The Original Soundtrack as Supplementary Narrative: *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* as Case Study

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Abstract. The original soundtrack (OST) is more than just accessory in a film, but a carrier for the emotional resonance between the audience and the story. Within the historical context of the OST in Chinese film, this article takes the song *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* from the OST of a contemporary Chinese movie *The Last Dance* as case study. By analyzing the main musical elements including the lyrics, the melody and the musical structure in the song, this article investigates how a song, composed in popular music style, can effectively convey the theme of the movie. Moreover, the article evaluates the expressive power and impact of the song in enhancing the overall effect of the film. Music serves as an auditory bridge between the film and its audience, deepening immersion in the narrative and fostering greater emotional resonance. It elevates the audience's audiovisual experience and overall perception of quality.

Keywords: Film score, Pop song, Pu Du Zhong Sheng, Chinese film, OST.

1 Introduction

The original soundtrack refers to film score and songs in films, TV-series, games and other audiovisual works. The development of Chinese original soundtrack is closely linked to the rise and fall of the film and television industry, and has profoundly influenced the direction of Chinese popular music. Original soundtrack is not an accessory to the movie, but a carrier for the emotional resonance between the audience and the movie. It is an important driving force for the music industry, promoting in-depth communications in different cultural fields. The history of Chinese film and music has gone through multiple stages of development since the 1970s and present, and has presented a contemporary look of being based on the excellent traditional Chinese culture, integrating different elements from multiple fields, keeping pace with the times, and keeping up with the truth and innovation [1]. The article focuses on the deep integration of the pop song *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* and the movie *The Last Dance*, and analyzes how the song is used as the original soundtrack of the movie and plays an improtant role in narrative assistance, scene atmosphere rendering, and space-time positioning [2, 3].

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This paper analyzes the lyric narrative and melody design of the pop music *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* and combines the audio-visual context of the movie *The Last Dance*, reveals the mechanism of strengthening the film theme by music elements. Research has confirmed that high-quality film music can not only enhance the audience's audio-visual experience, but also become the core carrier of cross-media narrative, and promote the development of film music toward industrialization, technological and diversified directions.

2 The Movie of *The Last Dance*

The Last Dance is set in Hong Kong's funeral industry. Through delicate emotional descriptions and profound social insights, it explores the conflicts and integration of people and the dead, family parent-child relationships, personal growth, and tradition and modern culture. Through the traditional Taoist funeral ceremony of *The Last Dance*, the film helps the dead people break the things that are obsessed with, free the deceased from pain and start a new life. Not only that, this movie is also guiding the people to break its obsession and focus on the present, which is also a profound reflection of Taoist thought - Let go and start a new life.

There are many kinds of "hell" of the characters in the film, such as: religion, belief, gender and other levels. The process of story advancement is the process of "breaking" [4]. The film breaks the tradition of breaking hell only for the dead people. As one of the protagonists in the movie, Daosheng said: It is not only the dead people who want to break hell, but the living people also face many hells. This triggers the audience to think about the problems facing life, and to a certain extent, it also gives the audience spiritual comfort, and encourages people to face life with a positive attitude, enjoy the current life, and cherish relatives and friends.

3 The Connection between Music and Cinematic Expression

When pop songs express themes in movies, they concretely visualize the abstract emotions, culture or philosophical core through the deep integration of musical language and narrative. And becomes the "auditory bridge" for audiences to understand the theme of the film. OST generally has the following functions in movies: narrative assistance, scene atmosphere rendering, and space-time positioning [2, 3].

In terms of narrative in movies, OST can not only assist or even replace movie plot clips to independently narrate and promote the plot, but also use the organic combination of melody, lyrics and movie pictures to awaken people's emotional resonance for the movie plot through the diversity of audience's auditory, thereby effectively enhancing the expression tension of the movie plot. OST usually sets the emotional tone in advance to lay the groundwork for the next plot [2]. Different music styles represent different movie plots. For example, in the movie *Jaws* (1975) - a piece of film music by John Williams, a simple melody played alternately by two double basses, with the

melody repeated and the speed getting faster and faster, creates a tense auditory feeling for the audience and paves the way for the shark to approach. Whenever the melody sounds, even if the picture is calm, the audience can sense that danger is about to come, forming an invisible psychological oppression and auditory impact. For another example, The *Imperial March* in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) is one of the most famous background music in the history of film scores, adapted by John Williams. The *Imperial March* ,the brass instruments played variations of the theme with dissonant chords, giving the audience a weird and humorous auditory experience, suggesting the intervention of dark forces, and making the audience mentally prepared for the following movie plot while hearing the song. Some film scores come first with sound and then with pictures, so that when the subsequent movie plot arrives, the audience will feel a narrative tension that is "reasonable but unexpected".

In terms of scene atmosphere rendering: Film music is one of the indispensable elements in creating a film scene. It can adjust the timbre, melody, rhythm, and volume of the music as the plot changes, creating an auditory effect that is in sync with the film image, making the audience feel as if they are actually there [2]. For example, the dancing scene in the observatory in *La La Land* (2016). The jazz waltz (3/4 time) dance music, combined with the illusion of an observatory in the picture, creates a weightless romance. The long synthesizer notes spread like a nebula, allowing the dance to escape from gravity and concretize the idea that "beautiful love is a dream beyond reality". The audience will feel as if they are in the scene as they dance, falling into the honeypot of sweet love atmosphere and feeling happy.

In terms of space-time positioning, as a comprehensive art of time and space, film score often appears as a finishing touch. Zong Baihua once attributed the deepest realm of art to "using illusion to express the deepest truth, and from illusion to truth" [3]. The time and space positioning in film score can not only allow the audience to travel through time and space through the music unique to the era, such as *The Legend of 1900* uses jazz to restore the cruise culture of the early 20th century. Listening to the film score with a strong sense of the times, the audience feels as if they are on a time machine, traveling back to the 20th century, and meeting the characters in the movie across time and space. At the same time, film score can also be positioned through regional cultural symbols, such as local folk songs, so that the audience can feel the cultural charm of different countries and regions. For example, the Mexican folk song *Remember Me* in *Coco* is full of regional cultural characteristics. Through music, the audience seems to have come to the warm and enthusiastic Mexico and experience the local folk culture.

4 *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* as the Theme Song of *The Last Dance*

4.1 *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* as Supplementary Narrative

The song was composed and sung by Lin Jiaqian. His original nickname "Nanwu Lao" echoes the character in the movie. The singer sings more like a Nanwu master in the

song, experiencing life and death, love and hate, and finally points out that life is like a one-way journey, and you have to get off when you reach your destination, so don't worry too much. In today's society, people are in a rapidly developing era, facing various pressures and difficulties, and are eager to be liberated and redeemed. The song *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* not only expresses the audience's infinite hope for the future, but also conveys a positive attitude towards life.

When we see a great film, we oftentimes find ourselves immersed in the narrative. There can be many reasons for this including an interesting plot, captivating cinematography, and thought-provoking dialogue. The visuals may draw us in, but it is the music that keeps us there. Film score can strengthen the narrative of the film plot through some kind of clues, and the audience can rely on the clues in these music, such as lyrics, to enhance our emotional response to the plot of the film, thereby increasing our empathy for the plot of the film [5]. And a deep understanding of the meaning behind the film. Different types of movies are inseparable from different styles of film score. Film score is not only an accessory to film and television, but also the emotional sustenance of the audience and the driving force of the music industry. Music combined with visual elements can convey deeper meaning [6]. In *The Last Dance*, the lyrics of the ending song *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* serve as a supplement to the film's narrative, strengthening the film's narrative effect and atmosphere.（See Table 1）

Table 1. The implicit meaning in lyrics.

Lyrics meaning	Lyrics
The lyrics describe how Master Nanwu performs a ritual to help the dead souls escape from hell and start a new life.	The five street lights at the station where heaven sighs lead the pain to transcend the next life. A weathered voice hummed southern music and performed a dance that would last until tomorrow.
The lyrics express the deceased's reluctance to leave the world and recall the regrets of their life.	How many past events are drowned in regrets, imprisoning freedom in the heart Looking back at life from the forked road, it may be beyond fate
The lyrics are intended to encourage people to face life with a positive and carefree attitude, enjoy the present moment, and be content with what they have.	Let the fallen leaves take root, don't be sad or angry Looking back at the sentient beings I have saved amidst so many regrets, I feel that I have received blessings.

The content of the lyrics is organically combined with the film images to construct a complete and impressive world. While listening to the lyrics, the audience can have a deeper understanding of the characters, plot development and theme of the film. First of all, the song title *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* is a concrete embodiment of religion and salvation, which means saving all sentient beings from suffering. In the film, this concept is extended to the double redemption of the living and the dead. The male protagonist

Daosheng in the movie is not only responsible for saving the dead, but also trying to change the traditional funeral ritual to save the living people's hearts. Just as Daosheng said in the movie: Not only do the dead need to break hell, but living people also need it. The five street lamps in the lyrics "The five street lights at the station where heaven sighs lead the pain to transcend the next life", "A weathered voice hummed southern music and performed a dance that would last until tomorrow". embodies the elements of Taoist rituals, which symbolize lighting up the road ahead for the deceased, taking them to let go of their obsessions and escape from the sea of suffering echoes the *The Last Dance* rituals in the movie. The lyrics of "People in the reincarnation world are unwilling to leave, wandering between death and rebirth". Like the lyrics of "How many past events are drowned in regrets, imprisoning freedom in the heart" it expresses the reluctance of the deceased to leave their relatives and friends in the world, and the regret for some things in this life. explores the inevitable nature of life's reincarnation and death. This is in line with the profound discussion of life and death in the movie, allowing the audience to have a deeper understanding of death while thinking about the meaning of life. These lyrics are a reflection and understanding of the theme of the film. They summarize the theme of the film in the form of lyrics, and to a certain extent, give the audience a kind of spiritual comfort. The lyrics tell the audience that when we look back on our lives, we will find that we have gone through many ups and downs and overcome many difficulties, and then we will realize how happy we are to be alive.

4.2 Music Analysis of *Pu Du Zhong Sheng*

Music is an important element in eliciting emotions in the audience [7]. Elements of a song, such as melody, rhythm, and harmony, can directly affect the listener's senses and trigger specific emotional responses.

Table 2. The structure of Pu Du Zhong Sheng.

0: 00-0: 14	Introduction	A
0: 14-0: 24	Interlude	B
0: 24-0: 56	Main song	C
0: 56-1:18	Chorus	D
1: 18-1:30	Second interlude	E
1: 30-1: 47	Main song	C'
1: 47-2: 40	Chorus	D'

According to the Table 2, paragraph A serves as an introduction, and a short line of lyrics sets the emotional tone for the entire song. The lyrics are: "People who reincarnate into this world, cannot let go, and linger on in the afterlife". It speaks of the joys and sorrows of the world, and the separations and reunions of the deceased, who are separated from their relatives and friends by the Yin and Yang. Because they cannot let go of their longing for their loved ones, their souls are reluctant to leave.

The Section B is the interlude, played by a single instrument - the piano. Although only one instrument plays the melody, it is very consistent with the sad emotion of the song and can also make the listeners immersed in the atmosphere of the song.

The C section enters the main song part. The lyrics of this section have profound meanings and can also resonate with the listeners. For example, the lyrics of this line "Breaking the lantern and looking back at life" reminds me of a traditional Chinese mythology that I read when I was a child. After a person dies, he will recall his life like a lantern, and then drink Mengpo soup, completely forget all the people and things in this life, and then pass the Naihe Bridge, complete reincarnation, and start a new life.

The Section D enters the chorus, which has two phrases. The first phrase is the same as the introduction of section a, and the second phrase expresses a similar meaning to the first phrase, both describing the deceased's memories of the world.

The Section E is the second interlude. Unlike the first interlude, the second interlude incorporates vocal singing and uses the three interjections "Hey, Ah, Ya" to imitate the tone of crying and create a sad atmosphere. Bring the audience into the song and immerse themselves in the sad atmosphere.

The epistemology of habitus is involved in the C' paragraph. Habitus is the concept of habit proposed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu [8]. It contains individual attitudes, habits, aesthetic tastes, lifestyles, etc., reflecting the social class and cultural background of their location. The lyrics "The vicissitudes of life sang Nanyin". Nanyin , also known as Nanguan, string duct, etc., a comprehensive music type that integrates singing and instrumental music, and is known as "the living fossil of ancient Chinese music" [9]. The Nanyin in the lyrics corresponds to the music of the rituals that save the undead in the movie, which is a manifestation of culture.

Three phrases are added to the lyrics of paragraph D, which brings the regret of the deceased for his relatives and friends who have to leave to a climax. In this song, part of the chorus lyrics are repeated over and over again. Repeating the lyrics can improve the fluency of the song and make it more marketable and resonate with the audience [10].

5 Conclusion

Taking the ending song of *The Last Dance*, *Pu Du Zhong Sheng*, as an example, the article analyzes how a pop song can convey movie themes through lyrics, melody and other musical elements, and how the song *Pu Du Zhong Sheng* contributes to the film's effects. It proves that pop songs can often express movie themes through thought-provoking lyrics and touching melodies, thereby enhancing the audience's resonance with the film's plot. Movies provide a narrative context for OST, allowing it to transcend pure auditory art and become a medium for multi-dimensional experience by combining audio and visual. OST is not only an accessory to film and television, but also a carrier of public emotions and a driving force for the music industry.

As globalization becomes the trend of the times, today's film music elements are becoming more and more diverse, and cultural exchanges between different fields are becoming closer. In the future, for creators, the production of film score will keep pace with the times and appropriately integrate AI technology, and try to integrate different elements from more fields, taking the essence and removing the dross, so that the quality of film music will be higher and higher. For the audience, the film music of the

future will make them feel more immersive and resonate with the film story, because the mission of film music is to give each story a frequency that resonates with its soul.

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