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From Home to Homeland: Re-Imagining Chinese Diaspora in Recent Science Fiction Films

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Abstract: This article investigates the representation of the Chinese diaspora in the films *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and *The Wandering Earth 2*, employing a comparative approach to explore how these narratives engage with and reshape notions of diasporic identity within a transnational context. Through a detailed analysis of both films, it highlights the complex interplay among cultural memory, identity, and migration, using the sf genre as a framework to examine these dynamics. It further argues that the films challenge traditional understandings of Chineseness and homeland, presenting a more fluid and dynamic portrayal of cultural identity that responds to contemporary global movements and cultural intersections. By juxtaposing these films, the article contributes to the discourse on globalization and cultural hybridity, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of ethnic and national identities in a progressively interconnected world.

Keywords: science fiction; Chinese diaspora; Chinese identity; transcultural cinema; globalization

In 2022 and 2023, two films with science fiction (sf) elements and Chinese characteristics caught the attention of critics and scholars. First, Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2022) won a record-setting number of awards while also achieving significant global box office success. The following year, Frant Gwo 郭帆 released *The Wandering Earth 2* (*Liulang Diqiu 2* 流浪地球 2, 2023) – the sequel to its predecessor that, as Chen Qiufan claims, "mark[ed] the inaugural year of Chinese sci-fi films" (Chen 2019) – further cemented the foothold of Chinese cinema in the sf genre and, as Yin Hong observes, reinforced "a Chinese perspective on imagining the future destiny of humanity" (Yin 2023). While disparate in content and style, these two films share many similarities, in that they both attempt to reclaim the genre by introducing Chinese/Chinese American worldviews and

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cultural memories, and they both employ sf settings to imagine alternative futures or worlds that are different from our own.

Most importantly, both films explore the experience and identity of Chinese diaspora within a cross-cultural context, while suggesting different forms of Chinese diaspora. In the domains of social science and cultural studies, the definitions provided by William Safran (1991) and Robin Cohen (1997) have been instrumental in shaping the theoretical understanding of diasporas, and while their typologies differ in some respects, they converge in their framing of communities and individuals displaced from a homeland. This article expands this concept of diaspora through a comparative study of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (*EEAAO*) and *The Wandering Earth 2* (*TWE 2*). Along with exploring how science fiction can be used as a medium for the self-representation of Chinese diasporic identities and a space for reconsidering the meanings of diaspora and homeland, I also unpack the complex cultural politics that appropriate science fiction for their own purpose, as a mode of presentation to negotiate self-other (re)positioning and local-foreign power relations.

Situating these two films within a broader context of border-crossing cinematic practices, I examine how these narratives portray the complex interplay among migration, identity, and cultural continuity within the context of the Chinese diaspora. I argue that both films reflect and reshape the cultural identification of the Chinese diaspora through their narrative structures and thematic concerns. In both films, diaspora can encompass both imaginary and real migrations in temporal and spatial dimensions, including post-migration, when the tensions and challenges of displacement transform diasporic identity, prompting characters in the film to either embrace their cultural in-betweenness or persist in wandering as they long for their homeland – whether this homeland be a deterritorialized Chinese society or the Earth itself.

The cinematic representations of Chinese diaspora in these two films also invite a reconsideration of the concept of Chineseness itself, especially in relation to global movements and cultural intersections. By juxtaposing films that originate from different social, political, and cultural contexts, this article does not intend to conflate the experiences of Chinese and Chinese American individuals, or to endorse a model of pan-Chineseness. Scholars such as Wei-ming Tu, Rey Chow, and Ien Ang have critically reevaluated the notion of Chineseness as a monolithic and immutable ethnic or cultural marker. In a similar vein, this article does not view Chinese diaspora as predicated on a search for some sort of authentic Chineseness (Chow 1993), and instead it views Chineseness as fluid and diverse. In this way, the article examines the complexities and contradictions surrounding the shifting conceptions of Chineseness, along with associated questions of ethnic, national, and cultural identities.

The first section of the article analyzes how *EEAAO* and *TWE 2* utilize science fiction elements to depict their respective diasporic experiences. It discusses the characters' physical and symbolic journeys, emphasizing how these migrations influence their identity formation and transformation. Moreover, it compares the ways in which the films represent Chineseness in hybrid, dynamic spaces that blend multiple cultures and languages, where characters navigate and negotiate their heritage in relation to the global or local communities. The second section probes the relationships among diaspora, home-family, and homeland, as represented in the two films. It demonstrates how both films complicate the concepts of home and homeland, with the characters' understanding of home-family evolving as they move through different spaces and times, ultimately leading to a redefinition of what homeland means in a diasporic context. Both films contribute to the discourse on diaspora and identity by depicting the Chinese diaspora not just as a spatial journey, but also as a complex process of cultural negotiation and transformation, offering a nuanced view of the challenges and possibilities that arise from living between cultures.

1 Chinese Diaspora: Identity Construction in Transcultural Science Fiction Narratives

EEAAO and *TWE 2* both present narratives centered on the Chinese experience of migration and diaspora. In *EEAAO*, the protagonist Evelyn has left China to follow her husband Waymond to the United States, where they start a new family. Analogously, *TWE 2* features a migratory community in Libreville, Gabon, where one of the characters, Liu Peiqiang, learns from his mentor, Zhang Peng, that the area, known as Africa's Little Dongbei,[1] was once filled with night markets and barbeque stalls. Despite the dystopian ruins depicted on screen, the conversation evokes familiar experiences of diasporic communities such as Chinatowns or Little Italy. These diasporic micro-territories, as noted by Ma Mung (2005, 35–36), constitute discontinuous territories, transcending and challenging national and political borders.

In the setting of *TWE 2*, it has been discovered that the sun will expand into a red giant and engulf the Earth within a century. To address this impending crisis, the United Earth Government (UEG) has decided to implement the "Moving Mountain Project" (later renamed the "Wandering Earth Project"), which seeks to use 10 thousand gigantic nuclear fusion engines to propel the Earth out of the Solar System toward another star system. Meanwhile, a sister project, the "Lunar Exile Project," involves pushing the Moon away from the Earth, to minimize its gravitational interference. Under these circumstances, the test base in Libreville becomes the home of people from 33 nations. Pilots from these countries, like Liu Peiqiang, have left their homelands to engage in training at the new site, and ultimately a select few will be sent to the moon.

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[1] *Dongbei* refers to a region in Northeast China.

Similarly, the film's other main characters have been mobilized to help address the impending disaster, for which they have all migrated from their original homes to various foreign locales – ranging from the test base in Libreville to the UEG headquarters in New York and even the Campanus Crater on the moon. In this way, TWE 2 presents two different forms of diaspora. First, as the crisis intensifies and terrestrial conditions deteriorate, more people are leaving their homelands, or even forced to relocate to underground havens for survival. Second, should the countermeasures succeed, humanity – and the entire planet – would collectively become members of an interstellar diaspora, where the lost homeland is the Earth's original position within the solar system.

Unlike *EEAAO*, where several characters have migrated from one nation (China) to another (the United States), the main characters in *TWE 2* inhabit a postnational world where post-migration environments are inhabited by people of diverse ethnicities and linguistic backgrounds. These spaces appear to epitomize a cosmopolitan ideal: a futuristic world where linguistic and cultural barriers have been surmounted, creating environments that are universally familiar and adaptable for all. In narrating Chinese diaspora stories situated in new living places, both films reflect the impact of context on the construction of diasporic identity. From these representations, we can see that Chineseness is not a monolithic, rigid category, but rather it is continually transformed by contextual influences.

In *EEAAO*, for instance, the multiverse offers Evelyn a chance to enjoy the possibility of escaping her banal real-life struggles. However, while the ability to jump between different universes ("verses") allows her to explore different identities, these imaginative constructions of identity are inseparable from the influence of the American media landscape surrounding her. Jason Coe points out that EEAAO "builds the worlds of its multiverse… by deploying every imaginable transpacific film genre: dystopian science fiction, wuxia, kung fu, superhero, anime, romantic comedy, immigrant family drama, art house, nostalgic romance, and so forth" (Coe 2023, 35). Most notably, by citing classic Chinese language films such as *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-wai, 2000) and *Farewell My Concubine* (Chen Kaige, 1993), alluding to Michelle Yeoh's actual film career, and referencing the red carpet footage from the premiere of *Crazy Rich Asians* (Jon M. Chu, 2018), the multiverse in *EEAAO* evokes the shared screen memories of its Chinese American viewers. However, by reproducing these classical moments, the film's visual spectacles fail to depict what Coe calls "a social world of 'contradictory and heterogeneous possibilities'" (Coe 2023, 36). Instead, they expose the restrictions that the contemporary media culture has put on Chinese Americans' imagination about their cultural identities and possible life experiences.

The multiverse in *EEAAO* provides a carnival of disparate identities for Evelyn, as martial artist, Chinese opera singer, chef, and so on. Notably, these are all common professions for protagonists of Chinese-themed films popular in the West. Despite changing the protagonist into a middle-aged Chinese immigrant woman, *EEAAO* does not evince any obvious rebellion in its imitation of representative scenes in those films. Nevertheless, it is exactly this similarity that reminds the audience that these screen memories have been deeply embedded into Evelyn's unconscious, and perhaps those of most other Chinese Americans. Therefore, while the film's multiverse seemingly offers unfettered access to Evelyn's imagination, it is nevertheless constructed based on the cultural context where she is situated, and from which she cannot break away.

In developing his idea of time-space compression, David Harvey observes that "mass television ownership coupled with satellite communication makes it possible to experience a rush of images from different spaces almost simultaneously, collapsing the world's spaces into a series of images on a television screen" (Harvey 1990, 293). Considering this in the age of modern mass media, when it is more convenient to perceive the "world's spaces" through compressed screen images, the latter is very likely to confound or even replace subjective life experiences intended to show more "contradictory and heterogeneous possibilities." As a result, mass media tends to impoverish people's imaginations, while also making it possible for them "to experience a rush of images from different spaces almost simultaneously" (Harvey 1990, 293).

Evelyn's imagined identities demonstrate what Hamid Naficy describes as "the undeniable significant and signifying role of the media in creating, maintaining, and disrupting individual, communal, ethnic, national, and postnational identities in today's technologized and diasporized world" (Naficy 1999, 2). Meanwhile, these representations not only illustrate how Evelyn's current cultural context influences her diasporic identity, but also indicate that, at the meta-cinematic level, the filmmakers' portrayal of Chinese diasporic identity similarly relies on this cultural framework. The filmmakers, known as the Daniels, do not envision Evelyn transcending the typical popular screen memories associated with Chinese or Chinese American characters, and this is possibly an acknowledgment that, entrenched as she is in their specific sociocultural milieu, Evelyn's imagination remains constrained by her surrounding cultural context. This limitation is also evident in the

Daniels' own cinematic choices. For instance, they select a stereotypically common profession among Chinese American immigrants for Evelyn: running a laundromat.

For people in the Chinese diaspora living in the U.S., common life experiences include intergenerational conflicts due to differing cultural backgrounds and values, anti-Asian racism, and pressures to assimilate within a white-defined mainstream. Historically, many films about Chinese Americans have depicted these clashes based on the common Chinese American experience. Although *EEAAO* employs the genre of science fiction to articulate the self-representation of Chinese diaspora, it still adheres to a narrative pattern similar to those of earlier films. Most of the characters Evelyn meets in the multiverse are alternate versions of her own family members. The antagonist, Jobu Tupaki, whom Evelyn seeks to subdue, is revealed to be an alternate version of Evelyn's daughter, Joy, who searches for Evelyn across every universe. Evelyn's Virgilian guide in the multiverse, who informs her of the mission and teaches her how verse-jumping works, is an alternate version of her husband, Waymond, from the "Alphaverse." One of the leaders of this campaign against Jobu in the Alphaverse also turns out to be an alternate Gong Gong, Evelyn's father in the primary universe.

Along these lines, the *EEAAO* multiverse serves as more than just a sf setting for Evelyn's confrontation with Jobu. More importantly, it is also centered on Evelyn's personal life experience, as it is closely related to her imagining of her diasporic identity. The branching parallel universes converge and diverge based on Evelyn's memories of pivotal events in her life and her life-altering choices, and thus are invariably linked to the family story in the primary universe. The three major universes depicted in the most detail all unfold around Evelyn's frustrations and the complex relationships she encounters residing in the Chinese diaspora. The martial artist universe, for instance, reveals Evelyn's self-doubt, stemming from her current struggles. She speculates about whether she and Waymond would have led more fulfilling lives had they not eloped to the U.S. to open a laundromat. The opera singer universe reflects Evelyn's longing for paternal love, hypothesizing that, if not for her father's neglect and abandonment, she might never have left her home in China. Her perceived failures in the U.S. make it impossible for her to meet her father's expectations or prove the validity of her choices, exacerbating her sense of loss and embarrassment. Lastly, the hot dog finger universe presents Evelyn's fantasy of reversing the prejudices and discrimination she faces in reality; in this surreal universe, Evelyn and tax auditor Deirdre – who harbor deep-rooted prejudices against each other in the primary universe – can become intimate lovers.

These fractured family relationships and the discrimination Evelyn faces as a Chinese immigrant to the U.S. frame her imaginative encounters in the parallel universes while also shaping her conceptions of Chinese diasporic identity. Navigating the multiverse, Evelyn appears to confront a crisis typical of the sf superhero genre – yet it is in fact merely an internal crisis, stemming from interpersonal relationships and particularly family ties, rather than an external or otherworldly disaster. Her goal is not to save the world (or the multiverse), but to resolve her own familial issues. In particular, she wishes to alleviate her conflicts with her daughter, Joy, that arise from cultural and generational differences. Given that the central crisis involves Evelyn and her daughter, and that the multiple identities and universes ultimately connect back to the family drama in the primary universe, *EEAAO* still aligns with other notable Chinese American films such as *The Joy Luck Club* (Wayne Wang, 1993) and *The Farewell* (Lulu Wang, 2019), both of which center around intracultural and intergenerational conflicts and the Chinese American family's in-between cultural status. Thus, while framed within the sf superhero genre, *EEAAO* could be viewed as a typical Chinese American family melodrama, presenting a Chinese diaspora whose members' experiences within the American cultural context shape its formation and transformation.

Similarly, in *TWE 2* the representation of Chinese diasporic identity is also situated within a new intercultural context precipitated by the impending solar crisis. In the cosmopolitan spaces depicted in the film, which are home to immigrants from a variety of nations, the representation of China is consistently framed in relation to the United States, the ultimate signifier of the West. The first part of the film focuses on the Space Elevator Crisis: After a terrorist attack on the elevator and the space station supplying the lunar operation, all other countries withdraw from the Moving Mountain Project pilot program. Under these circumstances, the Chinese government insists on continuing the feasibility test, ultimately propelling the Earth out of the solar system. Therefore, they decide to finish constructing the lunar and Earth engines alone, in just seven months. This daunting task invites skepticism from many countries, exemplified by the U.S. ambassador's question of "how much solving a crisis 100 years in the future should matter to the people living now." But eventually, China completes the feasibility test and brings hope to mankind, demonstrating that it is playing an essential and leading role in the world.

In this episode, the emphasized ethics of perseverance, responsibility, and self-sacrifice for the collective good represent the cultural identification of Chinese diaspora within this context of multiple nations jointly solving a crisis. Furthermore, this construction and representation of identity reflect not only the influence of a competitive international context rife with dissension and contention, but also the meta-cinematic world where a rising China seeks to reconfigure its image in the new world order against longstanding Western hegemony. Against this historical backdrop, the image of China created in the *Wandering Earth* series subverts traditional cinematic portrayals – such as the exotic, traditional, and backward China seen in films like *Yellow Earth* (Chen Kaige, 1984) and *Red Sorghum* (Zhang Yimou, 1988), and the aesthetic image of a pre-modern China in martial arts films like

Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon (Ang Lee, 2000) – of China as an oriental superpower in ancient times, yet absent in the modern international arena. In contrast, the *Wandering Earth* series, especially its second installment, presents a new image of China that highlights its rapid social development, particularly in science and technology; more specifically, it references actual achievements like the country's quantum computer, lunar probe, and infrastructure capabilities. The plot reinforces this new image, presenting a modernized, industrialized China that not only possesses the capability to build planetary engines alone in a short time, but also assumes the responsibility of guiding humanity in the right direction.

Meanwhile, in *TWE 2*, the posture that members of the Chinese diaspora adopt in this new global context is decidedly assertive. As shown in most of the film's scenes that portray international cooperation, Chinese decisions are usually non-negotiable. For example, in face of the Lunar Fall Crisis, Chinese ambassador Zhou Zhezhi's assistant Hao Xiaoxi announces in a UEG meeting that "China will be opening up all its underground cities, to maximize the survival rate within our territory." When questioned by a British ambassador, she stresses, "We are informing you of our decision to open up our underground cities, not seeking for advice." In the same vein, near the end of the film, despite not knowing whether the internet root server in Beijing can be successfully restarted in time, Zhou insists on igniting the Earth engines when the countdown ends. Most people in the room, including the American chief commander, oppose this move because if the root server in Beijing is not restarted, only some of the engines would be ignited and Earth's crust would be torn apart.

Under these circumstances, the only reason Zhou provides for his decision to immediately ignite is that "our people will definitely accomplish the mission," which is hardly convincing. Interestingly, even with so much opposition, the situation remains fully under Zhou's control. In fact, because of Zhou's unyielding attitude, a fellow operator pushes the ignition button without the chief commander's permission. Considering other details in the film, Zhou's decision is implied as being reasonable. For instance, we find many shots showing Zhou silently staring at a surveillance camera, followed by reverse shots suggesting that the camera is looking back. These scenes appear to imply that Zhou might have received some hints sent by the artificial intelligence computer that runs the lunar space station, thereby foretelling the series of crises humanity will face during the journey of migrating to a habitable star system with the earth. In practice, however, this approach to cooperation still manifests a tough stance, reflecting the dominant role that China is pursuing in the changing international context.

While traits of perseverance, responsibility, collectivism, leadership, dominance, and assertiveness may not fully represent Chinese cultural identity in other contexts, they are precisely what *TWE 2* portrays through its Chinese diasporic characters in all its transcultural and international settings. These are the attributes that the director and production team deliberately emphasize in a sociopolitical milieu following the rise of China – they are reasserting Chinese ethics and values that align with the new international situation, hoping for a global audience to perceive them that way and accept them. Thus, this identity construction is not only connected to past cultural memories but is also tailored to meet contemporary demands.

On a meta-cinematic level, *TWE 2* also showcases the new status of a rising China by deliberately altering the traditional Hollywood narrative model. According to director Gwo (2019), while *The Wandering Earth 1* adheres to a standard Hollywood model – employing screenwriting software and strictly following Syd Field's screenwriting theory by structuring the narrative in three acts with seven plot points – however *TWE 2* deviates from this Hollywood-style plot structure. Instead, the latter film adopts a distinctive Chinese annalistic historiographic style, organizing its multiple storylines in chronological order. Taking the perspective of MOSS, the space station's AI computer, this retrospective viewpoint transforms what the audience witnesses on screen (a near future for them) into a documentary recorded by the surveillance cameras that frequently appear in the film, as though MOSS has been continually monitoring the development of human civilization. Thus, on both the meta-cinematic and textual levels, the film constructs Chinese identity and image in new ways, adapting them in accordance with the shaping force of the current historical context.

As discussed above, both films reference the social, political, and cultural contexts that contain and define them, demonstrating how those living in the Chinese diaspora reimagine and reconstruct their identities in a new, post-migration environment. The main characters in each film navigate their new surroundings by redefining their value systems, thereby addressing their altered social, political, and cultural settings. Furthermore, the identity construction of Chinese diasporic characters in both films is influenced by their position within the dynamics of Chinese-Western power relations, especially responding to the latter's longstanding hegemony. In this sense, Chinese diasporic identity should no longer be considered fixed or monolithic. Rather, as Ien Ang suggests, "Chineseness becomes an open signifier, which acquires its peculiar form and content in dialectical junction with the diverse local conditions in which ethnic Chinese people, wherever they are, construct new, hybrid identities and communities" (Ang 2001, 35). This identity is inherently fluid and adaptive, perpetually negotiated against one's immediate backdrop. It might be in constant flux, but in both works it dynamically adapts to the influences, challenges, and opportunities presented by new cultural contexts.

2 Home and Homeland: (Re)signifying Chineseness

In their portrayal of family within transnational media culture, Patricia Pisters and Wim Staat describe how

> in the classic genres of the melodrama and soap opera … [the] homeland is almost never an issue. The home as 'household' is automatically in the homeland. However, with increased migration, home is no longer automatically connected to the homeland, and the family is often torn between the place where the family members live (home) and the place where they were born (homeland). (Pisters and Staat 2005, 10)

This disjunction between home and homeland, resulting from migration, is evident in both *EEAAO* and *TWE 2*. In *EEAAO*, Evelyn establishes a family with Waymond and Joy in the United States, though China remains her homeland. In *TWE 2*, Liu Peiqiang meets his wife, Han Duoduo, during astronaut training in Libreville. Han, due to illness, later requests to be taken back to her hometown, Shanghai, though by this point the city has already been abandoned and is no longer the homeland they remembered.

Both films also emphasize the idea that a homeland is a place to which their characters are unable to return. In *EEAAO*, for instance, despite globalization and new technologies that enhance individual mobility, spending decades in the U.S. has detached Evelyn, Waymond, and Joy from their ancestral homeland, making it impossible to return. Similarly, in *TWE 2*, the escalating solar crisis and environmental degradation make returning to the homeland unfeasible for the main characters. This pushes them to hope that they can travel to the future, where they may rebuild a new homeland. From this perspective, diaspora should be reconsidered as both a temporal and spatial concept, and the symbolic meaning of migration should thus be expanded to include both temporal and spatial dimensions.

In *EEAAO*, Evelyn's homeland only appears in flashbacks. At the film's outset, when Evelyn first learns of the multiverse's existence and her ability to verse-jump, her mind is instantly filled with memories of her life in China before coming to the United States. Hence, Evelyn's relocation can be seen as a temporal departure from the past, and her return is realized through sf imagination in the multiverse, enabling what is unachievable in real life: stepping back in time. Similarly, this temporalization of space in *TWE 2* is embodied in the homeland to which mankind seeks to migrate. As Zhou Zhezhi remarks in the film, "I believe. So will my children. And their children, too. By that time, I believe in the reunion under the blue sky, when the blossoms hang from every bough." Just as Earth is wandering toward a new star system 2,500 years in the future, those residing in its diaspora might finally return to their homeland.

With the migration to new homes in both films, concurrent familial crises emerge. In *EEAAO*, it is through a sf adventure across the multiverse that Evelyn ultimately reconciles her family conflicts, while in *TWE 2*, the sf catastrophe leads to the fracturing of the characters' families. Initially, in *EEAAO*, Evelyn believes that the evil entity Jobu Tupaki has possessed her daughter Joy, causing her to rebel against her mother by gaining weight, getting tattoos, having a girlfriend, skipping school, and engaging in other defiant acts. Evelyn therefore struggles to defeat Jobu so that she can save Joy from her bad influence. However, Evelyn gradually realizes that this evil entity is none other than Joy herself, who has been traversing through every universe not to defeat Evelyn, but merely to gain her understanding as a daughter – to make her mother see what she sees. With this realization, Evelyn finally grasps that Joy is an extension of herself, burdened with excessive expectations due to Evelyn's own failure and inability to prove herself to her father.

Similarly, *TWE 2* portrays all three of its main characters as being separated from their families: Astronaut Liu Peiqiang leaves his only son to work on a space navigation platform after his wife's death due to illness, Computer engineer Tu Hengyu's wife and daughter perish in a car accident, and Chinese ambassador Zhou Zhezhi and his assistant Hao Xiaoxi are always shown in their workplace, and the film never shows their families (with the exception that Hao's son appears once as a lock-screen image on her cellphone, which she quickly turns off due to work commitments). While showcasing these characters' inability to reunite with their biological relatives, the film hints at mentor-student relationships that are as significant and intimate as kinship ties, thereby expanding the traditional concept of family. Indeed, in all three groups of characters, the central relationship is a mentoring one: Liu was raised by his mentor Zhang Peng after his parents died young, Tu predominantly collaborates with his project lead and mentor, Ma Zhao, and Hao serves as an assistant and apprentice to Zhou.

Due to the impending solar crisis, all these major characters, along with many other ordinary people, are working together to move the Earth out of the solar system and are collaborating to deal with a series of accompanying challenges. By replacing traditional family ties with mentor-student bonds, *TWE 2* implies an alternative future in which close connections can be formed between people who are not related by blood but who share common living conditions and cultural memories. Although it is evident that these characters' own nuclear families are still very important to them, the characters may have an equally deep commitment to a larger family in the face of global crises – one that could consist of all mankind, all living beings, or the Earth itself. As a result, as Pisters and Staat note, the definition of a "traditional family of heterosexual parents and their children" can be expanded, "as long as it is considered as a group of people that care for each other and provide children a safe place to grow up" (Pisters and Staat 2005, 8).

By contrast, in *EEAAO*, we see how “the family is under pressure and being altered by the forces of globalization and migration” (Pisters and Staat 2005, 7). Evelyn’s father, Gong Gong, has recently flown from China to visit Evelyn in the United States, where Evelyn and Waymond are raising their daughter Joy. The family’s three generations each hold distinct cultural memories and values, which nearly causes the family to disintegrate. Ultimately, however, Evelyn comes to accept Joy’s lifestyle, and at the end of the film she reassures her, “We can do whatever we want.” In this sense, *EEAAO* presents a different dynamic between diaspora and homeland from the one that unfolds in *TWE* 2, in that here the homeland is a place Evelyn has willingly left.

The story of a queer daughter at odds with her immigrant mother has been told many times in Chinese American family melodramas. Usually, the crumbling families in these stories eventually reconcile after a series of confrontations, and *EEAAO* also follows this narrative arc. However, while Evelyn, Joy, Waymond, and Gong Gong rebuild their ties in the end with understanding and love, the unsolved question that remains in many Chinese American family melodramas is *how* the different family members arrive at this reconciliation. In *EEAAO*, we find that by the time the crisis has been resolved, no one in the family, except for Evelyn, has changed much. For instance, Joy still looks the same, still has not completed college, and is still with her girlfriend Becky, though now Evelyn has learned to accept that her daughter can have her own understand of what constitutes a meaningful life.

Furthermore, as Evelyn forms an alliance with her daughter to face Gong Gong’s critiques, she also assimilates into her daughter’s culture. As a result, at the end of the film, Evelyn no longer feels guilty about failing to live up to Gong Gong’s expectations or not showing him enough filial obedience. She informs him, “It’s okay if you can’t be proud of me, because I finally am.” At the beginning of the film, Gong Gong complains that Joy’s Chinese is getting worse every time they talk, but at the end Evelyn intentionally switches from Cantonese to English when she talks with Gong Gong so that Joy can understand her: “She turned out to be stubborn, aimless, a mess, just like her mother. But now I see, it’s okay that she’s a mess.” It is from this point that “not speaking Chinese” – the condition that inspired Ien Ang (2001) to reflect on questions of identity in an age of globalization and diaspora – stops being a problem for the members of this diasporic family, as they have accepted their new cultural identity.

Along with her daughter’s culture, Evelyn has also begun to embrace her own difficult life in the United States. At the beginning of the film, Evelyn feels it is unfair that the tax auditor Deirdre has continued to target Chinese businesses in the community. She herself also discriminates against people of other races, and at one point she scornfully calls one of her customers “big nose” in Chinese. However, in the end, simply because Deirdre shows her a little understanding and kindness, Evelyn forgets all about the systematic discrimination and oppression. Both mother and daughter voluntarily cast off the cultural values inherited from their (ancestral) homeland, because in their new Western host culture, Chinese values are rendered traditional and backward. Evelyn has to abandon her original parenting style because, as implied in the story of the imagined Alphaverse, her way of educating her daughter has given rise to Jobu's rebellious destruction. Since the release of *The Joy Luck Club*, the success and popularity of stories about Chinese mothers and American daughters reflects American society's fascination with such narratives. Daughters representing Western culture usually break free from the oppression of their Chinese mothers, and even teach their mothers to give up their conservative traditions. At the same time, the enduring appeal of these stories underscores the dominance of mainstream American culture over marginal immigrant cultures – with the former always, unfailingly, disciplining the latter in the sphere of popular mass media.

Evelyn and Joy's experience reflects one type of diasporic figure, who neither experiences enforced exile nor actively delimits a socio-cultural boundary within the host culture, but rather leaves their homeland voluntarily and assimilates into the host culture.[2] At the same time, in belonging to such a diaspora, they redefine Chineseness to – as Ang (2001) has described – accommodate their "in-betweenness" within a Chinese American context. By reclaiming and embracing the position of being in-between, Evelyn's evolving perspective on the culture of her homeland also demonstrates the Chinese diaspora's flexibility in self-identification, allowing her to reconcile her multicultural familial relationships and migration experience. Beyond that, it also reflects the potential diversity and complexity of the idea of being Chinese.

By contrast, *TWE 2* presents a different relationship between diaspora and homeland. Despite its ostensibly postnational setting and a narrative that emphasizes the importance of fighting for the survival of all mankind through global solidarity, and despite the envisioned sf deterritorialized world with a cosmopolitan hybrid culture, the film's main characters steadfastly maintain Chinese cultural and value traditions. Thus, although technological advances in this imagined future world have engendered what Arjun Appadurai calls "an altogether new condition of neighborliness" (Appadurai 1996, 29), borders still influence the deterritorialized transnational interactions. As Ping Zhu argues with respect to *The Wandering Earth 1*, even in a postnational future where traditional nation-states have ceased to exist, the narrative still imbues its characters and their relationships with a strong sense of Chinese national identity, creating a form of "deterritorialized nationalism" (Zhu 2020, 102).

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[2] Robin Cohen (1997) includes this kind of migratory group in his discussion of global diasporas.

A similar point can also be made about the film's prequel, *TWE 2*, which is also set in a context where nationalism is not bound to a specific territory, but which still evokes feelings of nationalist pride. This is evident not only in the depiction of Chinese individuals and groups, who display firm beliefs and a sense of duty in solving the solar crisis, but also in subtle details such as an African staffer playing Chinese chess and a non-Chinese character expressing his fondness for mooncakes in standard Mandarin. This suggests that people from a multitude of backgrounds appreciate and understand Chinese culture and values, underscoring their global influence.

The identification with Chinese culture and values connects the Chinese diasporic characters in the film to their deterritorialized homeland, enabling them to reterritorialize themselves as Chinese, regardless of where they are. Along similar lines, this emotional framework may expand to include a larger homeland of the planet Earth, as the film continuously and explicitly relates the characters' responsibility for humanity and the Earth to their love for their own home-families. For instance, Liu Peiqiang initially expresses disdain for Earth, wishing instead to reunite with his deceased parents in space. However, upon meeting Han Duoduo, he begins to see Earth differently, and by the film's end, he acknowledges Earth's beauty, having longed for his son when working on the navigation platform and watching Earth from afar. In the same spirit, Tu Hengyu's digitally recreated daughter motivates his involvement in Earth-saving efforts. Although Zhou Zhezhi's children are never shown, his remarks that reference them ("I believe. So will my children. And their children, too") suggest he views the planet as a home not just for the present generation, but also for his children and future generations. Throughout *TWE 2*, the home-family concept is considered a key metaphor for understanding the Chinese diasporic characters' sense of identity and connection to their homeland.

In this way, *TWE 2* conveys a clear future vision to its audience: in seeking a settlement in a new star system, mankind chooses to wander with their memories of their homeland. They are committed to the maintenance and restoration of the homeland from generation to generation, and believe that they will eventually return there to live as they did before. Since the resettlement involves a lengthy 2,500-year journey, the inheritance of collective cultural memories and the continuity of cultural traditions should be crucial to the maintenance of this diasporic identity. Moreover, since China is represented as the leading force behind the Wandering Earth Project, Chinese culture – though deterritorialized as people move to the underground cities – should become the mainstream, and thus the most deserving of being inherited and passed down.

This emphasis on cultural heritage is reflected in the film's depiction of the three mentor-student relationships, in which the Chinese diasporic identity – and the relationship between diaspora and cultural values from the homeland – is different from that in *EEAAO*. In *TWE 2*, before sacrificing himself to detonate the moon, Zhang Peng feels satisfied, because he believes he has not let his teacher down. This sentiment is also evident in Zhang's interactions with his student, Liu Peiqiang. In his final moments, Zhang helps Liu board the return capsule from the moon to the Earth, enabling him to survive. In this way, Zhang manages to pass down the responsibility of saving the homeland to future generations, emphasizing the role of mentorship in the continuity of cultural and national duties within the diasporic context.

Similarly, in the storyline of Zhou Zhezhi and his assistant Hao Xiaoxi, the latter asks, "A speech of such importance, are you sure you want me to deliver it?" With a laugh, Zhou answers, "Every speech here is important. Just read it, word by word." Their conversation is reproduced almost verbatim at the end of the film, though this time it is between Hao and her young assistant seven years later. This repetition not only suggests the recurrence of history, but also demonstrates that Hao has passed down what she learned from her mentor to her student. By foregrounding this mentor-student relationship in all three groups of characters, the film implies a kind of unity that transcends blood ties. Equally important, it also stresses the significance of maintaining Chinese cultural values as well as professional abilities, leaving the implication for the audience that, as long as this succession is continued, hope and faith will exist for the Chinese diaspora, and even for all mankind.

The characters' different ways of solving crises in *EEAAO* and *TWE 2* convey different attitudes toward cultural inheritance and succession, and are also entangled with the signifying and re-signifying of diaspora. In *EEAAO*, Evelyn assimilates into mainstream American society that continually marginalizes immigrant cultures. Conversely, in *TWE 2*, Chinese ethics and values are promoted and passed down as mainstream – at the price of equal participation of other countries and cultures. In this sense, though their constructions of Chinese diasporic identities are different, both films fall into the prevailing hegemonic cultural paradigm, and fail to open up new modes of self-representation that embody the heterogeneity of reality. Therefore, we are still in need of more vital cinematic interventions in the future: ones that can effectively address the systematic social violence of inequality, that can fairly depict the problems with both Western and Chinese hegemonies, and that strive for a more inclusive and egalitarian constitution of global community – a space of understanding, support, and rich diversity for a global audience.

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