

Cosmopolitanism in "The Wandering Earth"

Lingrui Zhang, Jia Lu*

School of Languages and Literature, University of South China, Hengyang, 421001, China.

* Corresponding Author

Abstract

In the movie "The Wandering Earth", human beings are faced with the crisis of the sun gradually expanding and about to be destroyed. To save the Earth, all human beings take joint efforts to establish the "United Earth Government", which integrates global resources and technologies to jointly develop solutions to the crisis. This global cooperation and coordination reflect Appiah's cosmopolitan ideology. Therefore, this paper will interpret the cosmopolitan ideas in the film "The Wandering Earth" from three aspects of Appiah's cosmopolitanism, namely universal cosmopolitanism, individualistic cosmopolitanism, and patriotic cosmopolitanism.

Keywords

Cosmopolitanism; Kwame Anthony Appiah; "The Wandering Earth".

1. Introduction:

With the deepening of globalization, humanity has gained an unprecedented material base and universal interaction, while at the same time being plunged into several crises. In the face of a series of global problems, cosmopolitanism, with its deep intellectual roots, has increasingly become an interpretative force on such issues as global governance. The rise of contemporary cosmopolitanism is arguably the most direct response to the formation of a global community and its consciousness. This cosmopolitan ideology is exemplified by the recent hit film "The Wandering Earth", in which humanity realizes that it is part of a global community and sets out to save itself when faced with a global catastrophe of enormous proportions, as briefly outlined below.

The film "The Wandering Earth" is a Chinese science fiction film about the collective self-help of all mankind. In this film, the core of the Sun is rapidly degenerating and expanding, and the solar system is on the verge of destruction. The earth will be engulfed. To survive, human beings and governments from all over the world made a groundbreaking project which is called "the Wandering Earth Project" to maneuver the entire planet to a new home located 4.2 light years away. The plan was to construct tens of thousands of thrusters for Earth's propulsion, called the Earth Engines, and tens of thousands of underground cities to protect human lives first. Then the Torque Engines encircled along the equator would be activated to stop Earth's rotation. The non-rotating earth would create mega-tsunamis that would sweep through the planet, eradicating half of the global population. And then the Earth would use the gravitational force of the Sun and Jupiter for final acceleration. When the Earth departs from the Solar System, Earth Engines would turn on at full power for 500 years and then slide for 1300 years. After that Earth Engines' directions would be reversed and the Earth would begin to berth at the targeted stellar system and arrive at our new home. But when the Earth passed Jupiter and was about to use the "gravitational slingshot" effect to accelerate its exit from the solar system, Jupiter's gravitational force surged, causing the Earth-Jupiter distance to break the rigid body Losch limit, and "the Wandering Earth Project" almost failed. At the life-and-death moment when human beings are facing extinction, the world starts to launch a saturation rescue, and

countless people go forward and die heroically, just to save the Earth and continue the hope of survival for hundreds of generations of children. In this film, the fate of all people on earth is closely linked, reflecting the idea of cosmopolitanism, which emphasizes the view of humanity as a whole, focuses on universal values, seeks to reflect on the crisis of globalization, and proposes a solution for the governance of the global community to achieve world peace and friendly development. This thought reminds people of the need to unite and work together in the face of common challenges, to continuously explore innovations, to jointly solve global problems, and to promote global equity and justice.

The political philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah's ideas on cosmopolitanism are important for the understanding of the film "The Wandering Earth". Appiah's cosmopolitanism is reflected in the book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in the World of Strangers*, and his cosmopolitan ideas are expressed intertextually in "The Wandering Earth". This paper focuses on the theoretical connotations of Appiah's cosmopolitanism in the film "The Wandering Earth", in order to reveal the cosmopolitanism and the reflection on human beings as universal beings contained in the film.

2. Cosmopolitanism

2.1. Definition

The term "cosmopolitanism" originates from the Greek word *Kosmopolitês*, and contemporary cosmopolitan thought can be traced back to the Stoic school of ancient Greece, which broke away from the constraints of the pollutes to emphasize the role of the cosmos (*kosmo*) and highlight the whole of humanity. Grounded in reason and natural law, the Stoics believed that human beings were homogeneous and that, in their view, being a citizen of the world was first and foremost a matter of loyalty to all humanity, the highest moral category. The Stoics established the most fundamental concept of cosmopolitanism: the world citizen. This concept, founded on the wholeness of humanity, has influenced Western cosmopolitan thought throughout the ages and is widely referred to in Western political thought. From the ancient Greek School of the Wise in B.C. to the medieval philosophy of the Academy, and then to the modern European philosophy, cosmopolitanism has gone through a process of rise, decline, and revival, and the interpretation of the concept of cosmopolitanism by various philosophers has been a matter of opinion and wisdom. For example, Immanuel Kant, Thomas Pogge, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and other brilliant philosophers have profoundly influenced cosmopolitan thought. Among them, Kwame Anthony Appiah believed that cosmopolitanism is fundamentally an ethic. He was not concerned with how to construct a cosmopolitan political community, but how to define the self concerning others and how different cultures get along and dialogue. Cosmopolitanism is a theoretical practice rather than a political ideal. Appiah's concept of "cosmopolitanism" can be categorized into three kinds of cosmopolitanism at the same time: universal cosmopolitanism, individualistic cosmopolitanism, and patriotic cosmopolitanism. For Appiah, there is no contradiction between patriotism and cosmopolitanism, and he strives to integrate these three seemingly incompatible conceptions of cosmopolitanism, which are also reflected in "The Wandering Earth".

2.2. Classification

For Appiah, cosmopolitanism is fundamentally an ethical rather than a political ideal. Ethics and values, universality and diversity, the individual and the other, identity and the nation, language, and culture thus constitute the keywords of Appiah's work, and his cosmopolitanism can be outlined in three different ways, each of which will be described below.

2.2.1. Universal cosmopolitanism

Appiah sees universal values as the premise and foundation of cosmopolitanism, which distinguishes it from positivism and relativism. He categorizes the problems of positivism and relativism as 'naturalistic fallacies', pointing out that positivism eliminates value judgments and any consideration of idealism. While criticizing positivism and relativism, he restores the dimension of 'value' and argues that there is a universal value. This value does not arise from the will of individuals, but from human interaction and common action, and is determined by the social nature of human beings. There are things that everyone finds valuable, and the universality of this value is an empirically based universality that is difficult to prove positivistically. Universal values provide the basis for communication and dialogue and the possibility of mutual understanding and learning from each other. Thus, while the cosmopolitan concept respects differences, cosmopolitanism, which upholds universal values, also emphasizes 'intervention'.

2.2.2. Individualistic cosmopolitanism

Unlike other contemporary ethicists who espouse cosmopolitan convictions and simply see human beings as a moral community and emphasize human values, Appiah sees the individual as the ultimate and immediate end of the moral concern of his cosmopolitan thought. More importantly, rather than asserting that human beings are persons who share a common humanity - abstract reason - Appiah's cosmopolitan thought is grounded in concrete persons, i.e., real-life, concrete practical individuals. The individual he values is real and can choose his or her way of life according to his or her concrete experience, common sense, and ideas. Secondly, the individual is a member of a specific social organization (or relationship), with a specific identity, belonging to a specific group, nation, region, and country. Finally, the individual is a unique practitioner in an open system. Although Appiah espouses the belief in cosmopolitanism, he does not advocate the construction of a unified globalized government. In other words, individuals are individuals who live according to their own beliefs and practice according to the revelation of their conscience. It is worth noting that although the center of Appiah's ethical concern for cosmopolitan thought is the individual, this center is not only the 'self' but also the 'other' - family, friends, neighbors, and other familiar people or people who are not familiar with him. The individual in Appiah's Universalism is not only the 'self', but also the 'other' - family, friends, neighbors and other familiar people or strangers. The individualism of Appiah's Universalism is not egoism, but an individualism that cares for others.

2.2.3. Patriotic cosmopolitanism

For Appiah, being a citizen of the world does not require one to give up one's national region or other collective identities to which one belongs; rather, these specific identities are the very foundation upon which the cosmopolitan ethic is built. He argues that there is no conflict between patriotism and cosmopolitanism before, and that only by identifying with and being loyal to one's own country can one cross national boundaries to care for the Other beyond them. Patriotism does not exclude cosmopolitanism; on the contrary, true patriotism produces true cosmopolitanism.

3. On Cosmopolitanism in "The Wandering Earth"

3.1. Universal cosmopolitanism in "The Wandering Earth"

Appiah argues that cosmopolitanism is first and foremost a universalist cosmopolitanism in nature. He points out that universal values are rooted in the most fundamental human will, and that there are things that everyone considers valuable and therefore empirical and universal. For example, we believe that "goodness" is a universal value, and we not only want everyone to have good intentions, but we want everyone to agree with us. Moreover, we want everyone to

be good in the same way. In *"The Wandering Earth"*, the main character Liu Peiqiang is full of goodwill. He is a Chinese astronaut on the Navigator International Space Station, and in the movie he is always determined to fulfill his mission of saving the Earth, going to the Navigator Space Station when his son Liu Qi was four years old, sacrificing his family for the sake of all, taking up the heavy responsibility of a navigator with his international peers, and finally even giving his own life to set Jupiter on fire. All of these practices indicate the goodness implicit in universalism, goodness that warms the world even in the face of global disasters. But Liu Peiqiang is not the only one practicing this kind of goodness. His father, Han Ziang, as the senior driver of the transport vehicle, took on the task of transporting the Flintstones and restarting the planetary engine in a critical situation. He finally left the hope of life to the members of the rescue team, whom he did not know, in a life-and-death situation. Liu Peiqiang's son Liu Qi, the child who lost all his blood relatives in the "Wandering Earth" project, perseveres in the plan of Wandering Earth, always believing in the hope and possibility of the future of mankind, and insisting on the position of protecting his compatriots even in the face of danger and difficulties. In addition, although he is estranged from his father in terms of relationship due to his father's absence since childhood, he still loves his father deeply and profoundly understands his father's mission and commitment when Liu Peiqiang decides to sacrifice himself in the end. Ultimately, the goodness in universalism makes them understand and care for each other. Arkady Sharogratsky, who was on the station with Liu Peiqiang, was also very kind. He could have been spared, but when he learned that Moss had defected, he decided to accompany his teammate Liu Peiqiang to the station's main control room. Unfortunately, the AI activated the "lethal defense mechanism" and part of the ejected meteorite fragment broke Arkady Sharogratsky's mask, which instantly froze him into ice, leaving him floating forever in the frozen universe. When disaster strikes, all of humanity works together; when the planetary engine is damaged by Jupiter's gravity, rescue teams from all over the world scramble to carry out emergency repairs; when Liu Qi and others decide to use the shock wave generated by igniting Jupiter to push away from Earth, rescue teams from all over the world turn around and participate in support. All these reflect that goodness is universal, and it is such human light that can make the world a better place. These lovely people profoundly practice Appiah's universalist cosmopolitan idea of universalism.

3.2. Individualistic cosmopolitanism in "The Wandering Earth"

Appiah's cosmopolitanism is also an individualistic cosmopolitanism, which implies that the individual (individual), rather than any form of community, is the ultimate purpose of ethical concern. Appiah states that we are concerned not only with human values but also with the values of specific individuals, and if universalist value concerns make us responsible for strangers, then individualist ethical claims also emphasize respect for the values of individuals. Among the individuals Appiah refers to are individuals with specific gender, country, and race, individuals with specific cultural identities and religious beliefs, and individuals with their values and unique habits and personalities - concrete, tangible individuals in real life. In *"The Wandering Earth"*, Liu Qi is an engineering vehicle repairman whose father is a Chinese astronaut and whose mother is a civilian. When he was young, his father chose to forgo treatment for his mother, who was seriously ill, to protect him and his grandfather, Han Zion, causing Liu Qi to hold a grudge against his father. When he was four years old, his father left him to be raised by his grandfather Han Ziang to carry out his mission, resulting in a long absence of his father. He is cynical, free-spirited, curious, and rebellious because his father was not around when he was young. However, he is kind by nature, has his own unique interests and personality, explores his own values, and is specific in his cosmopolitan concerns. There is also a significant character in the film, whose name is Zhou Qian. She is the only woman in the rescue team and she is intelligent, bold, and resolute. After the failed mission on CN171-11, the team leader Wang Lei insists on taking the Lighter Core to the next station, and Zhou Qian has

no choice but to destroy it. Zhou Qian is not nervous, let alone out of control, at this moment, she is more rational than Wang Lei. Because before this, countless people had sacrificed themselves to protect the Lighter Core, they could not bear such a heavy price anymore, and destroying the Lighter Core was the wisest thing to do. She does so for the sake of the survival of more people, a move that makes her character more distinct and vivid, and she is a specific person of concern to Universalism.

But individualism is not egoism, and it does not mean that the individual alone is placed at the center of ethical concern. Individualistic cosmopolitanism emphasizes the importance of the "self" in ethical life, but also stresses the dialogue between the individual and others, emphasizing that everyone has a responsibility to others and should care for and respect them. After the death of his grandfather, Han Ziang, Liu Qidai takes the responsibility of driving the transport truck for his grandfather, and like an adult, he takes on the responsibility of protecting his sister, Han Duoduo, along the way. In addition, when his father, Liu Peiqiang, decided to turn his life into the last fuel to help propel the Earth out of the solar system, he was grief-stricken but fully respected his father's approach, which not only comforted his father but also made Liu Qidai himself more concrete and vivid. These examples all illustrate that Appiah's cosmopolitan view of individualism is a caring individualism constructed with the concrete individual as the starting point.

3.3. Patriotic cosmopolitanism in "The Wandering Earth"

Appiah's cosmopolitanism is also a patriotic cosmopolitanism or rooted cosmopolitanism. Being a citizen of the world does not require one to abandon one's national and all other group identities to become a wanderer; rather, the ethic of cosmopolitanism is based on these very specific identities. Appiah believes that only by loving one's own country can one transcend national boundaries to care for those beyond them, that is, only true patriotism can produce true cosmopolitanism. In the film, Liu Peiqiang is not only an astronaut but also a Chinese soldier. Even though his child is only four years old, and even though he is very sad to leave his family, he still chooses to go to the International Space Station when he receives the mission, because this is the sense of responsibility and mission given to him by the country and society to "serve the people", and out of strong patriotic feelings, he has to make some sacrifices. But this does not mean that he does not love his family, and when he learned that his son and father were far away from the underground protection city, he sent them to the first time location of the nearest shelter. But as Appiah points out, patriotic cosmopolitanism begins with caring for family and friends, but it still lands on caring for fellow human beings and strangers. When he learned that there was a glimmer of hope for saving the planet, he took the initiative to connect with the coalition government to ask for support, and he hoped that everyone's reunion would not be the last. This reflects his care for his compatriots in China, and all the people of the world, and his hope that all will eventually be happy with their families all the time. He loved his family, his country, and the people of the world. Thus, the cosmopolitanism of patriotism lies not only in caring for one's own family, friends, and compatriots but also in caring for strangers around the world.

4. Conclusion

Set against the backdrop of a global crisis faced by humankind, "The Wandering Earth" shows the collective efforts of all humanity to create a common home. The success of "the Wandering Earth Project" is not the effort of one person, but the result of the joint efforts of all mankind, which also provides material for Appiah's cosmopolitan study. Several episodes in the film show the glory of humanity and advocate that everyone should show kindness to others, reflecting universalism; different characters have their own unique character traits, but they all care about and respect others, reflecting individualistic cosmopolitanism; Liu Peiqiang, Liu Qi,

and others not only care about their own relatives, but also insist on protecting the safety of their compatriots, and eventually make corresponding sacrifices for the happiness of the whole world, reflecting the cosmopolitanism of patriotism. Therefore, the analysis and research in this paper can show that "*The Wandering Earth*" fits well with the cosmopolitanism idea proposed by Appiah.

References:

- [1] Appiah, K. A. Miao, H. J (Trans.), *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* [M]. Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2012.
- [2] Appiah, K. A. Zhang, R. N. (Trans.), *The Ethics of Identity*[M]. Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2013.
- [3] Appiah, K.A., & Bhabha, H. *Cosmopolitanism and Convergence*[J]. *New Literary History* 49(2), 171-198, 2018.
- [4] Calhoun C. *Cosmopolitanism and nationalism*[J]. *Nations and Nationalism* 14: 427–448, 2008.
- [5] David H. *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and realities*[M]. Cambridge: Polity, 2010.
- [6] Phillips T, Smith P. *Cosmopolitan beliefs and cosmopolitan practices: An empirical investigation*[J]. *Journal of Sociology* 44(4): 391–399, 2008.
- [7] Pichler F. "Down-to-earth" cosmopolitanism: Subjective and objective measurements of cosmopolitanism in survey research[J]. *Current Sociology* 57: 704–732, 2009.
- [8] Skey M. *We need to talk about cosmopolitanism: The challenge of studying openness towards other people* [J]. *Cultural Sociology* 6(4): 471–487, 2012.