

"Popular Film" (1979-1989): Column Form and Characteristics of the Times*

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Abstract—As a film journal with important social influence in the 1980s, "Popular Film" and the development of Chinese film are interdependent, showing a close relationship with each other. By examining the column form of "Popular Film" in the historical period of 1979-1989 and the adjustment and change of editorial principles, it is found that under the integrated national film discourse, there are multiple levels of cultural discourse expression. With the development of Chinese film in the 1980s, the characteristics of the culture and ideology of the era emerged among the contents of the "Popular Film". In this sense, "Popular Film" was woven into the film culture network of the 1980s, becoming a unique perspective for historical observation.

Keywords—column form; integration; multi-layer; the characteristic of the times

I. INTRODUCTION

As an important part of the film production, dissemination and acceptance process, film journals play an important role in the popularization of film knowledge and the cultivation of fun of audience watching film. The film journal breaks the geographical isolation and forms a public space beyond the geographical limitation. The connection and imagination between the individual and the film is expanded and extended within this public space, strengthening the social impact of film production and communication to some extent. Specifically, in the 1980s, the highest circulation of the "Popular Film" in 1981 reached more than 9 million copies [1]. In 1985, "Beijing Evening News" once held a "Best Magazine Review" activity. Among the votes, the film publication with the highest number of votes was "Popular Film" [2]. Among the Chinese contemporary film journals, the "Popular Film" in the 1980s established a close relationship with readers/viewers with its large number of publications, making it a typical sample for contemporary film journal to study.

II. COLUMN FORM: CONTENT FRAME OF THREE-LEVEL TEXT

"Popular Film" was founded in Shanghai in 1950. In 1966, due to the outbreak of the "Cultural Revolution", it

was forced to suspend publication. In 1979, "Popular Film" announced the "re-sale" after 13 years of suspension. After the re-publication, "Popular Film" basically continued the cultural orientation of the mass/mass in the initial period and the design of the columns and contents for the public. The column framework established in this year was basically maintained until the adjustment of the publication policy in the late 1980s.

In the analysis of television culture, John Fiske proposed the concept of "vertical intertextuality" and based on this concept, the division of primary text, secondary text and third-level text was also applied. This division also applies to the interpretation of the column form of "popular film". As the primary text of the film is completed, it is necessary to enter the audience's view of viewing and interpretation from the perspective of the producer. During this period, comments and introductions to the film, including the introduction to film characters, stories, directors, actors and interviews, and news reports during the filming, were used as secondary texts to promote and criticize the primary text. After that, the audience further supplements and perfects the feelings after watching the film through the reading of the secondary text, and completes the interpretation of the film by means of the secondary text, thus generating the third-level text of the audience participating in the production.

For example, in the second issue of "Popular Film" in 1981, the secondary texts such as introductions, comments, creative talks, and post-views published in this issue include professional film reviews, reader forums, mercury lamps, and movie characters, foreign business card records, articles of patriotism, Taiwan video, Hong Kong video, film and whereabouts. The above secondary texts are intended to promote the circulation of the preferred meaning of the film text, and the preferred meaning often presents the content permitted by the mainstream ideology of this period. In addition to the secondary texts, the general public will use the ambiguity of the film text to create a third-level text according to their own cultural needs. "They are either verbally circulated or reflected in the reader's letter, forming a collective rather than an individual response." [3] For example, in the column "People's talks on film", the public's discussion of a certain film in the form of verbal dialogue has a distinctive color of "verbal culture".

One of the "People's talks on film" of the second issue in 1981 is as the follow:

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After watching "Spy" [4]

A: At the end, Tian Xinming knows that the gun is aimed at him. Why does he still run on the top of the wood?

B: Is it convenient for people to aim at him climbing so high? This fall also malicious, spies will be so end!

The column "small humor" that has been added since the 7th issue of 1981 has the same meaning as the column "people's talks on film", but it is more sharp and spicy in language, with more intense irony.

Going to the beach [5]

Female: Where are we going to play tomorrow?

Male: the beach!

Woman: Ah, is that OK?

Male: In the film, people falling in love mostly go to the beach!

Female: That is in the movie. How can I go there in one day?

Male: Let me hang up and ask the film director, and don't forget to bring a scarf.

The above two conversations use the words of the audience's daily life to dispel the serious and noble artistic language that originally existed in the film text and the elite discourse, pulling it into the daily oral temptation of the public, and changing the image of primary and secondary texts.

Based on the basic orientation of the magazine, the editorial department of "Popular Film" will also arrange and disseminate the content through the fine-tuning of the column setting in response to the changes in the film situation in each period. It is not limited to a certain style and form. It is with great flexibility and mobility. However, the column structure composed of the primary text, the secondary text and the third-level text established in the primary text of the film remains basically unchanged, thus forming a clear column layout of the "Popular Film" in this period.

III. IDEOLOGY DEVELOPMENT: INTEGRATION AND MULTI-LAYER NATURE

In the film journals of the 1980s, "Popular Film" was a publication that clearly marked its own popular position, and there were once more than 9 million copies at that time. The cultural effects and influences produced by the journal for the masses is unmatched by other film publications. The editors of "Popular Film" strive to realize the effective dissemination of national film discourse through the arrangement of column content. At the same time, in the specific historical context, it also needs to be adjusted continuously to obtain a short balance between the national film discourse and the reading needs of the general public.

This process of balance — the imbalance — restoring balance reflects the "integration" of the national discourse on the production, dissemination, and acceptance of film texts.

In the field of film, mainstream ideological discourse is realized through organized means. However, specific to the actual operation of film journals, editors often make strategic adjustment to the "dominant code" of national discourse by taking into account the actual cultural level and reading needs of readers, so as to present a multi-layer situation between the columns of the periodicals. The relationship between integration and multi-layer and the tension between the two states make a lot of "gaps" available for a variety of discourse appear in the column contents of the journal. The "Popular Film" has become a rich and confusing discourse field.

The wrestling between integration and multi-layer was revealed in the first issue of "Popular Film" after the republication in 1979. As the "opening" of the new period, this periodical article can be described as "cautious" in establishing its own cultural and ideological orientation, but the distribution and arrangement of the columns are extremely subtly predictive of "Popular Film". After a few years of continuous integration, the characteristics of multiple words coexist. Between the "discipline" of the mainstream film discourse in the country and the "popularity" / "mass" advertised by "Popular Film", there is a cultural space full of tension and competition.

Published on the front page of this issue was the speech of Yuan Wenshu, the vice chairman of the China Film Association, "Re-issue of <Popular Film>", which mentioned "to do a good job in reviewing domestic and foreign films to help readers understand the content of the thoughts of the film correctly; to improve their appreciation of the film; to cultivate their ability to watch modern movies; and to guide them to discuss and explore various issues related to film art, criticize various wrong tendencies, so as to enable the audience to obtain the benefits [6]." The verbs "help", "improve", "cultivate" and "guide" used by Yuan Wenshu in this passage aimed at the "they" who were "readers" and "general audiences". The subject/executor of this whole paragraph should obviously be the national film leadership department and its provisions and requirements for national film discourse.

Corresponding to Yuan Wenshu's message, on the 30th page of this issue of "Popular Film", there was a letter from the readers who signed the "Film Critics of Luwan District of Shanghai", entitled "Popularity of Popular Film". The author stands in the position of "we" and "the broad readers", "are full of enthusiasm and hope that "Popular Film" can carry forward the good tradition of 'the masses in the chest'.... It is different from the special publications such as "art discussion" or "academic research". The basic function of "Popular Film" should be seen in the popularity. [7]". It is also a suggestion for the function of "Popular Film". "We" as "the majority of readers" clearly believe that the content of "art discussion" and "academic research" should not become the main functional category of "Popular Film", but hope that the publication can be based on the entertainment, to achieving to be suitable for both young and old. Faced with the voice of two cultural orientations, the editorial department of "Popular Film" made a vague and ambiguous statement in the "post-editing" of this issue. On the one hand,

it affirmed with certainty that "the "Popular Film" was a mass film publication", and also stressed that it was necessary to "achieve the general task of the new era proposed by the party and contribute to the pace of four modernizations in China" [8].

From the "dialogue" of the voices and powers of the parties in this issue of "Popular Film" with the nature of "opening" and "fixing", it can be seen that "Popular Film" will also be in the competition of various cultures and ideological forces, and to some extent, it will become an atypical "public opinion space" in the 1980s. In the overall social image of the 1980s, although the efforts of integration existed, it still retained a relatively loose cultural space, which allowed the "slit" of history to be preserved, showing the richness of the hierarchy in the content of "Popular Film".

IV. THE CHARACTERIZATION OF THE TIMES: IMPACT AND CHANGE

As a typical film journal of the 1980s, "Popular Film" is not only an important part of the film production mechanism in the 1980s, but also deeply affected by the changes in the overall situation of the film system at that time. The external environment of the publication and the internal environment formed an organic interaction.

In 1979, Chinese film resumed its normal operation system of production, distribution and projection, and achieved annual production of 65 films. In 1979, the Chinese film market set an unprecedented record of 28 movies watched by the whole nation on average and 29.3 billion audiences nationwide." [9] The thing what behind these specific data is a cultural choice of an era. The Chinese public is eager to embrace the movie, a form of entertainment that reappears in daily life after leaving the "cultural desert". The "Popular Film" was re-published in the short-lived stage of this film, and quickly had a huge subscription.

In this "honeymoon period" of the Chinese film and audience, "Popular Film" and readers have maintained a very close interactive relationship. In 1981 and 1982, the editorial department held two large-scale reader satisfaction surveys, which not only received positive and enthusiastic responses from readers, but also received the real cultural and reading needs of ordinary readers in the specific historical context at that time. In the 8th issue of 1981, the editorial department consulted readers in the "Speech of this issue" at the beginning of the publication. "Please write to tell us: Which columns, pictures and articles do you like best? Which columns, pictures and articles do you least like? What do you want to increase or decrease? What do you think is the most important thing for this magazine to improve?" [10] After the consultation was issued, more than 2,600 letters from readers were received by the end of the year. Later, in the 12th issue of 1982, with the readers' opinion survey form issued by the 5th Hundred Flowers Awards, more than 300,000 copies were collected. Through this frequent interaction between the journal and the reader, the editorial department maintains a more accurate grasp of the public culture and aesthetic level, and also gains recognition and love from the

audience/readers through the prosperous external film environment.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, with the further expansion of the pattern of reforming and opening up, the logic of the market economy has basically been stabilized, and the aesthetic cultural psychology of the public has undergone major changes. The input of Hong Kong and Taiwan films and American blockbusters has become an important external factor in stimulating the psychological changes of popular culture. At the same time, domestic films are gradually losing their audience and are increasingly falling into a state of aphasia.

Of the 180,000 screening units registered in the country in 1985, 50,000 have stopped screening activities. The 50,000 screening units are mainly concentrated in rural areas. At the same time, the film screening units in the towns also showed a trend of decreasing year by year. In 1985, there were more than 30,000 urban screening units nationwide, a decrease of more than 2,000 from 1984. By 1987, the audience dropped to 21.3 billion, and Chinese films began to face significant pressure from the audience and the market [11]. Most film production units in China, including Beijing Film Studio, Changchun Film Studio, Shanghai Film Studio and Xi'an Film Studio, have felt the market crisis transmitted from the audience level.

The great decline of the Chinese film market, which began in the mid-1980s, especially in 1987, also caused the survival crisis of "Popular Film". Since 1986, the number of columns in "Popular Film" has begun to decrease, and the content has begun to become scholarly, academic and elite. This change does not happen suddenly, but rather a process of gradual transformation and eventual change.

Since 1985, the column of "Popular Film" has undergone a major change. Since the beginning, the editorial department has increased the proportion of color painting pages. More importantly, the "page of Hong Kong and Taiwan" has been newly created in the column setting, and the original "foreign film" column has been expanded. Since the beginning, the length of introduction of foreign, Hong Kong and Taiwan films, actors, and film and television materials has gradually increased. The adjustment that "Popular Film" in 1985 was a barometer of the increasingly alienated relationship between Chinese film and audience. As the audience pays more and more attention to foreign and Hong Kong and Taiwan films and movie stars, "Popular Film" is still trying to cater to the readers' new movie tastes. However, the overall decline of the film industry has taken shape, and domestic films have been deposited for a long time. The problem is increasingly sharp and spread to all levels of the film production and dissemination mechanism. Since then, "Popular Film" has begun to transform from the "public" orientation.

In the second half of the 1980s, "Popular Film" increased its knowledge and entertainment, and the readers did not recognize it. The circulation of magazines dropped from 800 to 900 million copies in the peak period to about 2 million copies per period. [12] To a certain extent, "Popular Film" witnessed and participated in the development of Chinese movies from the prosperous to the dying in the 1980s. In the

late 1980s, with the gradual alienation of domestic movies and audiences, "Popular Films" gradually lost its former glory.

V. CONCLUSION

In the process from the production of film texts to the interpretation of the audience, the "Popular Film" in the 1980s assumed the intermediary role of voice flow and communication. In the form of columns, "Popular Film" basically realized the purpose and proposition of "professional" / "mass" that it claimed, and provided a place for ordinary readers/audiences to express their words. In the typical film journals of the 1980s, there is a deep imprint of the national film discourse, but also retains a lot of real-life sounds from the masses. From this point of view, as a popular film publication, "Popular Film" shows an ideographic development of an era between its column forms.

From the overall pattern of film culture, cultural activities such as film production, audience acceptance, and cultural construction of mass media together constitute an organic network of relationships. Focusing on film journals, re-combing these several relationships can re-establish a new historical perspective and provide a new perspective for film culture research in the 1980s.

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