



# Research on Worldview Elements in the Science Fiction Film

**Lin Jiang**

Qingdao Film Academy, Qingdao, Shandong, China.

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\***Corresponding author:** Lin Jiang, Qingdao Film Academy, Qingdao, Shandong, China.

## Abstract

Through reproducing, representing, and recreating the real world, science fiction films create a fascinating picture of a possible future for human beings. People's enthusiasm for science fiction films demonstrates their constant self-reflection and desire for a brighter future. Currently, the enthusiasm for such films among people in China and the international market continues to grow. According to a survey, 45% of young Chinese audiences have high expectations for science fiction films, which have consistently topped the box office charts. The practitioners concerned enjoy the opportunity, however, they are still faced with challenges as the audience continuously hopes to see better works. Moreover, for a science fiction movie, the construction of the worldview serves as a more important foundation than the script or plot. The establishment of a comprehensive and captivating worldview is a crucial step toward the success of a science fiction film. But it is more difficult to build a new world in a science fiction film than to replicate the real world. The paper aims to explain the connotation of worldview and its key elements in science fiction films. Additionally, it will analyze how the worldview conveyed by science fiction films establishes a connection with the audience. In addition, it provides relevant theoretical guidance for the creation of science fiction films.

## Keywords

Science fiction film, worldview, basic elements of worldview

While immersing themselves in the captivating world of science fiction, the audience finds temporary respite from the monotony of everyday life and seeks to uncover the true purpose of existence. "Science" represents technology, symbolizing the "present"; "fantasy" represents something imaginative, symbolizing the "future". Science fiction films summarize and reflect current scientific developments, stimulating thoughts about the future direction of humanity. They also embody people's desires and expectations for the unknown world. Compared to other genres, explosive science fiction films rely more on special effects. Shen Yue, a renowned director who has been exploring science fiction films for decades, once stated that the essence of science fiction films lies in the underlying world ideology behind them. It is believed that the "worldview" created by science fiction films is more fundamentally important than the script. Compared to the magnificent special effects, the essence of science fiction films lies in a plausible worldview that mirrors the real world but in a distinct and unique manner. Only by successfully establishing a worldview system that is convincing, easily understood, and deeply embedded can science fiction be brought to life. Many questions in this field are waiting to be answered, such as "What is a worldview?", "How is the worldview of a science fiction film constructed?", "How can creators connect the audience to their films through worldviews?", and "What is the process of localizing the worldview of science fiction films in China?". In this paper, the aforementioned questions are further discussed to provide a reference for practitioners in related fields.

## 1. Worldview and Its Philosophical Meaning

Worldview represents people's holistic idea towards the world and describes the universal laws the world functions according to; it is based on the spiritual experience accumulated by society and the socio-cultural environment. Also, it reflects the wholeness and comprehensiveness of the real world, enabling people to view the whole world objectively across space and time. The issue of worldview has been studied accordingly in the fields of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and pedagogy. Here, the paper draws on philosophical and psychological perspectives to analyze worldviews, as well as their properties and meanings when embedded in science fiction films.

Philosophy itself serves as a discipline about worldviews. Freud regarded worldviews as conceptual and philosophical constructs held consciously by individuals, aiming to bundle worldviews into neat, interpretable packaged forms. Although Freud held a skeptical view of worldviews, he also outlined several important dimensions, including beliefs about valid sources of knowledge (epistemology), the origin of the universe (the source of happiness), the validity of magic and direct action, the existence of unconscious determinants of thought and action, the question of voluntarism (free will) versus determinism regarding human agency, and the spiritual versus material ontological issues. In the final part of *Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, Freud defined four basic worldviews: science, religion, philosophy, and art (Stefano, B., 2022).

## 2. Significance of Worldview to Psychology

Concerning psychology, worldview is considered a summary of rational, spiritual, emotional, and pragmatic cognitive experiences towards the world, and as a complete formation of the way of understanding the world, which can be regarded as a synthesis of reason and emotion (Davis, J. L., 2022). At the same time, as worldview represents a special organization of consciousness, people also generate constructive attitudes toward the world based on it, for example, define it as a mentally practical tool used to organize/reorganize the human world order, to understand the purpose and feelings of human existence, and to broaden the depth of human consciousness (David, M. H., 2023). Human beings have a highly developed sense of smell and a keen ear and can perceive information transmitted by verbal and nonverbal channels in an organized manner and in real-time, which is the material basis for constructing worldviews and using them. People perceive the world as a whole in a primitive, spontaneous way in different cultural contexts. These perceptions eventually become the background of individual consciousness, the priceless particles that form the basis of human spiritual life, entering deep into the subconscious and triggering and guiding people's thoughts and actions.

## 3. Basic Elements of Constructing the Worldview in Science Fiction Films

The worldview constructed in the science fiction film shows the creator's understanding of the "universe" where the story takes place and the characters' understanding of it. This approach originated in Hollywood science fiction films, and all the properties of a strange planet were designed specially for the plot and to facilitate the smooth development of the story in the new world rapidly in advance. From the perspective of art design, it can be called a successful method. The concept designer, Zhu Feng has said that a certain setting of the film's worldview can make the new world created in the film more accurate and help the audience to get a more visual and intuitive impression of it (Contreras J. L. 2022). The design principle of the worldview in science fiction films is the same as that of film art, which can be unfolded in layers according to the plot. The pursuit of visual stimulation may not bring the audience real shock, so the worldview of science fiction films is mainly created based on a reasonable and scientific platform. In practice, the director needs to propose the main idea of the worldview, later the concept designer will flesh it out accordingly, and finally, the movie art designer will create different scenes by combining the worldview concept and the plot. Many science fiction blockbusters strive to be realistic and make fewer "mistakes". Additionally, crews will hire some experts, such as physicists, astronomers, or chemists to participate in the film creation and direction.

Similar to film art in specific scenes that are designed according to the conditions of the era, characters, and plot, some necessary conditions are required as well in the construction of film worldview. These conditions are roughly divided into the following categories: 1) natural climate in the new world; 2) physical laws; 3) plants and animals; 4) resources; 5) social and cultural system; 6) religious traditions; 7) economic system; 8) science and morality; 9) knowledge limit; 10) history; 11), the position relative to the earth. More specifically, for example, the setting conditions of alien beings include: 1) appearance (image, height, weight); 2) athletic ability; 3) special ability; 4) physical endurance; 5) faith; 6) way of acquiring knowledge; 7) way of reproduction; 8) economic level; 9) morality; 10) way

of communication; 11) way of fighting; 12) automation level, etc. The film, *Avatar*, provides an excellent model for people to know these settings. James Cameron has created a strange but real planet in his world-class science fiction masterpiece *Avatar*.

The alien world in the film is a planet named Pandora in the universe, with the scientific name of "Alpha Centaur B-4". It is one of the planets in the Centaur Alpha group, and it is roughly as large as the Earth. Moreover, the natural environment is set up completely differently from that in the earth. Its atmosphere is composed of ammonia, methane, and chlorine, and earthmen cannot survive here as they must rely on oxygen. The planet has a pleasant climate, and people can enjoy the sunlight all over with very few devastating natural disasters. Compared to the Earth, Pandora has a low gravity ratio and a relatively abnormal magnetic field, resulting in many small visual spectacles presented in the film as the island floats in the air. The floating island is called Hallelujah Mountain, which has rich minerals in the mountain rocks. These ores are both a rare superconductor and a magical energy reserve that can be used to solve the energy crisis in the earth.

These mines are regarded as the sacred mountain by the local inhabitants. The earthmen come to Pandora to plunder the mineral resources to save their own home, however, this triggers a huge conflict in the plot. In the film, vivid and detailed living objects on the planet are described. For example, the eggplant in the vegetable field looks like fruit, large plants look like banyan trees, saber-toothed beasts look like panthers, and flying dragons look like pterosaurs. Although similar to creatures on the earth, they are slightly different under closer inspection. One of the most different settings, different from earth creatures, is that all of them in Pandora can transmit information completely and indiscriminately through the tentacles on their braids, which serves as an important way of communication for the Pandorans. Also, this way represents that Pandora itself is a huge unified life form. The Pandorans have bred a completely different natural culture in this magical nature. The intelligent beings here are called "Na'vi", who live in a way similar to people in primitive society and the Stone Age. They have their language and emotions. In addition, they believe in the god "Eva", who is created through the mysterious power of the moon (Contreras J. L., 2022).

Na'vi can also sing to praise their gods through various forms, such as stories, dances, and handicrafts like human beings. As the film takes place in a primitive tribal stage, the Na'vi have not yet developed a specific economic system, in stark contrast to the image of humans in the film. Humans in the film spend a lot of fortune to build an interstellar carrier to plunder the minerals. They want to gain greater economic benefits from it. Pandora's inhabitants have a more primitive moral concept. Most of them hunt for survival, and they accept the connection of all things in the world, but they don't have evil ideas similar to the seven sins of human beings. Na'vi are based on human images, although they have a dark blue body color and zebra-like skin stripes, forming the apparent image of a new race that distinguishes humans. The appearance of the Na'vi also differs from that of humans in many aspects. Their average height is nearly 3 meters, and their bodies are long and slender, with broad shoulders and thin waists in an inverted triangle shape. They have elf-like ears, long and thin necks, and only four fingers on each hand. Their clothing is simple and primitive.

The language of the Na'vi people has been scientifically recreated as a system. Professor Paul Frommer of the USC Department of Languages has created nearly 1,000 words for the Na'vi system. These examples vividly demonstrate the meticulousness of the *Avatar* film's worldview setting. It is the in-depth exploration of Pandora that made this phenomenal film possible. The project takes a decade and a huge investment to complete. Besides three to four years of filming and production, the rest six years were spent polishing the details of every aspect of the worldview. From this, it can be seen that the worldview of a good science fiction film is not an easy task to establish.

#### **4. Reflections on the Process of Localizing the Worldview of Contemporary Science Fiction Films in China**

Compared with Hollywood blockbusters, the worldview of Chinese science fiction films is equipped with oriental characteristics. The main reason relies on the fact that the long history of Chinese culture has provided rich materials for the creation of science fiction films and that people's spirit of morality and dedication has also instilled a different value system in them. For domestic science fiction films, collectivism is valued much more than individualism and individual interests are subordinated to collective interests as well. For example, in the movie *The Wandering Earth*, as the earth faces with the crisis of destruction, the Chinese people do not choose to reunite with their families but gather the strength of all mankind to save it. This worldview transcends the concept of a "nation-state" community and pursues collectivism to build a community of all human civilization. The film is adapted from the novel of the same name by Liu Cixin, a famous science fiction writer in China, which shows China's local literature and also

provides a fertile ground for the progress of science fiction films. Moreover, the native "Chinese science fiction film" is more likely to trigger the emotional resonance of the people. This year, another science fiction film, *Moon Man*, adapted from a comic book, also enjoys great popularity. The worldview in the original book is greatly different from the science in reality. For the comic book subject, less trouble exists, but criticism will be made when it is adapted into a movie easily.

Therefore, the creators conducted a lengthy exploration of the logical basis and behavioral norms that should be followed in the world of *Moon Man* before filming. Finally, a romantic and retro science fiction worldview is presented to the audience. The success of these domestic science fiction films cannot be achieved without the support of a reasonable and realistic worldview, which is also supported by the cultural core and aesthetics of Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, their success provides more experience and thoughts for the future development of domestic science fiction films. First of all, the advantage of domestic science fiction films lies in their unique and rich worldviews, but they are also trapped in a dilemma due to the lack of enough reference precedents. In the process of constructing the worldview of *Moon Man*, some episodes from foreign films are borrowed, such as *Solaris*, and *2001 Space Odyssey*. Secondly, the booming market of Chinese science fiction films cannot be achieved without the support of robust technology and great talents. On the one hand, the worldview is conveyed through visual effects, and on the other hand, talents are widely recruited to create Chinese stories about Chinese people. Also, it is imperative to explore the archetypes from Chinese history and keep trying with great works to interact and communicate with the audience, thus gradually realizing the localization and generation of Chinese science fiction films.

## 5. Conclusion

What worldview means to a film is equivalent to how important the steering wheel is to a car. It serves as a crucial component in controlling the actions of the entire vehicle. A comprehensive worldview helps bring together creators from all departments, enabling them to unify their thoughts and create films more effectively. In terms of a science fiction film, the establishment of the worldview and how it is conveyed are crucial elements in telling a compelling story. Sorting out the process of constructing a cinematic worldview on stage and engaging with the audience and individuals involved in the production will enhance the quality of science fiction films.

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