



How Independent Films Embracing the "Market" Became the New Mainstream

--A Comparative Study of the Films of Wes Anderson and Hirokazu Koreeda

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Abstract. Since the 1990s, with the change of wind direction in the film industry, independent films tend to mature in the game with the market. In the film market, independent films have gradually moved from the periphery to the mainstream and received more attention; many film talents from independent directors have also been recognized and accepted by the international film market. Among them, Wes Anderson from the West and Hirokazu Koreeda from the East are particularly typical. They have gone from being unknown to becoming household names. By analyzing the film road of the two, they can provide reference and reference for more independent filmmakers who have artistic pursuits and hope to be recognized by the market. This article mainly compares the two directors and their works from the aspects of the film market situation and the balance between commerciality and artistry in film creation, and tries to summarize the reasons why independent directors can enter the "mainstream market", and at the same time, discusses that independent films embracing the market are becoming the "new mainstream", so as to provide reference for the development of more independent film directors.

Keywords: Independent film; Wes Anderson; Hirokazu Koreeda; New mainstream cinema

1 Introduction

Since its inception, independent film has been characterized as "non-mainstream distribution and production, independent creation, anti-mainstream and anti-culture". If mainstream movie means "for the public, into the market", then independent movie seems to be naturally mutually exclusive with the public and the market, in a marginal position, difficult to integrate into the mainstream, independent directors are also the same. Focusing on today's international film industry, there are two such directors, initially outside of the film system, independent directors, because of their works

show a strong personal style and artistic aesthetic, and was noticed by the mainstream studios, and provide financial support for a broader film market. In the continuous polishing and refining, they not only won international film awards repeatedly, but also gradually won the recognition of the international film market and the public's favor. They are Hirokazu Koreeda and Wes Anderson. With very different cultural backgrounds and creative styles, they have both risen from small independent directors to internationally recognized directors. To explore the reasons behind such success, the focus should be on the era in which they were in the 1990s, an era in which independent films moved from the periphery to the mainstream.

2 Beyond the Movies: The Wave of the Times Pushes the Envelope

In the 1990s, due to the rapid development of film technology, high-quality and low-cost films and portable cameras greatly reduced the cost of making movies, thus more independent films relying on plots and marginal themes emerged. Steven Soderbergh's 'Sex, Lies and Videos' won the Palme d'Or award and the Best Director award at the Cannes Film Festival in 1989. As an important symbol of the success of independent films, it attracted the attention of the major Hollywood studios, which were in a hegemonic position in the movie industry, and tried to incorporate independent films into their commercial landscape. So Disney bought Miramax, Warner bought New Line, and the major studios continued to draw film talent from independent film festivals such as Sundance, of which Wes Anderson was a member. His second film "Rushmore" was funded by Disney Films when it was in financial difficulties, and was produced and distributed by Disney's Touchstone Pictures and Bowery Films, and eventually became one of the 400 films nominated for the American Film Institute's 2007 edition of the AFI's 100 Greatest Films of the Century. In 2004, "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou" was shortlisted for the Berlin Film Festival, and "The Darjeeling Limited" was shortlisted for the Venice Film Festival in 2007. Wes Anderson's film art talent was recognized by the top film festivals, and his reputation was getting better and better, but the opposite has been true for his lackluster box office performance. According to the data of Box Office Mojo, only two of the seven feature films in the United States have higher box office than the production cost ("The Royal Tenenbaums" and "Moonrise Kingdom"). The rest of the film to recover costs, can only rely on overseas copyright, media revenue and audio-visual products (DVD) sales.

However, while adhering to his authorship, Wes Anderson also consciously avoids offending the mainstream value, making his works highly recognizable visual features, presenting a "Wes Anderson-style" brand label, which makes some investors willing to pay for its brand benefits. "Independence in Hollywood belongs to the realm of aesthetics, but has nothing to do with the financial nature of movies" [1]. In the early 1990s, Hollywood absorbed the "Wernerian" aesthetic, and Wes Anderson received ample investment and distribution channels. Since then, Wes Anderson has become more and more skillful in controlling his personal style of filmmaking, and

the topics of his films have gradually expanded from the portrayal of personal experiences and family relationships to the exploration and reflection on grand issues such as war and history. Revolving around tragedy, war, fascism, art, nostalgia, revenge, friendship and loyalty, the 2014 feature "The Grand Budapest Hotel" swept a number of international awards on its debut, earning nine Academy Award nominations and a total of \$172.9 million at the worldwide box office [2], the 46th highest grossing movie of 2014. This figure signifies that independent films, in addition to the original definition of "not being able to comply with mainstream distribution standards," have been characterized as independent, anti-mainstream, yet able to "cut through to the mainstream market" and achieve success.

On the other hand, the development of Japanese independent films is the most prominent in the Asian film market. Japanese independent films basically rose gradually in the late 70s, when the large film studios tended to collapse, the number of small movie theaters and video rental stores increased, the film market, which gave more opportunities to these young filmmakers who used 8mm film to shoot "small films", with marginal subjects such as homosexuality, violence, and ethical relationships, etc. "independent films" into the public eye. By the 1990s, independent production companies had become the main distribution force in the Japanese film industry. In 1998, the total number of films produced in Japan was 249, of which 184 were produced by independent companies. At this time, Hirokazu Koreeda resigned from his institutionalized job at a television station and embarked on the path of independent creation. His first film "Maboroshi no hikari" was selected for the Venice Film Festival, and since then his works have continued to win awards at major film festivals. After the precipitation of many works, Hirokazu Koreeda has shown his skillful grasp of authorship and marketability. While the "Shoplifters" won the Palme d'Or at the 71st Cannes Film Festival, the box office eventually reached 4.55 billion yen, which was also the 11th highest domestic box office in Japan in 2018 [3], demonstrating the "box office appeal" of Asian independent films.

3 The Movie Itself: Commerce and Art Reconciled

3.1 Visual Presentation: Fairy Tale and Poetry

The intrinsic meaning of a work of art lies in the realization of the fusion of the receiver's aesthetic vision and the work's vision in the process of acceptance through the "change of vision", and the distance between the two visions should be appropriate, and the aesthetic pleasure will be affected if they are completely in line with each other or the distance is too big, and these two directors have mastered the distance between the two visions very well. From the audience and the market point of view, Wes Anderson with color and composition for the audience to create a fairy tale world, this dreamy and strong color itself has a strong visual impact, many viewers think that Wes Anderson's films even if not concerned about the plot only to see the richness of this children's style of cinema is also a kind of enjoyment. Color "can not only depict the scene of the story development and set the atmosphere of the plot, but more importantly, it can express the spiritual world and inner activities of the

main character and reveal the theme of the film.[4]" Anderson is very good at using three primary colors with high saturation. The main color of "Rushmore" is dark blue, which echoes with big red, with an undertone of youthful cruelty; the ocean in "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou" is blue, and the uniforms are light blue, which gives a sense of pure texture; and symmetrical and framed compositions will give a sense of being in a comic book, not to mention the perfect symmetry that can be called the gospel for people with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Wes Anderson uses closed compositions to filter the information in the image, emphasizing the information in the center of the vision, so that the viewer's attention is focused only on the frame. The most obvious example of this is "The Grand Budapest Hotel", where closed compositions are used many times, both in the shots of the train windows and in the distant shots of the hotel. This kind of composition will give people the illusion of watching a comic strip, coupled with the wonderful confrontation between the actors, they will feel a comic book-like fun and humor. The "Wes style" aesthetics has even been frequently out of the circle, and has been spread by the audience to the field of new wave architecture, clothing and fashion, etc. Such a trend of breaking the circle is undoubtedly the best proof of the influence of the market of Wes Anderson's movies[5-6]. As for Hirokazu Koreeda, his movies always attract a group of literary youths, and the small fresh style and healing painting style make countless literary youths deeply attracted. "Movie is a language art. Whether it is the sound, language or picture language in the film, it has the function of leaving blank. According to Gestalt psychology, when the incomplete form is presented in front of us, the aesthete will have a strong pursuit of integrity and symmetry. Hope the desire of harmony.." Such blank aesthetic has a special oriental flavor[7]. In "Our Little Sister", empty lens are used at the beginning to show the scenery of the island and to launch the narrative of the plot. The beautiful sea, the old houses, and the plum tree are different in all seasons. The plum tree is carefully tended by the sister, who picks the plums and puts them into wine, so that the sisters can sit together, enjoy the cool sea breeze, and drink the refreshing plum wine. This empty shot shows the emotion of sisters snuggling with each other. The healing style and warmth of the companionship, in this fast-paced and high-pressure society, Hirokazu Koreeda has become the ideal "poetry and the other side of the shore" in the hearts of most movie fans.

3.2 Selection Narration : Whose True Story

Wes Anderson's movies show a clear biographical style, while Hirokazu Koreeda's movies are mostly based on "social events". Wes Anderson's emotions and stories from his own experiences are able to make the audience empathize with him because these sincere emotions and easily overlooked details are honestly shown under Wes Anderson's outstanding ability to draw from his own experiences and create his own stories. In "Rushmore", Max Fischer represents the group of adolescent boys full of infatuation and melancholy, who express their inner pain in a unique way[8-9]. Director Wes Anderson himself had a similar experience, falling deeply in love with older women and directing plays at school, and these episodes are a true reflection of his own experiences. The love and confusion of adolescence depicted in the movie,

though seemingly insignificant, contains full and real emotions, and the common process of growing up and the loss of adolescence are presented in detail. What seems to be an individual's feelings epitomizes a generation of "lost people". In his films, Hirokazu Koreeda draws on the adaptation of real social events and tries to recreate the characters so that the audience can better integrate into the movie and appreciate the ideas and emotions conveyed. "Distance" is based on the Aum Shinrikyo gas sarin incident in Japan, which traumatized the Japanese people[10-11]. The film was conceived by Hirokazu Koreeda when Aum Shinrikyo member Fumihiko Joyu was released from prison in Hiroshima, and the media reported on his movements and even hounded him so that he had nowhere to escape. In the face of all the news reports, Hirokazu Koreeda's confusion and resistance to the "dichotomy of victimization and victimization", the emotional tone of the movie is not a condemnation of the brutal acts of the Aum Shinrikyo followers, but rather an exploration of the psychological distance between the relatives of the victimizers and the victimizers. This shift in emotional theme makes the movie's main theme not only limited to the impact of society on the incident, but also extends to the moral gap and crisis of trust between relatives, so that more audiences resonate and achieve 'empathy' for the protagonist.

In reality, however, it is not uncommon for movie directors to choose between personal encounters and news events, but what is more important is how they are presented or adapted. Wes Anderson is good at portraying "serious kids" and "childish adults", and their adventurous behavior in the order presents a kind of absurdity in fun. The audience looks forward to the ending with the main character's seemingly sensible "adventurous" actions, but in retrospect, they find that the seemingly reasonable behavior is actually "killing the chicken with the ox knife", which is inexplicable and makes people laugh helplessly. Instead, Hirokazu Koreeda captures many tiny details and tells a non-dramatic story with a long shot in a static observation style, but always pulls the audience's emotions with the tension of intense tearing of emotions under a calm life. Rationality and absurdity, calmness and intensity in the movie world of Wes Anderson and Hirokazu Koreeda are constantly changing the proportion, but always coexist, just like the wonderful real life full of contradictions. Art is infinitely close to reality but higher than reality, and in the presentation of truth and contradiction, their works also possess the artistic charm of "compelling people's hearts".

4 Mainstreaming: How Independent Films Reach the Audience

Movie is the art of people, and the movie market is always the market of the public. All forms serve "people". The real mainstream is to maximize the exposure of human nature and to grasp people's hearts under any style of presentation. And the audience's demands are to see people, understand people, and empathize in the film.

Type production can easily evolve into a spokesperson for popular culture in the realm of consumption. Wes Anderson's works can also be seen as typological, although they do not have explicit genre labels. He chooses to take the trappings of

various genre elements and, through authorialized narrative strategies, deforms them after completing the basic narrative task in order to make the viewer subliminally receptive to the film's expression. He tells the same story under the façade of a family melodrama, revealing the alienation of character relationships, complex human nature, and the story of a broken family. In *"The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou"*, through the analogy of the ship as a family framework, the captain also symbolizes the father, showing the complex relationship between the captain and his ex-wife, lover and self-declared son. Such alienated character relationships make the audience think deeply. In contrast, Hirokazu Koreeda realized the breakthrough of "warm narrative". Using emotion to write the story, converging emotion in the details, so as to reflect the subtle changes in emotion, and make the emotion more connotative and deep. Hirokazu Koreeda said in an interview when he talked about *"Still walking"*: "There is nothing but details in that movie. The details add up to life. That's where the drama lies — in the details. I tried to add details as I built each scene: pajamas, toothbrushes, and other items that you would find in a house that would help deepen (the audience's) emotions for the characters." The two directors have very different narrative styles, but both skillfully alter the classic narrative paradigm, putting innovative variations within the bounds of public acceptance, and giving the audience a "refreshing change of pace" from the familiar formula.

Of course in this era of globalization, audiences come from different cultural environments. And by having cross-cultural elements in the cinematic works of Wes Anderson and Hirokazu Koreeda, they are able to capture the attention of international audiences. Their films often span different cultural backgrounds and languages, and also incorporate many themes and emotions familiar to international audiences, especially since both directors make films about family issues, and family ethics is one of the most widely-viewed themes in itself, with the bonds and entanglements between members of a family resonating with people no matter what country they come from. Whether it is Wes Anderson's "magical realism" or Hirokazu Koreeda's "documentary aesthetics," they both look at individuals who are submerged by grand narratives from a microscopic point of view, and present the real existence of "people" in different cultural backgrounds. so as to reach the hearts of the people and audiences.

And in this age of evolving media, the promotion of a film is also a major factor in whether or not viewers can get into theaters to support the film. So to bring independent films to the mainstream, a strong promotional and marketing strategy is needed. This includes working with producers and distributors to utilize social media and other marketing channels to promote the film extensively and attract the interest and curiosity of the audience. Wes Anderson and Hirokazu Koreeda are usually able to secure good marketing due to their international reputation and box office, which plays an important role in propelling them to the mainstream market.

5 Conclusion

Both directors are not from the academy, one is from the West and the other is from the East; one of them has become famous at a young age while the other one has been lurking for years and has become a late bloomer. They coincide with the same golden age of independent film development, with very different styles, and they have started out from the independent film industry, and have climbed up the ladder step by step, with their peak works being recognized in the film market when they won the highest prizes at the international film festivals. They have responded to the wave of the times when independent films are integrated into the mainstream market, and their creations have also demonstrated a skillful balance between artistry and commercialism in their films. In the past, independent films only cared about personal expression, and even gradually went to extremes, the works were more than artistic, but they appeared to be high and few, separated from the public. Nowadays, it has been proved that only independent films that do not exclude the market, that can skillfully draw on popular elements of expression, that adhere to personal expression in the core, that choose to resonate with the hotspots of the times, and that write the story of mankind from an individual's standpoint are the new paradigm of mainstream cinema. Times keep changing, there is no permanent mainstream movie, but there will be permanent "Wes Anderson", permanent "Hirokazu Koreeda".

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