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Avatar in China--A Cyber-Audience Discourse Analysis Perspective

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that it has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.



Signed by _____

Abstract

Avatar (2009), written and directed by James Cameron, enjoyed great box-office success in Mainland China that, so far, had been No.1 box-office in the world in that it had a famous movie director, a high reputation and the first-rate 3-D movie techniques, these aspects led it to be a hot topic in Mainland China.

It became a controversial topic in fields of economy, technology and culture etc.. The thesis analyzed this popular Hollywood movie from cultural perspective, to be specific, the paper made an attempt to study to what extent Chinese audiences found the narrative of *Avatar* transparent based on Olson (1999)'s narrative transparency theoretical framework. Besides, because different countries had different social and cultural contexts, the project also analyzed the ways Chinese audiences decoded *Avatar's* text that show indigenous interventions particular to cultural and social situations. It disclosed audiences' negotiated readings of *Avatar* based on the semiotic model.

Discourse analysis was a qualitative method adopted in this thesis to analyze meanings decoded by *Avatar* reviewers in Chinese Dou Ban website. In Gee's (2010) words, discourse analysis was concerned with the examination of meanings and he presented discourse analysis in a formula----What the speakers say + context=what the speaker means. So it was necessary and

suitable to apply this method to analyze viewer's movie reviews. On the one hand, it could disclose to what extent Chinese audiences' meanings reflected Olson's narrative transparency theory; on the other hand, it also could examine the influence of context on what viewers meant.

In order to get a more scientific and accurate result, Watson (2003)'s semiological model was applied to analyze Chinese audiences' indigenous interventions in the part of results besides the method of discourse analysis in this thesis. Semiological model paid more attention to texts, so the thesis considered it as an appropriate tool to analyze how Chinese viewers decoded *Avatar* under Chinese social, political and cultural situations. From semiological perspective, we knew that a sign was constituted of signifier and signified. In *Avatar*, the signifier referred to the picture, sound and anything that appealed to our senses. The signified was conditioned by when, where and how audiences saw the sign. So the thesis used this model to elaborate upon indigenous readings of Chinese viewers.

The thesis got a conclusion that, *Avatar* was transparent to Chinese viewers to a great extent, such as some mythotypic attributes, openendness, virtuality, inclusion etc.. Further, Chinese audiences decoded it indigenously, and most of them were dominant and negotiated. According to Hall's Encoding/decoding model and Olson's textual transparency theory, when audiences did

oppositional reading, *Avatar* had some characteristics of opaqueness, like mythotypic apparatus ellipticality. Later, many indigenous interventions Chinese audiences did were found in this thesis, that means, viewers projected their local cultural, social and political situations into reading process on the basis of transparent characteristics of *Avatar's* text.

In the meantime, the thesis also did not ignore the two external mythotypic devices—production value and omnipresence. For keeping a more integrated and comprehensive conclusion, this project analyzed this two attributes from economical and philosophical angles. Further, besides analyzing *Avatar's* successful transparent text, the dissertation also disclosed some negative aspects caused by movie technology toward culture from alienation technology perspectives.

Finally, this paper also philosophically considered development of entertainment industry's negative impact on culture and appeal to Chinese entertainment industry for absorbing the success of *Avatar* for reference and having a sound development.

Key Words: *Avatar*, Textual narrative transparency, Discourse analysis.

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