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(IJLGC)**www.ijlgc.com**ANALYSIS OF HONG KONG ZOMBIE MOVIES AUDIOVISUAL
LANGUAGE IN THE 1980S**Kai Wang^{1*}, Nan Li²¹ School of Communication, University of Science Malaysia, Malaysia

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DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.729002.This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)**Abstract:**

As a subcultural type of genre film, Hong Kong zombie films play an important role in Hong Kong films. Hong Kong zombie films through visual languages such as color, light, lens, and auditory language such as language, music, and audio create a horror atmosphere and infect the emotions of the audience. The use of audiovisual language also implies the ideological representation of the collision between China and the West in Hong Kong in the 1980s.

Keywords:

Zombie Film, Audiovisual Language, Hong Kong

Introduction

Due to Hong Kong's unique historical period, it has affected Hong Kong people's thinking about whether to stick to traditional culture or to inherit Western culture (Zhao, 2007). Therefore, Hong Kong films have also shown a different look, forming the most local feature film-zombie film. Zombie movies are a subculture type of horror movies, and they play an important role in the development of Hong Kong movies. Especially in the 1980s, it reached its peak and became the leader of Chinese horror movies (Weng, 2002).

Audiovisual language has an indispensable position in zombie movies, it not only participates in the narrative, promotes the development of events or stories, conveys information to portray characters, expresses atmosphere, but also has the function of modeling horror elements in zombie movies (Liang & Li, 2010). This is not prominent in other types of movies such as action movies and comedies.

By discussing the origin and development of Hong Kong zombie movies, this article analyzes the characteristics and application of audiovisual language in Hong Kong zombie movies. Through the literature research method, the content analysis method discusses the role of audiovisual language in zombie movies. Finally, this article summarizes the future development route of Hong Kong zombie films.

Literature Review

Audiovisual Language in Films

Audiovisual language refers to film language that can only be expressed through the organic combination of video and sound after the pure literary nature of the film is stripped (Zhang & Guan, 2014). Audiovisual language is the conversion of language and literature scripts into image elements and sound elements, which are combined to form a new non-text language on the visual and auditory senses, which can better and intuitively express the theme, plot, and content of the script (An & Ye, 2017). Audiovisual language is mainly divided into visual language and auditory language; visual language includes lens, color, light, editing, etc.; auditory language includes music, sound, character language and other elements (Zhang & Guan, 2014).

The movie is an audiovisual language system, which is composed of visual image elements and auditory sound elements, a successful film must achieve the unity of sound and picture, and the unity of audiovisual (Shao, 2015). Audiovisual language has different functions in different types of movies. For example, in horror movies, it mainly creates a horrible and tense atmosphere, but in comedy movies, it is to increase the comic effect (Lv, 2006). Movie audiovisual language can not only express the themes and types of film and television works but also use the lens to show new imagery in addition to the picture and sound, to express narratively and convey emotions (Zhang & Guan, 2014). The director's mastery of audiovisual language determines the quality of a movie to a certain extent. Therefore, the director must attach great importance to the use of audiovisual language during the film production process (Lv, 2006). Only by mentioning the quality of the audiovisual language of film and television works can the visual tension and auditory charm of film and television works be improved, and the audience can be as immersive as they are watching film and television works, and the value of film and television works can be finally realized (Liu, 2012).

Zombie Films in Hong Kong

Each genre of film is a complete symbol system with cultural meaning (Li, 1992). As a genre, a horror movie refers to a movie with a gloomy atmosphere and terrifying themes, usually containing some violent incidents and intended to make the audience's creeps (Britannica, 1957). Horror films specialize in producing sensory stimulation with bizarre plots and eerie and horrible scenes to attract audience curiosity (Xu, Fu & Cui, 2005). The aesthetic category of horror is an emotion mixed with fear and disgust. The standard of fear is harmful, the

standard of disgust is dirty (Carroll, 2001). Hong Kong zombie films refer to film types that are based on traditional Chinese zombie images and incorporate the characteristics of Western vampires, with horror images as the visual center, thrilling fighting scenes, and humorous discourse as the core (Zhuo, 2011). Hong Kong zombie films gradually formed distinct and fixed characteristics and styles during the development process, and as a genre film, it was independent of Hong Kong film history.

Hong Kong zombie films have their special context. The image of zombies is not only based on the Chinese folk custom of driving corpses in Xiangxi but also combines the characteristics of Western vampire zombies. This image of Chinese and Western integration refers to the "dual identity" that Hong Kong has long been in a state of mutual penetration of Chinese and Western cultures (Gao, 2019). Hong Kong is a "colonial society" that has been under the colonial rule of Britain for more than 100 years. And Hong Kong itself is deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture, and has a deep attachment to local customs and traditional culture. Therefore, after being reduced to colonization, although affected by Western culture the roots of Hong Kong people are Chinese, and they have perseverance in traditional Chinese culture (Zhao, 2007). Hong Kong filmmakers have created a series of zombie movies based on Chinese folklore, combined with bizarre records of ghosts and corpses in Ming and Qing novels (Yan, 2009).

In the 1930s, Hong Kong had movies with zombies as the theme. *Midnight Zombie* (1936) produced by Hong Kong Nanyue Film Company in 1936 was the first movie with a zombie theme in Hong Kong film history (Ling & Peng, 2014). During the fall of Hong Kong in the 1940s, from 1941 to 1945, Hong Kong film workers at that time were unwilling to make films for the Japanese army. During this period, Hong Kong did not produce any movies. It was only after the recovery in 1946 that Hong Kong films began to be filmed, but there were no zombie films (Si, 2019).

In the 1960s, under the influence of the Cultural Revolution in Mainland China, the Hong Kong film industry promoted the film eradication movement, the content of which was to educate Cantonese film workers to anti-superstitious and anti-feudal ideas (Ling & Peng, 2014). The Chinese government does not allow filmmakers to make films featuring ghosts and ghosts (Si, 2019). Therefore, the creation of horror films in this period fell into a state of stagnation.

In the 1970s, influenced by popular vampire movies in Europe and the United States, Hong Kong zombie movies originally imitated the West directly (Ling & Peng, 2014). For example, the film *The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires* (1974) took a completely westernized path, but this style was not accepted by Chinese audiences, and the box office was bleak. After a long time, Hong Kong zombie films were rarely seen.

The success of *Mr. Vampire* (1985) in 1985 drove the prosperity of Chinese-language zombie films. Since then, Hong Kong's zombie films have developed rapidly. The narrative background is mainly based on traditional Chinese folk customs, supplemented by the thrilling sections of Western vampire films (Weng, 2002).

After 1990, the trend of Hong Kong zombie films borrowing from the West became more prominent, with several westernized zombie films such as *Doctor Vampire* (1990), *The*

Musical Vampire (1992), and Toothless Vampire (1997). However, due to homogenization and shoddy fabrication, Hong Kong zombie films have gradually moved away from the audience. In the film, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism are mixed in a mess, blindly plagiarized, and grafted indiscriminately, this is also one of the reasons why Hong Kong zombie films are at their end (Jiang & Liu, 2015).

After entering the 21st century, many familiar horror films followed one after another. Such as Bio-Cops (2000), The Vampire Combat (2001), god sleeps (2003), Vampire Super (2012), and so on. Although there are many zombie films, a few classic ones.

Methodology

In the process of writing, this article uses qualitative research methods such as literature and text analysis to analyze the use of audiovisual language in Hong Kong zombie films in the 1980s.

Visual Language

The visual language system mainly refers to the various factors and methods used to form the visual image in the film and television art, and the sum of various means and techniques to reflect the creative concept, it mainly includes the light, color, lens movement and many other expression methods (Zhang & Guan, 2014). Picture is the most important visual expression element of a movie. As a visual language, it has its own words, wording, omissions, rules and grammar (Liang & Li, 2010). As a genre in a movie, zombie movies have their own characteristics compared with other genres. The weird light and shadow in the picture, the cool visual space, and the close-up camera movement create a sense of doubt for the audience to distinguish between true and false. Through the continuous unfolding of the story, more visual fragments are put together in the minds of the audience, which presents a visual feast full of tension and excitement.

1) Color: The emotional effect of color is, in a sense, a concept of psychological category. If a world has no color, it is death for us (Itten, 1970). The color of the movie is not only a simple restoration of the external visual presentation of the scene, but also the presentation of the inner emotional meaning from the inside to the outside (Liang & Li, 2010). Because color can trigger psychological effects through visual stimulation. Film creators' attention to color is not only on the surface, but whether visual stimulation and psychological influence can enhance people's understanding and call for emotions have become the focus of the creator's attention (Zhang & Guan, 2014). In the process of film production, I tried my best to deconstruct each color combination, so as to use color to convey the deeper meaning of film vision.

Regarding the use of color, a relatively closed environment is often created as the main narrative scene in zombie films. The main scene is designed with a unified tone to set the tone of the entire film, rendering an "unknowable" environmental atmosphere, and then affecting the subjective emotions of the audience. Mamoulian (1960) believed that color must be applied as an emotional element, if you use color directly to express the emotions you want AUO in a scene, it will exert its aesthetic function independently, it will increase beauty and express emotions correctly. If you violate the mood and plot requirements of the scene, it will ruin the whole scene. It will ruin the performance of the actors, ruin your entire film (Guo, 2013).

In chromatology, black is a color full of doubts and urges to explore. The use of local lighting in the space to build black is not only natural, but also full of mystery. In order to match the unique ghost elements, the black and gray tone is the overall tone of the Hong Kong zombie movie (Guo, 2013). Yizhuang (modern ancestral hall) is an important scene in Hong Kong zombie films in the 1980s. For example, in the movie *Mr. Vampire (1985)*, the Yizhuang where the Taoist priest lived is gloomy during the day, and turns dark gray close to black at night. Taoist priest often hold ceremonies to destroy zombies in this place. These gloomy colors add a lot of mystery to Yizhuang and Maoshan Taoist magic arts.

Warm colors are also shown in the film, and the local hues are mainly yellow and red. Yellow represents light, hope, and justice, red represents joy. Yellow and red are the two most common colors in traditional Chinese culture. For example, in the zombie movie, the yellow priest frock, yellow sign paper, red chicken blood, red ink fountain, red money sword, each item is an indispensable tool for the Taoist priest to subdue the zombies. These brightly colored objects are not only to emphasize the image of the Taoist priest (to highlight the Taoist priest from the many characters in the film), but also to represent people's yearning for alive. Because wearing a yellow Taoist frock and holding sign paper, a profound Taoist priest is the hope of the people's survival.

2) Light: No matter from a visual level or an aesthetic point of view, the light in the space after subjective awareness and written meaning processing can fully act on the rendering of the atmosphere and the communication of the theme (Zhang & Guan, 2014). In actual life, we have not really realized the meaning of light as a physical phenomenon, but it is an indispensable part of us in the world (Zhang, 2002). Light is an important part of audiovisual language in film and television works. The use of light in film and television works is mainly to express the contrast between light and shadow, and to express the character of the characters through symbolic and suggestive methods (Liu, 2012). The light effects that we see in the movie screens are similar to those in the natural and real environment. In fact, they are all processed by artistic techniques, and finally they are brought closer to reality (Zhang & Guan, 2014).

In zombie movies, light is often active in the picture as a "main role" in a horror atmosphere. The light in zombie movies is often extremely prominent and eye-catching, especially in the dark and dim environment. They symbolize the appearance of ugly faces such as ghosts, evil spirits, zombies, etc., which appear hideous and arrogant, making people daunting. The light in zombie movies often fights against the dark abyss that surrounds them, especially when they are constantly changing and flickering, they will become the dominant force of the picture. In addition, in order to reflect the protagonist's inner tension, cramps and other emotions, photographers often use portable, weak, and movable artificial light sources as the only light source in the scene, such as kerosene lamps, lighters, candlelights, flashlights, and burning wood. For example, in the movie *Vampire Vs Vampire (1989)*, in a small, dark and damp church, terror and suppression are everywhere. The faint kerosene lamp formed a sharp contrast with the darkness that swallowed everything. The weak and windy kerosene lamp surrounded by darkness is as faint as the fate of the character, which makes people nervous.

3) Close-up shot: The so-called close-up shot is a kind of picture scene, which specifically refers to the partial shooting of the avatar or other subjects above the shoulders, such as the

eyes, ears, and nose occupying more than 90% of the picture (Shi, 2006). The close-up shot not only shortens the distance from us in face space, but it can transcend space and enter another realm, spiritual realm, or spiritual realm. It acts on our mind, not our eyes (Balazs, 2010). Close-up shots can convey the subtle expressions of characters and the expressions of specific moments of psychological activities to the audience. It has a strong subjective emotional color. Sometimes it is also used to express the detailed characteristics of an object, which often has a suggestive and emphasizing effect, and it can also be used to create suspense or create visual shock when editing a certain meaning (Liu, 2005). For example, in the movie *Encounter of the Spooky Kind* (1980), the zombie controlled by Taoist priest Qian spellcasting stretched his stiff arms from the coffin and slowly stood up. Here, a close-up shot was used to depict the zombie's terrifying face glowing with blue light. Characteristic, creating an atmosphere of repression and tension, the audience cannot help but worry about the life and death of the protagonist. Close-up shots are a manifestation of the artistic language of film and television, and are an indispensable and important artistic element. The proper use of close-up lens will better reflect its unique characteristics and its own powerful charm.

Sound Language

Elena (2005) believes that sound is very important to him, more important than pictures. What is obtained through photography is at best a flat image, and the sound produces the depth dimension of the picture, which is the third dimension of the picture. Once there is no sound, no matter how well the pictures are taken or edited, they still no longer have a sense of reality, and thus lose their appeal. The speed of the film also seems to slow down, and the result is often a series of photos (Bobker, 1969). As an important part of a zombie movie, sound can participate in narration, advance the development of events or stories, convey information, portray characters, and express atmosphere (Zhou, 1981). In zombie movies, sound, as an important artistic modeling method, prolongs the horror time that images bring to people, and leaves audiences with a stronger psychological effect than images. Therefore, how to maximize the role of sound in zombie movies is extremely important.

(1) Language: The language in movie sound refers to the spoken language of various characters (human or non-human characters) in the movie. Language plays a variety of roles in movies, such as narration, storytelling, and characterization, revealing the inner world of the characters, reasoning and augmenting reality (Jiang, 2008). Montage composed of various forms of language and pictures has become an important means of expression in film art, and an important bridge for the exchange of ideas and emotions between characters and between characters and audiences (Lv, 2006). For example, in *Mr. Vampire* (1985), the Taoist priest drinks foreign tea-coffee, the dialogue details of life language:

Fa Ren: What can you drink?

Tingting Ren: I want COFFEE.

Cai Wen: Master, what would you like to drink?

Jiu Shu: I also want COFFEE.

Cai Wen: Master, I don't want coffee, I want COFFEE, okay?

Jiu Shu: Don't change it.

This dialogue reflects a small conflict between the conservative and traditional master and apprentice and the squire who has accepted the Western lifestyle. This kind of conflict is not

presented in a serious way, on the contrary, it appears as a comedy, and the main purpose is to create a comic effect. It fully reflects the trend of entertainment and popularization of Hong Kong zombie films in the 1980s from traditional to modern. Placing the zombie film in this era, coupled with the zombie's Qing Dynasty costume modeling, makes this type have a strong implication of irony and reality.

(2) Audio: Audio is the name of a sound type unique to audio-visual art, which refers to the general name of other sounds in the film except language and music (Zhang & Guan, 2014). Audio is a decisive component of the picture, because it plays an important role in reproducing the environment of people and things that we feel in real life (Martin, 1985). Audio is not just a repetition of the occurrence of objects that have appeared on the screen, but as an element structure of the play into the sound creation structure of film and television, becoming an important means of sound art creation (Jiang, 2008).

Hong Kong zombie films often use methods to enhance and exaggerate certain types of audio to render the environment. In the movie *Mr. Vampire (1985)*, the characters are locked in jail and cannot escape, they can only avoid the zombies by holding their breath. Face-to-face with the zombie at close range makes the character's heartbeat speed up. This heartbeat sound is amplified as an audio, and the speed of each person's heartbeat sound is different. Taoist priest's heartbeat is more stable, while the team leader's heartbeat is more rapid. From the audio effects, we can clearly feel that the Taoist priest is not afraid of zombies and has the confidence to defeat zombies, while the psychology of the team leader is the fear of life and death. In addition, many scenes in zombies use the method of listening to the zombies' footsteps before seeing them to indicate that danger is coming, creating a tense atmosphere and mobilizing the emotions of the audience.

(3) Music: Music is one of the three major sound elements in movies. In some movies, music can be a compulsory means to strengthen or determine the emotional tone of the movie and even the value judgment system (Ye & Zhang, 2006). Film music is a new genre of music art. On the basis of the film's thought content and artistic structure, it integrates the visual image of the picture, sound and other elements, and plays a role in summarizing the theme of the film, expressing emotions, rendering the atmosphere and depicting the scenery, and strengthening the drama (Jiang, 2008).

Through the use of different ranges of music, you can successfully shape the horror atmosphere. For example, the intermittent entry of music such as percussion or piano is quite different from the main music. Such two out-of-match sounds can render the weird atmosphere in the space, indicating that the audience will be horrified or hidden somewhere. *Ghost Bride (1985)* is the most representative musical work in Hong Kong zombie films. It appeared once in full form in *Mr. Vampire (1985)*. The moonlight filled the woods, and the white mist scattered in the woods formed a sharp contrast with the dark night. Accompanied by traditional musical instruments, pipe and snare drums, the concert of jumping music brings the audience into an illusory world. At this time, the four paper-man imps, carrying the red sedan chair, leaped in rhythm from the depths of the forest. The female ghost Xiaofeng was sitting in the sedan chair, wearing a wedding gown, with a shy face. The music plays (lyrics: the bright moon shines, the dark wind blows the willow alley, and it is the female ghost looking for love. Whoever wants to love, the stern ghost bride. Accompany with the female ghost, worship the

moonlight late at night). The music portrays the image of Xiaofeng's first love story more three-dimensional and vivid.

Conclusion

The birth of Hong Kong zombie movies has a deep historical and social relationship. In genre movies, the audience's needs occupies a very important position. After the proportion of audiovisual language increased in zombie movies in the 1980s, the audience was delighted to discover that the horror characters that audiovisual language can endow have their own personalities and even lives, and can carry the development of horror stories together with the pictures. The emergence of Hong Kong zombie films is not only a new style of film, but also a mirror to look at Hong Kong people in a real crisis. Although the glory of Hong Kong zombie films in the current film market has faded, they still occupy a very important position in history. We should continue to inherit and explore the successful elements of Hong Kong's classic zombie movies, and re-establish the deep-seated recognition of Hong Kong's local experience and national identity after the return. Keep the national culture and Hong Kong-style comedy in the original movie, make good use of audio-visual language, and continue to innovate to maximize the local characteristics.

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