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A Study on the Conflicts Between Industrial Culture and Individual Value and Spiritual Freedom in The Legend of 1900

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the analysis of film not only as appreciative art creation, but also stresses its deep social context relating to that significant era based on work The Legend of 1900. Through the comparison and contrast of three progressive dimensions about cinematic language, humanism paradox and philosophical connotations, the paper demonstrates the importance of a specific era background it has on individual freedom and values. The greedy, cruel nature of industrial culture becomes a dominant factor leading to the annihilation of individual values and spiritual freedom in the process of objectification of people's natural rights and desires.

***Keywords:** industrial culture, spiritual freedom, humanism, cinematic aesthetics, tragic philosophy*

1. INTRODUCTION

As a masterpiece produced in the 20th century, The Legend of 1900 tells a fable story of a pianist's short and marvellous life on Virginia Ship, so far, many scholars have studied it from various aspects whereas lack of strong association with the era context concerning the film's profound value of social realism.

The paper focuses on analyzing the conflicts between industrial culture and individual value as well as spiritual freedom through cinematic language, humanism development and Nietzsche's tragic philosophy. With the accomplishment of solution that why 1900 could not find his belongings in the industrial cities regardless of his talent, yearnings and a pure soul, the study proves the dilemmas mainstream culture could create for individual spiritual existence, and advocates its significant value on human identity and dignity. Based on the fact, it also calls for an inclusive society with more solicitude for an individual destiny beyond his material recognitions, and a valuable idea of the balanced development within modern civilization.

2. CINEMATIC LANGUAGE ANALYSIS ON CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

2.1 Cinematography

Cinematography grants meaning to various cultural spaces and their relationships. Bindong Wu argues that, cities on the land as "subjective space" are disciplined by modern civilization and mainstream ideology, while Virginia Ship represents the natural and free "heterogene space" on the sea. [1] The citation raises a valuable approach to the story context in comparison to subcultural spaces. In the first year of the twentieth century, with spectacular sea sequences, immigrant's screamings at New York harbour, Ship Virginia embodies a space of dream and hope towards the new continent. Nevertheless, at the bottom deck, the mixture of blood and heavy coal is a tribute to miner worker Danny's short life featured with cruel poverty. As 1900 grows up, when surging waves of immigrants set their foot in the industrial cities, he stops in front of the huge gangway and turns back, stepping into another space where he finds the belonging for his life by playing dreams on limited keyboards until the exploding ship ends its voyage on the sea.

Through the contrast between different cultural spaces revealed by cinematography, it can be observed

that poverty, selfishness and inequality also create the nature of industrial culture in that era despite its flourishing phenomenon, the mainstream values have shaped people's unrelenting aspirations for material wants which inevitably lead to a shrinkage in their spiritual life. The characterization of 1900 forms a microcosm of human-being's pursuit of individual freedom out of ingrained social ideology and a brave spirit people living in that era lack.

2.2 Music

As an important aesthetic language, the contrast of musical theme between 1900 and Max's life represents the submerged dream in the irrestible trend of history. "Different from the piano in 1900's heart, trumpet was just a tool to make a living for Max." [2] The argument indicates that music has tranformed from an ideal dream to something people need to live from. Unlike 1900 who plays his piano freely against the heavy storm, Max is facing the destiny to sell his trumpet and ruin his talents in the endless streets, while still feeling the disparity between his yearning for music of god in that floating city and a secure sense on the land. To some extent, the inner struggles of Max are true descriptions of ordinary people at that time who flounder in the aftermath of industrialization and war, where survival instinct outweighs the value of free spirits as individual expression.

The broken vinyl and girl's innocent face by the porthole are pieces of evidence of 1900's transient but valuable love struggle, which peaks at his true emotional flows at the touching farewell upon the girl's leave. Contrasted with immigrant parents who abandon their children on the cold deck, people with abundant wealth are also losing ability to love with an indifferent heart. The music of 1900 is eternal as it expresses human-being's yearning for precious emotions against its vacancy in the utilitarian material world. Similar comparison finds its expression in another important sequence of piano competition where Jelly's flattering technique developed from carnel places overshadows under 1900's music which does not exist for anyone while its purity brings comfort to both rich and poor people's souls in a cruel life.

Based on the analysis, it can be indicated that rapid development of industrial culture to a large degree deprives people's ability to perceive dreams, true

emotions and freedom as a complete human-being. 1900 as an idealized character his choice to coexist with the ship represents an individual's spiritual freedom triumphing over real world restrictions under an independent, pure heart. Based on the fact, the film keeps a suspicious attitude that whether endless material aspirations could really bring well-beings to individual life and expresses concerns for the lurking spiritual crisis in modern civilization.

3. HUMANISM PARADOX AND EXISTING DILEMMAS

3.1 Humanism essence and its social dependency

Originated from Greek Times, humanism theory is an embodiment of the endeavor to protect and respect human values and freedom as an independent existence with realization of his inherent rights and dignity beyond social-imposed frameworks.

Hans d'Orville used to write, the realization of a humane world means positive actions to establish a society based on peace, justice, democracy and human rights, which are still challenged by growing social inequalities, lack of inclusion, increasing conflict of war as a continuous task. [3] Hans' viewpoint effectively demonstrates that a stable society with balanced development in both material and spiritual dimensions is more likely to propel individualism. On the contrary, a civilization undergoing great changes or upheavals may face trade-offs between each individual's well-being and the vertigo of a whole society.

3.2 Industrial society crisis - comparative study of culture

The film context lies at the start of twentieth century when human history proceeds at its unprecedented rate while bears greater pressure in perceiving a sustainable development. Over a century, fierce debates carried out continuously between pessimists and optimists that whether industrial revolution has improved the livelihood of all its citizens in the western world, its research reveals the lurking crisis under industrial prosperity and how it influences each individual's values and living states under mainstream society.

Table 1. Average real annual income per person, England and Wales(multiples of subsistence income)

	1688	1759	1798	1846	1867
Landed	30.92	45.42	53.57	49.97	50.98
Bourgeoisie	20.58	14.74	37.16	32.43	51.39
Lower middle class	5.26	5.19	8.40	12.74	7.25
Farmers	3.80	4.50	6.89	10.91	11.96
Workers	3.27	3.27	4.39	4.37	6.21
Cottagers and paupers	1.02	1.02	1.17	1.98	2.43
Average	4.90	5.16	7.77	9.43	11.07

Robert Allen has conducted the method of social tables validated by historians to study income changes in England across the industrial years, by dividing people into six social classes, the table contrasts dynamic changes of average subsistence annual income of each group. " The landed class were always well off, bourgeoisie was the second richest while the poor were always at the bottom of income distribution. " [4] Robert's observation of enormous income gap is well illustrated from the above table. First of all, a general growth of income can be captured during each period to conclude a promoted living standard under rising productivity. Nevertheless, in each time period, it is noteworthy that upper classes' incomes were almost 5 times more than workers and cottagers whose gain was sharply below the average income level. Moreover, the gap between maximum and minimal incomes showed an ascending trend growing from 26.02 in 1688, peaked at 40.54 in 1846 and remained a high of 39.91 in 1867. From the table analysis, it can be proved that only landed class and bourgeoisie were dominant sources of wealth distribution whereas the most contributing working-classes ended up with meager wages in the social schemes. The industrialization has unfortunately widened the disparity between the rich and poor, the strengthened social inequality further propels people's aspiration towards wealth either for survival or better material life.

Poverty is another social problem within the industrial culture. Workers in that era faced the cruel reality that their limited wages still could not maintain the basic needs of the family under the working time of 16 hours per day and 6 days per week. While the aftermath has penetrated to their lives far beyond the realm, cholera disease outbroke several times in the over-crowded housing with poor sanitation and ventilations, heavy smog from city's industry caused irreversible harm to people's health. Compared with The Legend of 1900, miner Danny's death could be a group image of the working-class people in a wider society where harsh working environment and high mortality rate meant their short and miserable life. Pradon Fanette states, "To support the mass production, working-class children endured overburdened works, bad sanitary conditions, violence and abuse with high child mortality." [5] The citation gives a true reflection of child labors situation right before 20th century England, entering large factories as a cheap workforce was the only road for poor, uneducated children at that time, both bodily and mental sufferings to the young life made them unable to pursue their rights. Under mass machine production, the inter-generational tribulations of ordinary people revealed that society put fewer concerns for individual well-being than social efficiency.

Depicting the great Statue of Liberty and excited passengers in Virginia, the film also explores a fascinating immigration culture during American Gilded Age. Still, the story keeps an artistic ambiguity and does insufficient portrayal that whether people's destiny was changed after their arrival on the new continent. " Immigrants still had to take the most difficult jobs with super low wages in a dangerous working condition but were treated disrespectfully as uneducated, didn't really have a word in what they wanted."[6] The statement clearly explains the real life of European immigrants in American cities that most poor arrivals could not change their destiny from unbearable works, people did not find the streets paved with golds, instead, they became the generations who contributed their youth and built America. Meanwhile, the cultural segregations made life even harder for immigrants away from home countries with low social status. In comparison with the story sequences, the explosion of Virginia Ship after the war in fact metaphorizes the broken of a delicate, unreal European dream, it also questions the rationality of mainstream cultural values that lead to people's loss of self in front of large cities.

3.3 The unprocurable humanism aspiration during industrial age

By comparison of humanism essence and industrial culture context, it can be demonstrated that there were various obstacles between humanity pursuit and twentieth century social realism. First of all, from the individual aspect, poverty, high working pressure, health-threatening environments as aftermaths of industrial revolution still create the existing predicaments of most people. Individual values are objectified to a large degree to benefit the mass production for rapid social transformation, whereas people's freedom and dignity as spiritual aspirations are ignored by the mainstream society seeking materialistic supremacy.

On the other hand, strengthened social inequality has widened the disparity between different classes, not only for the incomes, but also countless successes, fame and respect for the rich and social deprivations, mistreatment and sufferings for the poor. Society shows less solicitude for individual destinies other than his only material recognitions and thereby lacks social justice to achieve humanity goals. In the film 1900, people devote their whole life to expanding cities, wish to find back their freedom, dreams and dignity in the hallucination of material world, but are bound to fail in the transient era of ecstasy. 1900 is an idealized character who always defends his spiritual home and the meaning of his life, his farewell with the world deeply incarnates a secret anguish of the industrial culture, its vertigo to plunge off the torrent of history but without insightful observation of the rhythm, inclusion, and balance of civilization itself.

4. UNIVERSAL CONFLICTS AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

As a tragic story bringing emotional shocks to its modern spectatorship, The Legend of 1900 creates timeless inspiration for individual life in any region and era. Yuye Gao raises his opinion, "The purity of 1900 made the audiences sympathize the misfortune he has suffered, but at the same time, they also had a fear that they lived in the land world themselves. " [7] The argument indicates a fact that the conflicts between mainstream culture and individualism are universal as a shared human experience, the land represents a person's social identity, while the sea is a metaphor of idealistic self could not reach in the reality. Nietzsche's tragic philosophy opens up a new angle to appreciate the inherent conflicts in human society and inspires strong courage for an individual to confront his life with the release of his true spirit.

Apollonian and Dionysian art are two core components of Nietzsche's interpretation of the world, Peiyu Yang explains, "Apollonian spirit as a dream state of life symbolizes the brightness, moderation, rationality side of the world; While Dionysian spirit incarnates human-beings' realization of his true emotions and self beyond social regulations as a state of intoxication." [8] The statement stresses philosophical ruminations on two different existing states of human life and how they contribute to the universality of dramatic conflicts in the film. Apollonian art focuses on stability as life expression, it protects a phenomenological, unreal world free from destructive powers and makes it possible that an individual could survive from his misfortune and disasters, society could progress in the vertigo of historical upheavals in its order and harmony. Nevertheless, apollonian spirit could not reveal the essence of individual existence and the meaning of his life on the planet. In Dionysian art, people are able to escape from social-imposed limitations and back to a natural state of human life, through the battling with his sufferings, people find, express and realize the meaning of his existence with freedom and great courage, in this way, human-beings acquire dignity and well-beings for his eternal spiritual aspirations against the transient material world.

In The Legend of 1900, Danny, Max, and Jelly are characters who represent a majority of people in mainstream society, they spend their whole lives fighting against poverty, struggling between dreams and reality, or losing himself in the material desires, they are land people of different classes, status, values in that culture but all live in the phenomenological industrial world suggested by Apollonian spirit, the generation becomes a trajectory of the flourishing and decay of a civilization but never reach their own well-beings beyond social frameworks. By contrast, 1900's special experience enables him to observe the world with great sobriety, he denies, unveils the illusionary industrial culture as a ship too big without an end, with the unrelenting battles with loneliness and misery in life, he expresses his true self in the music and brings joy to people with a pure heart. The moment when Virginia Ship disappears into fires on the sea, 1900 truly realizes his spiritual freedom and the value of his life as he merges his existence with the original natural world. The sacrifice of 1900's life is an incarnation of Dionysian spirit as behind the annihilation of individual life, audiences receive strong emotional impact to witness the great courage rise from an ordinary person who transcend himself and cultural limitations of that era. Nietzsche's tragic philosophy provides a new angle for people to understand the complexity of a culture, it is the struggle and endeavors of wider group of people in the mainstream society that makes today's civilization. Meanwhile, it also foresees a possibility that through non-stopping fighting with his existing predicaments, mankind could acquire dignity not only for his material success, but also his spiritual aspirations towards a meaningful life, which is an eternal strength

individual life could bring for future generations. That creates a universal value of the conflicts between industrial culture and individual life revealed by the film.

Nietzsche does not deny the inherent tragedy of human life, while his Apollonian and Dionysian art recontextualizes world as an aesthetic phenomenon where he encourages the appreciation of multiple dimensions of human existence and inspires modern citizens to perceive his relationships with mainstream culture for a rational survival; On the other hand, human-beings should also confront his miseries as an independent existence, only when he discovers the indestructibility, dignity and strength of life, could individually find the spiritual belonging and well-beings in the complexity of modern civilization.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper studies the conflicts between industrial culture and individual values as well as spiritual freedom based on the film The Legend of 1900. Firstly, through the analysis of cinematic language, different cultural spaces and character choices are compared to reveal a fact that rising industrialization has led to a shrinkage in people's spiritual life in the assimilated material desires. Secondly, social tables of income between different classes and historical evidences of working-class life are further analyzed in the comparative study of the film and real culture, consequently demonstrates humanism goals are difficult to realize in the society which lacks inclusion and justice with most people's struggle for survivals. Finally, Nietzsche's tragic philosophy reveals the inherent disparity between stable social progress and people's spiritual aspirations therefore provides a universal value of the dramatic conflicts revealed by the film.

Focusing on three progressive dimensions of analysis, the paper demonstrates the significance of cultural background on individual destinies, it is hard for people to realize the distinctive values of their life and spiritual freedoms in a society battling with social deprivations, inequality and poverty to maintain developments in the changing historical torrent, which also creates 1900's tragedy in the story. With director's implicit critism for the impetuous industrial culture, there are more empathy sentiments for a wider group of people living in the mainstream society, the passage also calls for a more balanced development within modern civilizations, a society gradually develops from phenomenological supremacy and provides multiple dimensions to appreciate human-beings, that is, showing more solicitude for individual destiny beyond his material recognitions, therefore, an inclusive environment becomes possible for more individual's realization of his value and well-being under freedom,

dignity as an identity of human existence. However, this research shows its limitation on detailed methods to solve the conflicts and might indicate a direction for future studies which aim to promote both social progress and human identities in either cinematic representation, cultural phenomenon or aesthetic language.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently accomplished by the author.

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