

Global films that reflect social trends: Narrative strategies, Cultural Translation and Ideological Expression

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How to cite this paper: Luo, X. S. (2025). Global films that reflect social trends: Narrative strategies, Cultural Translation and Ideological Expression. *Literature, Language and Cultural Studies*, 1(3), 149–154. ISSN Print: 3079-5095; ISSN Online: 3079-5109.

<https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9050>

Published: 2025-06-24

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Abstract

This article examines global films as a medium for reflecting social trends, exploring their narrative mechanisms and cultural functions. The study reveals that existentialist philosophy, through the multidimensional temporal narratives in films like 'The Nameless Man,' highlights the conflict between individual freedom and the absurd world. In the technological age, the politics of the body in 'Passionate' transforms into embodied social practices, addressing the dis-embodied challenges and identity anxieties of Generation Z. National ideology is invoked through the 'micro-macro narrative' of the 'Changjin Lake' series, which reconstructs historical memory and imagines a shared community. The phenomenon of cross-media convergence promotes deep integration between literature and film, leading to a communication path that combines 'whole-to-part-to-micro-to-modify' and localized translation. Black humor, exemplified by 'Tomorrow Is Not Enough,' transforms social issues such as domestic violence into critical comedy. Through genre innovation and cultural translation strategies, films break down communication barriers, allowing local ideologies to be expressed globally and playing an indispensable role in ideological construction and civilizational dialogue.

Keywords

Global Cinema; Social Trends; Existentialism; Cultural Translation; Ideological Invocation; Cross-Media Narrative

1. The visual expression of existentialism and individual freedom

Existentialist philosophy emphasizes the core proposition that 'existence precedes essence,' which is vividly portrayed in the film *The Nameless*. The film constructs a multidimensional narrative of time and space, weaving together the parallel life trajectories of Nemo and Nobri: at the age of nine, he chooses his future companions before his parents' divorce, marking the beginning of his life's divergent paths. Each choice leads to distinct emotional entanglements and different fates — his relationships with Anna, Elise, and Jean, which symbolize loneliness, despair, and re-

demption, respectively. This narrative structure transforms Sartre's concept of free choice into a tangible visual map: when Nemo experiences different possible lives in his imagination, it embodies the existentialist philosophy that 'man defines himself through action.'

The film's portrayal of absurdity is deeply rooted in existentialism. The scene where parents meet after slipping due to a fallen leaf highlights the randomness of human fate; the 'butterfly effect' where heavy rain erodes phone numbers, causing lovers to lose contact, subtly suggests how the world's disorder mocks individual plans. These elements echo Sartre's concept of 'being-in-itself' — the external world, as a meaningless object, is always in tension with human consciousness, which is 'being-for-itself.' The protagonist, with multiple identities, embodies the modern individual's quest for essence in an absurd world.

More profoundly, *The Nameless Man* reveals how the gaze of the other can deprive a subject of its identity. The emotional entanglements between Nemo and the three women reflect Sartre's famous assertion that 'the other is hell': when an individual is objectified by others, their free will is suppressed. In the film, Nemo's loneliness and anxiety are symptoms of the alienation of subjectivity under the gaze of others. The elderly Nemo reconstructs his self through memories, suggesting the existentialist path of 'resistance-transcendence' — even in an absurd world, individuals can still find meaning through choices. Such art films transform philosophical debates into spatiotemporal experiments and psychological realism, serving as a cinematic interpretation of the existentialist movement.

2. The politics of the body and the reconstruction of community in the age of technology

The identity anxiety and disengagement of digital natives (Generation Z) are transformed into embodied practices of street dance culture in "Intense." The film's protagonist, Chen Shuo, moves between car washes, food delivery stations, and street performances, reflecting the employment challenges faced by today's youth. Breaking dance serves as a physical declaration against virtual addiction — each rotation and freeze of the floor moves awakens the body's sense of self. This bodily narrative responds to Mark Hansen's critique of the 'debodying' of new media, emphasizing the value of tactile media as a source of meaning.

In the film, the 'Exclamation Point' dance club forms a miniature embodied community. Members collaborate through physical coordination to perform challenging team moves, building emotional connections through the refinement of muscle memory. When Chen Shuo transitions from a stand-in to a full member, he restructures the social network through body language. The street dance competition scene at the National Street Dance Championship places individuals at the heart of a collective emotional ritual: when the music pauses, Chen Shuo fills the void with continuous spinning, igniting an emotional surge among the audience. This design

skillfully illustrates how major social events shape young people's personalities — when individual actions resonate with collective energy, self-identity is integrated through a ritualistic celebration.

The support mechanisms within the original family are also noteworthy. Chen Shuo's parents, as cultural workers, have transformed their genetic legacy into a non-utilitarian passion for their son. The scene of his mother singing in the market suggests how grassroots aesthetics challenge elite narratives. This setup breaks free from the professional anxiety framework of the competitive environment, highlighting the vitality of the 'pre-discursive body' in the theory of affect: the pure joy derived from dance transcends utilitarian goals, becoming a spiritual resource to resist alienation. The film thus constructs a three-dimensional healing system of 'passion-driven-community interaction-social events shaping,' offering solutions to the disembodied symptoms of the digital age.

3. The screen reshaping of national narratives and collective memory

The ideological appeal mechanism of mainstream films has evolved into a micro-macro narrative aesthetic paradigm in the 'Changjin Lake' series. The film weaves together grand historical narratives with individual perspectives, depicting the transformation of new recruit Wu Wanli from an innocent youth into a seasoned warrior, embodying the values of 'individual-collective-nation.' When he sees the Great Wall at sunset on the train, a symbolic moment that shifts time and space—its majestic and solemn presence on screen and off, unconsciously elevating the individual to a sublime subject. Althusser's theory of 'ideological appeal' is perfectly illustrated here: the state apparatus, through cinematic rituals, summons the audience to become the bearers of historical identity.

The construction of collective memory relies on the strategy of transforming pain. The frozen ice sculpture, the close-up of veteran Tan Zhiwei's sacrifice, and the red-framed name in Wu Qianli's notebook transform the trauma of war into an artistic 'pain pleasure.' Audiences experience the historical suffering through trembling and sobbing, projecting their emotions onto an 'imagined community.' Benedict Anderson argues that nations are essentially products of political imagination, and 'The Battle at Lake Changjin' awakens this imagination through the accumulation of details: the tragic scene where Wu Wanli reports, 'Company Seven should have 157 men, but only 1 is present,' transforms abstract casualty figures into emotional impact, fostering a collective consensus to 'cherish peace.'

The breakthrough of "The Battle at Lake Changjin" lies in its skillful weaving of political and non-political narratives. On one hand, Wu Baili's promise to 'bring his brother home' embodies Confucian family ethics; on the other hand, the names of the three brothers—Baili, Qianli, and Wanli—symbolize the geographical scale of defending the country. This narrative technique bridges the gap between main-

stream ideology and youth subculture, transforming revolutionary history from a didactic message into an empathetic life experience. When young audiences are moved by Wu Wanli's transformation, they are actively internalizing the value of "the unity of family and country," thus achieving the subtle infiltration of ideology.

4. Global circulation of cross-media narrative and cultural translation

The symbiotic relationship between literature and film has entered a new phase of cross-media integration. From the adaptation of Liu Cixin's science fiction novel into 'The Wandering Earth' to the film and television adaptation of Chen Yan's original work in 'Zhuangtai,' Chinese film and television have adopted a creative approach that combines 'overall adaptation with minor adjustments' and localization. The TV series 'Zhuangtai' changed the tragic ending of the original novel to a family reunion, catering to the audience's interest in family ethics; 'The Human World' reduced the focus on the intellectual character Zhou Rong, highlighting the struggles of the commoner Zhou Bingkun, reflecting the creation orientation of a 'people's epic.' These adaptations reflect how media characteristics shape narrative forms: TV series need to consider the emotional structure of the general public, while literary works focus more on the complexity of individual characters.

The innovation in the types of Chinese films 'going global' highlights the central role of cultural translation. 'The Wandering Earth 2' breaks through international communication barriers with a strategy of 'hardcore technology + soft culture': visual spectacles like the space elevator and quantum computer meet global audiences' expectations for sci-fi; the 'Mountain Moving Plan' symbolizes the spirit of Yu Gong moving mountains, while the failure of the 'Ark Plan' underscores the advantages of collectivism, naturally integrating Chinese values into disaster narratives.' Ne Zha: The Rise of the Devil Boy 'achieves universal appeal by stripping away cultural specificity: Ne Zha's spirit of resistance transforms into the theme of self-awakening, family bonds replace conflicts of feudal rites, and traditional ink painting style is reimagined through 3D rendering technology into a cyber aesthetic beloved by global youth.

Animation media has significant advantages in cross-cultural communication. "Ro Xiaohei Zhanji" uses facial expressions and body language to convey emotions, effectively overcoming language barriers; "New Gods: Yang Jian" transforms the Penglai Immortal Island into a steampunk aerial city, giving Eastern mythology a futuristic twist. This cultural hybrid strategy aligns with Homi Bhabha's "third space" theory — where different cultures generate new meaning fields through interaction. When "Still Tomorrow" grossed 20 million yuan at the Chinese box office, the issue of women's suffrage in Italy resonated because the film's language transcended geographical boundaries, addressing the global agenda of gender equality.

5. Comedy as a soft power of social criticism

Black humor in "Tomorrow" is transformed into a social surgical knife. Set against the backdrop of Italian women gaining their first right to vote in 1946, the film uses dance and song scenes to deconstruct the gravity of domestic violence: when Della, played by Paula Koteris, suddenly dances as her husband beats her, the painful experience is transformed into a surreal image. The director candidly admits that the creation is like "embroidering a balance between tragedy and comedy," aiming not to alleviate suffering but to reinforce criticism through laughter—the more the audience laughs, the deeper their reflection on oppression becomes. This approach not only caters to the sensory tolerance of female audiences but also reveals the subversive power of comedy as a weapon for the weak. The cross-cultural circulation of comedy makes it an ideal medium for the spread of ideas. Della's journey from enduring silence to voting, rooted in the Italian context, resonates with women's autonomy in Latin America and Asia. The film uses black-and-white tones and retro costumes to balance historical accuracy with artistic exaggeration, making it accessible to contemporary audiences. When Della finally casts her vote, her personal redemption transforms into a tribute to democratic institutions, achieving a dual expression of social critique and humanistic concern.

Conclusion: The screen is a ferryman of civilization dialogue

The process by which films reflect social trends is fundamentally a dialectical movement of ideological coding and cultural translation. From the existentialist questioning in 'The Nameless' to the embodied resistance in 'Passion,' from the national call in 'The Battle at Lake Changjin' to the comedic critique in 'Tomorrow,' global films use genre narratives as a vessel to carry the spiritual aspirations of different cultural contexts. To deepen the dialogue on social trends in cross-cultural communication, future films must consider three dimensions: at the content level, they should delve into local cultural resources while highlighting universal human values; at the form level, they should explore narrative innovations enabled by technology; at the industry level, they should build a diversified and parallel dissemination matrix. Only then can the screen truly become a spiritual mirror of the 'community with a shared future for mankind' — illuminating the ideological changes in specific societies and reflecting the common dilemmas and ideals of human civilization.

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