

Study on the Evolution of Chinese Commercial Film Aesthetics Since the New Era

Minjie Yin*

Liaoning University Science and Technology Institute , Shenyang 110036, China

Abstract

Since the beginning of commercial recovery in mainland films in the late 1970s, Chinese commercial films in the new era have gone through a journey of nearly half a century. The entertainment movies appeared in the 1980s, The Rise of Citizen Movies in the 1990s, the attempt of Chinese cultural and commercial expression in the new century, the trend of landscape film in the first ten years, and the beginning of film industry aesthetics in the post ten years, constitute a complete clue of the evolution of Chinese commercial film aesthetics.

Keywords

Chinese Commercial Films; Commercial Film Aesthetics; Film Industry Aesthetics.

1. Introduction

In the course of the rapid development of the Chinese film market, a large number of commercial films that have achieved good box office results and have had extensive social influence are not only the direct product of the reform of my country's film system and the expansion of market capacity, but also closely related to the social and historical environment at that time. Since the new era, under the multiple effects of the market and society, Chinese commercial films have continuously adjusted their aesthetic expressions and formed several distinctive style changes of the times. With the continuous emergence of double-high box-office films such as "The Wandering Earth" and "The Eight Hundred", the mature aesthetic discourse of Chinese commercial films has begun to take shape.

2. 1980s: The Entertainment Movies Appeared

At the beginning of the reform and opening up, the prosperity of the film industry became an important cultural phenomenon. With the help of the state-run film system established by New China and the distribution and projection network of China Film Corporation that penetrates into the grassroots level of counties and townships across the country,[1] coupled with the suppressed enthusiasm of the audience for watching movies and the objective reality that other entertainment methods such as television have not yet been popularized, China has created a Chinese film industry. This period was the first golden age of new Chinese cinema. In 1978, the national movie audience reached 23.14 billion people, and in 1979 it reached 29.3 billion people. At the same time, it also set an unprecedented record of 28 movies per capita in the country. [2] During this period, although the "exploration films" of the fourth and fifth generation directors achieved brilliant artistic achievements, it was the entertainment films that were not valued by the academic circles at the time that won the audience and the market. The movie "The Mysterious Buddha" released in 1981 combines suspense, action, thriller and other commercial elements and has achieved good market performance. The film cost more than 100,000 yuan to shoot, but nearly 300 copies were distributed. According to statistics, the national box office revenue of "The Mysterious Buddha" was as high as 100 million yuan. Calculated at 0.25 yuan per movie ticket at that time, the number of moviegoers reached 400 million, more than one-

third of the country's total population at that time. [2] At the beginning of June 1982, the film "Shaolin Temple" was released as a co-production film, which became a topical work with great influence at that time, with as many as 300 million people watching the film. [3] From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, entertainment films represented by "The Mysterious Buddha" and "Shaolin Temple" met the audience's popular entertainment needs and formed an aesthetic trend of commercial films characterized by easy-to-understand and bizarre plot twists.

3. 1990s: The Rise of Public Aesthetic Taste

In the 1990s, the contradiction between the state-run film system and the market economy became more and more prominent, and the film industry began to enter a period of transition. In 1992 alone, 6 of the 16 state-owned film studios in the country lost money, while the number of moviegoers nationwide was 10.55 billion, 13 billion less than in 1982. [4] In the face of the continuous shrinking of the film market, the government began to promote the shareholding system reform of state-owned film companies and began to introduce imported blockbuster films. Almost at the same time, China's urbanization process began to accelerate, and the expansion of the pan-citizen group and the increase in income made commercial comedy films a dark horse in the market downturn. Under the dual effect of policy and market demand, in the Spring Festival of 1995, the action comedy "Rumble in the Bronx" starring Jackie Chan broke the mainland box office record with a box office of 95 million. From 1998 to 2000, Feng Xiaogang directed the urban comedy "The Dredm Factory", "Be There or Be Square," and "Sorry Baby" trilogy, which achieved good market feedback and made the concept of "New Year's Eve" generally accepted. In the 1990s, the life-oriented and citizen-oriented aesthetic tastes represented by light comedies and Hong Kong films constituted the main aesthetic style of commercial films.

4. New Century: Attempt at Commercial Expression of Chinese Culture

After China officially joined the WTO in 2001, it has become an inevitable trend for Chinese films to directly participate in the global market competition. In 2002, marked by the implementation of the revised "Film Management Regulations", the reform of the film industry entered a deep-water zone. At this time, the reorganization of the cinema chain system and the lowering of the threshold for capital access have made my country's film box office and moviegoers grow at a rate of more than 30% for 10 consecutive years. [5] Starting from Zhang Yimou's "Hero", the fifth-generation directors who have won quite a lot at international film festivals have started their own Chinese-style commercial blockbuster attempts with the expectation of participating in the international market competition and sufficient creative funds. These films are all based on the national cultural fables that the fifth-generation directors are good at. At the same time, they fully respect the laws of the market. The production methods of big investment, big scenes, big stars and all-round publicity strategies constitute the mainstream business film aesthetics in China in the early 21st century. Although public opinion on Chinese-style commercial blockbusters is mixed, these films have made an undeniable contribution to the domestic and foreign expansion of the Chinese film market and the initial attempt to industrialize film production.

5. Early 2010s: Landscape Film Trend

In the second decade of the 21st century, my country's film market continued to maintain rapid growth relying on the reactivation of the sinking market. In August 2013, the Ministry of Finance and the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television issued the "Notice on the Application and Management of Subsidy Funds for the Construction of Digital

Cinemas in County Towns" to further strengthen the construction of county-level cinemas.[5] As of the end of September 2018, there were 57,672 screens nationwide, of which 21,287 were screened in county-level cinemas, accounting for 37%. [1] It can be seen that the growth of my country's film market since 2010 has largely been accomplished by activating groups that had previously watched less films.

The lack of movie viewing experience of new audience groups and the popularity of the Internet make the impact of publicity, especially Internet publicity, on the box office of commercial movies more and more important. Beginning in 2013, the "Little Times" trilogy directed by Guo Jingming relied on the full network marketing of the participating stars and the original IP of the novel, and finally achieved a box office result of 1.36 billion yuan. The "Little Times" series of films also became the origin of IP movies. As scholar Zhao Yi said, the intersection of the two keywords "fan movie" and "IP" in 2014 re-identified the basic paradigm of IP development in China's cultural industry. [6] Since then, IP movies with stars and various cross-border IPs as the marketing core, such as "My Sunshine", "The Lost Tomb", "Where Are We Going Dad", and "The Old Classmate" have become an important phenomenon of Chinese commercial movies. The over-reliance on IP and stars made many commercial films in this period a landscape display of certain elements. This trend of landscape films is also a distinctive feature of the commercial film aesthetics of this period.

6. Late 2010s: The Beginning of Film Industry Aesthetics

Compared with the previous waves of commercial film aesthetics, the growth of China's "film industry aesthetics" and the emergence of "heavy industry films" have an obvious official tone. In 2017, scholar Chen Xuguang gave a report on the "Golden Rooster and Hundred Flowers Film Festival China Film Forum" titled "The New Power of Chinese Directors and the Rise of the Principles of Film Industry Aesthetics", which initially explained the principles of Chinese film industry aesthetics. [7] At present, film industry aesthetics is still a concept that is constantly developing and improving. Based on the current views of scholars, the period can be summarized from the following three aspects: First, film industry aesthetics advocates the unity of film industry concepts and aesthetic production ideas. the rules. Second, the core of film industry aesthetics is to guide and shape the market with limited and efficient aesthetic expressions while respecting business and the market. Third, as an aesthetic system, film industry aesthetics has a complex origin.

In general, the concept of film industry aesthetics is an academic summary of the film aesthetic style after the Chinese film industry encountered the "new normal" since 2016. During this period, the market performance of IP films such as "L.O.R.D: Legend of Ravaging Dynasties" was not as good as before, while new commercial blockbusters such as "Operation Mekong" began to gradually become phenomenal films with a win-win situation at the box office and word of mouth. For "Wolf Warrior 2", "The Wandering Earth", "My Motherland and Me" and other new popular movies with high industrial production standards and both Chinese-style aesthetic expression and Hollywood aesthetic characteristics, the academic circles use "heavy industry movies" "The concept of "film industry aesthetics" named it, and extracted the common aesthetic characteristics of "film industry aesthetics".

7. Epilogue: Film Industry Aesthetics as Chinese Aesthetic Discourse

As a complex social practice field, film production includes the game of multi-dimensional forces such as culture, aesthetics, economy, and society. Since the new era, with the rapid growth of China's economy and the continuous deepening of the reform of China's film system, the scale of the film market has begun to expand rapidly. Under this circumstance, the split between economic capital and cultural capital, aesthetic capital, and social capital has always

been a problem in the field of Chinese commercial film production. The ebb and flow of multi-dimensional forces in the field of film production constitutes the internal motivation of the aesthetic evolution of Chinese commercial films.

At the same time, as a cultural phenomenon, the material basis of film aesthetic expression is a complete film production system. If the evolution of Chinese commercial film aesthetics is the characterization of the game of forces in the field of film production in different periods, then the film production system is the operating mechanism of various capital forces. From this perspective, the aesthetic evolution of Chinese commercial films is the concrete presentation of the transition from the state-run film system to the film industrialization system since the new era. Film industrialization refers to the film production industrial system established through standardized processes and large-scale production systems. [8] China's film industry system has been gradually established with attempts after the new era in the reform of my country's film system, the development of the film market, the evolution of audience groups and aesthetics, and the competition and reference with foreign films. At present, relying on the initial construction of the film industry system, the emergence of a group of heavy industry films featuring "high concept, high technology and high budget" can be said to have bridged the tearing problem that has always existed in the field of Chinese film production to a certain extent. And provides a standardized paradigm that can be copied from. It should be noted that the systematization of my country's film industrialization is still in its infancy. The tearing phenomenon between box office and word of mouth, market and aesthetics has eased but still exists in the field of commercial film production. How to continuously promote the continuous deepening of Chinese film industrialization and build a perfect Chinese film aesthetic model is not only the direction of the film industry and academia, but also an important part of building my country's cultural soft power and enhancing my country's cultural discourse power.

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