

Influence of Michael Corleone's Personalities on His Relationship With Other Characters in Trilogy of *The Godfather*

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ABSTRACT

Analyzing the personalities and relationship of the characters is an effective method for both the professionals and the ordinary audience to comprehend movies. By discovering and explaining how Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* influences his relationship with other characters, this dissertation is aimed at assisting readers to fully comprehend the essence of movies in detail. This paper utilizes the method which extracts a variety of conflicts and major transitions between Michael and other characters to reflect how Michael's personalities work on these relationships. Based on the facts in the movie, Michael demonstrates different attitudes to his family members and the outsiders of his family. It will be helpful for the audience if there are researches which can deeply analyze a more well-rounded image of Michael's Corleone, besides analyzing his relationship and personalities appears in the future. This paper finally concludes that Michael's personalities cause him to have completely different relationships with two types of character, as the family members and the outsiders.

Keywords: Personalities, relationship, influence, gangster, *Godfather*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Godfather, as a classic and representative Italian gangster movie, reflects the conflicts between Corleone family and other forces in United States as well as tanglesome human sentiment in the 1940s. Michael Corleone, the most remarkable and suitable heir to his father Vito Corleone, demonstrates his character and personalities to the audience through his subtle relationship with his family members and his enemies in the movie, which effectively promotes the development of plot, incites the audiences' emotions and exhibits the state of society at that time. Michael demonstrates different attitudes and behavior styles on a variety of characters in the movies because of his luxurious character. In order to deeply discover and understand Michael's inner world and external connections, on the basis of comprehending Mike's character and his relationship with other characters, this paper aims to conclude the influence of Mike's personalities on his relationship with other characters by analyzing the relationship between Mike and other characters. The purpose of this paper is to assist readers to use the analytical methods to comprehend characters in other movies smoothly and logically so as to gain insights and thoughts from movies more easily.

2. OVERVIEW OF MICHAEL CORLEONE'S PERSONALITIES

Overall, Michael has two types of personalities, including the stable personalities and the variational personalities. For the stable personalities, Francis Ford Coppola, who is the director, and the script writer Mario Puzo "clearly portray his introvert, aloof, indifferent and strong character" through the description of his interpersonal relationship within other characters, which "lays the groundwork for his potential as a triad leader" [3]. For his variational personalities, as his life goes through many turning points, his personalities change accordingly. At the beginning, Mike is a young soldier with passion and American dream in his heart, with lofty ideals and ambitions, and a mentality of arrogantly displaying his talents. However, after a period of time, since his father's gang needs someone to inherit and the personal safety of his family members is threatened, he has to become cautious, strict, and decisive so that he can continue his family business successfully and safely. Finally, as he encounters lots of setbacks and obstacles and the deaths of his family members on the road the legalization of his family business, he becomes gradually compromised and helpless, as if lost his spirits and energy which he originally has.

3. ANALYSIS OF MICHAEL CORLEONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CHARACTERS

3.1. Michael Corleone's Relationship with His Parents

Since Michael is a Sicilian American, he has strong sense of family identity. Along with his filial piety, even though his values have some differences from his parents', finally he still chooses to follow his parents' wills.

3.1.1. With his father

At the beginning of the story, Michael and his father Vito Corleone indeed has a huge conflict of ideas and beliefs. Michael wants to chase his own American dream while Vito wants Michael to inherit their family business. Their gap is demonstrated at the wedding of Vito's daughter, where "the movie describes the leisure conversation between Michael and his girlfriend Kay, while at the same time traces that Vito uses his power to help Johnny embark on a brilliant acting career. It portrays the rights of Vito from the side and implies that the business Vito is engaged in is actually a gangster business" [2]. This contrast between Michael and Vito is first shown to the audience. Although Michael and Vito have different opinions about their gangster business, they still have close communication and interaction. For instance, Vito rejects to take a family picture without Michael at the wedding. At the beginning, none of them can convince each other so that Michael does not return to family affairs until Vito was assassinated, which can also exhibits that Michael is a family conscious person like his father. It is because of Michael's calmness and composed personalities that he can move Vito's position with the nurse to protect Vito and comforts Vito when he goes to visit Vito in the hospital in an anxious and sad mood. When Vito is near his death, Michael still chooses to have a close conversation with his father about their family business. However, "the last shot of this scene is a decisive moment: when the father's figure blurs and obscures the son's space again, that tragic fate is doomed" [5]. "Michael represents the second generation of Italian immigrants: they become American citizens since birth, and indirectly inherit the characters of Italians from their previous generation. Therefore, they have American and Italian dual cultural characteristics. In Italian culture, the absence of a father means the disintegration of the family, which evokes the Italian side of Michael" [4]. In conclusion, Michael's strong family belief promotes him to treat Vito with full of respect and loyalty.

3.1.2. With his mother

Although Michael's mother appears very rarely in the movie, her conversation with Michael is conducive to

portraying Michael's character. "In order to take on the important responsibilities of the entire family, Michael tried to endure his inner loneliness to make himself strong. This feeling was vividly expressed in a conversation between Michael and his mother" [3]. Compared with Michael's father, Michael's mother plays as a warmer and more amiable character to Michael.

3.2. Michael Corleone's Relationship with His Brothers and Sister

Michael is the youngest son in his family, but he endures the most responsibilities because of his talents to be a leader. The director and the screenwriter fabricate many conflicts between the Corleone brothers in order to portray the character of each of them to be more well-rounded.

3.2.1. With his eldest brother

Compared with Michael, Santino Corleone, who is Michael's eldest brother, is more irritable and impulsive with an evident mafia style, which is not a suitable heir of his father yet. When the Corleone family encounters some problems, Michael always choose to have a family meeting with his brothers first instead of dealing with the problems alone, which is related to the Michael's respect to his family especially his brothers. Since Santino often prefers to use extreme and direct ways to solve problems without considering about the consequences like always wondering to kill someone relied on his own power. Michael, who often chooses to analyze the situation first and then make a rational and logical decision, experiences lots of fight with Santino. However, Michael maintains consistent calmness and tolerance in front of his brothers, so he does not choose to enforce Santino to follow his instructions but comforts Santino's feelings and then patiently explains the situation to Santino.

3.2.2. With his second eldest brother

Different from his two brothers, Fredo Corleone is timid by nature and often cannot intervene in the quarrel between Michael and Santino, so he is always the overlooked one in his family, which paves the way for his subsequent rebellion. In *The Godfather I*, Fredo, as a subordinate of Moe Greene, helps Moe to persuade Michael to follow Moe's ideas which directly embarrasses Michael. However due to the fact that Fredo is his brother and his strong sense of his family identity, Michael chooses to tolerate his brother's behaviors. Nevertheless, in *The Godfather II*, after giving many admonitions and suggestions to Fredo, Michael finds Fredo as a man who reaches a point where he cannot change his mind, so Michael finally kills Fredo on his own since Fredo seriously harms the business of Corleone family. Although this murder becomes the dark shadow of Michael's whole

life, Michael's firm beliefs of safeguarding his family's interests and dignity enforce him to directly kill his own brother, which reflects from the side that in Michael's mind, family business is much more important than everything including his strong brotherhood. This consistent belief always exists in Michael's mind, but Michael still thinks about what his sinful acts means after he watches the deaths of his family members one by one. However, this character of Michael is seemingly difficult to be shaken by the external world, which alludes to his sad and lonely ending.

3.2.3. *With his sister*

Connie Corleone, Michael's only sister, rarely participates in family business in the movie, but her relationship with Michael is important for further describing Michael's character. Michael, without considering about Connie's requests, emotions and feelings, murders Carlo Rizzi, who is Connie's husband, after absorbing the secret information from Carlo since Carlo not only betrays Corleone family, but also utilizes violence against Connie, which is the cause of Santino's death. From this behavior of Michael, the audience can see that Michael can even become a cold-blooded and merciless killer on family affairs.

3.3. *Michael Corleone's Relationship with His Wives*

Michael's handling with his relationship with his wives is different from how he deals with his family members in some degrees, and he even shows different self in front of his different wives.

3.3.1. *With Apollonia*

Michael meets and marries with Apollonia in Sicily when he hides in Corleone village. Although at the end, Apollonia is killed by accident, Michael's pastoral life in Sicily with Apollonia is what he expects for his whole life.

3.3.2. *With Kay*

Michael's relationship with Kay is more complicated than that with Apollonia. In *The Godfather I*, after Michael goes back to New York for one year, he chooses to find Kay for their marriage. Subsequently, after Michael carries out the slaughter at the end of movie, Kay asks Michael whether he kills Connie's husband Carlo, but Michael confirmedly denies his guilty to Kay, and then the door between them gradually closes. It seems that Michael is a crafty liar, but simultaneously, it also demonstrates that Michael is the husband who takes cares of his wife and does not allow his wife to bear the extra psychological burden from him. Admittedly, one of the reason which forces Michael to do

so is that although nominally Kay is the person with closest relationship to Michael, she has the blood flowing in her vein which is not similar to Michael's. According to the Sicilian tradition and based on Michael firm belief, Michael has no reason to share the truth with Kay.

Otherwise, Kay is the exact representation of Michael's pursuit of his own American dream. In *The Godfather II*, Mike's cultural marriage begins to collapse. "His wife Kay is a typical American woman, lacking the tradition of Italian women's loyalty to the family, demonstrating that American society emphasizes the importance of self-worth, and to a certain extent coincides with the radical feminism of the time" [4]. Due to Michael's pious religious belief, he resolutely separates from Kay because Kay has an abortion, which cannot be tolerated by Michael. This sudden divorce reflects that Mike is a person who can abandon his favorite wife for his faith and family dignity, and his decision and goals cannot be changed by anyone, or even anything. Michael originally believes that he can let his wife and his children to enjoy a decent and comfortable life, but the abrupt end of his happy marriage with Kay symbolizes the complete shattering of his American dream.

3.4. *Michael Corleone's Relationship with His Offsprings*

Michael has a daughter and a son, which originally corresponds to the Michael's wish, but as his two children grow up, their views and thoughts do not meet Michael's expectations on them. Through describing the entanglement between Michael and his children, the director demonstrates the unique personalities of Michael.

3.4.1. *With his son*

Anthony Corleone is the only son of Michael so Michael put a great expectation on him. Since Michael considers that his is too old to handle the family business, he is eager to find a heir for the family business, and apparently Anthony is the most suitable person to be Michael's heir. However, Anthony, like his father at the young age, has his own dream: becoming a famous musician. At first, Michael strongly repudiates Anthony's thoughts, but Michael gradually sees his shadow on Anthony, so he finally acquiesces Michael's requests. Michael's compromise towards his son exhibits his strong sense of love and pardon for his children.

3.4.2. *With his daughter*

Michael always spoils his daughter Mary Corleone, but one thing of Mary that he cannot tolerate is her love to his cousin Vincent Corleone. Michael finds many opportunities to destroy the love between Mary and Vincent so as to protect the dignity of Corleone's family. On the other side, when Michael lost Mary at the end of

the movie, Mike bursts into tears in the Roman church, which can also reveal his deep love to his daughter.

3.5. Michael Corleone's Relationship with His Followers and Opponents

In Michael's whole life, he has lots of followers and cooperation partners, but based on his strong acknowledgment to the family identity, his relationship with his followers is different from his relationships with his family members which are discussed above to a great extent. Tom Hagen is the adviser of Vito Corleone, and he provides tactics and methods to Corleone family for many years so it can be reasonably inferred that Tom is the most suitable person for Corleone family to trust. Although Tom contributes his power and wit to Corleone family even more than the family members of Corleone themselves, Michael still chooses to disbelieve Tom sometimes. Due to Michael's disapprobation to the identity of his followers, Michael only orders his followers to take action instead of exchanging his authentic ideas and feelings with them which only appears in the his inter-family meeting. This way Michael uses to deal with his followers represents that Michael is always cautiously skeptical about the true purpose of people outside the family, which fully expresses Michael's strong desire and belief in protecting the safety of his family. Nevertheless, Michael does not do this for no reason. Tassio's sudden betrayal to Corleone family at the end of *The Godfather I* is an excellent example for explaining the motivation of Michael.

Standing out from the three brothers, Michael has unique and cruel approach to deal with his opponents. At the end of *The Godfather I*, when Michael's nephew was baptized in church and Mike promised not to do anything evil, Michael's followers are clearing out all the gang leaders that Mike has vengeance with in New York. "Cruel killing scenes and sacred religious rituals alternate. The family survive from the crisis, and Michael reaffirms his quality of an Italian and assumes his new father image" [4]. In *The Godfather II*, Michael, through lying to both Hyman Roth and Frankie Pentangeli, finds out the person who tries to assassinate him is his close business partner Hyman, not his follower Frankie. Also, Michael deliberately makes and utilizes Senator Pat Geary's dirty behavior with the prostitute. It is Michael who uses a more vicious way to suppress Pat's evils. For protecting the safety of his family members, the dignity of the family name - Corleone - and the interests or business of the whole family, Michael is unrelenting to the opponents who harm his family. "Violence is not a means of plundering wealth, but a weapon to protect the family from abuse" [4]. "Like the United States, Michael naively wants to correct the mistakes and injustices left by his predecessors. However, his hands are stained with blood. He finds excuses for his actions and purposes, deceiving himself and others. In the end, he not only commits the crime like his predecessors, but his crime is even more vicious" [1].

4. CONCLUSION

"The movie vividly portrays that Michael, with the courage and wisdom shown in his calmness, who is a typical underworld leader who is wit, cold and bold and always protects his personal and family dignity" [3]. From this analysis, it appears that Michael's characteristics cause him to conduct different behaviors and has different attitudes towards different characters, and those characters can be divided to two types: the family members and the outsiders. Michael chooses to be patient and obeyed to his relatives, but being extremely suspicious and cautious to the outsider of his family. Although this mentality cannot be counted as a character that a distinguished family leader should have, but it indeed assists Michael to avoid many troubles to both himself and his family. Overall, the methods about analyzing characters' personalities and relationship can be also utilized on comprehending other gangster movies and teleplays, since the plot trend and character images of most gangster movies are similar to each other. Admittedly, there may be other factors (although it has little effect on this research) that will also affect Michael's relationship with the characters in the movie. If there are more in-depth researches on Michael's image in the future (not only limited to his character and relationship), these studies combined with this research will more effectively to help the audiences appreciate the essence of *The Godfather*.

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