On the Methodological Enlightenment of Classical Criticism to Chinese Film Creation and Criticism

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Abstract: The paper will study and reinterpret, from a modern perspective, The Imperfection of the Cinematic Mode of Xie Jin authored by Zhu Dake. It aims to dig into its way of writing and criticism as well as its enlightenment to modern film criticism. Discussions about the cinematic mode of Xie Jin will be sorted out in the paper. Besides, reinterpretations of the cinematic mode of Xie Jin from a modern perspective will be conducted, in an attempt to throw enlightenment to future film creation in China. This paper holds that Zhu Dake's criticism of Xie Jin model is related to the background of the times at that time, the theme of the meeting where the viewpoint originated and the overall value orientation of young intellectuals at that time. Zhu Dake's article has very avant-garde and advanced critical thinking and research methods. His writing method of Sinicizing western theory is worth learning from current literary criticism. He made a more precise, original and capable summary of Xie Jin's films, but the starting point of his judgment and his own ideas were a bit extreme. Carrying out the modernization cultural reform does not mean the wanton denial of the fine traditions of the country, nor does it mean to deny the "shadow play" tradition from a completely critical angle. The scale of the discussion on Xie Jin film model is very large, and the views of all parties are wonderful and unique. For the present, the result is not so important. Paying attention to the current enlightenment of Xie Jin's film is the key and focus at present. Balancing artistry and commerciality, artistry and politics, practicing the production concept of "beauty of ordinary people", fully respecting the audience, carrying out "production within the system", and creating with the aesthetic production concept of film industry are the creative enlightenment given by Xie Jin model to current filmmakers, and also the overall creative characteristics of new force directors.

Keywords: Xie Jin Film Mode; Zhu Dake; Film Industry Aesthetics; New Power Director

1. Introduction

The discussion on "Xie Jin film model" was a great upsurge in the film academia and the film creation circle in the 1980s and 1990s. Although the discussion was not long at that time, it had a great influence on the whole film circle. With the passage of time, the articles are often read and new, and by re-examining and re-reading the articles that produce the "butterfly effect"[1] from a modern perspective, you should be able to find different aspects from the past. At the same time, we should commemorate this huge but seemingly hasty debate with no clear results.

2. Background of the Times: The Context in Which Viewpoints are Formed

Looking at the current and previous academic studies, it seems that there are not many studies on the background of Zhu Dake's own views or characteristics of the times. Undoubtedly, the presentation of opinions or ideas are not groundless, but are supported by the background of the times and historical context. When we sort out the background of opinion formation, we can better analyze Zhu Dake's article which caused academic debate for many years.

The discussion on "Xie Jin film model" originated in a seminar on urban culture strategy, and was proposed by a young scholar, a non-film scholar, and organized by Wen Wei Po. "In May 1986, as part of the Shanghai Urban Strategy seminar, the seminar on "Urban Human ecology and Mentality—Urban Literature and Urban Film" was held in Shanghai Film Theater on Fuxing West Road by Shanghai writers' Association, Shanghai Film Association and Shanghai Film Corporation. As a young literary critic, I made a keynote speech at the conference, and proposed the concept of 'Shikumen culture' for the first time, trying to define the cultural semantics of Shanghai's landmark buildings. As a young
literary critic, I made a keynote speech at the conference, and proposed the concept of 'Shikumen culture' for the first time, trying to define the cultural semantics of Shanghai's landmark buildings. In my speech, I also criticized Xie Jin film model, arguing that the images of women who endure humiliation and bear the burden of humiliation represent the moral and aesthetic tastes of the agricultural age, and cannot be in line with urban civilization and its modernity."[2] Thus, from the perspective of the originator and the place of the discussion, it is against the general law that such a brief point of view of the conference, a brief point of view of a non-film academic conference, has been widely discussed in China. Contingency also contains inevitability, the formation of this discussion is closely related to the historical context at that time, the full attention of film industry experts and the overall strategy of the country's cultural opening.

The formulation of opinions and the formation of discussions are related to the "place of opinion formation" and the cultural opening strategy of the country at that time. Before analyzing Zhu Dake's article and opinions, we need to see the purpose of this originating seminar and the theme of the seminar, which is aimed at "leading the revival of Chinese culture" and carrying out cultural opening and cultural revival. In 1986, under the planning of Mr. Wang Yuanchua, former minister of the Propaganda Department of the Municipal Party Committee, Shanghai held the seminar on urban culture strategy. It was Shanghai's most open-minded moment since 1976, showing its ambition to lead a cultural renaissance in China. Writers and scholars from Beijing and Shanghai, as well as cultural officials such as Xia Yan, Shi Ximin and Yang Xiguang, were invited to attend the conference, totaling more than 300 people. It is said that the "Proposal on Formulating Shanghai Cultural Development Strategy" (draft) was also drawn up. Nineteen years later, Mr. Zhu Houze, the then head of the Central Propaganda Department, once explained to me the reasons for cultural openness at that time. He pointed out, "This is Hu Yaobang's strategic thinking, without him, there would be no benign situation of cultural openness at that time."[2]

Based on this, Zhu Dake, who was a speaker at the conference at that time, proposed that Xie Jin's film "represents the moral-aesthetic taste of the agricultural era, and cannot be in line with urban civilization and its modernity", which can be reasonably explained. He criticized Xie Jin's films from the perspective of the revival of Chinese culture and the opening of Chinese culture. His purpose is actually the same as the theme of the whole conference, that is to promote the revival of Chinese culture.

So, from this point of view, the shaping of traditional Confucian women in Xie Jin's films at that time did not conform to the strategic layout of the era and the theme of the conference, "The symbol of Xie Jin Confucianism is women's shape, and many qualities such as submissiveness, kindness, industriousness, perseverance, gentleness, respectfulness, thrift, three obedience and four virtues, and self-sacrifice have accumulated into the standard image of an old-fashioned woman. It is a deformed product of patriarchal culture."[3] In fact, it is not difficult to see from this that Zhu Dake has feminist ideas, and he criticizes Xie Jin's films from the perspective and arguments of equality between men and women in the new era. He also represented the thought and cultural attitude of a class of young intellectuals who were looking forward to cultural revival at that time, "The core concept of Zhu Dake's above-mentioned critical discourse is 'tradition and modernity', which is to criticize the 'traditional factors' in Xie Jin's films from the standpoint of the so-called modernity named after the 'May Fourth Spirit'. This was the general position of the radical elite in the 1980s."[4]

3. Text Analysis: Precise and Ingenious Generalizations and Extreme Ideas

Looking at the general overview of Zhu Dake's articles at that time, we can find his cutting-edge academic insight and reflection on the times, and we can see his indignation as a young intellectual, a persistent expression of his own ideas. In the expression of his clear views, Zhu Dake showed a forward-looking cultural research and cultural criticism, but also showed a kind of arbitrariness or individuality. Leaving aside for the moment whether it is reasonable for him to attribute the director's creative characteristics to "mode" through only three films, his social and cultural analysis and historical summary of the three films show that his summary is shrewd and original.

Zhu Dake's critical vision is very broad and unique, using research methods such as structuralism and cultural criticism. However, the critical methods and distinctive, precise and ingenious generalizations in the article seem to serve some of his overly avant-garde and somewhat extreme ideological cores. As Yu Yingshi believes, in terms of attitude and form, the intellectual elites of the 1980s continued to inherit the radicalism including the Cultural Revolution since the May Fourth
Movement[5]. Undoubtedly, Zhu Dake also has this kind of radicality, and has a kind of thought of "comprehensive criticism of traditional culture".

Indeed, as a young scholar at that time, Zhu Dake's critical intensity and skillful use of methods are commendable, because he used a different way of film criticism from the past in China. "He breaks away from the critical mode of theme analysis and character analysis, as well as the superficial attitude of the impressionistic view in the past Chinese film reviews. His use of academic discourses such as structuralist narratology and archetypal criticism theory initially showed a certain academic depth."[6]

First of all, Zhu Dake did not correctly understand or handle the "cultural analysis" when he consciously used the textual method to carry out ingenious structural splitting and textual cultural interpretation of the film, and in the critical process, there is a kind of far-fetched and plausible overall problem.

The article points out, "There are various superficial and deep cultural codes in Xie Jin mode, which obey some common structures, functions and characteristics."[3] It can be seen that Zhu Dake split Xie Jin's films as a structure and judged them from the perspective of induction and summary. This kind of judgment vision and perspective was relatively new at that time, and this kind of analysis method biased towards text codes also had a certain pioneering and expansive nature.

From the perspective of structuralism and cultural analysis, Zhu Dake pursues and examines the links, codes and procedures of Xie Jin's films. "Just like the established model of popular culture, Xie Jin's code of moral emotion is always arranged according to prescribed procedures, from which four moral matrix: 'good people are wronged', 'value discovery', 'moral exhortation', and 'good will overcome evil'"[3]. Here, he argues that the emotional processing method of Xie Jin's films is an established model of popular culture, and uses the text as a program device from the perspective of structuralist research to dialys out several established models or moral matrix. Moreover, he compares Xie Jin's four moral matrix or structure combination with Hollywood classic narrative structure, and concludes that Xie Jin's films have some characteristics of Hollywood films. "As long as you think about it a little, you can find that Xie Jin's moral myth has some kind of kinship with Hollywood. That kind of Cinderella story used to be one of the staples of Hollywood business movies, and it stuck to deep structures from 'good men are wronged' (Cinderella is abused by her stepmother), 'value discovery' (the prince falls in love with her at first sight), 'moral exhortation' (the stepmother has a change of heart) and 'good will overcome evil' (they get married and Cinderella becomes queen). A large number of Hollywood classics, such as Waterloo Bridge and The Sound of Music, are all wonderful interpretations of this structure."[3]

However, in the process of structural analysis and research, Zhu Dake did not make an in-depth analysis of the differences between Chinese and Western cultures and the correspondence of internal structure, so that he was a little far fetched in language expression and comparison with Hollywood films. On the one hand, he took some Hollywood works as reference and the parameters of the comparative study were not very large. On the other hand, the context and emotional concept of China and Hollywood are different. Hollywood romantic films and other types of films focus on personal consciousness and heroism or romanticism, but Xie Jin's film is based on "reflection". It is a revolution of reflection that affects all the people of the country, and it turns its vision to the little people and pays attention to the individuals in the current of the times and takes care of them—this is also one of the reasons why Xie Jin's films attract audiences.

Therefore, this mode of Xie Jin's films is not so much a "mode", but rather a general artistic characteristic that China has had since the development of opera art and an expression of China's overall moral concept. Xie Jin grasped the key to the construction of the script—turning, conflict, reversal, and also dealt with the Chinese-style "big reunion" ending. From the excellent opera works such as "Zhang Xie Zhuang Yuan" and "Injustice to Dou E", we can actually find the general characteristics of this creation: good people are wronged—value discovery—moral exhortation—good will overcome evil. From another point of view, Xie Jin is actually an innovation and inheritance of the concept of Chinese shadow play, and is a director who fully pays attention to the times and culture. As Jiang Junxu said in the article Xie Jin Films Belong to the Times and Audiences, "Xie Jin has a strong sense of historical mission and superiority, so his works are always full of a strong sense of the times. Xie Jin's films are not Hollywood-style moral myths, but true reflections of real life."[7]

Secondly, Zhu Dake seems to criticize Xie Jin's films from a completely westernized point of view, using the research methods of feminist criticism and the perspective of cultural criticism, but he lacks the research perspective of traditional Chinese culture and Chinese culture of good character, which makes his overall judgment seem to be arbitrary, too westernized, and not based on the people and
historical development.

From the viewpoints of second sex, male accessories, "fixation", "stylization", "the viewed", and "satisfying the patriarchal imagination", he made a pungent and sharp critique of Xie Jin's way of portraying female characters: "The symbol of Xie Jin Confucianism is the shape of women. Many qualities, such as meekness, kindness, diligence, fortitude, gentleness, courtesy and frugality, three obedience and four virtues, and self-sacrifice, have accumulated into the standard image of old-fashioned women, which is the abnormal product of patriarchal culture. Those earthen huts, shabby huts and Chaimen courtyards silently express their stubborn fascination with the way of life in the agricultural (nomadic) community where men ploughing and women weaving. Medieval-style well-off homes are now the highest form of human happiness. On the contrary, family destruction (such as Luo Qun, Han Yuxiu, Yang Gaihua) is the pinnacle of tragedy; according to the same logic, the biggest punishment for people like Wu Yao is to make Song Wei run away angrily and make them lose their family forever. The above-mentioned codes of familyism are sometimes displayed in the form of "patriotism": Xu Lingjun's refusal to go abroad to inherit property, in addition to depriving the country of the opportunity to earn large amounts of foreign exchange, can only show a certain psychological inertia to stick to the ancient way of life, and a certain peasant-style nostalgia for family and land. It can be seen that Zhu dake made a very refined and highly generalized summary of the commonness of female roles in Xie Jin's films, and found Xie Jin's way of dealing with contradictions, emotions and laws, private and public, that is, "patriotism" is the expression technique to resolve contradictions.

It is untenable to judge Xie Jin as the suspect of male chauvinism only from the female's good and fearless spirit of self-sacrifice. In fact, from another point of view, this is actually Xie Jin's attention and praise for the female group, and it precisely expresses a sense of equality and liberation of women as the main body of the narrative and the protagonist. On the other hand, it is inappropriate to say that this is an old, ancient psychological inertia from the "homesickness". The sense of family and country is a constant, so it has become an urgent historical requirement to decipher, reevaluate and restructure the tradition, respect the audience and base on the people.

To sum up, it is not difficult to find that Zhu Dake examines and criticizes Xie Jin's films from the perspective of "tradition and modernity" and "the process of modern cultural transformation". As his last concluding sentence, which is both argumentative and critical, "Xie Jin's film is now in the process of Chinese cultural transformation, a serious dissonance, a vigorous step back from the spirit of the May Fourth Movement, so it has become an urgent historical requirement to decipher, reevaluate and subelate xie Jin's mode."

It can not be ignored that although Zhu Dake is based on the vision and perspective of cultural change or cultural innovation and modernization process, his modernization and cultural innovation seem a little extreme, with opposition to excellent and good Chinese traditional culture and civilization. It is true that he drew on the methods of foreign criticism to make film criticism more academic, but what he thought or expressed in his article was a less eclectic attitude: The process of cultural change is not necessarily Westernization or creation and production according to foreign routines. In fact, the essence of cultural process and cultural change is to serve the people and national development. The cultural process does not mean to deny the tradition, but to inherit and carry forward the tradition, respect the audience and base on the people.
4. "The Times Have Xie Jin but Xie Jin Has No Times": The Current Reflection On Xie Jin Model

It is true that the fermentation of the discussion is inseparable from the constant contention of relevant scholars. Another article was published in Wen Wei Po on the same day as Zhu Dake's article, Xie Jin's Films Belong to the Times and Audiences(Jiang Junxu). The article praised the epochal significance of Xie Jin's films and his grasp of the audience's interest to a certain extent, which contrasted with Zhu Dake's article in a certain sense. Later, on August 1, 1986, Wen Wei Po published a series of articles on "how to treat Xie Jin's film mode", such as Li Jie's Xie Jin Era should End, Huang Dacai's I Say a Word for Xie Jin's Films, Qiu Yi's Concept of Advocating Multiple Combinations, and Xu Deren's Does Xie Jin Belong to Hollywood Model? "Among them, some supported Zhu Dake's judgment, and some questioned Zhu Dake's viewpoint, which formed a good academic discussion field. It is worth noting that Shao Mujun, an academic expert in film circles at that time, published the article Debate for Xie Jin's Film in Wenyi Bao on August 9, 1986. He gave positive affirmation to the "tear-jerking technique" of Xie Jin's film model and its "kinship with Hollywood", and considered it was "alarmism" to dismiss Xie Jin's film as contrary to modern consciousness.[7] Later, experts such as Zhong Dianfei and Zhong Chengxiang joined the discussion one after another and made their own unique opinion. Mr. Zhong Dianfei did not directly criticize Zhu Dake's article, but praised his thinking from a social and cultural perspective, Zhu Dake's article is very bright. In addition to his generalization and courage as a theory, what is more important is that he regards film as a cultural phenomenon and shows his sense of responsibility for the entire society and literature and art."[9] Later, academic journals such as "Film Review" and "Film Art" set up columns in succession, many scholars joined the discussion from the aspects of narratology, cultural studies, structuralism, and textual content such as "patterns". In the article The Position of Xie Jin's Films in Chinese Film History, Li Yiming, while acknowledging Xie Jin's status, believes that Xie Jin's films are related to social politics and are influenced by social ideology. He believes, "Xie Jin's films have lost the object of dialogue and question-and-answer. This not only means the anxiety of understanding, but also means the loss of language and power of expression."[10] In the article The bright Dusk of Classical Writing—Xie Jin and His Family Taoism World, Ying Xiong believes that the Xie Jin model is already dusk and the Xie Jin era has come to an end. [11] In the article The Secret of Politics and Morality and Their Replacement, Wang Hui summarizes Xie Jin as a "person with politics as his bounden duty" and skillfully replaces politics and morality.[12]

Undoubtedly, the discussion on Xie Jin film model seems to have not been a clear result, but from the articles of many experts and scholars, we can clearly see their clear and definite summary of Xie Jin's film. At the moment, it doesn't make much sense to discuss which view is correct and which view is insufficient. On the contrary, Xie Jin film model has certain enlightenment and reference significance for the current film development.

From Zhu Dake's article, we can summarize several major characteristics of Xie Jin's films from his views: 1. It has a clear creative mode, which is similar to the creative mode of Hollywood films. 2. Respect the audience very much, and take "inciting tears" as the ultimate appeal. 3. Pay close attention to women and devote themselves to shaping the image of women with high moral character. 4. Has a keen political insight and can skillfully handle the relationship between politics and art. 5. Both artistry and commerciality are very good, achieving a balance between art and business.

Therefore, the advantages of Xie Jin film mode, which keeps pace with the times and the flexibility of Xie Jin's creation, are obvious after taking a foothold in modern times. Not only that, Xie Jin film model can also be used as a reference for current filmmakers when creating, giving them a creative inspiration for balancing art and business, art and politics, box office revenue and audience reputation. The creative mode of Xie Jin's film is actually similar to the creative concept emphasized by the current "film industry aesthetics" theory.

First of all, the current film creation can draw on the creation methods of Hollywood genre film, and create a large number of genre films. Genre films have relatively fixed creative routines and modes, and each genre film has a certain audience base. There is a lack of genre films in the Chinese movie ecosystem. [13] Therefore, it is extremely important and necessary to create a sufficient number of genre films and conduct genre film production. Of course, the production of genre films must be based on the country, based on the domestic cultural system and context, so as to achieve better development and harvest. For example, Captain of China localizes disaster movies. While absorbing the closed space narrative and hero growth narrative of foreign disaster types, it also incorporates some core values of Chinese society, such as Chinese local collectivism values.
Secondly, the current film creation should pay full attention to the audience, take the "beauty of ordinary people" as the creative concept, and be based on the people and rooted in the times. At present, there is no doubt that it is the audience that determine the film's performance (such as box office, word of mouth, dissemination, etc.). Therefore, when creators fully respect the audience, they are fully respecting their own creations, and they are also consciously making progress in the process of the times. The current film creators can learn from the experience of the "tear-jerking mode" in Xie Jin's films, deeply explore the audience's aesthetic preferences, fully grasp the plot points that the audience can be rendered and moved, and take the audience's recognition and resonance as the starting point and foothold of creation. Films such as Dying to Survive, A Cool Fish and Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child are all created in accordance with relatively complete drama structure. The elements of growth, success and helplessness in the content of these films are also realistic problems faced by the majority of audiences. It is precisely because these films are aimed at "tear-jerking" that they become excellent works.

Finally, the current film creation should fully deal with the relationship between artistry and commerciality, artistry and politics, and directors should try their best to "produce within the system" when creating, so as to effectively reconcile personal emotions with market demand. Undoubtedly, for the current film market, works that are too artistic are not very competitive, but the director, as a writer, actually wants to express his ideas and emotions. Then, the contradiction between the author and the commerce, the author and the market will appear. To correctly handle this binary contradiction, we need to start with the correct creative method and follow a creative method of "film industry aesthetics" production concept. "During the process of film production, the emotional, intimate and egotistical experience is weakened. In contrast, the great importance is given to the rational, standardized, collaborative and normalized manner of working, so as to achieve the coordination and balance between the commerciality and artistry of film making, and pursue the consistency of aesthetics."[14] The correct handling between artistry and commerciality has been reflected in many "new power" directors in China, such as Wen Muye, Han Han and Zhao Wei. While expressing their own ideas, they also fully respect the audience and take "the beauty of ordinary people" as the production concept. They are a generation of technological survival, industrial survival and network survival. They show new characteristics different from previous directors in terms of subjectivity, film view, audience view, film aesthetic style and creative thinking. "New Power" directors explored and gradually formed their own "film industry aesthetics" with Chinese characteristics and in line with the Chinese social system in industrial practice. They are the new force of the current Chinese film, but also an important force of the future of Chinese film.[15]

Taking Xin Yukun as an example, he skillfully controls the balance between art and commercial films, and achieves an organic fusion between narrative and expression. The superb narrative skills cast a mysterious veil on the film, and the ups and downs of the plot fully explain the word "suspense" and fully prove the importance and necessity of "the script is king". Xin Yukun has his own unique view of film and integrates his personal expression into the film. He also pays great attention to the communication between the works and the audience, which can make the audience have a strong resonance with the movie characters, show a kind of respect for "ordinary people", and present a kind of ordinary people's beauty. Xin Yukun has his own unique view of film and integrates his personal expression into the film. He also pays great attention to the communication between the works and the audience, which can make the audience have a strong resonance with the movie characters, show a kind of respect for "ordinary people", and present a kind of ordinary people's beauty. At the same time, his vision of focusing on reality has not changed. Using black humor to show the complexity of human nature, social class and other issues, constantly touching the dark side of human nature. Xin Yukun's film truly restores the life of the characters, revealing the sense of fate that little people cannot escape under the tide of the times.

At the same time, current film creation should correctly handle the relationship between ideology and art, and spread correct values while attracting audiences to watch. The "strategy that swings violently with changes in the political situation"[2] shown in Xie Jin's films is actually where the current film should learn and learn from experience. The current new mainstream films[16] such as Operation MeKong, Operation Red Sea and Wolf Warrior 2 have become the masterpieces of new mainstream films, through heavy industry production, spreading the mainstream concept of value like patriotism, collective consciousness, teamwork, focusing on the group in special occupation at meantime. The works such as Captain of China, My People My Homeland and The Bravest eulogize ordinary people and professional heroes, convey a new type of civilian consciousness and write a civilian style of noble aesthetics.
5. Conclusion

As Mr. Zhong dianfei said, "the times have Xie Jin, but Xie Jin has no times." Xie Jin's films have the characteristics of common appreciation of elegance and customs and suitable for both young and old which should be learned by current filmmakers. Although the era of Xie Jin has long passed, there should be excellent filmmakers similar to Xie Jin in every era. They adhered to the production concept of "the beauty of ordinary people", and skillfully combined with the politics and ideology of the time to create a series of excellent works. Undoubtedly, judging from the current vigorous "new power" directors, they have some of the characteristics of director Xie Jin, such as respecting the audience, balancing the relationship between art and business, and keeping pace with the times, which is very worthy of praise and encouragement. In the final analysis, the movie still has to be seen by the audience and belongs to the people. It must fully respect the audience's aesthetic taste, so as to achieve a synchronization effect with the times. Although Zhu Dake believes that "this cultural debate that could have been healthy and in-depth, after repeated struggles, finally died in the dim light of the spring of 1987," there is no end to the discussion about modernity and tradition, mode and breakthrough, theory and creation. In Xie Jin film mode, the respect for the audience, the grasp of narration and rhythm, and the reflection of history and times will continue to affect future generations and Chinese film creation. The respect for the audience, the grasp of narrative and rhythm, and the reflection of history and times in Xie Jin film model will continue to influence later generations and Chinese film creation. We can also see from the creation of the current new power directors that there will be a second and third Xie Jin in China in the future.

References