

Class, Race, and Humanity: Analysis of Speech and Behaviour based on Dying to Survive and Green Book

Yatong Wang

*The Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China
gloria_yyy@sina.com*

Abstract: With the development of cultural and historical processes, supported by technology, more and more media platforms are focusing on the value of people's ontological meaning. Cinema is one of the biggest platforms, with different types of films interpreting what it means to be human. *Dying to Survive* and *Green Book* both present different social meanings in their unique words and actions. Two films are classics of intercultural communication, with actors whose words and actions convey themes of class, race, and humanity. This essay firstly compares the words and actions in the film, analysing the content in the texts of *Dying to Survive* and *Green Book* films, mainly the differences between the different cultures represented by lines and actions, thus revealing the embodiment of humanity, race, and class. Ultimately, this essay will summarise the factors that influence social class, race, and human nature, despite the fact that as human society and culture continue to improve, there are still a large number of social problems. Film as a medium for the transmission of these different cultures also plays an important role in creating social value.

Keywords: Class, Race, Humanity, *Dying to Survive*, *Green Book*

1. Introduction

The "Green Book" in the film, "The Green Book" is a book issued in the United States in the mid-20th century, a travel guide for black people travels guide, *Easy Holiday: The Black Driver's Green Book*. In this book, places for black people to eat and stay were clearly provided, and the so-called 'easy' in the title of the book reflects. The book also reflects the admonition and instruction in white culture by following the instructions. The book's instructions enable black people to follow 'tradition' in an unfamiliar environment without crossing the black-white line [1]. The film is set in 1962, the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, a century in which black Americans were legally freed from their status as "Negroes" but still lived in segregation under racial discrimination, more so in the southern states of the United States. *Dying to Survive*, on the other hand, is an analysis of the current situation of people at the bottom of society through a different dimension. The "grassroots hero" in *Dying to Survive* is an impressive civilian character. The article analyses the civilian characters in the film from different levels of theory, respectively emotional, life, moral and legal speech acts, revealing the bottom-line consciousness of people at the bottom of society, and bringing inspiration to the thematic narratives of similar realist films. In this research, the author also compares the two films in the multi-dimensions to reveal the cultural shock in modern society. The significance of this paper is to explore culture shock, social class, and human morality, it provides

reference and reflection for Chinese films of the same genre and assumes the social responsibility of film art.

2. The Interpretation of Social Class in Film

2.1. The Human Light of the Underclass

Under the pressure of the need for survival and security over and over again, the film's protagonist, Cheng Yong, emerges as the representative of the civilian hero. The characterisation is aptly designed and is logical both in terms of the setting of the character's native community in the film and the choice of performers. Cheng Yong is a small man thrust into the limelight, being pushed for rent, fighting for custody of his children, and facing his father's illness, "survival" is the mountain he has to face. For the same type of people at the bottom of the social ladder, survival becomes one of the most deadly issues. What we see is Cheng Yong's lowest physical and security needs, but they are not guaranteed[2]. When the doctor says his father is critically ill, it fuels Cheng Yong's desire to make money, which directly contributes to his decision to work with Lui for the first time. He had no ambition but just wanted to make some money, keep custody of his children, pay for his father's surgery, and open his own shop.

Similarly, Liu Sihui's first appearance is a dance in a nightclub, reflecting the audience as a dusty woman. But on the other side, the audience sees a great mother who is willing to commit herself to the dust for her daughter's medical treatment shouting out to the audience: I want to earn money. The power of class and environment to corrupt people is insidious, and when you take the first step, you can never walk away. And it is this role of a female figure, raising a child alone after being abandoned by her husband, sacrificing her dignity for the sake of the child, that is representative of the radiance of maternal love and leaves the audience in admiration[3].

In *Dying to Survive*, different classes have completely different attitudes and completely different psychologies when faced with different levels of suffering caused by illness. The portrayal of the psychology of the minor characters in the film is able to illustrate that people at the bottom of the social ladder just want to survive, and survival has become their only belief.

2.2. Emotional Changes Brought on by the Social Class

After Cheng Yong has made his first bucket of money, it is clear that the hierarchy of needs required for the survival of the lower class is complete, so he has the capital to fight for the custody of his son. At the moment, Cheng Yong, no matter how down and out he is, is determined to tell the newborn that "I want my son". He is the most important character in the film's mission and the most contrasting character at both ends of the plot. For Cheng Yong's character, money has helped him to change class in a way, but this change is only brought about by money, and for him, he will think that class has changed. But in society, money is only a symbol, and the real social class is influenced by many factors, including social culture, one's own moral values, etc. The other character, police officer Cao Bin, embodies the changes brought about by different professional classes[4]. The uniqueness of Cao Bin's characterisation lies in his respect for the truth; he shows the sharpness and tender patience of a police officer in an approachable manner, and the change of mind before and after police officer Cao Bin is able to evoke strong emotional resonance in the audience[5].

3. Racial Discrimination as Reflected in the Film

There is another widespread phenomenon that is particularly prominent in society, and which has been illustrated in recent years through various aspects of cinema, and that is racism. The two male protagonists in *Green Book* are Tony, a white Italian-American driver, and Shirley, a black artist.

From time to time, during their long journey on tour through the South, the two men feel the distress that the racist social environment around the 1960s caused black people, especially aspiring black people. The journey sees the two men intervene in each other and understand each other as they work through a series of troubles, and foreshadows more communicative encounters and misplaced thinking. Racially charged circumstances and friendship across racial lines intermingle in the exchange of understanding.

3.1. Image Analysis in the Green Book

First image: throwing the black man's used teacup into the trash. Tony's distaste for black people is innate and moreover culturally ingrained. This is evidenced by the way Tony looks at black people and throws away two cups used by black employees. When his wife called in two black workers to haul coal for the family, Tony threw the drinking glasses the two had used into the trash with great contempt. The wife finds it in the bin and picks the cups back up with a shake of her head. Second image: applying for a job. Tony is the bottom white man and Shirley is the top black man, and you can sense this in the job application scene where the two men first meet, with Shirley towering over Tony and Tony looking down at him with his legs crossed and his head slightly cocked, highlighting Shirley's superiority and Tony's casualness. The third image is the mockery of the black counterpart. In Louisiana, Shirley sits alone in the courtyard of a hotel drinking, only to be mocked by his own kind: "You think you're noble?" "Just don't want to get your butler's clothes dirty", etc. The difference in social class and the fact that his kind does not agree with Shirley shows sideways that this is what blacks think their status is[6].

3.2. Conversation Analysis in the Green Book

The first meeting of the two leading men occurs in the 14th minute of the film. Dr. Shirley arrives, dressed in a traditional large African robe, and calls out Lip's Italian surname in a very standard way. In addition to the difference in skin colour and ethnicity between the two men, the dialogue reflects a great difference in cultural levels. All these differences are brilliantly presented in the first conversation between the two men in return, setting the scene for the rest of the film's narrative. Shirley: I'm Dr. Donald Shirley. (Lip's taken aback. Not what he expected. He stands.) Hi. Tony. (Shirley extends his hands. They shake.) Shirley: please, have a seat. (Lip sits. Shirley sits on his "throne", looking down at Lip.) LIP: This is some place you got here. (Motioning to the Elephant Tusks.) LIP: Them horns real? Shirley: Elephant tusks. Yes. (lip nods, points to the chain around Shirley's neck.) LIP: What about that? That a molar? Shirley: A what? LIP: A molar. (Lip points to his side teeth.) Like a shark tooth? Or a tiger's? Shirley: Um, no. It was a gift. LIP: Oh. (Looks around) I thought I was going to an office. They said a doctor needed a driver. Shirley: That's all they told you? Lip shrugs. Shirley: Actually, it's a bit more complicated than that. Have you ever driven professionally before? LIP: Sanitation. (beat) Garbage trucks. (Off Shirley's unimpressed look.) LIP: Plus I drive my boss home at night. I can drive anything. Shirley: I see. What other experience do you have? LIP: I worked a lot of joints. The Wagon Wheel, Peppermint Lounge, Copa... Shirley: In what capacity? LIP: What do you mean? Shirley: What did you do there? (Lip chews on that. You can smell the wood burning...) LIP: Public relations... (Shirley nods, understanding). Shirley: Well, first of all, Tony, I'm not a medical doctor. I'm a musician. LIP: You mean like songs? The two men first met when Shelly tried to recruit Tony as a driver to complete his tour of the American South[6]. The dialogue presents the following, particularly striking contrasts. One is the huge literacy gap between Tony as a white man and Shirley as a black artist. In conversation, Shirley is standard in his diction and rigorous in his delivery. Tony, on the other hand, uses simple grammar and expresses himself casually and irregularly. In the exchange, Shirley is using written expressions that Tony does

not understand and needs to be re-explained by the other party. Secondly, there is a clear status gap between the two men. Thirdly, Tony is surprised that Shirley is a very established artist but a black man. But the dialogue also shows Tony's frankness and straightforwardness[7].

4. Discussion

The interaction of the values of social subjects under certain social conditions, together form a stable normative property, the social order. The process of integration of the social order is the process of its function. The process of integration requires the formation of collective consciousness through value identification between individuals, and the collective consciousness constitutes the social order orientation [8]. But in this social order, certain constraints are needed to stabilise the existence of the social order. For Turgot, "law and morality are all that binds us to ourselves and society". Finally, social authority dominates the active becoming of the social order. By building a social order, it is possible to achieve a 'social field' with a cohesive force that transcends any social individuals and groups, and organisations. In the process of integrating social order, the most difficult thing to control is the formation of collective consciousness. According to Turgot, "the more rapidly the division of labour develops, the easier it is for individuals to live in harmony with their environment[9].

Both in *Dying to Survive* and in *Green Book*, the society in which the characters live have two distinct social order settings. One layer of macro-social order is from the perspective of power delineation, while the other layer of micro-social order is from the perspective of the moral setting. Both the macro and micro social orders are inextricably linked to the social division of labour developed by the film text[10]. But the two layers of social order also have an inherent commonality, namely the exploration and consideration of human nature. In *Dying to Survive*, there is no difference in cultural background. On the contrary, what the people at the bottom are seeking is survival, and the human morality tested is completely different from that in the last century in America. In different cultural contexts and at different times, people's moral ethics or humanity are subject to different degrees of electricity [11]. At the root of determining the social status people hold is the social capital they possess. Social capital determines the social class in which the persona symbol is placed, which in turn determines their social division of labour. Thus, both film worlds construct the first layer of social order in which the amount of capital possessed determines the social status of the characters. The gap between the rich and the poor is also reflected in the films, and this dichotomy is constantly testing people's consciences. The text presents the characters of different classes as having their own good and evil sides, mixing the complexities of human nature in the choices of different classes of people.

5. Conclusion

This article analyses the words and actions in *Dying to Survive* and *Green Book* to analyse the different levels of issues that arise in society, whether it be racial issues, social class, or human nature. With the spread of the mass media, people are constantly gaining new insights and interpretations of different levels of social knowledge and news, and film is just one of the channels through which the mass media disseminates information[12]. While interpreting the words or symbols of the film, it is hoped that the audience will be able to think about the current issues in society from a variety of perspectives. Social development, cultural development, and even technological development are constantly influencing people's lives. Through the analysis of two representative films, the author hopes to convey different perspectives and elaborate on social issues in future research.

Reference

[1] Nie X. *Principles of genre cinema [M]*. Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2019.

- [2] Zhang, D, *Exploring a comprehensive theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis*[J]. *Chinese Foreign Languages*, 2009(01).
- [3] *Multimodal critical discourse analysis: theoretical exploration, methodological. Theoretical exploration, methodological thinking, and prospect*[J]. *Journal of the PLA Foreign Language Institute*, 2019(09).
- [4] Zhao, Q, Zhu, Y. *The Progress of Humanity and Rule of Law from the Film "Dying to Survive"* [J]. *Game Progress* [J]. *Journal of Hehe College*, 2019(4): 205-206, 209.
- [5] Wen, M, Xie Y, "The Construction of the Aesthetic System of Self in Video --- Dying to Survive" interview with director Wen Muye, *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 2019(1).
- [6] Yu, F. *The American story behind the Green Book* [J]. *Fang Yuan*, 2019, (6).
- [7] Cheng, M. *Tutorial of International Communication* [M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006.
- [8] Adam Abraham Maslow, translated by Xu Jinsheng et al: *Motivation and Personality* (3rd Edition), Beijing, China People's Publishing House, 2012 edition.
- [9] Emile Turgot. *Theory of the division of labour in society* [M]. Qu Dong. Beijing: Life, Reading, New Knowledge, 2000.
- [10] Morgan, M[M]. *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture*. Cambridge University. 2002.
- [11] Zhang, S et al. *A review of identity research* [J]. *Psychological Research*, 2012, (1).
- [12] Gao, X. *Literary Imagination and the Conflict of Identity in Cultural Communities* [J]. *Humanities Miscellany Journal of Humanities*, 2005, (4).