/Disaster	4 billion 687 million	2019
The Wandering Earth II	Science Fiction/Adventure/Disaster	4 billion 29 million	2023
Kung Fu Yoga	Action/Adventure/Fantasy	1 billion 748 million	2017
Mojin-The Lost Legend	Action/Adventure/Fantasy	1 billion 679 million	2015
The Great Wall	Plot/Adventure/Fantasy	1 billion 173 million	2016
The Climber	Plot/Adventure	1 billion 104 million	2019
Duckweed	Plot/Comedy/Adventure	1 billion 46 million	2017
Assassin in Red	Fantasy/Action/Adventure	1 billion 35 million	2021
Meg 2: The Trench	Adventure/Action/Science Fiction	851 million	2023
Buddies in India	Comedy/Action/Adventure	756 million	2017

Source: <https://www.maoyan.com/>

There are relatively few literature studies on domestic adventure genre films. However, there have been relevant studies are gaining focus/momentum. These new researches focus/study/discover film themes, connotations, and visual innovation. They provide certain references for the in-depth study and development of Chinese adventure films. However, there is still no further theoretical research to explore the genre characteristics of Chinese adventure films and their artistic innovation in the sense of genre. Based on the combination of Robert Stamm's theory, this paper studies several high box office Chinese adventure films in recent years through case analysis and comparison. It points out a new path for the innovation of Chinese adventure films.

3. Overview of Robert Stam's type theory

Robert Stam's genre theory can provide a new way of thinking about the genre fusion of domestic films. Robert Stam divides the film into "main type" and "sub-type". As explained in Film Theory, "Genres can exist implicitly, and some films appear to belong to one genre on the surface, but at a deeper level, they belong to another. For example, the famous Taxi Driver appears to be a crime film on the surface and can be considered a "true" Western because it explores such core elements of the classic Western genre as loneliness, moral dilemmas, and personal redemption (Robert, 1992)".

Robert Stam's dividing of films into "main types" and "sub-types" is not a simple idea of genre fusion. It aims to give genre films deeper connotation using internal codes as the carrier. The film "The Climber" is a multi-genre film. Although the label of the film itself is "plot/adventure", the core of the film is a main theme adventure film, which transmits the country's feelings through adventure stories. "By narrating the fate of the characters, inner contradictions, and major choices, the film highlights the value connotation and emotional characteristics of the pursuit of the greater self and the supremacy of the country. The value connotation conveyed by the film goes beyond a

single individual destiny and highlights the narrative core of " collective heroism(Zhang, 2021)" .

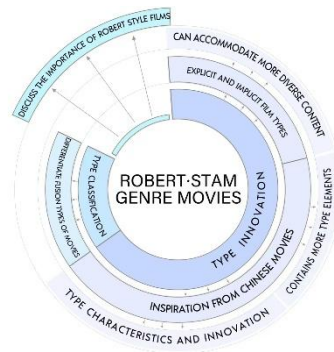


Figure: 2: Robert Stam Type Theory ConceptSource

Source: Film Theory : An Introduction

"A full understanding and application of Stam's genre film theory can also expand the connotation of Chinese genre films. It can make them richer and more diversified, and present more in-depth and diverse film works to the audience(He, 2008)". Stam put forward his views on the study of genre films, the most important of which is to take genre as the basic element of transcendence and the springboard for innovation. This point of view implies that the film genre can be a starting point for creators to innovate and explore rather than just a stereotypical template. The advantage of this approach is that it can combine the framework and elements of traditional genres and give the works new connotation and meaning so that the audience can enjoy the familiar plot of the genre but also feel the fresh creativity and exploration spirit. Among the frames and elements of traditional genres, genre films' genre characteristics are the most noteworthy. Breaking the genre characteristics of traditional genres has become a new path for traditional genres to innovate. This innovative method beyond the traditional genre can promote the progress of film creation and revitalize the film industry.

4. Genre characteristics of adventure films

The Dictionary of Motion Picture Arts explains the adventure genre as "An adventure film is a genre of stories in which people experience a variety of real or fictional dangerous situations under unusual circumstances. Features of this genre include tense, suspenseful plots, strange and compelling situations. The protagonists/characters are often in thrilling and dangerous situations, but in the end, they escape unharmed. Their plots often revolve around the exploration and adventures of intrepid explorers in uncharted territory(Xia, 1968)" . When talking about genre films in the Chinese academic circle, a widely mentioned identification criterion is summed up by Shao Mujun. "Genre films contain three basic elements. The first is the formulaic plot, such as the hero saving the beauty in the western, and the villain is brought to justice in the gangster movie. Then there are the stereotyped characters, such as the computer genius in science fiction movies and the tough guy in war movies who faces death. Then there are the graphic visual figures, such as the Gobi Desert landscape of the West, the dark caves or underground passages that represent the unknown and danger, the ruins of ancient civilizations that symbolize treasures or mysterious ancient ruins" shao2005. Based on Mr. Shao Mujun's formalist point of view, genre characteristics can define the genre label of genre films. From the broadest point of view, many Genre films is a noun fusion films based on common genre characteristics can also be called adventure films.

4.1 Reliability test Narrative innovation in the characteristics of adventure genres

The genre narrative of adventure films needs continuous innovation and breakthroughs are continuous to maintain the interest and attraction of the audience. "In Chinese adventure films, the Adventure films' narrative often adopts a binary structure, in which one of the core things becomes the source power to promote the development of the plot" (Han, 2016). Adventure films always focus on finding something as the driving force for the story's development. For example, in the movie/film "Mojin: The Lost Legend", the story unfolds around the adventure experience of Hu Bayi and his entourage searching for the flower on the other side. The overall narrative of the film is relatively simple and easy to understand. The story can fall into a stereotype if the whole narrative structure is simply "adventure". This is due to the audience's aesthetic fatigue of adventure film narration and the upgrading of audience's viewing ability. "Because" imitation "endows genre films with an open structure, the genre presents the characteristics of" hybridity ": on the one hand, a film often refers to several works, and the diversity of samples shapes the richness of the replica. On the other hand, to elude the "original sin" of imitation, genre creation attaches importance to adding various strange elements to highlight individuality(Xiao, 2023)". Therefore, since entering the new century, many domestic adventure films can be combined with other types of films, such as love, fantasy, and action, to form a variety of genre hybridity works. This kind of genre fusion under the aesthetic system of the Chinese film industry uses other genre elements to make up for the monotony of "adventure". For example, in Mojin: The Lost Legend, the fantasy world view of "Ghost blows out the light" provides the audience with a sufficient narrative supplement, transforming a tomb raiding adventure into an adventure full of strange creatures, mysterious cultural relics, and unknown dangers. It brings more narrative supplements to the audience, making the story more engrossing and making people constantly pursue the fun of solving puzzles and exploring the unknown. This kind of genre fusion makes genre narration more in line with the Chinese audience's aesthetic taste to some extent.

What makes the film "Where Nothing Grows" special is its dramatic diminution. This skillful treatment allows the audience to detangle themselves from the shackles of the story and focus more on the film's theme. "Fantasy genre adventure films tend to use a looped narrative structure. They feature virtual worlds and ghosts. This kind of narrative structure has many advantages. It gives the story more layers, keeps the audience engaged and immersed, and keeps the plot full of twists and surprises" (Yang, 2018). The film relies on its unique film structure and dramatic visual effects to attract the audience. Adventure movie "bombard" the audience with normal narrative rhythm and expressionistic visual effects scenes. In essence, it is just the presentation of a "cool feeling" culture. With the improvement in the audience's psychological expectation and viewing experience, the psychological pleasure of the film can become increasingly shallow, losing all the aesthetic appreciation.



Figure 3: Posters of adventure movies

Source: <https://www.douban.com/>

Abandoning dramatic plot and suspense in "Where Nothing Grows" is a great challenge to theatrical films. It creates an immersive experience for the audience and makes the film interesting using restrained drama conflict. The film is very similar to the style of film "Paths of the Soul(Zhang, 2015)". It uses the restrained image style to suppress the characters' expression until the film's end "The camera objectively examines story's object, and does not interfere with the audience's attention to the film, giving a feeling of intimacy and remoteness(Mora, 2019)". The plot and techniques used to express characters or stories are important for a film or a story. More importantly, the inner words of the audience are used to construct the structure and understanding of the film narrative. "The basic characteristics of genre film narration lie in the pattern of narrative structure and the immobilization of plot development(Shen, 2005)". In an era of gradual assimilation of genre films, "Where Nothing Grows" explored the renewal of the genre narrative of/for classic genre films and absorbed some characteristics of European art films into the overall narrative. Although the narrative structure of the whole film did not break through the traditional cause-and-effect linear narrative, it also provided a moderately diversified and open narrative idea. It guides the audience to consume their emotions in the less dramatic stories. It also generates and satisfies their emotions in a new sequence or mode in such atypical narration.

4.2 Character construction in the adventure genre

From the Hollywood period, adventurers, as the protagonists in adventure films, have also been stereotyped in genre films. The standardization, stereotyping, and homogenization of character construction are also characteristics of genre films. "The construction of genre characters relies on appearance, psychological, and social elements(Yang, 2018)". Through these elements, the film externalizes the characters' basic characteristics, and in turn, the characteristics construct the characters' handling of events. Taking social elements as an example, see (Figure 4) where the identities and occupations of the characters are highly similar, but there is a significant gender gap.

The characteristics of the protagonists in adventure films can be summarized as "masculinity", "typical social status", and "adventurous spirit". This makes it difficult for these characters to exert their characteristics in the face of typical zed performances and stories, and the actors are bound by their roles. "When we trace the movement of the characters, the narrative pattern of the genre film is revealed. The genre characters make similar choices, establishing a certain mode of action, adding unique charm and depth to the film(Yang, 2018)". It can be seen that the stereotyping of characters also limits the space for the story's development.

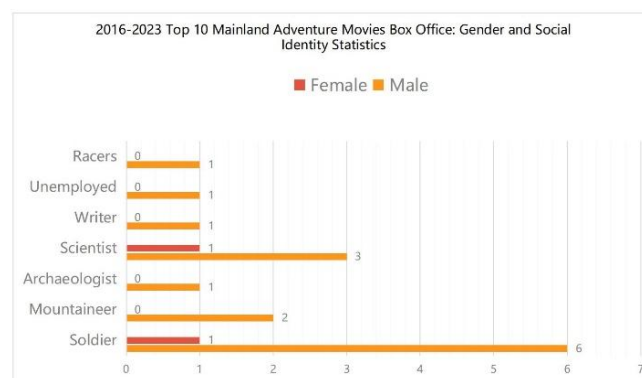


Figure 4: Statistics on the gender and social identity of the top ten characters in Mainland adventure movie ticket rooms from 2016 to 2023

Source: <https://www.douban.com/>

At the same time, from the perspective of gender, "gender temperament, as a key link in ethics, emphasizes men's and women's character and psychological characteristics. It forms stable and solidified behavior patterns based on the physiological differences and social role stereotypes of the sexes, which have different social meanings in different cultural backgrounds(Chen, 2023)". As a film subject in the context of male power, women are often in a foil position in the adventure genre. "From the macro perspective of film history, the female image in most Hollywood films has always been shaped into the object of "male gaze". Although Lara in "Lara Croft: Tomb Raider" and Alice in "Resident Evil", the female image is no longer weak but shows a flexible heroine who can defeat a large group of men. This way of showing female power is based on gender differences, which is a pseudo-feminist to please the male power perspective. It is difficult to get rid of/break the shackles of the male gaze, although this kind of role presents a superficial reversal of the image of women(Lou, 2017)". Many female characters in adventure films are more in a kind of appendage under the male perspective, presenting "physical wonders" in the film. Laura Mulvey, a British film theorist, studied the phenomenon of spectacle in films from the perspective of feminism and psychoanalysis. She explained the wonder of female bodies under the influence of visual pleasure through "voyeurism". Mulvey follows the logic of spectacle movies, arguing that "mainstream Hollywood films are the female image landscape 'structure the film form(Mulvey, 1999)". As a genre, it makes it difficult for adventure films to gain the recognition and empathy of women from different backgrounds. "In the face of the strong patriarchal culture, the women's status can only be changed by shaping their cultural attributes according to the values and aesthetic ideals of the patriarchal culture(James, 1989)". It is difficult for female audiences to empathize with the story's development and the changes in the characters' personalities in the film, and to experience how the characters seek individual growth in the narrative to achieve a perfect self. It also makes the characters of the main characters flatter rather than three-dimensional.

Compared with the traditional adventure film protagonist "adventurers", "Where Nothing Grows" boldly adopts the design of a one-man show. Whether they struggle to survive alone in the wilderness or are devastated by the cruel environment, Ren Suxi gives the audience a lively performance of the characters' inner world. The realistic style of the film is inseparable from the actors' performance, whose attention to detail is often the most touching. Pudovkin also stressed that "Actors in the creative process must understand the real life. Through an in-depth understanding of reality, actors can better shape the role and give the role richer connotation and authenticity. Then, through their artistic characteristics, they can externalize the emotional behavior they feel(Pudovkin, 1960)". Especially after almost losing the important "weapon" of an actor, lines, Ren Suxi used his acting skills to support this relatively simple film with low narrative density. Ren's image in "Where Nothing Grows" also breaks the stereotyped aesthetic. She takes part in the performance with a neutral appearance, a degendered name full of vitality, and a rough, egoistic, and aggressive image breaking out of the stereotype of characters in adventure films. In the "Where Nothing Grows", Ren Suxi's artistic style is not very feminine. In the film, she has almost no makeup and a dusty face, completely breaking the audience's imagination of the heroine.

With the development of Chinese society in the past decades, Chinese women have won more equal rights opportunities, and shackles of traditional social roles. The values expressed in the characters and narratives, as the images of various psychological plots, have manifested themselves in the changes of the past decades. "The modernization of society accompanies the individuation process, economy's development, education popularization, and increasing marketization of professions. Individuation brings a sense of equality, independence, and the enhancement of autonomy, which constitutes

the internal factors of women's status (Zhou, 2016)". As a reflection of life, films interpret women in social and cultural contexts from a gendered perspective. To showcase the Cong Lin's inner world, the director cleverly utilizes dreams and illusions to externalize the protagonist's state of mind. Firstly, there are flashbacks of the three characters happily sitting around a campfire during their journey. Almost every day in the Cong Lin, they experience such dreams or illusions. The director externalizes her obsession with her father, metaphorically representing the film's theme. Without this obsession, perhaps she would have had her life and family, and could have cherished happy father-daughter memories. However, now, after countless times venturing into the wilderness to find her father's traces, causing the death of her brother, or having her brother sacrifice his chance at life for her, it has become more than just an obsession for her. It has become a nightmare or burden. She must break free from it to relieve herself of this psychological burden.

In "Where Nothing Grows," the protagonist symbolizes the demands of women in society for individual rights and equality and the metaphor of individuals breaking free from societal entanglements. Throughout the film, they gradually lose their water supply as they trek through the Cong Lin. Ultimately, the Cong Lin sets fire to her backpack, signaling for survival. She sheds her coat, leaving her innerwear. This liberation from burdens reflects an implicit expression towards society – that individuals can truly find redemption by freeing themselves from societal entanglements. "Where Nothing Grows" can pay attention to this change of social concept, and apply this realistic demand to the film boldly and innovatively, which is itself a unique attempt and presentation of Chinese films.

4.3 Visual image in the adventure genre

"Domestic films combine digital images with virtual reality, reshaping aesthetic and emotional experience, and cultural imagination of the public. They promote films' modernization characteristics with genre, industrialization and digitalization as the main trend, and inject modern connotation and spiritual character of contemporary and national character into them(Li, 2023)". Starting from the creative logic of commercial genre films, it will actively integrate the elements of wonders with the original characteristics of genre films. Since the Hollywood period, many visual wonders have flooded adventure films, such as the "Indiana Jones" series. We see the South American jungle during Jones' exploration, the desert landscape in North Africa, and the pharaoh's tomb hidden in the desert pyramid, all of which have left a deep impression on the audience. The success of these films makes the spectacle element occupy a larger proportion. Adorno believes that "the aesthetics "of the media industrialization era has not yet ended, and real art still exists, and the importance of illusion in artistic works is expressed by the" salvation of illusion (Adorno, 1998)". The element of visual spectacle has become important in Chinese adventure films. In the film "The Climber", there is a thrilling scene in which the mountaineers are exposed to dozens of strong winds when the sky is dark, and the tent is rolled up with the team members. To save the falling team members, the team leader tied himself to the cliff with a long ladder, and the ladder kept shaking in the storm, almost causing the team members to slip into the cracks of the ice sheet. This scene brings strong visual stimulation to the audience by combining a thrilling plot with suspense, and becomes an unforgettable "famous scene" in "The Climber". "Human's aesthetic is different from animal's sensory pleasure. There are abstract imagination, aesthetic ideas, and concepts of The Times in human's aesthetic(Luo, 2018)". The strong visual spectacle stimulates the audience. However, the film's narrative is no longer the only key when it breaks through the excessive emphasis on the story structure and the relationship between characters. "Therefore, film creators at that time were more inclined to use non-daily images shaped by technology to express their understanding of the visual art of film at that time. This resulted in the

excessive expansion of technology and the naivety of art. The excessive pursuit of spectacular effects led to an imbalance between technology and art" (Zheng, 2023). This also means that the principle of emphasizing the plot in traditional films is no longer dominant, but satisfies the audience's visual pleasure. However, it would be incomplete to regard mere watch ability as the key for films that aim to create a grand spectacle.

In the creative process of adventure films, vivid camera language and reasonable scene selection are the key links for the screen presentation in the creative process. In the face of today's postmodern "anti-traditional" aesthetic style, Baudrillard once predicted that "The more aesthetic values enter the market, the less pleasant the possibility of our aesthetic judgment(Hughes, 1990)". "Where Nothing Grows" is no longer confined to the aesthetic experience brought by the visual effects bombardment of the previous adventure genre films, and its image style has a strong uniqueness and aesthetic feeling. The image style presented in Figure 5 gives the picture a distant artistic conception and records the profound changes of the characters during their journey through the distinctive film language.



Figure 5: Screenshots of "Where Nothing Grows" and "The Wandering Earth 2" show the vastness of the natural space

"Where Nothing Grows" is shot in no man's land, showing the power of nature in the film, grand and merciless. The wide-angle shot is rarely used as an important shot throughout the film, allowing expansive views and a sense of vastness. While presenting the natural beauty of the desert to the audience, the director also uses a wider field of view to imply the insignificance of man relative to nature. In the film, starting from the first day of walking, the director chooses many long shots to show the situation of the Cong Lin trek. At this time, in addition to constructing the spatial relationship of the film for the audience, the film's color tone presents a dry and gray feeling, in line with the wilderness theme. Such a unique and biased image language also makes a poetic, more specific image style, especially in "Where Nothing Grows", where the Cong Lin treks alone along the desert ridge in the film, moving from one scene to another, forever-continuing Gobi Desert. Alfonso Cuarón is particularly fond of wide-angle long shots in the shooting of "Roma". He believes such a vivid documentary style can better express natural, calm, and distant aesthetics. The same aesthetic style is also presented on the screen in "Where Nothing Grows". In many paragraphs of the film, the director uses many wide-angle shots to summarize the Cong Lin process, moving from one end to the other along the desert ridge. In combination with the fixed shots of the characters in the desert narrative space, many wide-angle shots are used. This brings a different visual experience to the audience.

Many visual details in the film help the audience understand the protagonist's deteriorating solitude and progressive inner world. Visual details usually have two aspects: On the one hand, they refer to depicting the characters' emotions and detailed actions. For example, the Cong Lin's state in the process of trekking changes from walking fast to walking slowly to stumbling and even crawling forward at last. The whole person's mental state changes from looking for rescue for his brother with a heavy heart to gradually turning saving his brother into a belief with the sharpening of the environment and fatigue of the body. Then, to the aimless trudging after her brother's

death. The Cong Lin has empty eyes and seems to fall at any moment. The faith is nearly broken, and the body is tired, almost stumbling forward. Finally, the Cong Lin completely relies on the survival instinct to support itself. Although she looks more tired, her eyes are uncharacteristically determined. On the other hand, it refers to the use and processing objects' details, using objects to assist the construction of the plot, scene details, including clothing, makeup, props, geographical environment and details of objects bearing the emotions of the characters in the film. In the film, the Cong Lin is set for seven days of the wilderness journey. The scenery moves with people, capturing and presenting different landforms and weather conditions. There is a vast expanse of desert where yellow sand is piled up into undulating dunes. These immersive shots skillfully use the landscape to produce a series of small and grand contrasts in audiovisual language, vividly showing the image of a Stoic and lonely woman. The shot shows the overall environment and the behavior of the Cong Lin, completing its first semiotic stage. From the protagonist's stormtrooper jacket constantly broken, the changing environment around him gradually moves from desert to wasteland. The characters' lips, from chapped to broken skin to bleeding to dried blood scabs, explain the characters' status changes to the audience in this low-density narrative. To a certain extent, his construction of code in the film, is also the application of the latent type theory proposed by Rooters to increase the level of the film.

"Where Nothing Grows" is very successful in the processing of image style, showing the natural beauty of desert and the characters' emotions of the characters. It also provides strong support for the emotional expression of the film. Its image style is unique and rough, presenting a unique visual feeling and atmosphere for the audience.

5. Conclusion

In the Chinese adventure film market, "Where Nothing Grows" is a pioneer expression of adventure films and an atypical genre film. It shows another artistic style of genre films through its unique narrative and image style, revealing that domestic adventure films can pass the first stage. 1) Adopt the "atypical" narrative expression to complete the innovation of plot structure; 2) Construct anti-traditional roles to challenge established concepts of traditional aesthetics; 3) Can break the aesthetic fatigue of "visual spectacle" through poetic lens language. The three aspects open up a diversified path for the artistic innovation of domestic adventure genre films and achieve the result of expanding the artistic innovation space. Similarly, as a rare female adventure film, it puts forward new thinking and makes a brand-new attempt. In the Chinese genre films's development perspective, "Where Nothing Grows" is a bold and valuable attempt at the Chinese adventure film market.

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