

Discourse Construction of "National Stories" in Film and Television Works*

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Abstract—Since the emergence of film and television, what kind of story should be told has become a topic of study by Chinese and foreign theorist and practitioners. Under the current theme of "cultural confidence" in China, film and television works should pay more attention to reflecting the narration and inheritance of China's five thousand years of civilization.

Keywords—film and television works; national stories; discourse construction

I. INTRODUCTION

From the 1905 drama documentary "Dingjun Mountain (定军山)" to the 2019 sci-fi blockbuster "The Wandering Earth (流浪地球)", Chinese films have pursued the national culture, national connotation and national spirit for more than 110 years. For instance, the "An Orphan Rescues His Grandpa (孤儿救祖记)" interpretes Chinese traditional ethics and morality; the "Street Angel (马路天使)" depicts the life of ordinary people and criticises the real society; the "Spring River Flows East (一江春水向东流)" is a realist epic of the country on the basis of family; the "Yellow Earth (黄土地)" seeks the root of Chinese culture; the "Old Well (老井)" reflects Chinese people's spirit of hard work and striving in severe environment; and the current social theme based works such as "Wolf Warriors (战狼)" and "The Wandering Earth (流浪地球)" reflect homestead culture and Chinese spirit. Compared with films, television works have more in-depth practice in topics such as regional culture, ethics and morality, and the conflict and development between modern culture and traditional culture. For film and television media the main carrier of modern cross-regional and cross-cultural communication, how to tell the "national stories" is an important content of communication.

II. FILM AND TELEVISION PRESENTATION OF "NATIONAL STORIES" IN THE EYES OF SCHOLARS

The film and television works of countries all over the world demonstrate a diverse expression of "national stories" at different levels.

A. Construction of "National Stories" in Foreign Countries

The core of American story is what they call universal values: freedom, democracy, and fraternity. Under its traditional commercial production mechanism, the film and television themes in the United States always pursue the shaping of heroism, whether it is civilian population or the president of the country. As a traditional capitalist country, British expect its film and television to express the traditional and exquisite life of civilization; its "national story" often relies on the cultural charm contained in the country's rich literary works.

Compared with the United States and Europe, Asian film and television generally follows a similar vein, twists and turns in the game of national and Western culture. It can be said that Japanese film and television best realizes the integration of modern and national development; it draws on the achievements of Western civilization to convey its national culture. Classical family melodrama, new realism, natural narration and so on are all iconic features of Japanese film and television and vividly display the aesthetic characteristics of Japanese ethnic contradictions. On the basis of retaining traditional songs and dances, Indian film and television has developed its own national, religious and cultural character based works, and has ingeniously transplanted Western realism, feminism and other theoretical experiences into the creation of local styles. South Korea opens the door of culture output to foreign countries through the elaborate Korean family drama, the motif-style love drama and original variety show and even lead the whole Asian in clothing, food and even the public aesthetics.

As a cross-cultural media product, how to well tell "national stories" by film and television is a world concern. Whether it is in the West or the East, the cultural narration used by countries in film and television works can all provide different ideas.

B. Different Perspectives of "National Stories" in Chinese Film and Television

The research related to the "narration of the 'Chinese stories' in the film and television works" in China is mainly reflected in relatively macro perspectives such as the persistence and inheritance of Chinese culture and the strategy for cross-border and cross-cultural communication. Especially, the all-round clear recognition of Chinese film

*Fund: Heilongjiang Provincial Higher Education Institutions' Fundamental Scientific Research Project 2018 "Research and Practice on the Storytelling Strategy for Documentaries of Minority in Heilongjiang Border Area from the Perspective of Cultural Heritage" (2018-KYYWF-1277)

and television narration in the 20th century provides material and theoretical support for future in-depth study on "TV narration", "Chinese film and television aesthetics" and "discourse construction of Chinese film and television works" and so on.

1) *A macro perspective to build Chinese culture in the forest of world culture*: He Guoping and Liao Zixuan's essay "How to tell Chinese story in film and television works" (2017) analyzes and summarizes the "Chinese story" in Chinese documentary and TV play works from the perspective of globalization and cross-cultural communication, and puts forward their own insights based on the shortcomings: namely to optimize and innovate documentaries and create Chinese TV plays from global perspective; Yang Chenghu's "Starting from telling a good story to make Chinese film and television culture go to the world stage" (2017) firstly explains the "national stories" created in the film and television works of the United States, the United Kingdom, and South Korea, makes a comparative analysis on the shortage of Chinese film and television and variety shows in propagating and building Chinese culture, and points out that "in the new era, there will be new development opportunities and challenges, and the concepts, routes and method of telling 'Chinese stories' by films and televisions need to be upgraded and iterated. Similarly, the value connotation and judgment in the story also need to follow the new rules." and it is needed to be changed into systematic, scaled and theoretical positive presentation such as "Chinese story", "Chinese experience" and "Chinese style"; Chang Yuan's "Chinese Films with Good Story-telling: The Discourse Frame of Chinese Film" (2018) points out that contemporary Chinese film's external communication should construct a discourse framework that matches with the universal concept type and connection of world life based on the predecessors' conclusions on the motives of overseas Chinese audiences to watch Chinese films. And through the movies "Farewell My Concubine", "Raise the Red Lantern" and "Hero", the specific script discourse analysis is made.

2) *Exploring the way to tell Chinese story from the perspective of ontological narration of film and television*: Chen Yang's "Retiring Narrative: The Narrative of Chinese Film under the Influence of Chinese Culture and Aesthetic Concepts" (2018) summarizes the characteristics of "desire narrative" in Hollywood films and the "retiring narrative" in Chinese films by comparing the narratives of Hollywood films and Chinese films, and analyzes and summarizes the marking feature of Chinese films that the character finally abandons his desire and feels the beauty, taking Chinese films such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" as an example; Zhou Genhong's "On the Discourse Construction of Chinese Stories and Movie Narration" (2015) analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of the narrative strategies of different types of film and television works in different periods in China in case analysis method and points out that

"the lack of thinking and spiritual pursuit in a story are the prominent problems in Chinese film and television plays". It also proposes that Chinese story should "excavate traditional cultural elements to realize the modern transformation of culture; highlight multi-dimensional human discourse based on the micro-narrative perspective; carefully create story text to realize deep value communication; be close to real life and show the proposition of the times". Huang Jin's thesis "Resource Transformation of Chinese Traditional Culture and the Evolution of Movie Narrative Themes: The Historical Construction of the Subjectivity of Ethnic Groups in Chinese Films in the 20th Century of China and Its Practical Significance" (2018) makes an overview of Chinese films' adherence to national culture in the 20th century, discusses the transformation and development of national culture in the film and television works under the influence of modernization, and points out that in the current confusion of aesthetic exploration in Chinese films, it is of great significance to sort out the transformation course of traditional culture and national construction by virtue of Chinese films in the 20th century.

III. WAYS FOR CHINESE FILM AND TELEVISION TO TELL CHINESE STORIES

How to convey Chinese national culture in the world by virtue of Chinese film and television is a grand proposition. "Telling Chinese stories" is the most basic and most crucial part of this proposition. It must be acknowledged that the development process is full of hardships and turns, but these twists and turns have made Chinese civilization of thousands of years tempered and made Chinese film and television works closer to real life. The essence of Chinese story is to explore narrative resources from the perspective of story based on the grand vision of culture; and the core to tell Chinese stories well is to deconstruct traditional and realistic stories and explore narrative strategies and discourse methods by using modern film and television theories.

A. *Film and Television Story Is Completed in the Process of Watching and Being Watched*

Story is the telling or re-creation of life events. It is a stylistic form produced by the contradictory relationship between the inside of the characters, the characters and the society or the nature, in addition to social concept and self-emotions. From the very beginning of human beings, information transmission is completed in form of story. In the long history of social development, story is always accompanied by people. It attracts people and also reflects the reality through clever personal relationships and conflicts.

Story in film and television works is a dynamic form of thing's presentation and an artistic style that makes it vivid by art means on the basis of life story. Through social life experience, the editor uses his own observation and analysis on life, promotes the development of things, enlarges the social artistic expression forms, and adds his own ideological elements to make the works more ornamental and achieve a thought-provoking purpose.

B. Discourse Construction of "Chinese Story" in Film and Television Works

Jung believed that people had been given the subliminal model of "good" and "evil" since their birth, so people from different countries, different ethnic groups, different cultures, and different languages can appreciate and understand the same "primitive model". Theoretical research and artists often pursue this "primitive model" of creation, with a view to bring more convenient reliance to subsequent research. However regardless of the model, the creation of film and television works begins with the selection and determination of themes, then setting storyline based on the dramatic needs, and ultimately ends with technical expression.

1) *Selection of themes*: China has a long history and a vast territory, which provides countless historical materials and natural landscapes. And even, the humanistic society existing in such an environment can get political, economic, military and cultural events and characters integrated, go deep into the inside story, which is a exciting and meaningful thing. Chinese film and television can restructure the events with dramatic potential in life. Therefore, it is an important factor in the success of a work to pay attention to the selection of themes with "story".

In view of the reality, a wide range of themes can be selected, such as history, nature, social life and so on. At the beginning of the creation, it is needed to make a reasonable investigation and study on the original material of the relevant theme, understand some issues that may arise in the shooting, try to make those preliminary data more valuable, and lay a good foundation for subsequent shooting and editing.

2) *Determination of themes*: A theme with story and development potential has already had the basic structure of film and television stories. The theme of creation should also be embedded in the selected theme and generated through the judgment, analysis, and refinement and processing of the theme. According to the characteristics of the themes, China's film and television creation has a wide range of themes from exploring the excellent traditional civilization of a nation through a group of characters to the inheritance of a skill through description of a scene. Just because there are rich themes, it provides such a large space for relevant creation, as long as the connotation to be expressed by the theme is found.

Film and television should be full of strong emotions. Its purpose is not to present facts and events in general, but to focus on the most touching examples. Therefore, touching themes should be selected, just like the recent popular TV documentaries that show the craftsmanship spirit centered on characters and inheritance of craftsmanship, because they convey strong humanistic connotations through records.

3) *Plot design*: Plot is the terminology of feature film. The most accurate is Robert McKee's "story triangle". The storyline of documentary can also follow this route: it can get the real event incorporated into the intrinsically linked story model, or further design a turn or suspense.

For traditional ethical ethic stories, it is considerable to adopt big plot which can get the storyline arranged in a complete dramatic form, so that the occurrence, development, climax and endings are unified in the whole film, showing a broad philosophical significance; for love stories of the youth, it is considerable to adopt small plot which can get the events in different spaces and times connected and unified in the connotation of the theme so that the beauty of the story can be increased in the poetic feeling of prose; whereas, counter plot more emphasizes occasional events which can run throughout various story plots and requires that the creator is observant and has incomparably rich imagination and the creator can make clever design on motivative events, characters, and plots according to the theme to be expressed.

4) *Application of imaging technology*: The art form that gives the audiovisual language performance depends more on the image techniques. The narrative image having story, plot, and style can give the audience more direct and effective sensory stimulation; so the narrative, descriptive images and expressive picture images applied in all the feature films can become the major discourses in the "discourse construction". Excellent work is the combination of exquisite pictures and abundant emotions. The creators should consider making full use of various means and techniques under the existing conditions to make the graphic discourses of film and television works have a strong theme expression power.

Editing is the final determination of the previous images and stories. It is the re-association of meaning and connotation. This process allows the image creators to re-recognize all the carefully mined materials and achieve the re-structure of the theme. Narrative montage is also a common way of artistic thinking in the process of storytelling. The creator should reasonably organize the content of the pictures in logical order. Cross or parallel, flashback, or narrative techniques can be used in the creation as long as it can meet the needs of the story and is conducive to the expression of the ideological connotation and aesthetic value.

IV. CONCLUSION

The fast-paced life of the whole media promotes the rapid fission of visual information. In order to gain more audiences, film and television creators in all countries are trying to enhance the attraction of the works and increase the expression intensity of the national spirit by changing the way of narrative. It is considerable to apply the "primitive model" theory to the process of film and television story discourse construction, making it a network of cultures to get together story icons one by one. In practice, it is needed to use artistic thinking to visualize the icons, get national sense of honor, national connotation and the like essences penetrated into the creation so that the commonality and individuality coexist, and strive to pursue the essential characteristics of the artistic image.

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