

# A Hermeneutic Analysis of the Love Relationship in the Movie "A Chinese Odyssey"

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## Abstract

The movie "A Chinese Odyssey", as a surrealist magic movie, became a cultural totem in the late nineties, and the main love story as a clue throughout the whole drama has always been enjoyed by people. Characters such as Supreme Treasure and Zixia Fairy have unique love relationships, and the movie weaves a complex web of love. In this paper, the famous psychoanalyst Lacan's philosophical theories are used to hermeneutically analyze the love relationship in the movie, so as to prove the impossible truth of love in A Chinese Odyssey.

## Keywords

Jacques Lacan, Mirror stage, Other, A Chinese Odyssey.

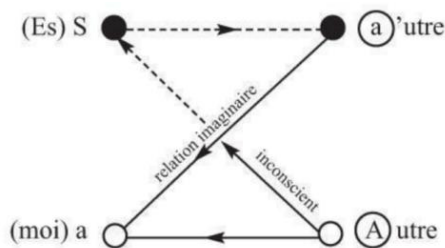
## 1. Introduction

The phenomenal comedy movie starring Stephen Chow has been profoundly interpreted from a variety of perspectives. Although the question of whether the multiple interpretations are merely a crude splitting and restructuring of the movie is worth pondering, the movie itself, as a facsimile of the original, gives itself a vast hermeneutical space anyway. Starting from the philosophical theories of the famous psychoanalytic master Lacan, this paper attempts to build a bridge of dialogue between the film and Lacan's theories by analyzing the love relationship in the film in depth, thus proving the impossible truth of the love relationship.

## 2. Lacanian Theory of Strabismus and Cinematic Analysis

Jacques Lacan, the famous French psychoanalyst after Sigmund Freud, whose theory of mirror stage made him famous. Lacan's thought embodies surreality as well as multidisciplinary complexity, especially in the later period when Lacan's theory habitually utilizes topological structure, which poses a considerable challenge for understanding his theory. The subtitle of this paper is therefore Lacanian theoretical squint, a term that has actually been used by Lacan, who argued that "it is only in the state of one's squint that the object a, which is the ontological existential reality, can be rendered failingly." [1] The relationship between the love objects in the Big Little Lies movie, as interpreted in this paper, is one of mutual negation and pursuit of the object a in the state of squint.

"Mirror stage", "Theory of the Other", and "ISR" are the main parts of Lacan's psychological theory, and in order to explain the relationship between these three, this paper quotes Lacan's "scientific expression of the relation between the subject and the other" (L-schema) for Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Lacan's L-scheme

There are four subjects (others) in the schema, the first is the unconscious subject Es, discovered by Freud, in Freud's view, the human psychological phenomenon is composed of both the conscious and the unconscious, and the territory of psychoanalysis is in the unconscious, but Lacan refused to recognize the subject status of the unconscious, and transformed it into an "ineffable stupidity" in the subject." [1] The lowercase a is what is usually assumed to be the subject's ego (moi), but in Lacan's theory the lowercase a is not the subject but the subject's object a (the little other, Lacan's false ego), and what can really be called the ego is the lowercase a' (autre), which is a formal ego mirrored in the subject's object a. In Lacan's theory, the ego is not the subject but the object of the subject a (the little other, Lacan's false ego). In Lacan's theory, the ego is not a Freudian synthesis of the conscious and the unconscious; the ego is first an unconscious subject, and then, due to the existence of the object a, the subject forms a formal I (which is the empty "nothing") under the mapping of the object, and the so-called ego is finally crystallized under the transformative relation between the subject S, the lowercase a', and the lowercase a'. and the so-called self is finally framed in the small other (object a) under the transformational relationship between the subject S, the lowercase a', and the lowercase a'. The transformation from lowercase a' to lowercase a is accomplished under the relation imaginaire. It is the capital A (Autre) that participates in the whole process of ego formation. As the constitution of the subject S to the object a, there are two channels for the big Other to participate in the imaginative realm through the subconscious (inconscient) way and constitute the object a together with the lower-case a', and the second is to influence the object a (the ego) directly through the gaze (i.e., the symbolic realm) of the big Other.[4] Thus, in Lacan's schema, both the lowercase a and a' as well as the capitalized A are constitutive of the subject's object-form as the Other, and the ego is always in a position of absence.

Love is a main theme in the movie "A Chinese Odyssey". And its love is characterized by the following absurd and magical relationship schema. According to the plot of the movie, the entangled love lines are mainly on Sun Wukong & Zhi Zun Bao. In which Sun Wukong on the one hand betrays his marriage contract with Bai Jingjing, so much so that Bai Jingjing loves and hates him, on the other hand, he cheats on each other with Princess Iron Fan, the wife of the King Bull Demon, forming a pair of anti-ethical lovers, and lastly, a love relationship with Fairy Zixia. As Supreme Treasure, firstly, he fell in love with Bai Jingjing at first sight and concluded a marriage contract with each other, secondly, he had a love-hate relationship with Zixia Fairy, and lastly, he had a matrimonial relationship with Bull Demon King's sister, Niu Xiangxiang. Therefore, what the whole movie "Journey to the West" mainly shows is the web of love woven between the two subjects and the four objects. In these many relationships, love and hate, loyalty and betrayal, ideal and reality, lie and honesty, ethics and anti-ethics, love at first sight and love over time, these contradictory concepts are all displayed in this web of love to the fullest extent. If this is the case, how can love in a movie be true? The common definition of love is firstly a set of one-to-one relationship, and secondly, love cannot tolerate deception, betrayal and abandonment; love is a beautiful and sacred thing. But the divine love embodied in the film using the surrealistic interplay of time and space is precisely incompatible with ordinary

human love. Does this mean that the film is always just a film, and the real love is the materialized ordinary human love? In Lacan's view, if we want to compare the authenticity of these two kinds of love, not only the love of ordinary people is not real, but also the surreal love of fairies cannot be real. Or rather, both the one-to-one love of ordinary people and the one-to-many and many-to-many love of the movies deserve to be defended, because both are the impossible truth of love.

### 3. The Pseudo-Subject in the Mirror Image-The Void of Love

To argue the rationality of Lacanian love, the primary issue is the subject relationship between the Monkey King and the Supreme Treasure in the movie.

In the movie, Bai Jingjing's love object is Sun Wukong at the beginning, due to Sun Wukong's betrayal of his marriage, which makes Bai Jingjing fall into the painful situation of not being able to love him, and then Zai Zunbao appears, although in the image of Sun Wukong, but has his own self-consciousness, Zai Zunbao falls in love with Bai Jingjing at first sight, and launches an intense pursuit, and Bai Jingjing, whose heart's mirror image has always been the Monkey King, appears to be overwhelmed when facing the Supreme Treasure, who looks exactly like Sun Wukong, but then stumbles in a moment of weakness. The mirror image in Bai Jingjing's heart has always been the Monkey King, and when faced with the Supreme Treasure, who is exactly the same as the Monkey King, Bai Jingjing appears to be at a loss for words. However, in the subsequent ups and downs of the plot, both the Monkey King and the Supreme Treasure complete their self-identification with each other, and thus the object of Bai Jingjing's love is actually a combination of the two of them.

And the second major emotional line of the movie is Zixia's entanglement with both. Zixia first meets Zi Zun Bao and falls in love with him due to his drawing of the Zixia Sword, but at this time Zi Zun Bao is caught up in a cutthroat anguish of self-identity with the Monkey King and rejects Zixia's advances due to his marriage contract with Bai Jing Jing. However, in the subsequent unfolding of the plot, the object of Zixia's love is revealed to be the image of a worldly hero who is powerful and treads on the seven-colored auspicious clouds. From this point of view, as a mortal, Zizunbao is not the ideal object of Zixia's heart, but the image of the Monkey King is more in line with her imagination, and the object of Zixia's love is therefore a combination of the two.

Therefore, to summarize the love object of Bai Jingjing and Zixia, it can be called the Supreme Treasure who is not the Monkey King and the Monkey King who is not the Supreme Treasure. In Lacan's theory, what lies between the two is not a crisis of identity in terms of image, but not only that both are not each other, but also that the combination of the two is only an empty symbol.

In the movie, as the center of the love network, Zai Zun Bao & Sun Wukong, from the beginning to the end, are deep in the crisis of self-identity. The root cause of the crisis lies not in the lack of a strong sense of subjective self in Zi Zun Bao, which leads to the alienation of the double identity, but in the fact that there is no subjective self of Zi Zun Bao in the first place. In Lacan's vision, the reason for such a situation lies in the first self-identification of man - the mirror stage. According to Lacan, until six months of age, the infant is in a state of chaotic "fragmentation", which is "a consequence of the premature birth of the human being as a class". [1] Since all human beings are born prematurely, their nervous systems are not yet mature enough to distinguish between the ego and the outside world. [1] Because humans are born prematurely, their nervous systems are not yet mature enough to distinguish between the boundaries of the self and the outside world, and it is common for infants to suck on their fingers as if they were nipples. In the period from six to eighteen months, "the infant, who cannot yet speak, who is incapable of controlling his movements, and who is entirely governed by the disorder of his

native desires"[3] finds for the first time a whole image of himself in a mirror when confronted with it, and happily accomplishes his first identification with his own self. This stage can also be summarized as the birth stage of the Formal Self-Small Other  $a'$ . In this stage, the ego moves instantaneously from the world of "nothing" into the realm of the subject, and therefore remains essentially a formal "void," and this mirror-image of the self begins as a "foreign image of the other that is still different from the self" [the image of the other] [the mirror-image of the self]. This mirror-me begins as a "foreign image of the other that is still inscribed with differences from the self" [3], and in the subsequent process of growth, the pseudo-subject continuously reinforces this little other  $a'$  through the mirror image. This also explains why human beings never stop looking in the mirror in their lives; by looking in the mirror, the original mirror-image of me is strengthened, and the opposite is the invisibility of that original unconscious subject, so that "I and the mirror-image are by no means a one-to-one mutual correspondence of equivalent forms; it is the thing that clothes the subject of the indeterminate entity that is me, that hides the subject, and that holds it up in the image something that holds it up in the midst of it, rather than a kind of unity that is easily allowed to be united." [3] The Supreme Being as the first subject has fallen into the mist of mirroring in the original sense and thus cannot be distinguished from the mirror image of the Monkey King given to him by others, and it is interesting to note that the act of looking in the mirror occurs many times in the movie and each time it is an act of consciousness when the subject is unable to identify with himself. If we ask when Zenith identifies with the Monkey King, it is actually at the beginning of the second part of the movie, when Zenith picks up the mirror and sees his own monkey image; at that moment, the first mirror image of the pseudo-subject collapses, and the new one is the second mirror image of the lesser other  $a$ , which is given to him by others.

Lacan's notion of the little other  $a$  refers to the subject's object  $a$ . In contrast to the little other  $a'$  in the mirror stage, the little other  $a$  is no longer a formal "void"[5], but rather it is what gives the subject the possibility of imaginative identification. Before entering the world of language, the young child grasps the object mainly through imagination, and this object  $a$  is the clothing that the object "attaches" to the little other  $a'$  under the realm of imagination. The mediators of transformation are first of all the people around "I", and when Zai Zun Bao is the first subject, the others around him constantly "mistake" him for the Monkey King, and the first "mistake" must be in the imaginative relationship. The first "misrecognition" must have taken place in an imaginative relationship. Under the influence of others, Supreme Treasure forms an object  $a$  of the Monkey King in his mind, and this object  $a$  becomes a residue as a deprivation of the existence of the concrete Monkey King in another time and space. Due to the absence of concrete existence, the object formed by the Supreme Being is imaginative to begin with, and this residue continues to erode the mirror self of the Supreme Being on the one hand, and on the other hand continues to flesh out the image of the Monkey King through the words of others. In reality, the object  $a$  belongs to all of us, and since the language system of the young child is not yet formed, he or she is more inclined to use imaginative means to understand the "language" of adults.[6] This also explains the phenomenon of homogenization of children's ideals. Usually, in response to the question "What do you want to be in the future?" children mostly answer scientists, astronauts, doctors, teachers, etc. The reason for this is that these answers are alien and non-existent for the child. himself to be some elder or some member of the family, but rather mixes together what he himself heard as a child to form the core of various symbols in the unconscious." [1]

The composition of object  $a$  is always under the influence of others, which leads to the fact that in the course of each individual's growth object  $a$  becomes the self that everyone thinks of, and if the influence of others is excluded, the concept of the self can only remain in the mirror-image of the little other  $a'$ , but in reality, the others are omnipresent in the field, which leads to the fate of a kind of unavoidable alienation of identity.[7] When the child steps from the imaginative

realm into reality, i.e., when the child grasps and utilizes language as maturely as the adult, the object a does not escape from the imagination so that the individual truly recognizes the self, but rather the object a is further identified with the self as an alien being. The reason for this is that adult reality is not an objective world, but an all-encompassing symbolic world.

In the journey of self-alienation of Supreme Treasure, the most important role is played by the words of others; when he thinks he is Supreme Treasure, others say that he is the Monkey King, and when he thinks he is the Monkey King, others say that he is Supreme Treasure. Why are the words of others so important? So much so that as an individual, the Monkey King lives under the words of others throughout his life. The cause of this state of affairs begins with the individual's relation to the world, and in Lacan's theory, the Big Other is not the concrete other, but the symbolic realm of language.[9] The individual becomes more and more separated from the world through the mirroring stage and the completion of the object a. The individual inevitably undergoes the destruction of the imagination, i.e., he is inevitably thrown into the world of reality. Under Lacan's discourse, reality is not real; the real world is palpable and sensible, while reality is the world of language (the world of the Big Other). "Whoever enters language is in fact already in a completely new domain different from the domain of the imagination, a jurisdiction whose quality supports and welcomes him in the form of language" [1], which is the symbolic realm. The greatest characteristic of language is the absence of existence; when the Supreme Being is faced with the misrepresentation of others, he could have identified this being (the Monkey King) and shown without a word that he is not this being, and because of the absence of the Monkey King, the only way for him to argue is through language. Thus as a human being he has to be bound in the web of cultural symbols. In the course of human life, one is always prescribed by language, always symbolized, so much so that the individual takes it for granted and boldly proclaims and speaks of "the self shaped by language". "The symbolic relation, centered on the signifier of presence and absence, becomes the existential structure of the subject's existence, the subject, a pseudo-subject that bears the name of a symbolic signifier but is empty inside." [1] And this is what every human being is. [1] And this is the fate from which every individual cannot escape.

Up to this point, what constitutes the two subjects of the Monkey King & the Supreme Treasure are such four nodes, namely, the unconscious subject S, the formal I a', the object a, and the big Other A. And in the relationship between these two subjects, each subject possesses two subjects of objects, one of self and one of Other. Thus in the dual subjects of the Monkey King & the Supreme Being each would have two subjects, two selves, and two others. But putting aside the unconscious subject S of both, all is the Other, whether it is the little Other or the big Other, which is Lacan's dialectic of subject and Other [1]. From this, it is not difficult to understand what kind of delusional subject the complicated love relationship in the movie is based on. The complexity of the love relationship comes first of all from the complexity of the individual himself, and as soon as he establishes a relationship with another person, he falls into the Lacanian intersubjective dialectic, in which the dominant role is not played by two subjects, because the subject is a mirrored object but the Other, or the Symbol.

#### **4. The Absence of Presence-The Falsification of Love Relationships**

In the whole movie, the most representative of Lacanian love is the love between Zixia and Zizunbao. In the love relationship between the two, there are four objects straddling each other, namely Zixia's object a, Zizunbao's object a, the Monkey King, and Bai Jingjing. It can be said that what they see in each other's eyes are dual subjects, for Zixia Xianzi, one of which is Zizunbao, and the other is the fantasized image of Sun Wukong. For Zi Zun Bao, it is Zixia and Bai Jing Jing, whereas Sun Wukong and Bai Jing Jing as existential absences are spoken of only in terms of language, thus forming a forbidden structure of absence in the love relationship.

In the previous L schema, the line from object a to a' (relation imaginaire) is described by Lacan as the "veil of the narcissistic phantasmagoria," a line that acts as a sticky spider's web, which "seduces and captures" whatever is mapped onto it. anything that is mapped onto it. [1] The endpoints of this web are the mirrored form of the I as the object of narcissism, a', and the object as the target of seduction and capture, a. The mirroring stage mentioned earlier frames love initially in terms of an obsession with the mirrored I, which is what is commonly referred to as narcissism. For Freud, narcissism is the bet of the human libido, the prerequisite for all that is possible in love, and a person who truly loves himself has the capacity to love others, hence Freud's narcissism is a positive psychological behavior. Lacan, on the other hand, from his relational schema of the ego, hits the nail on the head when he suggests that the object of Freud's narcissism is nothing more than the mirrored nothingness-that constituent formed in the mirror stage. Thus, in Lacanian love, not only does narcissism fail to acquire the capacity to love others, but it further superimposes on the subject the garb of the mirror-image I. Narcissism, as a kind of autotelic love that encloses love within itself, eventually transforms into an object-love that turns love toward an external object, and narcissism as a prerequisite for love is falsified by Lacan into a personal monologue without a subject.

When love is transformed into object love, it involves a relationship between the two subjects, and the relationship is a mirror. When the two partners in love gaze at each other, what they see is not each other's true selves, but a mental image that has been taken in by the subject as a remnant of the object a. Since one cannot really know the other, which means that one cannot take in the external object as it is and accept it, the only way to do so is to present the other fantastically as an image of the other, which, as an alien being, is continually being fleshed out through imagination and the speech of the other, and this image of the other is the object of love. "The object that has been processed in some way and then drawn into the human spirit will not be a bad object for the subject to avoid straight away." [1] Thus the love relationship creates an illusion of beauty, with each other narcissistically accepting the other as a heart image to love, totally unconcerned about the other's shortcomings, and the breakdown of the love relationship often lies in the collapse of each other's heart images, due to the fact that the object of love is nothing more than something that exists as a sort of trace of what has been lost. In Zixia's heart image, Zizunbao is a non-realistic existent, and this existent is taken away, what remains is the beautiful heart image of the subject of Zizunbao and Zixia's inner unconscious self-deception, so Zixia will say, "My man of my dreams is a world-class hero, and one day he will step on the colorful auspicious clouds to marry me", "I am so happy that I can run so fast", even though the subject of Zi Xia as Supreme Treasure does not have this image.

## 5. Conclusion

Through a Lacanian reading of the love relationship in the movie, it is ultimately demonstrated that at the point where the two partners in love become each other's mental images, the presence of existence dictates that neither can merely take the other into their imaginative embrace, but must resort to reality. But reality here remains the symbolic realm. This creates an unavoidable structural deficit in love, i.e., the mental image cannot contain all of the other person; one still needs to know the other person realistically, but reality is an impossible reality. The subject can only resort to language, to the realm of symbols, to symbolically supplement each other's mental image through words, which is the gaze of the third party. Therefore, there is always a third party among the two parties of love, and this third party influences and dominates the two parties of love all the time by means of language and symbols. Thus Lacan says, "There are people who would never have fallen in love if they had never heard of it." [10] Love in fact owes its origin to symbols, the element of love is caused by language, and all love affairs are caused by imaginary and symbolic relations in conception.

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