



The Influence of Charlie Chaplin on Early Chinese Comedy: Formal Adoption and Thematic Localization

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Abstract. During the 1920s to 1940s, early Chinese comedic cinema reached an artistic zenith, profoundly influenced by the introduction of Charlie Chaplin's comedic philosophies and concurrent societal transformations. This period witnessed significant advancements in comedic techniques, character development, and the exploration of social issues. This paper conducts a comparative analysis of seminal early Chinese comedic films and Chaplin's works, focusing on the use of misunderstandings, coincidences, and the portrayal of marginalized and women characters, alongside the depth of thematic intentions.

Keywords: Comedic Cinema; Chaplin; Early Chinese Film; Cinematic Appeal

1 Introduction

The evolution of Chinese comedic cinema commenced with its earliest vaudeville films and matured into a thriving state post-war. During this phase, the creative development of content in Chinese comedic films was significantly influenced by the comedic director Charlie Chaplin. This perspective is reflected in scholarly articles by Chinese academics, such as Hu Wenqian's journal article, "Chaplin and the Idea of Early Chinese Cinema." Hu discusses how early Chinese films not only endeavored to emulate and draw inspiration from Chaplin in cinematography but were also profoundly influenced by his concepts at an ideological level (Hu, 2019, pp. 178-183) [7]. Consequently, the academic discourse has recognized the correlation between the artistic form and content of early Chinese comedic films and Chaplin's cinema.

The strong comedy and humanistic themes embedded in Chaplin's films have also made Chaplin's films enduring, and have been borrowed and learnt from by comedy directors and films from various countries. As early as the 1930s, Chaplin films were introduced and screened in large numbers in China. During this period, the newspaper Shen Bao, known in English as Shanghai News, contained advertisements for Chaplin films to be shown in major cinemas. The picture below shows a 1932 Shanghai newspaper advertisement. (Figure 1) Influenced by Chaplin's large number of films, Chinese post-war comedy began to be influenced by Chaplin's films. After the 1930s, realism became popular in China, and a number of tragedies and comedies reacting to social reality were born in China under the background of the suffering society. This genre

genre was also similar to the genre of Chaplin's directorial works, and most of the Chinese comedy films in this period were progressive films, which often reacted to the social problems in a more profound way. For example, the series of comedy films of Mr. Wang and Mr. Li Ah Mao reacted to the difficulties of people's livelihood in the society at that time.

[illegible]

Fig. 1. Newspaper Shen Bao's advertisement for the cinema screening of Chaplin's film

The influence of Charlie Chaplin on early Chinese comedy films has not only been studied by Chinese scholars, but also by Western scholars. Funnell believes that Chaplin's comedy techniques and styles had a significant impact on Chinese film narrative and aesthetics in the early 20th century (Funnell & Yip, 2014) [3]. He be-

believes that this cross-cultural exchange was not simply a matter of imitation, but rather a process of adaptation, in which Chinese filmmakers reinterpreted Chaplin's characteristics to further adapt to the local cultural context (Funnell & Yip, 2014). Although many Chinese and Western scholars have paid attention to the influence of Chaplin on early Chinese films, especially comedy films, most of the relevant studies focus on the macro perspective of cultural transmission. For example, Funnell and Yip (2014) discussed in detail the transnational flow of Chinese and American film cultures, emphasizing the influence of Hollywood films on the Shanghai film industry. However, current research has not delved deeply into the specific influence of Chaplin's films on Existing literature lacks an interpretation of the influence mechanism of Chaplin's classic films at the detailed level. In addition, research on how post-war Chinese comedy films have developed a unique Chinese-style expression based on Chaplin's films is also relatively weak.

Therefore, this paper examines post-war comedies such as *Taitai Wansu* (Hu Sang, 1947) and *Wuya yu Maque* (Zheng Junli, 1949), while incorporating an analysis of classic Chaplin films such as *The Great Dictator* and *City Lights* to explore Chaplin's influence on the form and thematic dimensions of Chinese post-war comedies. This paper first analyses the influence of Chaplin's films on the specific film plot level of early Chinese comedy films through the concept of "coincidence" (Bordwell, 1997) in comedy films. Next, the classic image of "The tramp" in Chaplin's film is taken as the research object, and a comparative analysis is conducted on the portrayal of the underdog in early Chinese comedies. The study also analyses how "spectacle" (Gunning, 1990) [4] attracts the audience through exaggerated scenes. Finally, the influence of Chaplin's film on early Chinese comedies at the ideological level is further analysed. These contents will fill the research gap in existing studies and provide a new perspective for understanding the localised transformation of early Chinese comedies.

2 Chapter One: Influences at the Level of Comedy Technique

Comedy films have been developed in China for a long time. Early Chinese comedy films were mainly vaudevillian and playful, for example, *Lao gong zhi ai qing* (Shichuan Zhang, 1922), is an early and successful comedy films. After 1926, there was a commercial wave in the film industry, with themes mainly in the genres of costume, martial arts, and supernatural films. During this period, comedy films also became subsidiary to other genres. In the 1920s-1940s, comedies directed by Chaplin were introduced and shown in China. These comedies, which reflected the society and minor characters, not only influenced the early Chinese comedies in terms of content and theme, but also inspired the Chinese comedies in terms of comedy form.

2.1 Advancing Plot Development through the Utilization of Coincidence and Misunderstanding

Coincidence is one of Chaplin's favourite narrative devices. Coincidence refers to the occurrence of a small probability event. In classic Hollywood comedies, for example, coincidence plays a key role in driving the narrative, especially in creating conflict and facilitating problem solving. Neale and Krutnik (1990) explore how coincidence appears as a narrative device in comedy plots, often shaping character interactions and events to influence the direction of the story. For example, they point out that coincidence is a central element in films such as *A Chump at Oxford* (Alfred J. Goulding, 1940), where characters are often placed in unbelievable situations, which not only increases the comedy but also provides unexpected twists for the resolution of the plot. The fortuitous nature of these situations plays a crucial role in creating comic tension and eventual resolution, striking a balance between chaos and narrative closure (Neale & Krutnik, 1990, p. 33). Essentially, these coincidences highlight the arbitrariness and absurdity of narrative causality in comedy, as the characters respond to these low-probability events to ultimately resolve the predicament and achieve their goals.

Coincidence also plays an important role in the narrative structure of early Chinese films. Huang (2022) points out that many plots in Chinese comedy films from the 1920s revolve around the development of improbable events, which drive the plot through humour and coincidence. For example, in *The King of Comedy Visits China* (Zhang Shichuan, 1922), the protagonist is caught in a series of improbable situations, which both create dramatic conflict and provide opportunities for resolution (Huang, 2022, p. 282) [8]. These plots exemplify the use of coincidence in early Chinese cinema.

However, coincidence events also have the rationality of inevitable occurrence under the factor of chance, for example, in *The Great Dictator*, although the probability of an ordinary soldier helping the pilot is small, its occurrence is also reasonable. coincidence not only fleshes out the characters of the film, but also to a certain extent, it can make the characters of the film more attractive, and it can also make the characters of the film more attractive. The appearance of coincidence not only fleshes out the characters of the film, but also promotes the development of the plot to a certain extent. In addition, coincidence can also generate strong comedic effects.

In *The Great Dictator*, the pilot coincidence incident is an important plot point for achieving comedic effect. Charles Chaplin is the ordinary cowardly soldier who happens to hear the pilot's cries for help while helping his officer on a mission and by mistake helps the pilot complete his mission. Afterwards Charlie is discharged from the army and becomes a barber. The pilot he helped is promoted to chief. Further leading to the key plot point of the pilot helping Charlie avoid discrimination. In this clip, the initial set-up of the cowardly soldier is given room to develop for comedic effect. Charlie helping the officer on his mission is a small probability event, hearing the pilot call for help and helping him achieve his mission further adds to the element of coincidence. This event in turn influences the advancement of the subsequent important plot - Charlie being discriminated against because of his Jewish identity.

In addition to coincidence, a common narrative technique, misunderstanding is also a narrative method often utilised in comedy films. Misunderstanding is an unexpected event set up by the director for the characters, which is often a contradictory relationship between the characters due to the sudden misunderstanding of each other. Constant misunderstandings also reflect the absurdity that characterises comedy films. This technique is also used in *The Great Dictator* on several occasions, such as at the end of the film, when Charlie's mouth is used to voice his declaration of freedom and equality. This outcome needs to happen under the premise that the characters in the film mistake Charlie the barber for the Prime Minister, under the condition of misunderstanding, the plot becomes reasonable and natural, and the main idea of the film can be presented through the mouths of the characters in the film.

In China's early post-war comedy films, there are also many comedy sequences built by coincidences and misunderstandings. *Taitai Wansui*, for example, also makes clever use of coincidence to advance the plot and build characters. The film employs a highly coincidental event in portraying the strained relationship between the daughter-in-law, Chen Si-Zhen (Jiang Tianliu), and her mother-in-law (Lu Shan). As her mother-in-law is afraid that her son is in danger because of his flight, Chen Sizhen hides her husband's flight from her mother-in-law and falsely claims that he travelled on the Sea Breeze ship. But the coincidence is that the Sea Breeze ship happened to be wrecked and the mother-in-law also happened to see the news. It is under the multiple coincidence that the story holds up and also enhances the comedy. The mother-in-law faints several times when she hears about the wreck, but her attitude changes extremely quickly to one of reproach when she learns the truth. The picture below shows how the mother-in-law changed her attitude towards her daughter-in-law before and after the misunderstanding. (Figure 2) The contrast in the acting level brought about by this setting brings about a great comedic effect.



Fig. 2. Comparison of the extreme change of attitude of the mother-in-law in the film *Taitai Wansui*

Therefore, in the specific situation where coincidence appears, the film naturally pushes the plot towards the climax, attracts the audience and reveals its main connotation at the same time, and the characters also show their unique character arc and charisma. Unlike other types of films, the appearance of coincidence often makes the audience feel unrealistic and not life-like enough. The absurd assumption of the com-

edy genre, as a unique paradigm of the genre that the audience is already aware of before entering the film, has already prepared the audience for the psychological preparation, and the technique of coincidence has therefore played an important role in the early Hollywood comedies represented by Chaplin as well as the Chinese post-war comedies.

2.2 Crafting Iconic Portrayals of the Underclass/Subaltern Figures: A Study of "The Tramp"

In Chaplin's films, the image of the little man is most often portrayed, which is also uniquely reflected in early Chinese comedies. Chaplin's film history has created two classic images - Charlotte the Tramp and Charlie the Labourer, both of whom are lower-class characters. Charlotte began to appear in his early *The Kid* (Charles Chaplin, 1920) and has accompanied Chaplin in more than seventy films, while Charlie, as Chaplin's own real name, has also played important roles in films such as *Modern Times* (Charles Chaplin, 1936) and *The Great Dictator*. Whether it is Charlotte or Charlie, the image is the same: a small man with a moustache, a bowler hat, a narrow tuxedo on top, wide trousers at the bottom, big leather boots, a black cane and a small step. This distinctive and symbolic image of an underclassman epitomises an ordinary man of his time.

Although Chaplin's portrayal of small, underclass people may seem awkward and ridiculous, in the film they have a high degree of similarity in that they positively love life and try to be optimistic. In *City Lights*, the Tramp (Charles Chaplin) meets a blind girl (Virginia Cherrill). The girl is blind and has mistaken Chaplin for a millionaire ever since she heard the honking of a car. Chaplin decides to stay with the blind girl, but he does not reveal that he is a tramp. Although he can't even arrange bread and butter, he does everything he can to try to help the girl. In *City Lights*, the Tramp wants to help others even though he has nothing. Similarly, in *The Great Dictator*, Charlie the barber is just a small man, even an oppressed Jew, but he helps the pilot when he is in trouble, and he still tries to fight against the evil forces, and so he is rewarded - the pilot he helps helps him after he is promoted, which also reflects the warmth and humanistic concern that Chaplin gives to the underclass characters. Chaplin's warmth and humanistic concern for the underclass. In his other films, Chaplin maintained the image of the little man, which also deeply influenced the characterisation of Chinese post-war comedies.

In Chinese post-war comedy, the image of the little man trying to make a living also appeared in major comedy films. In the film *Wuya yu maque*, Boss Xiao (Zhao Dan), a peddler who sells American goods, is also a typical image of a small person who is oppressed by life but still has a passion for life. At a time in history when the economy was in a serious bubble, many traders speculated. Boss Xiao, as a typical example of these traders, thought he was smart to do speculative business, and as a result, he was not only beaten up by other traders but also lost all his hard-earned money. Although life is tough, he always strives for his original goal - owning his own house. Similarly, in the film *Jiafeng Xuhuang* (ZuoLin Huang, 1947), XiaoMao (ShiWang), a barber, has the same profession as the main character of *The Great Dic-*

tator. As the plot develops, Xiao Mao discovers that the rich merchant's daughter is also a poor widow in disguise. These two underclass characters meet in a scam, but develop genuine feelings, and the story ends with the hope of working together to create a better life. In these two early Chinese comedies from the 1940s, Boss Xiao and Xiaomao's hardworking attitudes towards life and their struggle against the times bear a strong resemblance to Charlotte and Charlie in Chaplin's films.

In addition, the fact that both early Chinese comedies and Chaplin's films chose underdog characters as protagonists is also related to the similar social backgrounds of the films. In the film *Modern Times*, Chaplin's "tramp" character is placed in a highly mechanised factory environment at the beginning of the industrial era, symbolising the alienation in industrial production. The opening scene of the film shows the assembly line work scene, in which the tramp's sense of powerlessness and comedic struggle show the oppression of industrialisation on individual workers. Through the plot of the film, Chaplin conveys his sympathy for the plight of working people at the bottom of society in the face of technological progress. As Howe points out, in criticising technological progress, Chaplin actually reveals the dual role of film as a technology – it is both a product of modernisation and a tool for criticising it (Howe, 2020) [6]. In the same vein, after World War II, the Chinese Civil War broke out again, and the people had a difficult time living under the oppression of various forces, as reflected in the social background of the movie *The Raven and the Sparrow*. This situation is similar to the social environment in which Charlie Chaplin lived – the oppression of the lower classes in post-World War II Britain and the United States under capitalism. Therefore, Chinese post-war comedies adopted a similar format to Chaplin's, using lower-class characters to resonate with the audience, highlighting the social background and social issues, and showing the director's beautiful vision of the lower classes maintaining a positive attitude in the face of hardship.

2.3 Spectacle: Cinematic Appeal and Comedy

Regarding the characteristics of Chaplin's films, early Chinese cinema selectively adopted and adapted elements during its learning process. For example, in Chaplin's comedy films, the exciting spectacle often appears (Gunning, 1990, pp. 56-62). In this paper, spectacle refers to Tom Gunning's characterisation of attraction cinema as directly appealing to the audience's attention, provoking visual curiosity and providing pleasure through exciting spectacle (Gunning, 1990, pp.56-62). For example, in the film *Modern Times*, Chaplin, wearing skates and blindfolded, constantly skates back and forth along the side of a broken staircase, occasionally presenting a shocking moment of impending fall, which is very disturbing to the audience. Such behaviour does not often occur in everyday life, so it can have the effect of capturing the audience's attention in a film. However, the presentation of spectacle often interrupts the narrative of the film, which is a result of the use of spectacle (Gunning, 1990, pp.56-62). For example, in *Modern Times*, the ice-skating sequence, which lasts for over a minute, cuts through the preceding and following sequences, causing the audience to focus on watching the thrilling dance moves and thus temporarily detach themselves from the plot.

In early Chinese comedic films, the assimilation of the spectacle from Chaplin's movies exhibited a developmental shift from significant to almost negligible. In Chinese comedy films of the 1920s, spectacle was still a frequently used clip and technique in comedy films. For example, in *Love of Labour*, Zheng Carpenter makes the staircase a movable device in order to fulfill the promise he made with Zhu Langzhong and also to teach a lesson to the guests in the chess room upstairs; whenever a guest walks down, Zheng Carpenter moves the mechanism so that the guest falls down the staircase, and Zheng Carpenter is smug behind the staircase. The action of such rare everyday scenes also formed a spectacle in early Chinese comedy films. However, in the 1930s and 1940s, comedy films began to consciously reduce the use of spectacle, and the slapstick of action in the films became more everyday. For example, in the film *Ma lu tian shi* (MuZhi Yuan, 1937), some of the comedic effects of the comedy are created by everyday situations, such as the drummer Chen Shaoping (played by Zhao Dan), whose saliva spews out of his trumpet because he plays it for too long, and who gets his shoes stepped on in order to greet his friends when he falls out of the line, which is much closer to the real life.

Although exaggerated visual spectacles in early comedy films can attract the audience, they can also interrupt the film narrative. For example, in *Modern Times*, the scene in which the tramp is caught in the gears of a machine in a factory is highly visually impactful. However, while this exaggerated performance provokes laughter, it also temporarily interrupts the continuity of the narrative (Fowkes, 2020) [2]. Horton (1991) further explores the dual role of exaggerated visual spectacles in early comedy films. He pointed out that Chaplin's films successfully captured the audience's attention through these slapstick scenes, but also tended to distract them from the core narrative themes. In particular, visual spectacles such as the endless chaotic operations in the assembly line scene, while enhancing the film's comedy, also weaken the narrative focus to some extent. Horton emphasises that although Chaplin's films successfully create compelling humorous scenes, these visual spectacles do sometimes affect the rhythm and continuity of the narrative (Horton, 1991) [5]. Therefore, the use of visual spectacles in Chaplin's films has the potential to disrupt narrative coherence.

3 Chapter Two: The Impact of Chaplin's Films on the Ideological Dimensions of Early Chinese Comedy

The creation of early Chinese cinema was not only significantly influenced by the formal aspects of Chaplin's films but also resonated with the thematic essence of Chaplin's cinematic creations in a manner that displayed striking similarities yet distinct uniqueness. In early Chinese comedy films, the individual's resistance to the system was an important theme. In Chaplin's films, there is also the strong resistance of the characters at the bottom of the capitalist system. At the same time, female characters in early Chinese comedies and Chaplin's films also have a distinctive shaping and deepening process, which to a certain extent reflects the influence of Chaplin's films on early Chinese comedies at the level of intention.

3.1 Depicting Individual Resistance against Institutional Systems in Cinema

The theme of individual resistance against the system in Chaplin's films is exemplified in *The Great Dictator*. For example, Charlie, the barber, picks up a rag and wipes off the Jews written on the barbershop window at the very beginning, and he does not back down even when threatened by the enforcers, but fights with them. After the Jewish policy was enacted, Charlie's group of Jews didn't back down either, they shielded the elderly and infirm from the women and children and stood up to the murderous enforcers. As Jews, they had no choice, but in the face of fascist brutality, they resolutely decided to uphold their dignity. Especially in the end, when Charlie is mistaken for the Prime Minister, he is forced to give a speech in front of the crowd, which is also about the theme of freedom and equality, which shows that Chaplin wanted to convey in the film for the old system of resistance and criticism. Similarly, in Chaplin's film *Modern Times*, the theme is also about the alienation of human beings under the capitalist system, and the struggle and resistance of an individual under capitalism and socialism. Chaplin's spirit of individual resistance to the system is also present in many of his films.

In Chaplin's films, the director shows the idea of individuals rebelling against the system through the film plot. In *Modern Times*, Chaplin's tramp endlessly repeats his work in the mechanised process of the factory, and this plot is not just a comedic scene, but also a profound revelation of the dehumanising working conditions of the working class under the capitalist system. Chaplin uses slapstick to show the tramp's resistance, which is superficially ineffective but symbolises the indomitable spirit of the individual in the face of the oppression of machines and capital (Stephens, 2021) [10]. This resistance not only shows the plight of the working class, but also reveals the oppression of the individual by the system. White (2021) [11] also analyses the resistance in *Modern Times* from a social criticism perspective. He points out that through the work scenes of the tramp, Chaplin profoundly shows how the working class is dehumanised under the capitalist system. The antics of the tramp and the plot of constant mistakes are not just for laughs, but to convey an implicit rebellion against the system. White emphasises that through this narrative approach, Chaplin reflects the helplessness and resistance of workers in the face of highly mechanised and institutionalised oppression (White, 2021). The tramp's struggles symbolise the working class's plight of survival under an oppressive social system, and also express Chaplin's dissatisfaction with and criticism of the system. Through comical exaggeration, Chaplin successfully incorporated criticism of the system into the form of comedy. Although this resistance is presented on the surface as humour, it hides a profound criticism and reflection on the social system.

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Through this form of comedy, Chinese films not only present the absurdity of the system to the audience, but also use humour as a weapon to subtly express their criticism of institutionalised society. As Ferguson analyses, comedy can use satire, exaggeration and humour to challenge authority and expose oppression and injustice in the system. This resistance is not direct political action, but a silent rebellion expressed through culture (Ferguson, 2019) [1]. In Chinese comedy films, although the storylines are often tinged with light-hearted humour, there is a serious underlying critique of the system. For example, the greedy Kuomintang official Hou Shan, who is called the “crow” in the film, tries to forcibly take possession of an apartment, forcing several residents to move out. However, these ordinary citizens, the “sparrows”, cleverly resist officer Hou's unreasonable demands through their resourcefulness and mutual cooperation. The humour in the film lies not only in the residents' comical coping strategies, such as using moral pressure and public opinion to counteract Hou Shan's bullying, but also in exposing the corruption and incompetence of the Kuomintang bureaucracy. At the end of the film, officer Hou has to flee in a hurry due to the Kuomintang's defeat, and the ordinary residents finally win. This ending is not only a personal satire on Hou Shan, but also a metaphorical critique of the corrupt system.

In the 1920s-1940s, Chaplin lived in a society that experienced war and innovation, while China was under the turmoil of the Anti-Japanese War and the Civil War in the same period. Similar wars and social backgrounds brought great trauma to the people of the world. During this period, comedy films not only carried the function of soothing trauma, but also carried the call of their creators. Therefore, Chaplin and early Chinese comedy carried a similar spirit of struggle in the post-war period. Such similar themes were influenced and determined by similar social backgrounds.

3.2 Enhancement of Female Role Functionality in Comedy

Both in Chaplin's films and in early Chinese comedic cinema, numerous profound female characters have been crafted. With the further development of comedy films, female characters were portrayed as stronger and stronger, and played more and more crucial roles in the dramas. In the early days of Chaplin's films, the male characters

played by Chaplin were the main characters, and the female characters only played a weak and functional role. For example, in *City Lights*, although the blind girl is optimistic and strong, she has always been in a more vulnerable position, and is the object of help and motivator of the male characters, and does not reflect other more important functions in the play. In *The Gold Rush* (Charles Chaplin, 1925), women are also objects of fantasy for the male characters. However, in *The Great Dictator*, the female character is empowered by the fact that she fights back verbally when teased by the law enforcement officers, and she also lends a helping hand to the barber when he is being beaten up by the law enforcement officers upstairs with a pan to help the barber. Female characters are getting more and more attention in Chaplin's films, which also reflects the increasing power of women in society. Unfortunately, the female characters often do not become the final heroes or successes, and the main successes remain the male characters. This also has to do with the fact that Chaplin's films were made earlier.

In early Chinese comedy films, female characters were also portrayed from weak to strong. In *Lao gong zhi ai qing*, Dr Zhu's daughter, who is a woman, is only a bonus for the male lead, Zheng Carpenter - only by helping her father with his business can she marry his daughter. This also relates to the relatively traditional social environment of early China, where women tended to be subservient. In the post-war comedy, however, the status of women's roles was significantly elevated, and in *Taitai Wansui*, the director has created four types of post-war women that are typical of the post-war period, and that correspond to the four stages of the emancipation of the mind. First, there is the mother-in-law, who is the defender of feudal rites and customs and is deeply rooted in traditional thinking; second, there is the woman who is trapped in her family's cage while being subjected to the impact of the new ideas, the film's heroine, Chen Sizhen; third, there is the new woman, Zhiqin, who is a new woman of the intellectuals who has already found her freedom under the impact of the new ideas; and lastly, the socialite, Shiqin, who appears to be out of the house and on her own, but is actually still dependent on men for a living. As an image of women in a film genre, women in early comedy films started out in a subordinate position in the film and gradually became the main characters or even the protagonists of the film's storytelling, which demonstrated the female characters' continuous exploration of their own subjectivity and the change of women's social status. Further, the changes in the roles of these women also reflect the impact of changes in the social environment on women's social and family status, as well as changes in women's own individual consciousness.

Whether it is Chaplin's films or Chinese comedies, the change of women's image corresponds to the change of women's status after the rise of women's thinking in the context of the real society. When Western countries entered the capitalist era, the rapid development of productive forces prompted the issue of gender division of labour to be raised, and women's subjective consciousness began to enter a critical period of awakening. In the process of participating in social production, women felt their oppressed status and issued a strong call for liberation. As a result, in the process of the development of productive forces, the status of women has also been rising in the public's voice. In China, in the early 1920s, some intellectual women began to awak-

en, and with the help of their fathers and brothers, they entered the public space, and through the women's liberation movement, firstly, they liberated themselves physically, and changed the clothes they wore. By the 1930s and 1940s, the pursuit of education and self-awareness seemed to have liberated women's minds as well; for example, the recruitment of 2 announcers in 1946 drew more than 200 female applicants. This shows that women gradually began to emancipate themselves and go out into society. Although there was a male driving shadow behind all this, the emancipation from body to mind really began to affect women from generation to generation. Against this social backdrop, the innovative portrayal of women's roles in the film is also evident in the real world.

Women in comedy films have gradually evolved from simply functional roles to more full-fledged feminist representatives. For example, both Chaplin's early silent comedies and early Chinese comedy films demonstrate the transformation of female roles, from being initially restricted to stereotypical images to later becoming an important force driving plot and social change. Sloan (1981) [9] pointed out that Chaplin's comedies show male fear and resistance to female power through the laughs of gender conflict. For example, in films such as *Modern Times*, although the heroine is not the central character, her presence drives the plot and demonstrates the oppression and powerlessness of working-class women in an industrialised society. Despite the functional nature of these early roles, their acts of resistance have begun to reflect women's position in the system, hinting at the rise of female power (Sloan, 1981). Similarly, early Chinese comedy films have gradually transformed female characters from subordinate status to independent symbols of strength. In *Wuya yu maque* (1949), women are not just the supporting characters in the family, but they become an important driving force for the plot and the final victory by uniting and fighting against the corrupt Kuomintang officials. Whether through humour and satire or through real social resistance, the power of women is no longer hidden, but gradually becomes an important symbol of social change. This transformation reflects the development of female roles in film creation and the advancement of women's status in society.

4 Conclusion

This paper explores the influence of Chaplin's films on early Chinese comedy films in terms of form and intention. Through a comparative analysis of Chaplin's *City Lights* and *The Great Dictator* and early Chinese comedies such as *Lao gong zhi ai qing*, *Taitai Wansui*, and *Wuya yu maque*, and come to the following conclusions: Firstly, at the formal level, early Chinese comedies absorbed traditional comedic techniques such as Chaplin's *Misunderstanding*, *Coincidence*, and the technique of portraying underclass characters, as well as the plot based on spectacle, coincidence and other traditional comedic techniques; the techniques of characterisation of the underclass as well as the localised exploration on the basis of the spectacle-based plot. Further, the article analyses the creative background of Chaplin and early Chinese cinema, and

reveals the value of cinema as an artistic medium for social research from the perspectives of individual resistance to the system and the development of feminism.

However, there are some limitations to this study. For example, the selection of film samples chosen for this paper may not be comprehensive enough to cover more relevant film works of the same period. Meanwhile, film as an artistic creation carries a certain degree of subjectivity. Future research can further compensate for the limitations of historical and social analyses through more extensive textual analyses.

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