

Homi Baba Postcolonial Perspectives Analyzing the "Magic Negro" Movie *The Green Book*

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Abstract: *The Green Book*, a winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture, provides an in-depth analysis of racial issues in 20th century American society by presenting a deep friendship across race and class. Starting from postcolonialism, the film embodies the hybridity of identities through the interchanging of roles between whites and blacks, while the blacks in the film seem to be different from the traditional image of blacks. This paper interprets the film from Homi Baba's postcolonial perspective and the perspective of the "magical negro" to provide new thinking on the issue of race, culture and identity hybridization in the postcolonial era.

Keywords: *The Green Book*; Homi Baba; Postcolonialism; Identity Hybridization; Magical Negro.

1. Introduction

The Green Book, known in its entirety as *The Negro Motorist's Green Book*, was a pamphlet initiated and published by New York mailman Victor Green.[1] During the 1960s, and the height of segregation in the U.S., it provided messages to blacks on the road to help them find inns and restaurants that specifically catered to blacks. After its debut in 1936, the book was continually revised and reprinted until 1966. The book has been described as a "traveler's guide" for people of African descent because of its detailed identification of African-American friendly establishments and routes. While the book was ostensibly a convenient travel guide for blacks, it was actually a symbol of racial discrimination, clearly defining the boundaries between people of color and whites, and clearly distinguishing between their respective ethnic identities.[1]

Directed by the talented director Peter Farrelly, the movie *Green Book* is based on actual historical events. The movie is set in the 1960s during the Kennedy administration, a period that coincided with the sharp confrontation between racial discrimination and the affirmative action movement in the United States. During that period, racial discrimination in the U.S. was an exceptionally serious problem, especially in the South of the United States, where blacks were denied many basic rights, including access to restaurants, hotels, and public transit vehicles that were exclusively for whites. *The Green Book* depicts a journey of friendship across racial lines, featuring Don Shirley, a talented black pianist, and Tony Lip, an outspoken white chauffeur. In this journey, Don Shirley needs to perform a series of shows in the then racist South of the United States, while Tony Lip helps Don Shirley to solve all sorts of difficulties. After experiencing all sorts of difficulties during the journey, the friendship between Don Shirley and Tony Lip gradually deepens, and finally Don Shirley and Tony Lip complete the road trip together and establish a deep friendship.

Homi Baba's theory of hybridity is an important part of his postcolonial theory, and at the heart of this theory lies an emphasis on the mixing, intertwining and interaction between different cultures and identities. According to Baba, in the context of globalization and postcoloniality, cultures and

identities no longer exist in isolation, but are intertwined and mixed. This hybridity is not only reflected in the exchange and fusion between different cultures, but also in the process of constructing individual identities. Homi Baba emphasizes the balanced development and recognition of cultural rights in both parties through mutual dialogue, conversation and negotiation, as well as the constraints and harmonization of both parties. This mutual adaptation of cultural practices has both positive and repressive aspects, which are manifested in the repressive effects of strong cultures on weak ones.

2. The Embodiment of Identity Hybridity in Cinema

Homi Baba's theory of postcolonialism explores the effects and consequences of colonialism on colonized countries, while *the Green Book*, which tells the story of a black pianist and a white driver in the segregated South of the United States, deals with issues of race and identity.

2.1. Identity Hybridity in Relation to Movie Themes

Homi Baba's hybridity of identities is an important theme in *the Green Book*, which reflects the issues of race and culture in a postcolonial perspective. In the movie, Tony and Don represent two distinct cultures and identities - one is an underclass white driver of Italian descent whose lifestyle, language and values are deeply marked by the American underclass. One is an upper-class black pianist whose life, language and values are more characteristic of the American elite. These two very different cultures and identities form a stark contrast in the movie and constitute the main conflict and contradiction of the movie. During their tour in the South of the United States, they not only experienced the oppression of racial discrimination, but also realized the mixing and integration of their cultural identities through mutual understanding and respect. This hybridity is not only reflected in their individual identities, but also in the complex relationship between race, class and culture in American society at that time.

2.2. Stereotypes and Prejudice in Film

Racial discrimination and segregation in the movie also reflect Homi Bhabha's theory of "identity hybridity". In the 1960s, segregation and discrimination were very serious in the southern United States. Blacks were treated unequally and discriminated against in many occasions. For example, in the movie, Tony holds obvious stereotypes and prejudices against blacks. He initially believes that blacks are rude and ill-mannered and holds prejudice against black music and culture. This stereotype is based on his limited knowledge of the cultural and social background of blacks and the racism and prejudice that was prevalent in the social environment at the time. However, over the course of his time with Don, Tony gradually transcends racial prejudice and begins to appreciate and understand Don's talents and qualities. This transformation demonstrates the identity mixing and cognitive shifts that Tony, as a white man of Italian descent, undergoes when dealing with people of different cultures and identities.

And society has this stereotype and prejudice against people of Italian descent. In the movie, Tony is portrayed as a rough, blunt man who sometimes solves problems through violence. This image reflects to some extent the stereotypes of the society at that time towards people of Italian descent, who may not be civilized and educated enough. However, as the movie progresses, the audience can see Tony's deep-seated kindness and integrity, his loyalty and passion for his friends and family. This portrayal shows Tony's true personality and values that he maintains as an ethnic Italian in the face of societal stereotypes.

However, in the movie, Tony and Don's interracial friendship breaks down this segregation and discrimination, and their relationship becomes a symbol of cultural mixing and represents the exchange and integration between different cultures and identities.

3. Interpretation of the "Magical Negro" Perspective

Magical Negro, under the white mainstream ideology, in order to complete the realization of the value of the "self" and cultural hegemony, to construct the image of the "other", "other" to provide support for the realization of the cultural hegemony of the "self", "other" to provide support for the realization of the cultural hegemony of the "self". The "other" provides support for the realization of the cultural hegemony of the "self". Therefore, the "magical negro" shown on the screen is portrayed by the white man. This unique concept was originally introduced by Christopher John Farley to refer to the "magical negro" character who often appears in Hollywood movies to help white people solve their problems, who has supernatural abilities, who is mysterious and omnipotent, and who is derogatory and discriminatory against black people, and whose central goal is to save or help their white peers. The central goal of the character's existence is to save or help fellow whites.

3.1. A Break from the Usual "Magical Negro" Image.

In *The Green Book*, Don's on-screen persona subverts the traditional Hollywood stereotype of the "Magical Negro". Instead of appearing as a supporting character, Don is one of the two main characters and has a significant screen presence. This change breaks the convention of Hollywood movies in

which black characters often serve as subplots in the lives of white people, and makes Don one of the central characters of the movie.

With the awakening of national consciousness, the civil rights movement became more and more intense. Don's emergence as one of the dual protagonists is, in a sense, an increase in the power of the "other" to speak on screen. Don escapes the traditional black economic and cultural status (learned, skilled in chess, wealthy), but is so detached from black culture that he is no different from a white man except for the color of his skin. According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity "reflects shared historical experience and shared cultural codes." Is Don still black when he has lost the cultural symbols of his people and has only black skin color? He is a black man constructed by his "self".

Tony, a white man, helps Don, a black man, to fulfill his wishes. Tony has some sort of magical power (the ability to solve complex problems quickly) and helps Don solve problems on his way to the South on tour. What is the reason for the identity switch when the black Don becomes the mainline and the white Tony becomes the supporter? It's the result of social enlightenment and tolerance, but it's worth looking deeper to see if breaking away from past conventions is the same as breaking through the identity barrier.[2]

3.2. Don Shirley Didn't Break Out of the "Magical Negro" Mold.

Looking back at the historical context of white-dominated ethnic supremacy in the United States during that 1962 period, it was not so much Tony who assisted Shirley with his Southern tour as it was the presence and experience of the black Don that prompted the white Tony to achieve a profound self-redemption on a moral level.

Black director Spike Lee walked out of the Oscars after *the Green Book* won Best Picture, upset that it was "a white savior-driven, racist movie." The plotting of the movie, in which Don Shirley is repeatedly helped out by either Tony's white fists or a phone call from a white man in high places when he encounters trouble on a tour of the South, led many blacks to believe that "Green Book wasn't made for black people, and that it exists only to make white people feel good about themselves about racism". [3]

4. Conclusion

The Green Book is a film that embodies the values of the American mainstream society in a warm and affectionate way. Through a light-hearted and humorous approach, the film recalls the ethnic strife in history, subtly reduces the tension between ethnic groups and thus promotes the reconciliation and understanding between blacks and whites, and realizes the mixing, intertwining and interaction between different cultures, identities and identities. Although it breaks through the conventional image of the "magical negro" in the past, and black people have gradually gained more screen power, it ultimately fails to break through the essential core of the "magical negro", constructing the history of the "other" with the "self", lacking historical objectivity, and diluting the struggle of the black people in the civil rights movement, which is a kind of "black" struggle. This is a historical and ideological limitation.

And while Tony, as a white man of Italian descent, is discriminated against and stigmatized by other pure whites, and is not at the top of the chain of contempt, this is not the

focus of this research paper, so I will not elaborate too much.

References

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