

錯位

Cuòwèi (Displacement; also translated as Dislocation)

date: 1987 Xi'an Film Studios

screenplay: Huang Xin; Zhang Min

director: Huang Jianxin

music: Han Yong

cast: Liu Zifeng (as Zhao Shuxin and the Robot); Yang Kun (Yang Lijuan);
Mou Hong (the Secretary); Sun Feihu (Mr. An)

The title means literally "in the wrong place" or "in the wrong position". Billed as the sequel to another film "The Black Cannon Incident," (about foreign trade intrigue, or imagined intrigue) this is one of China's earliest "science fiction" movies. A scientist who feels his research impeded by the time he has to spend in meetings and political study sessions contrives to create a robot duplicate of himself that can take his place at those time-consuming meaningless activities, so as to enable him to spend more time on his research. However, the experiment backfires when the robot begins to develop a personality of its own, starts mismanaging his affairs and making advances on his girlfriend.

The film begins with the title written in crooked, disjointed characters. We see a modernistic machine, on which a metallic ball gyrates back and forth on a thin arm, mimicking a perpetual motion machine. The machine recurs throughout the film. We then see a surreal operation in a hospital setting, which turns into a nightmare. The scientist then goes into his study, plays with a toy robot and gets an idea. We see a strangely shaped car and modern buildings. A meeting with Germans who are interested in the scientist's research is interrupted by his secretary who announces: "Kaihui de shijian dao le!" (It's time for you to be off to a meeting). The camera pans on huge statues carved of white stone in sparring postures (surreal). At a meeting, an example of successful research is shown to him. We do not see it, but get the impression he is irritated by this showmanship. Driving back with his secretary, who looks and acts a bit like Agent 99 in "Get Smart", the scientist pulls into a gas station (Esso).

Disturbed by the need to go to more meetings (the secretary keeps reminding him: "It would be bad if you don't go."), he creates a robot that looks exactly like him, telling the robot time is limited in life, so he does not want to spend his time performing meaningless tasks. The robot talks back. His girlfriend comes over and asks for his help in getting her transferred to his work unit. He tells her he can't help her precisely because she is his girlfriend. In the next scene, he walks with his secretary through a series of self-opening doors along a long white hallway. The secretary keeps addressing him as "Juzhang," a bureaucratic title meaning "Bureau Chief," which he does not enjoy.

Meanwhile, the robot is sent to stand in for him at an insurance convention. When the robot's back begins to smoke, it comments during the opening speech: "Someone just said my back's on fire. Well, it isn't. But if it was, it wouldn't matter anyway, because I am insured!" The entire assembly burst into laughter and applause. They toast him afterward and he short-circuits (in a secret back room, first calling its inventor for help). The scientist shows up in time to save the robot. We are subsequently taken to more meetings and see more modern buildings. The robot tells its inventor it wants to have its own personality. He refuses, responding, rather mechanically: "I created you to obey my orders, otherwise I'll destroy you." The robot asks about love. He is unnerved and, thinking that the robot has been hitting on his girlfriend, slaps it's face, hurting his own hand. The robot later borrows romance novels in an attempt to learn about love.

More surreal rides through a white world, people appear in a white building which he walks through. This leads to a desert wasteland where a sage like Laozi (Lao Tzu) appears, watching a commercial for Toshiba on a television set. The scientist demands a circular from the Central Committee of the CP on combating bureaucratism, which the robot has concealed from him. He tells the robot he will limit its nengliang (capacity for thinking and performing). Again, we see the sparring figures, looking like they are carved from white ice and this time including a revolving female torso. This is the sculptor's studio where the robot's body was made. The inventor presents a short speech saying that some people want to work but being stopped by others. The robot plugs into a defective socket and shoots off sparks at an entire auditorium. He then walks into a parking structure and accidentally brushes against a taimei or juvenile delinquent's "moll". Gang members try to intimidate him into apologizing, then attempt to beat him up, but he forcefully resists, defeating them easily, then breaking their guitar in a rage against humanity. The inventor is woken by his secretary, who tells him he must go to more meetings. In an office, he runs into the robot impersonating him. When they come to confront each other face to face, the secretary screams and lightning flashes. The inventor then awakens from another bad dream. Does the robot survive or will the inventor...?

questions:

1. Is this more a science fiction story or more a comment on the contemporary Chinese reality?
2. If there is satire in this film, what do you think is the object of the satire?
3. What do you think the device on the inventor's desk, which the camera focuses on several times symbolizes?

4. What are the implications of the film's title "Displacement"?
5. Does the "contradiction" between the inventor and his creation, the robot reflect the contradiction between the "public" and "private" faces of an individual in communist society?
6. Did this film remind you of early examples of Japanese science fiction? Why or why not? What differences do you think there were between the Japanese reality of the 1950s and early '60s and that of China then and now?