

From Mainstream Film to New Mainstream Film: An Analysis on the Development of New Mainstream Film

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Abstract: *The social mainstream values embody in and give birth to mainstream film. Consequently, plenty of excellent films have come out, which focus on mainstream values. In the past decade, with the rapid development of new media technology and rich achievements in the construction of socialist spiritual civilization, Chinese films have gradually entered to the new era, in which plentiful New Mainstream Films have been put onto screen. By analyzing China's mainstream films in the past decade and New Mainstream Films in recent years, this thesis introduces a study of the basic drive for film composition and development of domestic mainstream films in the past ten years, and briefly predicts the trend of mainstream films in the future, aiming to provide reference for the interpretation and promotion of New Mainstream Films market.*

Keywords: *New Mainstream Film, Mainstream Values, Chinese Film*

1. Introduction

Every era has its mainstream values which are the manifestation of social mainstream moral concepts. It is a value system and thinking model that meets the guidelines of the public. The mainstream values have always been the source of inspiration and drive for film composition. In European and American films, the mainstream values are political correctness and free will; while in China, it is patriotism and collectivism.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, mainstream films have always been an important part and the main development direction of domestic films. Mainstream films try to bridge the gap between historical events and ordinary life, which gives it political education function. Therefore, mainstream films play an irreplaceable role in the promotion of national ideology, positive thinking, mainstream values, and the strengthening of political education. Every decade, mainstream films may undergo a change to match the development of economy, politics, culture and others. Following the rocketed development and advancement in Chinese economy and people's living standard, New Mainstream Films have come out in the past decade. Moreover, New Mainstream Films meets the changes in the mass entertainment methods caused by the new media technology. The analysis on New Mainstream Films allows the public to learn more about Chinese film, and promote film-making.

2. Literature Review

New Mainstream Films are in line with a series of mainstream values such as patriotism, fighting heroes, and models of the era. It serves for the expression of mainstream ideology. The concept of "New Mainstream Films" is proposed by Ma Ning in 1999. Later, Wang Naihua defines it as "a commercial film that conforms to mainstream values."

Domestic researches mainly focus on the new expression of mainstream values and the innovation of narrative techniques in New Mainstream Films. Fan Zhizhong proposes that the narrative paradigm of New Mainstream Films is "industrial production model and business type". Fu chihua believes that New Mainstream Films are teeming with "emotional narration" in its theme, content, character shaping, etc. Through emotional narration characterized by "emotional identity, emotional mechanism and emotional level", New Mainstream Films easily transmits patriotic emotions to audiences. Yuan Lin proposes that "the hero growth narrative" is to "link the growth of individual heroes and heroic collectives and the

growth of countries and nations, showing unique features in shaping the image of hero, carrying forward the spirit and value orientation of China, and forming a resonance between the mainstream values advocated by the state and the values generally accepted by the audience".

Foreign researches mainly focus on aesthetics and expression strategies. Zhou Anhua, Chen YuanYuan et al. propose that: "The "Core Actions" and "Uniquely Colorful Lyricism of New Mainstream Films", using the narrative strategies of "attracting contemporary interest" and "combining the public's wishes and interests" to reveal the true nature of life and struggle, and finally achieve "creating open space and thematic meaning, to restore the sincerity and authenticity of the screen, and feel the changes in people and society".

3. The Definition and Characteristics of New Mainstream Film

3.1 The Definition of New Mainstream Film

New Mainstream Films refer to films made with the theme of new mainstream values in society. New Mainstream Film is the result of Mainstream Film's self-evolution in the New Era in line[1] with the development of political pluralism, economic integration, and cultural globalization. New Mainstream Films are different from the previous ones—the indoctrination function of the mainstream films is too obvious, while the profit-making function of mainstream commercial films is the most important or even the only one. New Mainstream Films must balance mainstream values with commercial values. New Mainstream Films will become "mainstream" in China in the future, which is the carrier of national cultural soft power, and is also the spiritual convergence of national will and people's needs.

3.2 The Characteristics of New Mainstream Film

There are two core characteristics of New Mainstream Films. Firstly, it must be accepted, recognized, and welcomed by the film market and the forks. Secondly, it should clearly embody the core socialist values, which includes prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, friendship. In other words, New Mainstream Films should express the mainstream values recognized and accepted by the public through wonderful stories and ordinary lives. "New mainstream" means the unification of mainstream values and mainstream markets[2], like Hollywood popular films that integrate American values with commerciality. The details are as following.

3.2.1 Positive Theme

The themes of New Mainstream Films must be positive, which are in line with the development of the era and the mainstream values. Especially, the positive themes, in the last decade, are patriotism and the struggle of ordinary people. Its basic connotation can be found in the core values of socialism. New Mainstream Films should reflect the connotation of core socialist values clearly and prominently. Among the Chinese films released in the past decade, there are many films with the theme of core socialist values. However, many of them cannot conform to New Mainstream Film, because their core values are not displayed clearly and conspicuously enough, and the audience cannot understand the theme of the film at a glance. The theme of New Mainstream Film must be clear enough that the audience can see its value orientation from the name, poster, and pre-trailer. The content of New Mainstream Films should be positive. Under the premise of focusing on the core socialist values, the content and the theme of New Mainstream Films should be full of positive energy. Positive characters can go through hardships or face various difficulties, but their stories must match the real archetypes of the characters and historical truth. Suffering cannot be exaggerated for the sake of sensationalism. New Mainstream Films should let the audience feel the positive energy from the stories of the characters, and realize the basic logic that hard work can bring rewards.

3.2.2 Commercial Value

New Mainstream Films should have sufficient or even excellent commercial value. The "new" of New Mainstream Films is not only reflected in the novelty of the theme, but also in that it can adapt to the needs of the domestic film market and meet the taste of the audience in the New Era. The film language is constantly changing. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Chinese films have begun to implement comprehensive market-oriented reforms which poses challenges on mainstream films. Essentially, New Mainstream Film is the modernization of mainstream film. Only through greater dissemination effect can New Mainstream Films[3] gain the love of more audiences and become the mainstream of the domestic film market. This means that New Mainstream Films need to have high

commercial value. In the past decade, many tribute films centered on mainstream values have appeared in China. Among them, there are many excellent films. However, due to the lack of commercial value, they have little influence and poor box office. As a result, it is difficult to occupy a large share of the domestic film market, and difficult to actively promote the mainstream values of society. On the contrary, New Mainstream Films not only contain core socialist values and express patriotic enthusiasm, but also win a large number of box office and become landmark of Chinese films with both fame and fortune. China's film should serve the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. The needs of the people can be directly reflected by the commercial attributes of the film. Excellent new mainstream films should be created on the premise of satisfying people's aesthetic needs, and take mainstream values, namely core socialist values, as the core[4]. In this way, New Mainstream Films' function of constructing core socialist values and political education for the audience can be maximized. New Mainstream Films use commercial elements as a selling point to attract audiences to watch films, and give audiences a baptism of mainstream values after watching. This can help New Mainstream Films to form a virtuous circle.

4. The Development of New Mainstream Film in the Past Decade

Since 2012, China's New Mainstream Films have flourished. Thanks to the generous achievements of core socialist values, the masses have a more consistent thinking in line with the main theme of the party and the country. Moreover, people's gradually diversified film viewing needs summons a higher degree of acceptance of New Mainstream Films. The rapid development of new media technology helps to promote the propaganda of New Mainstream Films. Nowadays, New Mainstream Films have become an indispensable part in domestic film market. In recent years, New Mainstream Films have frequently become box office champions, showing great development potential. According to the subject, New Mainstream Films in the past decade can be divided into three types: war film, historical film, and films on ordinary people.

4.1 War Film

In the past decade, the domestic film market has been affected by Hollywood commercial films. Domestic film directors and producers shoot mainstream war films according to the aesthetic needs of the people. This type of film is a military theme film with grand scenes and strong commercial film nature, such as "Operation Mekong", "Wolf Warriors II", "Operation Red Sea" and so on. This type is the most loved New Mainstream Films of domestic audience. Its visual presentation and storyline are similar to Hollywood commercial films, because of its strong Hollywood commercial nature. The visual impact and dramatic stories of such films meet the aesthetic needs of the current audience, so they have won many box office. For example, "Wolf Warriors" and "Wolf Warriors II" have won more than 6 billion box office. It is an excellent work in the box office in the past ten years. The central connotation of New Mainstream Film of war is mainly patriotism. This kind of film demonstrates the national strength and military forces of the People's Republic of China, and shows the style and spirit of Chinese soldiers. Take "Operation Red Sea" and "Operation Mekong". For example. The former shows the strong combat capability of the Chinese military, especially the Chinese special forces, and the latter shows the deep determination of the Chinese police to fight drug traffickers and the strong combat effectiveness of cross-border combat. In New Mainstream Film, war is still a popular content in China. In recent years, war films have also begun to merge with other genres, forming new film categories.

4.2 Historical Film

The historical film of new mainstream mainly focuses on the presentation of modern Chinese history of more than 100 years, and their themes include the founding of the Party, the founding of the People's Republic of China, and major battles China's modern history shows the humiliation it has suffered. China has suffered both from world major powers and the warfare between warlords with following social tangle. The people lived in an abyss of suffering until the Chinese Communist Party appeared. The party leads the Chinese people to fight against aggression and step by step towards a new society of prosperity and harmony. For such historical reasons, New Mainstream Films about modern Chinese history often focus on the hard work of the Communist Party of China. Such films are typical representatives of "Beginning of the Great Revival", "The founding of an army", "For the sake of the Republic of China", "The Battle at Lake Changjin", and "The Eight Hundred". Both are New Mainstream Films, but historical films can show the core values of socialism than war films. Real historical events were described by the

film, where the audience could clearly feel the great contribution of the Communist Party of China to the Chinese nation, and feel the hard work of the Party when leading the Chinese people to the great victory. Therefore, the ideological and political education of such films are more significant and more in line with the mainstream values of the era[5].

However, before the appearance of films represented by "The Battle at Lake Changjin", the box office performance of such films was not good, because historical films had relatively high requirements for the audience's aesthetic, knowledge, and ideological or political literacy. While war films can attract the audience by gorgeous and shocking scenes. Until recent years, domestic directors combined war films and historical films to form New Mainstream Films of historical war. This creation has strongly promoted the development of historical films. It uses the shooting method of war films to describe the famous campaign in modern history. Such films can not only attract the audience, but also maximize the ideological and political function of New Mainstream Films. The representative work "The Battle at Lake Changjin" is still a box office champion in the history of Chinese film. This film tells the Battle of Chosin Reservoir in the War to Resist U. S. Aggression and Aid Korea, showing the heroic and dedication of volunteer soldiers, and has been well received by domestic audiences.

4.3 Films on Ordinary People

Films on ordinary people is a new inspirational film in recent years. This kind of film focuses on ordinary people. By adapting to the artistic prototype of real characters, ordinary people's extraordinary struggle is presented in front of the audience. The biggest advantage of this kind of film is that it can better resonate with the emotional resonance of the audience because it is close to their actual life. This also has a positive effect on the spiritual transmission of the film.

Films on ordinary people are representative of "Jiao Yulu", "My Country, My Parents" and "Nice View". These films are about the struggle of ordinary people's life. From the experience of these people, the audience can see the most fulfilling and true core socialist values in ordinary people. The struggle of ordinary people can mostly straightforward and impress the audience's feelings. Although ordinary people are suffering, they still choose to be extraordinary when protecting the interests of the country and the masses[6]. Therefore, films on ordinary people are becoming more and more popular in the domestic market, and gradually become the main force of New Mainstream Films. Film is a visual art, and it is bound to be limited by visual fatigue. In recent years, the domestic film market has also reflected a certain decline in preferences for war films, so it has greater development opportunities with the popular New Mainstream Films.

5. The Advantages and Disadvantages of New Mainstream Film

Compared with the mainstream films in the previous period, New Mainstream Films have both advantages and disadvantages. Although New Mainstream Films are good at box office, they have some defects in content themes, script writing and actors' acting skills. Those shortcomings may damage the long-term development of New Mainstream Films. The details are as follows.

5.1 The Advantages of New Mainstream Film

The advantages of New Mainstream Films are mainly its advanced technology and increasing number of audiences.

First of all, thanks for the technology advancement of film special effects and shooting, New Mainstream Films in recent years achieved better visual effect, especially for war films, whose commercial function is mainly affected by special effects. In recent years, domestic special effects technology has made very significant improvements. It not only has introduced many special effects technology used by Hollywood commercial films, but also independently developed many special effects technologies with strong visual presentation, making the film screen more eye-catching. New technologies have enhanced the commercial value of the film, which has become the box office security. In recent years, most of those top-grossing films were good at special effects.

Secondly, with the continuous improvement of people's material life, people's spiritual demand has also increased significantly. On the one hand, people's consumption capacity of films has risen rapidly; on the other hand, audience's demand for films has continued to grow. Both of them provided a broad market for New Mainstream Film. Only if audiences willing to pay for New Mainstream Films, it can

continue to develop, with more high-quality films springing up.

5.2 The Disadvantages of New Mainstream Film

The apparent advantages of New Mainstream Films are accompanied by its many disadvantages. New Mainstream Films also belong to commercial film which have a strong commercial nature. Consequently, various problems of commercial films are inevitable in the script, casting, and content.

Firstly, the themes of New Mainstream Films have shown high homogeneity. In addition to series film, most of New Mainstream Films focus on certain specific themes. This doesn't match the diverse content of core socialist values. Especially in recent years, China has made remarkable achievement in targeted poverty alleviation and the strategy of the rural revitalization. However, New Mainstream Films show less on such subject.

Secondly, there are problems in casting and actor's acting skills. New Mainstream Films are commercial, so it is inevitable to insert advertisements and hire celebrities with huge followings in the film. However, those celebrities with huge followings have poor acting skills and always tend to put on airs, which seriously restricts the audience's sense of substitution and leads to poor viewing experience. The most obvious example is that some celebrities keep a hairstyle that is seriously inconsistent with the background of the story and its era. It caused the audience to be immersed in the viewing of the film. In addition, many celebrities' lectures and acting skills need to be improved, otherwise they will continue to hinder the development of New Mainstream Film.

Finally, there are some flaws in the script. Although some New Mainstream Films in China are selling well, there are still many flaws in the script. For example, the behavior logic of some main characters does not conform to common sense. For another example, the screenwriter deliberately created and inserted the plot deliberately in order to create a laugh or tears. All of them seriously affect the overall perception of the film.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the core of New Mainstream Films in China in the new era falls on the core socialist values. Through new technologies and innovative shooting, many outstanding New Mainstream Films have been made, which has both ideological values and high commercial value. Nevertheless, many problems should not be ignored. With the development of economy and the level of spiritual civilization construction, New Mainstream Films in my country will inevitably become more developed in the future. It also requires film creators to collect and use innovative film materials and implement core socialist values, so that new mainstream films can truly become a popular approach to the cultural and ethical advancement.

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