

Analysis on Russian Contemporary Films: History, Present and Future

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Abstract—As a huge system, film involves many fields, such as text, image, sound, etc. It is the combination of technology and art. As a big country in the world, Russia has made remarkable achievements in science, culture, art and other fields, and the film industry is no exception. In this article, the author will try to analyze the intrinsic relationship between Russian genre films and film language, and explore the future development trend of Russian films.

Keywords—film; film language; Russian film; film development trend

I. INTRODUCTION

Russian movies once occupied an important position in the world film forest with the distinct ideological and exquisite artistry. The outstanding artistic expression and intriguing viewing effect won wide favor of domestic and foreign audiences. In the long history, Russian movies have experienced both the glory of the former Soviet Union and the pain behind them.

II. RUSSIAN FILMS BEFORE CONTEMPORARY TIMES

A. The Early History of Russian Films

The production of Russian films began at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1908, Shandrakov filmed the first Russian feature film "Free Man in the Downstream of Volga River", which opened the development of national films. The earliest filmmakers drew inspiration from the native literary works. They drew materials from the famous works of Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Chekhov, Tolstoy and other literary masters, such as Protogantov's "The Queen of Spades", "Andre Koruhov", and Galkin's "House of the Aristocrats" and so on. Before and after the October Revolution, some fleeing Belarusian immigrants took copies of films abroad, and Russian films were widely spread.

B. Russian Films in the Former Soviet Period

During this period, Soviet filmmakers were particularly active in exploring art. Kurishov led the National Film Laboratory, which not only experimented with montage techniques, but also created the theory of "film models". Among them, Einstein's silent film "Bronenosets Potemkin" in 1925 was the first film using montage editing technique to achieve great success, and won the Grand Prize at the 1927 Paris International Film Festival.

In the 1930s, the emergence of sound films enabled the film art to integrate with literature, music, comedy and other art forms, and the theme and style of films began to show diversification. Films reflecting historical events and socialist construction emerge in endlessly. The most representative ones are "Peter the Great" and "Brilliant Life". At this time, most of the films are small films.

Soviet films in the 1940s were affected by the war of patriotism. During this period, the creative power mainly focused on the theme of anti-fascist struggle. From the end of the war to the early 1950s, Soviet film creation was at low ebb. There were some films that praised the leaders excessively and whitewashed reality, presenting the characteristics of formularization and conceptualization.

1) *The prosperous period of films in the former Soviet Union*: In the 1960s and 1970s, the Soviet Union's films reached an unprecedented climax of creation and entered a period of heyday. The movies of the former Soviet Union are more diverse and focused than that in the past. In 1972, the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party issued a resolution on measures to further develop the Soviet film industry, which required that film creation should reflect the spirit of the times, that modern subjects should occupy a dominant position in the creation, and that shaping the image of contemporary protagonists should become the main subject of Soviet film creation. Therefore, in the 1970s, the Soviet Union's films had four major themes: war, industrial and agricultural production, social life and politics. The most influential ones are "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears", "Two People's Station", "Cruel Romance", "Autumn Marathon" and so on.

Andrei Tarkovsky's style can be regarded as the two main directions of the overall development of film art in the 1960s: "the external world is the internal world"; and "the internal world in the screen". His efforts to show "invisible things" do not mean that the screen becomes non-documentary. "Mirror" is the most complete film to present such things. Andrei Tarkovsky's poetic lens language makes his films go further than his words, and the film media also carries more rich content.

Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film "The Stalker" is recognized as the most obscure of all his films. Compared with "Mirror", which has a complex and changeable

structure, "The Stalker" has opened a simple path for tower-style creation, and follows the principle of the unity of time, scene and behavior. People can find many masters in "The Stalker". Bresson's documentary works and Antonioni's aesthetics are not limited to the plot. In his poems, he explores life and death, the strong and the weak, time and eternity. This is a deep metaphor for the film of the previous era and the development of another line.

2) *The decline period of Russian films*: In the mid-1980s, the former Soviet Union entered an era of uproar and agitation. Mikhail Gorbachev's "reform and new thinking" gradually lost control, which eventually led to the collapse of the once brilliant Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Soviet film has since become a historical term, replaced by "Russian film".

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian society once fell into chaos and confusion. The Russian film industry was greatly impacted. Films rarely appeared. Excellent films were rare. The number of film practitioners decreased from 300,000 to less than 100,000 during the peak period. The annual output of films decreased from 150 to about 20 per year on average. There were few original 39 film studios left. Cinema screenings are full of Western films, especially American ones, and Hollywood entertainment films have entered the market in large numbers. The most popular Russian films are about crime and comedy. Most of the truly decent films come from the imitation of Hollywood films.

III. CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN FILMS: TYPES AND THEMES

A. *Film and Politics*

Contemporary art is always interwoven with contemporary politics and developed in the same perceptual domain. The impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union on Russia has permeated various fields, including films. In recent years, many Russian films, such as Alexander Sokulov's "Father and Son" and Baviile Chuhley's "Thieves", have expressed their complex feelings towards the former Soviet Union, and these films have also received a lot of praise at various festivals. Forty years after Tarkovsky's "Childhood of Ivan" won the Golden Lion Award, Andrei Sargentzev's directorial debut "Return" won the same award at the Venice International Film Festival in 2003. This story tells how the son gets along with his "sudden" father. Its style is close to the national character of Russia, which is sad, persistent and hides tenderness under the strong exterior. Its appearance, as well as its title, is a real and rare return of Russian movies.

B. *Developing Toward the East*

The geographical location of the film began to expand to the east. As a "non-European" and "non-eastern" country, Russia is always influenced by the two cultures because of its special geographical location, and always has to make the choice from the two extreme poles. In 1975, the film Delsu Uzara, co-produced by Akira Kurosawa and the Soviet

Union, became the best film of the Oscar and laid the foundation for the eastward expansion of Russian films. Russia is trying to penetrate into the choice of development mode full of oriental factors.

C. *The Recovery of Documentary Films*

Since the beginning of the 21st century, some documentaries have begun to emerge in major film festivals, such as Fahrenheit 911, which won the Golden Palm Award at the 57th Cannes Film Festival. This means that documentaries have begun to win awards at the festival, and also shows that documentaries have gained more and more public attention.

D. *Devaluation Scenario*

Movies are no longer just about telling stories, at least not putting storytelling first. This development is an indirect result of the mix of feature films and documentaries. The development of movies means that storytelling is not the most important thing, but pioneering in concept and technique. Interestingly, the experimental "slow movies" produced in this process are not inclined to use fast-paced narrative and illusory editing. Perhaps they can teach a good lesson for the penetrating mainstream movies.¹

E. *New Character Animation*

The rapid development of Japan's Ghibli Studio, Britain's Adman Animation Company and Pixar Animation Studio in the United States has brought animation a wide audience. When animation enters the documentary, the screen will resume showing a lot of incredible materials, but ingeniously will not be divorced from the truth of the event. Today, animation has become one of the main areas of film innovation, including Russia. The animated short film "We Can't Live without the Cosmos", directed and written by Constantine Bronze, was nominated for Best Animated Short Story at the 88th Academy Awards. From that point of view, the short film is exquisite. It seems that it only tells a simple friendship story. But behind the simple story, there are all kinds of things. The real theme is the insignificance, nihilism and resistance of individuals under the huge system.

F. *Movies of Marginal Population*

The narrative object of the film is not limited to some specific groups of people, or too idealistic and unreal characters. It begins to include a wider range of people, and becomes a prism reflecting social and cultural diversity. Oscar's best films of the year never shy away from their political tendency. From Catherine Bitchelow's "The Hurt Locker" to black director Steve McQueen's "12 Years a Slave", the annual Academy Awards Conference has promoted and led the social trend, especially the "political correctness" red line, which has increasingly become a creative hot spot and growth point. Speaking of Russian movies, Kiril Serebrennikov, as a bold director, often uses

¹ CM.: <https://seance.ru/n/65/mirovovoe-kino-tendencii-dvadcat-pervogo-veka/>

sharp film language to describe various subtle relationships. His representative works are "Betrayal" and "Heartbeat".

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the exploration of national destiny in Russian movies seems to have gradually risen to a rational and philosophical level. In the movies, metaphors and symbols are widely used to explain the path and direction of national development with fables and personalized styles, to express the spiritual crisis in the public consciousness, and the mentality of being at a loss when making historical choices. The representative works of this period include the 300-year-old Russian Ark, the film "Return" directed by Andrei Sakinsev, and the film "Kirkjabel" directed by Boris Klebnikov.

If people only start from the surface narrative mode, the last two movies mentioned above seem to fall into the category of "road movies". In other words, travelers move along the road in different ways, so as to understand the fate of different people on the way. Under the director's deliberate arrangement, the film dilutes the narrative of the plot and lacks obvious dramatic conflicts. Slow rhythm makes the relationship among the characters become the main narrative subject, which in essence belongs to the psychological drama that focuses on depicting the inner emotional world of the characters. From the point of view of the theme, to a certain extent, it is the inheritance of Russian literary tradition, which forms the intertextuality and contrast with Turgenev's novel "Father and Son".

Russia's exploration of national destiny is also reflected in war-themed films. In 2016, a film eulogizing the revolutionary heroism during the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, "Panfilov's 28 Men" was popular in Russia. This film, based on real historical stories, depicts the heroic behavior of the Soviet soldiers defending the country in the brutal and bloody war, ranks sixth in the box office among the Russian native films and televisions. The movie scenes are grand, the plot is shocking, and the fighting scenes are magnificent. And the details of weapons are as good as any previous World War II blockbuster, which has aroused strong public resonance. In recent years, in response to the subversive activities of the "color revolution" of the hostile forces in the ideological field and the long-term infiltration of the West in the ideological field, Russia has constantly defended the right to speak through film and television creation and other means. The patriotism, nationalism and military defense complex contained in such films have become the core values strongly advocated by Russia, which has played a great role in helping people understand Russia's unique military culture and shaping a positive image of the country, and also highlighted the unique heroic plot in the Russian national character and the attitude and determination to safeguard the contribution of the Soviet Union in World War II.

In addition, when it comes to contemporary Russian science fiction movies, it has to mention the "Night's Watch" directed by Timo Beckmanbertov, which can be said to be a small-cost ambitious work, mainly from its stories and pictures. The story of the "Night's Watch" is complicated and tense. The conventional war between light and darkness has

turned into the confrontation between the night watchman who represents light to supervise evil and the day watchman who represents darkness to stop the good in modern cities. In a seemingly black-and-white world, it is full of malicious curses to the self, senseless bloodshed to the innocent people and profound doubts to the self-worth. Without hesitation, the film criticizes teleology, and the purpose of justice cannot erase the means of injustice. Because of the moral gaze of the "night watchman", the "other" who can change the world can see the hypocrisy under the skin of justice, consciously and voluntarily choose the dark side, which is also the point that the film should be profoundly in the same kind of drama. It is precisely because of this speculation that the film has become a black film.

IV. FACING THE FUTURE: NEW CHALLENGES OF RUSSIAN FILMS

In the post-modern era, the development of film visual effects technology provides a broader space for film development.

In recent years, the popular virtual reality technology (VR) is profoundly transforming the production and consumption mode of traditional movies. It changes the way that the film screen can only be presented by two-dimensional projection in the past few decades, expands the film space into the three-dimensional space of panoramic vision, and helps the film to create a brand-new world. The best of these should be interactive cinema, which is more like a big game than a movie. Filmmakers are trying to bridge the gap between the screen and the audience. With the help of special gadgets or smartphones, the audience can independently change the plot of the film and participate in the creation of the film. At critical moments in the story, the audience even has the opportunity to influence the protagonist's actions, such as turning right or left, agreeing with the dialogue or arguing with it.

VR movies can break the traditional cinema viewing mode. The audiences are no longer restricted by vision. Also, it is an unprecedented change for film creators. The control of film directors on the screen is weakened, and Montage will disappear in VR. The film will change from the director's theme status to the audience's dominant position, which needs the filmmaker to look for innovative story forms to give full play to VR's greatest experience advantage.

However, the advantages of VR movies are not omnipotent. First, virtual reality movies are meant to convince audiences to enter a real scene, which means that the same scene requires multiple cameras to shoot at 360 degrees without dead angles at the same time, which leads to a substantial increase in costs. Furthermore, the biggest feature of VR is immersion. Although VR glasses and helmet are constantly updated, most users will have discomfort when watching for more than 10 minutes. Finally, the exploration of virtual reality movies lags far behind VR games. At the same time, VR movies integrate audiences into the shock of movies, which often makes audiences lack of attention and thinking about the content of movies, resulting in the weakening of deeper ideas expressed in

movies. VR movies seem to make movies three-dimensional, but they are actually more flat, and Montage's aesthetics is greatly discounted.

Many foreign researchers, including Russia, are concerned about the increasing number of supporters of virtual reality movies worldwide. The incredible realism scene in virtual reality can cause strong emotional fluctuation of the audience, prompt them to repeat some actions continuously, and exert a subtle influence on people. Moreover, virtual reality technology has not been properly regulated by morality and law. The development of VR may affect the younger generation's perception of real life. The emergence of some cruel and violent scenes in virtual screens can't be effectively controlled and supervised, and it is very challenging to determine the legal boundary of human experience in VR. How to limit individual freedom in the VR world is more like a question rather than an answer.

V. CONCLUSION

As the only art that can create time and space freely, movies have a high freedom of creation when expressing time and space, which makes it possible for people to make all fantasies about time possible. Nowadays, it is difficult to judge where the end point of film development is. With the continuous improvement of science and technology, digital film provides new historical opportunities for the development of film. The rapid growth of the number of cinema screens and the technological progress of the projection market all put forward new and higher requirements for film production. The future development of film is worth looking forward to. What people can understand is that Russian films with profound cultural background and industrial foundation, after experiencing setbacks and hardships, are attracting worldwide attention with a new look.

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