

"National Writing" in the Biography Film of Contemporary Russian Characters

Taking "Legend No.17" as an Example

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Abstract—For a long time, Russian film has been famous for its profound historical background and grand and elegant cultural taste in the national film of "The Belt and Road". In Russian films since the new century, due to authenticity and important advocacy role, character biographical film has become one of the representative types of films. This paper, taking "Legend No.17" as a cut-in text, analyzes how does contemporary Russian film completes the task of exporting the mainstream ideology of culture through the construction of the "public history" in the film.

Keywords—*biography film; Russian film; "Legend No.17"*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1920s and 1930s, with the arrival of the first "golden age" in the film history of the former Soviet Union, under the influence of the former Soviet montage school and the new economic policy, a group of young directors and filmmakers filmed series excellent works with strong storytelling and rich artistic connotation including Chapayev, Alexander Nevsky and A Village Schoolteacher.etc. It has a great influence on the development of the world's film history. However, after dissolution of the former Soviet Union, the Russian film was once in the midst of a crisis, especially after the sudden changes and social unrest in the country and the Russian people are generally trapped in the mental aberration and chaos of the collapse of traditional values. Meanwhile, the western culture and values have also made a great deal of communication and infiltration to the Russian society at this time.

II. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY OF THE SELECTION OF THE BIOGRAPHY

In biography film, the choice and shaping of the biographical characters form the core of such film narrative. Narrative context that is constructed with "Person" as the main body attract the audience to the social environment of the people's life, the historical background and the character's destiny. The choice of biographical characters becomes the key to the theme expression of the characters.

Compared to the Hollywood biography film that as a sub-type in the western biographies, always focus on the spiritual and psychological activities of the characters, by taking the

shaping and presentation of characters as the main content, with the characteristics of the development track and spiritual predicament of biographical characters being presented in narration, Russian biography films are more likely to be based on the principles of socialist realistic creation, "describing the typical environment and shaping the typical characters according to real characters and real event." (Encyclopedia of China Film Volume). The choice of biographical characters is insisted on the field of "Outstanding figures in history and real life.", and takes their great achievements as an important selection criterion for typical events on the selection of the real event. The above Russian biographical films are characterized by highlighting the publicity of socialist realistic creation, which is bound to play a role in speaking for the times, when cutting into an important stage or event of a life experience of biographical characters, in the narrative expression of biography film as everyone knows. The creator will reorganize and reconsider about the historical stage according to the characteristics of his current social times. As Croce speaking, "all true history is contemporary history."¹ In a biographical film of Russian characters in the new century, it has clearer reflection about completing the inquiry of the subject of the present national spirit by portraying the spirit of the past.

These features are almost always reflected in the biography films of outstanding Russian characters after the new century, for instance, Admiral directed by Andrey Kravchuk in 2008, which is based on the famous Russian Admiral Gorchak as prototype, telling about his military career, eulogizing Gorchak's loyalty to his motherland in betrayal and sufferings. The romantic love story in the film makes the tragic fate and national emotion of the protagonist particularly capable of evoking praises and tears. Vesotsky: Born Without Regret in 2011, revolving around the life story of the famous poet and singer Visotsky, emphasized on the description of the conflict between Vesotsky, the representative of "singing poetry", and the stagnant and rigid sociocultural reality in the 1960s, 1970s, and called back the public's memory of Russia's excellent history and culture by virtue of Russian people's love to Visotsky. These biographical characters are not only outstanding person in

¹ [Italy] Theory and History of History written by Croce and translated by Tian Shigang. Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2005, p. 6.

their own fields, but also the "spokesmen" for the national spirit of the Russian state. In the story that the protagonists continue to challenge difficulties, overcome themselves, and end in triumphant return, the audience was able to review the glorious moments in the memory of Russian history, to re-establish the mainstream values of the State and the people and to reconstruct the self-confidence of the national culture.

Sports biography film Legend No. 17 directed by Nikolai Lebedev in 201 highlighted more about the characteristics of character selection in biographical films. The biographical character of this film was the former Soviet ice hockey player, Valery Halimov before the 1970s. The main narrative content of the film revolved around Valery and Tarasov, and Tarasov a famous coach of the central army of the former Soviet Union, telling that life experience about Valery successfully beating the Canadian hockey team under Tarasov's education and training. For Russia, the choice of such biographical characters has the value and meaning far beyond sports field. After the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, sports were still a mixed means of war for Russia.² The consciousness that "the competition terrain is like a battlefield" had a profound impact on every athlete. With different attention to the personal life and personality traits of biographical characters in Hollywood sports biography film (eg. Rush, Ice. etc.), the part of love and affection in the personal life of biographical characters in Legend No.17, only had moisturizing effect outside the intense training game without practical function for the development of the plot and the fate of the protagonist. Valery's mother, lover and friend are projection of Valery's fantastic emotion to ice hockey. The real driver of Valery's growth is coach Tarosov, known as Zhukov³ II.

In the whole film, the change in the personal relationship between Valery and Talosov constitutes the main line of plot. The relationship between the two is not only master-apprentice relation, but also the absolute relationship of command and obedience. Tarosov cultivated Valery and established a sense of teamwork meanwhile constantly polished Valery's publicity and free personality. In the film, in an important plot of the opening match between the former Soviet Union and Canada, Valery, like a "soldier", greeted the battle on the field according to the training of "commander-in-chief" by Tarosov. Even after the injury, he forced to control his old leg diseases by medicine. He won a victory through undertaking the risk of not being able to play hockey again after the game. At this time, the protagonist Valery has gone beyond being an individual. In the expectation of the people and the struggle with strong opponents, he has become the national heroes of Russia.

Biographical characters in the contemporary Russian biography film are the carrier of Russian national culture. As far as the demand for Russian films to revitalize their own culture and establish the image of a big country is concerned,

² Russian Media: Russia Shows Soft Power to the West Through the World Cup. Asia Pacific Daily, June 23, 2018.

³ Georgia Konstantinovich Zhukov, a famous Soviet militarist and strategist and marshal of the Soviet Union, recognized as one of the best generals in the Second World War.

different biographical characters themselves have different personality, which is in the second place in the narration of the biography film. The great needs of the individual in the film are presented through the greatness of the nation. However, the establishment and export of the brilliant history and excellent culture of the Russian nation they represent together is the narrative trend of contemporary Russian biography films under the mainstream ideology.

III. THE CONSTRUCTION OF "PUBLIC HISTORY" RECOGNIZED BY AUDIENCE IN NARRATIVE TIME AND SPACE

In Tarkovsky's film Voyage in time, the real artist has the ability to retain an important part from a group of time to, voyaging in time to exchange for the eternity of life. As the embodiment of the modern art of "mummy complex", the birth of character biography films can best reflect the desire of human beings to fight the passage of time in a recorded way and the primitive desire to preserve life. For biography films, the artistic processing of time is more difficult than other types of films since the audience's true grasp of the characters and experiences in the biography films needs to be completed through time experience. Simultaneously, biographies are also "representations of the spirit of the times"⁴, which determines that biography films not only need the diachronic presentation of the character development process but also need simultaneous reconstruction of biographical characters and audience memories.

In terms of "National Writing" of contemporary Russian biography film, the choice of narrative time and space has become an important embodiment of Russian people's "memory" and "commemorate" of national history and culture. Therefore, in film Legend No.17. etc., it can be found that narrative paragraphs and scenes in which narrative space and time occupy the main length are the most profound part of the "public history" in the memory of the Russian people. When the creators of biography films choose the narrative time and space of the film, firstly, they are based on the psychological demands of the current Russian society and the audience to set the theme of the movie and select the life experience of biography characters. Secondly, according to the basic laws of film narration, they select and process the time of the event again, to make it more focused on highlighting the twinkling points in Russian national culture and history and they can lead the audience into the real memory space by means of a picture with identification.

Valery, a biographical character in Legend No.17, was portrayed as a successful man with a fatalistic color and a strong personality. Starting with Valery's childhood in Spain, the film adopted the narrative structure of Spatio-temporal sequence and emphasizes on the selection of an accident that occurred on Valeri during the Bull Festival. After narrowly escaped from death luckily, Valery survived and got precious beliefs and qualities in life from his uncle Jose who saved his life. The prelude made the narrative go smoothly to the development road of plot that "brave and fearless hero" is

⁴ Yang Zhengrun, Modern Biography. Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2009, p. 58, p. 73.

bound to succeed. As a result, Valery has the characteristics of transcendental success. For the audience, in the next story time, the protagonist must overcome many difficulties for reaching the peak of his life. After giving a clear account of his childhood experiences, the narrative time of the film began with a hockey game. It was Valery's first meeting with coach Tarasov. The subsequent plot development was that with a turn of Tarasov's cold test and training of Valery again and again, Tarasov fully fulfilled the role of "mentor" in the prototype theory of the story to make Valery grow from a skilled hockey player to the core and leader of the winning team of the Soviet national hockey team. In the choice of narrative time, hockey games participated by Valerie linked his growth process through suffering: The competition with the central army when Valery was on the Chepakur team made him formally join his dreaming team where he gained the guidance of Tarasov, but became a "bench player"; When the central army played against Sparta, Valerie was sent to play at the last moment, and performed "last minute rescue", turning the team back into a victory, but he was suspended by Tarasov for neglecting teamwork; In the following competition, Valery finally realized that he should work with his teammates and formed a "Russian hockey trio". Breaching of etiquette in the match between Sapporo and Sweden, Tarasov's punishment made Valery and the players from other teams be aware of the importance of teamwork to grow up to the strength of the national team. For political purposes, against Sparta again made Tarasov lead the players on strike. Tarasov was forced-out by the hockey league, and Valery was seriously injured in the leg for the car accident; Valery, decadent because of the disability of his legs, was inspired and trained by Tarasov and walked back to the ice hockey rink. Finally, in Montreal, Valery realized his dream of playing against the Canadian team. In 30 minutes' narrative time, the film switches through a fast lens with multiple perspectives and multiple shifts to perfectly present a pulse — pounding game. Valery, with Tarasov's heavy trust, left his own body and future at the end of the film, in exchange for this precious victory for the country and the nation.

In the real development of history, there were eight games in 1972 first Soviet and Canadian hockey league matches. In the end, it was still Canada won the victory. However, in order to achieve the most exciting emotional resonance for audience when watching biography film, in Legend No.17, the opening game in which Soviet national team won in this league matches. Through this glorious time in the history of the Soviet sports, the Russian people were brought back to the "public history", so as to inspire the people's national pride and identity.

Similarly, on the choice of narrative space in Legend No.17, the "competition terrain" became a scene that appears many times over and over again, which had multiple spatial meaning expressions. Firstly, from the perspective of narrative, the narrative content of this film is mainly about the ice hockey so that the place of hockey game constitutes the main scene where the characters took activities in the film. Secondly, multiple appearances of competition terrain in different countries (Sapporo, Montreal, and in the Soviet

Union) became the "battlefield" of the confrontation between the former Soviet Union and the Western countries in the 1970s. It is endowed with a strong ideology nature. And in the film, the failure of Sapporo and the victory of Montreal themselves carried the political implication outside the sports competition. At the end of the film, Valery, who wept with joy, crowded together with his teammates to call coach Tarasov at home to report good news. The picture was interlaced between the Valery and the Tarasov. The voice of Tarasov in the voice-over is solemn and serious: "guys, I'm proud of you! You are the best team in the world! The camera surrounded the field full of applause and the film was clearly conveying a theme to the audience: We (Russia) are the most excellent teams (nation) in the world. In another sense, the victory on the field realized the victory of the former Soviet Union in the confrontation of the great powers. The Russian nation's self-respect and pride had been maximized at that moment. Again, the "competition terrain" had become an important stage in this film. In the last shot of the film, Valery glided in the middle of the field circle by circle and a beam of stage chasing light had always shrouded his figure. The competition terrain, in the film, was not only the stage to show the success way of the biographical characters Valery, but also the stage to show the spirit of national culture. Valery's courage and persistence, as well as Tarasov's perseverance and integrity on the stage of hockey became the embodiment of Russian national spirit. The film Legend No.17 made full use of the "competition terrain" as a stage, by virtue of the carrier of film, showed the excellent spirit of the nation to the world. It outstandingly realized the construction of national image and the export of national culture through the audience's emotional substitution and recognition of "public history".

American biographical film researcher Karsten Zeng found that Hollywood classic biographical films established "a profile for the public to become famous, in which the greatness of the characters had genuineness and the difference is within manageable boundaries."⁵ This feature was also available in the biographical films of Russian characters after the new century, like Legend No.17. After the Hollywood film entering in Russian in 1990s, Classical Hollywood narration had a certain influence on the creation of Russian film in the 21st century. The integration of the principle of socialist realism and the Narration of the classics biography film made the spread strength of the mainstream ideology in the biographical films of the characters be strengthened and magnified. The Russian character biography also became one of the effective propaganda tools of the national film industry. The arrangement of time and space, structure and viewpoint in the classical Hollywood narrative law always takes the audience as the main starting point. Drawing on the experience and lessons of the formalization of the pursuit of "typicality" in socialist realistic creation in the 1980s, which led to decline, the Russian biographical films formed the closed narrative chain with the continuity and the logic in the classic narration as far as possible and constructed the

⁵ [American] Zhang Yingjin, Narrative Subject and Object of Biographical Movies: the Choice of Multi-level Life Writing, Literary and artistic Research, 02/2017.

character experience with the strong drama conflict, varnishing and packing direct propaganda intention of mainstream ideology. In order to make audience achieve emotional identity with a country and a nation through a movie, the first thing we need to do is to combine skilled narrative strategies with clear thematic expressions so that the audience can sense and identify the "character" displayed in the biography film and then to complete the sublimation from "the greatness of man" to "the greatness of the nation". From this point of view, Legend 17 film Legend No. 17 still has part of the space to depict characters. After all, after the audience is infected with the fierce competition scene and the tragic and lyrical music atmosphere, only a profound, complex and full character image can stand in the heart for a long time.

IV. CONCLUSION

In the context of the development of the "The Belt and Road" national film, Russian film occupies an important position. Due to its profound historical culture and unique artistic style, Russian films have brought important impetus to the "The Belt and Road" national film. As a type of film for the establishment of the national film image and the export of foreign culture, the biographer of the character should continue to highlight more important responsibilities and missions in the future development of Russian film.

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