

# Study on an Extreme Communication Form in Chinese Film History

Hongyang Wang

School of Communication  
Huaiyin Normal University  
Huai'an, China 223300

**Abstract**—Jiang Qing's influence on the film communication in transfer phase during the "Cultural Revolution" period is carried out by ensuring the wideness of transmission and the accuracy of restoration. In this process, Jiang Qing mainly conducts personnel assignment and resource allocation through administrative intervention, which provides favorable conditions for the development of technology, and the production, promotion and application of tools. It is true that Jiang Qing has her own ideas about the use and development of film technology. She is eager to hope that the film industry can support her to carry forward the excellent "revolutionary model" in technique. If these "models" are to go to the assembly line for mass reproduction to be widely spread, the strong support of film technology will be indispensable.

**Keywords**—film communication; films during "Cultural Revolution" period; mathematical model; "model opera"

## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the pattern of film communication during the "Cultural Revolution" period, Jiang Qing never personally compiled the code, but formulated the coding criteria; she never invented any technology or improved tools, but provided conditions and space for the development of technology that can promote the breadth and precision of film communication. Therefore, since she got involved in the film communication pattern during the "Cultural Revolution" period, Jiang Qing did not place herself in the do-it-yourself position, but controlled the corresponding personnel to carry out specific activities relying on the political status obtained previously. Then, can this thinking routine be applied to analyze Jiang Qing's control over the effects of film communication during the "Cultural Revolution" period, or what kind of means does Jiang Qing use to achieve the expected communication effect of films in the "Cultural Revolution" period?

It needs to be explained in advance that the film involved here refers to the film released during the "Cultural Revolution" period. Jiang Qing mainly controls the expected effects from the following two aspects over films released during the "Cultural Revolution" period to ensure the accuracy of the communication effect. The first is the review stage before the film is released. This stage mainly includes the stage of reviewing some of the work samples that have

been completed or the "double film" composed of working samples and magnetic sound track film. Due to the destruction of the "Cultural Revolution", the establishment of the film bureau responsible for film censorship has been revoked, and the Ministry of Culture is actually in a state of paralysis. Therefore, at this time, the Ministry of Culture of the State Council controlled by Jiang Qing and others is responsible for this work. This institution was established in March 1970 with the consent of Mao Zedong. It is nominally affiliated with the State Council and is actually directly controlled by Jiang Qing.<sup>1</sup>

## II. REVIEW OF UNRELEASED FILMS

When reviewing unreleased films, Jiang Qing held two sets of guidelines for review: one is the coding standard that was set up in the initial coding stage and mixed with a lot of personal taste; the other is political needs. These factors interacted when Jiang Qing conducted film censorship, which were changing and different. Under the combined effect of these factors, mainly the following two kinds of situations will occur when Jiang Qing conducts film censorship: the first case is simply judging the performance of film art. This situation mainly occurs in the review of the "model opera" controlled by Jiang Qing. The situation presented during this period is different, because Jiang Qing's various principles are either from the stage of the drama or a summary of personal artistic experience. In short, it lacks the basis for realistic operation. In other words, these "models" exist as models after birth and there isn't any practical example before. Therefore, the earlier "model opera" movies always have the "experimental" nature, and Jiang Qing has placed high expectations on them, so the review is always full of "hardships and bumps". Perhaps this is exactly "close relationship resulting in strictness" that Jiang Qing is always saying. Another reason for this complexity is Jiang Qing's personal reasons. After establishing an instruction system, Jiang Qing lacks a systematic understanding, which makes it more difficult for the person responsible for the operation to grasp. They often "cross the river by feeling the stones". Therefore, accompanied by the repeated revisions of film "Taking Tiger

<sup>1</sup> Dai Jiafang. "The Ups and Downs of Model Opera: Jiang Qing, Model Opera and Inside story" [M] Knowledge Publishing House, 1995, p. 170.

Mountain by Strategy", Jiang Qing suddenly proposed the general formulation "restoring stage, higher than the stage". For example, in the process of reviewing the film "Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy", Jiang Qing pointed out that "the lens is chaotic," so the filmmaker decided to use the long lens. In the beginning of the fourth game of the film, "making a plan", a long lens over 400 feet is used from outdoor places to the room and finally to the characters, but Jiang Qing thinks that "the empty lens is too long, which is detrimental to the later part." In some section of the eighth and ninth scenes of the film, a lot of overhead shots were used to express the precipitous and imposing environment. As a result, the sample review always can't be passed, because Jiang Qing held that "there was no outstanding person".<sup>2</sup> The technical flaws can be tinkered, but sometimes Jiang Qing's review comments lack consideration of specific situations. For example, after Jiang Qing reviewed the movie "Harbour", she ordered to shoot it again only because the face of the character was long and the overall tone was gray. According to the photographer who controls the camera, Li Wenhua after the event, it is very likely that the screening room at that time was covered with a layer of gray because it was not used for a long time.<sup>3</sup> The films with the situation slightly better than that of "Harbour" include "Attack on the White-Tiger Group", "The Red Lantern" and "Sparkling Red Star" and other films. Although Jiang Qing also made a lot of comments after the review, the film can still be released as usual smoothly. Jiang Qing's comments during the film review often have the following two characteristics. The first feature is fragmentation. These opinions basically cover all aspects of film performance, so they give people a trivial feeling. Second is concentration. These opinions are the embodiment of the "three prominent" instruction system. In the actual operation, they mainly point to the core of the "three prominent" instruction system — how to highlight the main characters. Therefore, Jiang Qing's comments during the review were a dialectical unity of "fragmentation" and "concentration", which involved all aspects of filming based on the instruction system among all the review opinions. The second judging situation is to put a political "hat" on the basis of artistic judgment. This situation may be more catastrophic for the filmmakers than the first one. The specific operational method of this kind of judgment is to determine a kind of artistic technique that is inconsistent with the instruction system or Jiang Qing's personal will as a political error. In fact, the means of expression in art itself is a matter on which different people may have different views. There is a difference between high and low, but not right or wrong, and this kind of political judging method is the typical product in the "left" political environment at that time. Therefore, especially during the shooting process of the "model opera" at that time, the film crew often held the creed of not seeking merit of art and, but seeking politics rightness. For example, Jiang Qing repeatedly emphasizes "catchlights", which is regarded as the main means of shaping the image of the "high and complete" proletarian

hero. In this way, whether the use of "catchlights" is right has become a problem of class stand, which is ridiculous. Of course, sometimes, as the case of the previous judgement, Jiang Qing's judgment will make the filming staff feel inexplicable when making political characterizations of some artistic means. For example, regarding the core of the "three prominent" system — the shaping of heroes, the photographers of "The Red Lantern", turn the camera around Li Yuhe even when Li Yu and grandma are in the same picture, and even in the composition processing of the paragraph "drinking a bowl of wine before leaving", they shoot the front side of Li Yuhe while show the side face of grandma. The filmmakers try their best to make the central figure to be the most prominent one among the main heroes. However, Jiang Qing "criticized" it: "You have highlighted the old lady who is in the organ, and used grandmother to suppress Li Yuhe!"<sup>4</sup> The situation of feature film will be a bit more complicated. This is mainly because the process of a series of feature films from the coding production link to the transmission and circulation link is no longer like "model opera" that is controlled by Jiang Qing's "from the source". The feature film is different from the "model opera" movie. The original text of most feature films comes from some literary works after the founding of New China and most of these literary works are politically "qualified", so the key is the artistic transformation. The problem is often also in the transformation of art, because it is the conversion of abstract words into specific images rather than the "restoring stage" as the theoretical basis of "model opera" movie. The creation of the feature film left larger space for creating to the film crew, which exactly leave Jiang Qing with more room for giving advice. Therefore, Jiang Qing's censorship of feature films is often not like the "model opera" movie, but mainly focuses on the means of artistic expression, and sometimes even involves the modification of the plot. For example, for the film "Bright Sunny Skies", although Jiang Qing has a basic affirmative attitude towards the film, she still believes that the performance on the class struggle is not intense enough in the film, so the film crew strengthened the portrayal of the class struggle when they shoot again.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in general, Jiang Qing combined the individual will with the established command system to influence the communication of the film during the review of the unreleased film. Among the two criteria, we can find the following common points: First, the judging criteria are mostly based on the coding system established earlier. The judgment is mainly based on the practice of reviewing the coding rules to ensure the accuracy of communication. Second is the comprehensive and strong penetration of Jiang Qing's personal will. In the judging process, the previous coding rules contains a large number of Jiang Qing's personal likes and dislikes, some of which are repeatedly emphasized by Jiang Qing. For example, whether the "green" in film is beautiful, and whether the "catchlights" is good. Others are completely random. For example, after the review of the film "Fight with Flood", Jiang Qing thinks that the

<sup>2</sup> Zhai Jiannong: "The Red Past: Chinese Films from 1966 to 1976" [M], Taihai Publishing House, 2001, pp. 82-83.

<sup>3</sup> Li Wenhua: "Recalling Jiang Qing's Film Review" [J]. Reading Digest, 2011, 04.

<sup>4</sup> Zhai Jiannong: "The Red Past: Chinese Films from 1966 to 1976" [M], Taihai Publishing House, 2001. p. 111.

<sup>5</sup> Zhai Jiannong: "The Red Past: Chinese Films from 1966 to 1976" [M], Taihai Publishing House, 2001, pp. 105.

director fails to express the scene of class struggle naturally enough, and draw the conclusion that the director is "very reluctant". Then she decided to mobilize all Chinese people to criticize the director Su Li.<sup>6</sup>

### III. REVIEW OF RELEASED FILMS

The second stage of precise control of the expected effect is the stage of judging the released film, which is the stage where actual effect is produced during mass communication. There is a ready-made fact at this stage — the film has been completed, so there is no room for modification and all the judgments are not likely to be "improvement" opinion as in the previous stage. Therefore, since there is no change in the "presentation" of the film, the best way to accurately control the expected effect is to do something about how the public "think about" the film. In fact, there are two situations involved here. The first one is the judgement after the release of the "model opera" movie, and the second is the judgement after the release of feature film. The reason for the discussion according to situation is not only because of the special situation of movie production during the Cultural Revolution period, but also related to the subtle relationship between Jiang Qing and the "model opera" movies and feature films. Because the source of the "model opera" film coding comes from drama that have experienced the "Beijing opera revolution", after being selected by Jiang Qing, they became the "standard" of drama creation. The "model opera" movie uses the means of film to express the stage art. It does not change the content of the original "model opera" but the form. Jiang Qing repeatedly emphasized: "The scene should not be changed, and the libretto, vocal music and plots of drama should not be changed. You have to remember that the model opera shouldn't lose shape! Don't lose shape!" Zhang Chunqiao once said that "there is a counter-revolutionary punishment for changing a word of the model opera."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, according to the previous discussion, it can be found that it is the reason why Jiang Qing concentrated a large number of judgements on the film and expression means of film. As long as these "model opera" films are satisfactory in terms of performance means, it is not going to be put too much pressure by Jiang Qing. The attitude towards the feature film is not the same. To consider this issue, we must contact the checks and balance and evolvement of political trends and power relations during the decade of the Cultural Revolution, because the production of "model opera" movies and feature films has a certain sequence. Therefore, in order to avoid falling into the chaotic political movement history, the discussion here carrying on the preamble regards the motivation as: Jiang Qing regards the feature film as the arsenal of her political strategy, which means Jiang Qing timely use feature films to serve her and demand everything according to her personal will and specific political needs. For example, after the film "Entrepreneurship" was released, it unexpectedly touched the political "mine". Jiang Qing issued three bans: one is not

allowing follow-up copy; second is not allowing the establishment of review articles and stopping playing. The third is not allowing to be released abroad. To figure out the reason, it can be seen from Jiang Qing's ten comments on "Entrepreneurship" issued by the core group of the Ministry of Culture that Jiang Qing believes that the Chinese political commissar in the film alluded to Liu Shaoqi, which "intentionally belittles Zhou Tingshan to raise the level of "Hua Cheng" and plays a role in beautifying Liu Shaoqi to a certain extent; "In general, the Central Committee of the Party and the head of the Central Committee played a role in the smearing Liu Shaoqi and Bo Yibo." Of course, it also involves opinions on artistic expressions, such as thin characters, conceptualization of language, and structural drag.<sup>8</sup> For the critique of the film "The Song of Teacher", it is more about stealing the concept, and catching at the shadow. In August 1973, Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao said after watching the movie "The Song of Teacher" that "the teacher should be the member of Communist Party, so why is he a teacher?" Jiang Qing said that the line in the film "How can he bear the burden of revolution without culture?" is a counterattack. Therefore, the workers, peasants and soldiers of the film department of Five Seven Art School also made a blind criticism of "The Song of Teacher" according to the remarks of Jiang Qing and others. When the film was staged in 1974, the major newspapers in the central government also made a false criticism of the film.<sup>9</sup>

### IV. CONCLUSION

In general, Jiang Qing's influence on the film communication at the stage of transmission during the "Cultural Revolution" period was carried out by ensuring the breadth of its transmission and the accuracy of restoration. In this process, Jiang Qing mainly relied on administrative intervention. Personnel deployment and resource allocation provide favorable conditions for technology development, tool production and application. It is true that Jiang Qing has her own ideas about the use and development of film technology. She is eager to hope that the film industry can support her to carry forward the excellent "revolutionary model" in technique. These "models" want to go to the assembly line for mass reproduction to be widely spread, which is inseparable from the strong support of film technology. At the same time, the quality of the film "copying" technology also affects the communication effect, because the film is not the art of "performance" on the spot, but the art of "returning", so the first problem to be solved in technology is to guarantee the quality of the film in communication process, so that the story that happened in the filming of the "Great Wall of the South China Sea" will appear. It cannot be said that Jiang Qing's thoughts or instructions are the product of "unconsciousness". In the early years, she went through numerous hardships in the film circle, so she has become an expert to some extent. However, from the perspective of political struggle at that time, she

<sup>6</sup> Zhai Jiannong: "The Red Past: Chinese Films from 1966 to 1976" [M], Taihai Publishing House, 2001, pp. 226.

<sup>7</sup> Zhai Jiannong: "The Red Past: Chinese Films from 1966 to 1976" [M], Taihai Publishing House, 2001, pp. 82.

<sup>8</sup> Li Duoyu: "Chinese Film Centenary" [M], China Radio Film & TV Press, 2006, p. 378.

<sup>9</sup> Ren Jie, Editor-in-Chief: Records of Beijing Film Academy [C], Beijing Film Academy, 2000, p. 38.

simply regarded the film as an "arsenal" for power struggle. In any case, due to her special status, Jiang Qing's behavior indeed had an important impact on the development of film technology and the film industry at the time. Jiang Qing once pointed out: Regarding the film machinery industry, the management in the past was very scattered, involving the State Council, the Military Commission, the provinces and cities. In future, when investigating and obtaining contact letters, we can get them in the name of CPC Central Committee, "Central Cultural Revolution", the State Council, and the Central Military Commission. <sup>10</sup> This have led that: "until the "Gang of Four" collapses, various departments responsible for plan and construction projects, money, materials, and people, all factories, institutions, institutes, and academy, including the military, all have numerous "political tasks" different from others for the work deployed by the film authorities, which can't be neglected. In the meantime, whether it is to give full play to the existing production capacity, or to expand the capacity of infrastructure and equipment investment, the addition of equipment for the institute, and even the foreign exchange that was extremely difficult to obtain at the time for the introduction of products and technologies, have been arranged preferentially." <sup>11</sup> It is also based on Jiang Qing's certain demands for film technology. To a certain extent, it led to the abnormal development of the film industry and technology departments at that time compared with other film departments. With the help of the political task, the various problems in the fields of R&D, production and management in the film technology industry before the "Cultural Revolution" was significantly improved. This "power of the whole country" which only appeared in the extreme political background once again showed its "magic power".

However, no matter what kind of judgment is finally made on the film, it is the product of the strong involvement of the individual will by administrative power in a communication system with own rules in a special extreme political environment. This intervention changed the original communicating pattern. In the last part of the film's communication, in order to achieve the expected feedback effect and ensure the accuracy of the code transmission, Jiang Qing compiled and revised the unreleased films to ensure the implementation of strict coding system. For those films that have already been released, she organizes public opinion to control the effects of communication based on their political needs.

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