

Reflection on the Development of Genre of Chinese Road Film

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Abstract: Chinese road film, as a unique and special cultural product, plays an important role in the self-examination of social moral culture and the expression of human emotion. It is a known that there was a scarcity of really excellent works from the development process of Chinese road film in the recent two decades. In addition, Chinese road film faces dilemma of either the lack or rigidity of artistic themes, the strange and disharmonious film fusion, the loss of desire in the consumerism circumstance and the low artistry which exists in line with the rapid pace under the impact of commercial interests.

Keywords: Chinese road film; Development reflection; Genre film

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1. Introduction

The commercial success of Chinese road films in recent year, instead of a breakthrough in the art, triggers the gradual and vague handling of “road spirit” and value trending and the lack of criticism of Chinese road film which made it difficult to gain a new achievement in art. Although Chinese road films have been fixated on a particular type mode and have garnered audience approval, there are many problems awaiting to be solved in the development of Chinese road films.

2. Development dilemma of Chinese road films

2.1. Rigid mode attributed to aesthetic fatigue

Most works employ superstars to act in road films, causing the reduction in the work’s aesthetic, not to mention the persistent use of the rigid theme in the Chinese road films in recent years. Since the 21st century, Chinese road film has formed its own language model and type characteristics. In the meantime, a number of works have garnered good reputation. The audience’s acceptance of road film has increased day by day, and audience has also given high appraisal to the creators of road film. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that the repeated utilization of same theme and element not only cause the aesthetic fatigue among audiences, but also cause the hidebound model of realistic subject of Chinese road film.

Chinese road film, which is a product of the film industry system and also represents a great transformation largely reflected in its works, leads to the aesthetic fatigue of the audience. It is certain that the works of art in the post-industrial era will inevitably show the value metamorphosis of mechanical reproduction, making the charm of art less vivid and flexible. That is to say “a transformation from the worshipped value of art to the displayed value of art”^[1], and a transformation from art of aesthetic to art of recreation, such as the single narrative mode, and the similarity of characters and the emptiness of film value are concerned. The narrative standard of *Lost In Journey* takes the emergence and solution of the

crisis as the clue, the misfortune of characters, and the messing up of successful and social elites as the beginning, and takes the escape from real society and traveling as their self-healing. It is obvious that films cannot get an unexpected and understandable dramatic tension if audiences know how the story will go at the beginning with their own aesthetic experience.

2.2. Element confusion under type fusion

The mixing of types and non-standards is a major development dilemma in the process of creation of Chinese road film. Irrespective of the construction of Chinese road film, Chinese Road film, for its current creation situation, blends other types or models of film and mixes with chaotic elements, and there is no sign of road spirits and cultures in the appearance of road image. For example, borrowing the cover of the theme of “highway,” *Buddies In India* is just the integration of comedy and song and dance and the chaotic and disorganized elements of the film.

The chaos element of the integration of Chinese highway film and genre elements are reflected in the superposition of various elements. Taking the superposition of comedy elements as an example, comedy is a “feature film characterized by the effect of laughter.”^[2] Unfortunately, parts of Chinese road film don’t get a widespread popularity due to topic selection and ingenious arrangement like comedy films. There is constant comedic effect in *Breakup Buddies*, and absurd elements which stimulate audience’s senses. This film not only relieved the audience a lot, but also eliminated some inner fears for attitudes towards the obscene, dark and even cruel side of human nature which were conveyed to audiences in the film. However, *Breakup Buddies* blindly amplifies desire and mixes many eye-catching type elements, “successfully” dispels the original intention of the film to explore the depth of human nature as an art work. This is very unfavorable to the rapid development of Chinese road film. Robert Mackey once pointed out, “Values, which decides the right and wrong sides of life, are the soul of art. Writers always build their own stories around the understanding of the fundamental value of life,”^[3] and so does Chinese road film. In *Lost In Thailand*, low artistic stature used by creator to satisfy the audience with a low-speed, vulgar and kitsch attitude is not able to show the value embodiment of the artistic works to the audience, and will perplex the development of the road film itself. This will catapult the development of Chinese road film towards bottleneck in the attempt to swing between creating artistic film and satisfying the audience.

All in all, to fix these kinds of problems, Chinese road film should enrich the narrative mode of a realistic theme, expand its internal value and show its humanistic connotation with vitality and vigor. To achieve this goal, creators of Chinese road films must pay attention to the life track of the individual audience, understand the audience life represented by the middle class, understand the contradictions and conflicts in Chinese regional culture, and consider the balance between art and commerce. Therefore, Chinese road film should not only observe the reality, but also perform its artistic and commercial value.

3. Cultural reflection on Chinese highway films

3.1. Loss of value in face of consumerism

As a cultural product, the film not only plays a role in spreading and carrying forward cultural values and ideology, but also has the nature of commercial entertainment as a commodity. The development of Chinese road film cannot segregate itself from the intertwined links between art and commerce as well as the support of the dual logic of culture and market. The nothingness in the value aspect of Chinese road film was birthed when we were frequenting the entertainment carnivals and become the victims of spectacle effect in the development of Chinese road film.

The production and making of Chinese road films have gradually moved towards the mainstream of entertainment and have been adapted to the norms of entertainment under consumerism. At present, a growing number of Chinese road films, despite their successful box office, lack the inherent value

responsibility and are unable to establish realistic theme ideas and humanistic concerns. Chinese road films only combine different types of elements for the purposes of entertainment, which were also called the mechanized grafting and transformation, diminishing the value core embodied in the “road spirit.” The Chinese road films also do not explore the value of its types elements in-depth. In the *Breakup Buddies*, the creator incorporated into the film various social phenomena and cultural factors encompassing eye-catching themes, such as crisis of love, subculture of modern young people and the sense of absurdity because of intergenerational differences. However, these films fail to reflect the real society, and thus, they were badly reviewed from the perspective of ideological connotation, rather than the perspective of box office.

3.2. Fast food supremacy under commercial interests

The explosive emergence of the popular fast-food film in the recent years in Chinese film market is attributed to their easy-to-understand content, which become a pastime for people to relax in their spare time. However, fast food film belongs to the category of commercial film, and their success lies in satisfying the audience without “bottom line.”

The commercial interests put pressure instantly in the consumer culture, and the audiences get crazy about mass carnival, making it more difficult to make a creative choice between elegance and popularity of Chinese road films. It can be said that the aesthetic thinking of daily life is the key factor leading to the deconstruction of the boundary between life and aesthetics and the addition of commercial interests makes it easier to fill the gap of this boundary. The actor’s lines in *The Continent* are also the “soul soother” originated and adapted from our daily life. “We have heard countless truths, but we still have a unpleasant life.” Such similar lines constantly intrude the heart of less mature, young audience, making the film more recognizable in this form of text. The temperament shown in the film is what young audiences are happy to see, but as a road film, what really matters is not these so-called symbol cultures, but their original meaning position and value spirit.

It can be said that the reflection on the development of Chinese road film should be based on the understanding of the road film itself, i.e., the appearance of “road spirit.” What road film should present is the reflection related to society and culture and it is what road film lack of at present.

4. Chinese road film’s development in the future

What has been mentioned in the previous article is that a series of problems exist in Chinese road films, such as aesthetic fatigue, type rigidity, element confusion, value loss, and fast food supremacy; therefore, one needs to know the essence of the development of road film as a Chinese road film creator.

4.1. Breaking through the restriction of “homogenization”

What is necessary to confront with the rigidity problem under aesthetic fatigue in Chinese road film is to break through the barriers of type homogeneity, to require the creators of road films to expand their imagination and to work more responsibly and seriously. In the beginning, what Chinese road film production team should do are constant improvement of artistic pursuit, enhancement and adoption of the nation’s spiritual civilization in the process of selecting content, themes and the expression of values, and manifestation of their respect for film art. In addition, catering to the audience to understand audiences’ thoughts and creating the most popular and loved films with high standard are important. “Only relying on capital operation and gimmicky commercial speculation cannot support the long-term operation of China’s film industry. Only making the film itself fundamentally related to the reality and audience of our times is the foundation of a film industry.”^[4] In the end, the creators of mainland films should have a strong spirit of innovation, not only limited to the selection of theme but also the construction of narrative techniques and characters. Only if creators innovate boldly, can they continuously deliver high standards to Chinese

road films.

4.2. Figuring out the essence of types elements

In view of the confusion of elements in Chinese road films, creators need to see its essence through the phenomenon of type elements. Taking comedic elements as an example, we find humor is the most essential pursuit of creation of this kind of element in the perspective of form and laughter in the perspective of audience, but humor is surpassing from the perspective of inner spirit. "Facing all kinds of evil and alienation in human society, and even the transcendence of all kinds of anxiety and fear in social life." [5] The biggest difference between Chinese road films and comedies is that comedies can surpasses the social contradictions of reality through laughter rather than noninterference reality with real reproduction. Understanding the transcendence of comedy, the creators of Chinese road films can use realistic means to express the value of joy so as to express the freedom of life and spirit further.

4.3 Deeply reflecting on cultural connotation

The content expression of Chinese road films which is more entertaining and commercialized needs the some cultural reflection. Chinese road film needs to absorb the information from current social reality, popular culture and other fields, and connect a series of cultural connotations to lifelike expression. We need not only combination of the rational thinking and perceptual experience of the film, but also showcase the unique understanding of life and the true nature of mankind. Chinese road film expresses features of ideology and marginal folk position by commercial publicity. It is to say, we should not only pay attention to the response of the market and the audience, but also reveal some different critical realism and explore spirit different from common entertainment films.

5. Conclusion

The value innovation of Chinese road film is characterized by fuzziness and dissociation, which are responsible to the rigidity of the model leading to aesthetic fatigue, the confusion of elements due to the integration of types, the loss of value from the perspective of consumerism, and the widespread promulgation of fast food films due to gigantic commercial interests. Despite the challenges facing Chinese road films such as less well-thought preparations by the creators', it is undeniable that Chinese road film plays a positive role in carrying and spreading national ideology and depicting the picture of national development, as well as relieving the anxiety of modern people. The lack of road spirit expression in Chinese road film does not prevent Chinese road films from expanding their own cultural connotation and expressing the real critical spirit at all, which are where the direction of Chinese road films lies in the future.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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