Laughing Mechanism and Social Value of Chinese Black Comedy Films——From the Perspective of Bergson's Comedy Theory

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Abstract. This article aims to explore the mechanism of laughter and social functions of Chinese black comedy films from the perspective of Bergson's comedy theory. As a popular comedy subgenre in the Chinese film market, black comedy films combine dark and absurd tragic themes with comedy forms to form a unique film style. By using Bergson's comedy theory, while analyzing the comedy and the production mechanism of laughter in Chinese black comedy films, it also analyzes the social functions and cultural values of black comedy films, and explains how to use universal comedy techniques to empower them Black themes are accepted by the current Chinese society, providing some useful ideas and perspectives for further understanding of the creation and appreciation of Chinese black comedy films.

Keywords: Black comedy film; Bergson; mechanism of laughter; social function.

1. Introduction

In recent years, black comedy films have gradually become a popular comedy subgenre in the Chinese film market due to their novel audio-visual techniques, unique aesthetic style and deep social metaphors. According to incomplete statistics, from 2016 to 2022, more than 20 black comedy films will be released in China, with a total box office revenue of more than 3 billion yuan. Among them, films such as "Donkey Gets Water" (2016), "Big Buddha Plus" (2017), "I'm Not the God of Medicine" (2018) and "Sherlock on the Plain" (2019) have achieved excellent box office and word of mouth.

This type of film cleverly combines dark and absurd tragic themes with comedy forms, and connects the evil of crime with the laughter of comedy, forming a unique film style. It not only refreshes the audience's inherent perception of comedy movies as light and bright, but also broadens the form of expression and thematic connotation of comedy movies. The combination of "black" and "comedy" is not only watched by the market and audience, but also becomes a phenomenon worthy of attention in the field of film and television research. Black comedy films have been discussed in the academic circles, but they mostly focus on narrative analysis, characterization and morphological research, and there are not many discussions on the laughing mechanism and social functions of Chinese black comedy films. The clarification of related issues has positive significance for the development of Chinese black comedy films.

Viewing Chinese black comedy films from the perspective of Bergson’s comedy theory can not only explain the production texture and laughing mechanism of Chinese black comedy films relatively effectively from the comic level, but also further explain the ethnicity contained in black comedy films. Aesthetic and social functions, that is, how black comedy films use universal comedy techniques to empower black themes and are accepted by the current Chinese society. Therefore, this article intends to cite Bergson's comedy theory and Chinese local comedy aesthetics theory, starting from the laughing mechanism and social functions of black films, and deeply discussing the production mechanism and social value of Chinese black comedy films, with a view to improving the development of Chinese black comedy films. Development provides a theoretical picture from which to draw.

2. Bergson's Comedy Theory and Chinese Black Comedy Films

Henri Bergson (Henri Bergson) is a French philosopher, writer, and playwright and Nobel Prize winner in literature. In his book "Laughter: On the Meaning of Funny" (hereinafter referred to as "Laughter") published in 1900, he brought together three articles published in the "Paris Review", based on the theory of games and philosophy of life, from Situation, language and character, etc., systematically explain the production mechanism of comedy and the role of laughter in comedy. "Laughter" is considered an important reference for modern Chinese comedy theory, and has had a profound impact on Chinese drama, film and literary creation. Chinese comedy theorists such as Zhu Guangqian and Xiong Fuxi were all influenced by Bergson's comedy theory, "In the process of Chinese modern comedy constantly activating life consciousness, there are two important facts that should be given special attention: First, modern psychological science has a great impact on China. The infiltration of modern comedy, and the second is the influence of Bergson's theory on modern Chinese comedy." [1]

Since the reform and opening up, with the vigorous development of Chinese comedy movies, the scope of comedy themes has been continuously expanded. It not only focuses on daily social life, but also pays more and more attention to the marginal areas of society. Black comedy movies are a symbol of this phenomenon. Appear in the public eye. Black comedy movies, this kind of "black comedy" with "little people as the center, criminal behavior as clues, social phenomena as the background, double-line narrative structure and absurdity" is becoming a popular form, and has formed a consensus among the audience."[2] The definition of black comedy films is widely still controversial, some scholars believe that black comedy films have a strong commonality of black humor, that is, satirical humor with social criticism, and at the same time embody absurd, dark and cruel colors. [3] Another scholar believes that black comedy is not a proper term, but a general term for a type of film that has a dark and pessimistic world view, but the audiovisual form and narrative content are presented in a humorous form. [4] Some scholars believe that domestic black comedy inherits the characteristics of international black comedy film types Comedy subgenre. [5] What this article refers to Black comedy movies are feature films that use crime suspense as the story theme, "anti-hero"-style little characters as the narrative subject, present the tragic and absurd worldview in the form of comedy, and produce laughing results.

The combing of the above literature shows that Chinese black comedy films have two core features, namely humor and absurdity. Humor, as one of the core features of black comedy films, has multiple references. On the one hand, humor means a means of making a laugh. "Comedy cannot be without laughter [6] ", laughter is the core feature of comedy movies, it is not only the audience's praise for comedy, but also the bond between the audience and the creator's spirit. It can be said that laughter is the soul of comedy movies. [7]On the other hand, humor is about morality. In China, laughter itself is not pure, but always contains a kind of moral teaching. Chinese literary and artistic works have always adhered to the historical fate of "literature conveys truth" and "poetry can resent grievances", especially for narrative art forms such as movies. Judging from the categories of Chinese comedy films, Chinese pure comedy films have not been developed enough, and comedies that contain didactic meaning and social functions have always existed. Especially in the decades after the founding of New China, due to the influence of political and social backgrounds, films such as satirical comedies, eulogizing comedies, and light comedies are more popular. These films emphasize the significance of social education, emphasizing the promotion of correct values and ideas. With China's reform and opening up and the introduction of Western literary and artistic trends, commercialized comedy films with themes of sex, violence and crime have emerged in addition to traditional comedy films featuring laughter and social education. The combination of humor as a comedy expression method and black elements has caused the variation of humor, and the object of comedy has changed from "harmless ugliness" to "harmful evil" in reality. [8] Therefore, from the perspective of the humorous nature of black films, there is laughter and moral characteristics.

On the other hand, absurdity, as another core feature of black comedy films, is mainly extended to an expression of anxiety with a sense of pain, "In the sense of absurdity, the vitality is always

suppressed but does not know where to confide, thus causing anxiety. " [9] The themes of black comedies are mostly taken from the dark side of society, and the overall concept is relatively dark, mainly highlighting the underground order. The relationship between gangsters, human nature and a changing social environment. The effect of comedy has also changed from the relaxed and joyful humor of traditional comedy to the blend of horror and funny. However, under the influence of Chinese national aesthetic culture, Chinese black comedy films have a sense of social discipline, endowed with a kind of "good" guidance on the basis of absurd pain. Although the narrative style and character of Chinese black comedy movies have broken through the category of "harmless" in traditional comedies, the degree of realism of black content such as sex and violence and the resulting sense of terror and anxiety have been weakened.

The emergence of this unique morphological feature of Chinese black comedy films has a great relationship with the integration of Chinese and Western comedy theories. Chinese black comedy films are the product of multiple fusions. Judging from the images themselves, they are closely related to Western black humor genres and international black comedy films. But we can see a lot of shadows of Chinese comedy aesthetic culture in Chinese black films. Many comedy techniques in Chinese black comedy films are universal, and the comedy techniques sorted out by Bergson can still be seen in Chinese black films. It can be said that comedies have considerable commonality in terms of skills. In addition, in terms of themes, compared with Bergson's emphasis on purely funny comedy theory, the artistic practice of Chinese film noir highlights the comedy logic of "combined sorrow and joy". Compared with purely funny, Chinese black comedy films show more moral meaning, which is inseparable from China's native cultural and aesthetic traditions. Therefore, taking care of the development of Chinese black comedy from the perspective of comedy theory will undoubtedly provide a new perspective for the study of Chinese black comedy films. Starting from Henri Bergson and the Chinese comedy theorist's comedy concept, starting from the laughing skills and social functions of black comedy, we can better understand the current appearance of Chinese black comedy.

3. Situation, Language, Character: Laughing Skills in Black Comedy Films

3.1. The funnyness of the scene

The construction of comic situations is the key to the art of comedy. It is not only the carrier to show the characters and narrative content, but also the basis for creating the emotional atmosphere of the audience. Based on the theory of games, Bergson connected the toys of human childhood with comedies, and summed up the laws of laughter that effectively create comedy situations: repetition, inversion and mutual interference. "These techniques exist in classical drama and modern comedy in a pure state." [10] In Chinese black comedy films, this "pure state" of situational laughter is often integrated with image time and space and lens language, producing interesting effects.

According to Bergson, the "repetition" of a scene mainly refers to: "The scene repeats itself several times according to the original appearance, which is also contrary to the ever-evolving life" [11]. Behind this repetition is the mutual struggle between the two spiritual forces of the comic characters, one is a simple mechanical force, and the other is a spiritual force that corrects the mechanical nature. The comedy law of spring repetition can be mainly classified into two categories: "one is the repeatedly suppressed emotion, which bounces back like a spring; the other is the idea and action of trying to suppress the emotion, which makes fun of it." [12] Black comedy film "Sherlock on the Plain" in the main line In the process of finding the murderer, a comedy mode with repeated scenes is staged. In the film, Chaoying and Zhanyi form a detective team to search for the escaped driver for the friend Shuhe who was hospitalized in a car accident, and shuttle between the countryside and the city. Based on the information given by the sorceress, the two investigated the three vehicles to determine which one had signs of a collision. In the process of repeated investigations, they bravely broke into the school, outwitted the security guards, and pretended to be delivery personnel, etc., not only did not make the audience bored, but instead amplified the sense of fun of the two in the process of finding the murderer. The embarrassment of re-investigating the vehicle again and again goes

against the ever-evolving life, creating a comedy of situations and characters that makes the audience laugh out loud.

The second rule of creating a comic situation is "inversion". That is, "reverse the order in the scene and reverse the status of the characters." [13] And get the comedy situation. In the inversion, it is the conflict between the free will of the characters and the spiritual power of the playwright. In comedy, the characters seem to be free to live in the comic situation according to their own will. However, when the playwright inverts the relationship between the comedy scene and the characters, revealing the strings of the characters like marionettes to the audience, so that the audience can see the playwright's operation, then the audience will regard the characters as puppets and no longer associate with them. The characters empathize, which results in laughter. "The seriousness of life comes from our freedom... So what does it take to turn it all into comedy? It's just to imagine that beneath our apparent freedom lies the puppeteer's joystick... So, if we could make people have the illusion that this is a puppet show, then there is no real, serious, dramatic scene that cannot be used to express comedy." [14] In the black comedy movie "Donkey Gets Water", Zhou Tienan was originally a just and forthright young teacher who dared to speak out against all injustices. But after the bullet grazed his cheek and his life was threatened, Zhou Tienan became a timid and indifferent person. Obedient to the special commissioner, saw Zhao Yiman was indifferent to the insult, and even persuaded Jiajia to marry the coppersmith. The image of the upright young intellectual suddenly fell into a snobbish snobby in an instant. The reversal of the character's personality gave the audience a great sense of humor and impact.

The third technique of creating a comic situation is "mutual interference": "A situation must be comical if it belongs to two independent events and can be interpreted in two completely different meanings at the same time." [15] In fact, this mutual interference is similar to the butterfly effect. The Butterfly Effect refers to a small action that drives the entire system to produce a long-term and huge chain reaction, which eventually evolves into an amazing result. A simple "coincidence" event triggers the transformation of other events, and even changes the direction of the whole story, resulting in ironic comedy situations. Behind such techniques is the conflict between events and events. The incongruous influence of independent events leads to the mechanical nature of the event itself and the irrational phenomena of social life are displayed through ingenious scene arrangements, so that the audience can witness the errors and errors of habitual logic in daily events. "The object of our laughter is what proportionality of cause and effect explains in certain circumstances a particular mechanical arrangement, transparent as glass, through which we see behind a series of mechanical arrangements of effects and causes ."[16]

The black comedy film "Crazy Stone" uses the clever situational technique of mutual interference. The three forces of security, Jiangyang robbers and thieves interfered with each other because of a sky-high priced emerald stone, and a battle started. A stone, in the eyes of security guards and others, is the hope of saving factories on the verge of bankruptcy and keeping workers' jobs. In the view of the Jiangyang gang, only after the factory loses its stones can it close down, so that high-rise buildings can be built on the factory's land. And the three thieves coveted the value of the emerald stone. The comedy arrangement shows the comedy of the three running towards the goal and pulling each other, and at the same time sees the mechanical arrangement caused by the incoordination among the three forces.

Regarding comic language, Bergson also has a unique analysis. It distinguishes the comedy of situational language from the comedy of language itself. The former is associated with the comic situation, the latter with language itself. The comedy of situational language is often accompanied by a specific comic situation, and looking at the language itself without this situation cannot produce the effect of laughter. "If it can be said correctly, the comic of language is nothing but the projection of the comic of action and situation on the plane of language."[17] Therefore, the creation of language comedy in comedy situations can basically follow the creation techniques of comedy situations such as repetition/inversion and mutual interference, so I won't repeat them here. The comedy of language itself is attributed to rigid habits and metaphors. The rigid habits in the language are shared by the

characters themselves and the psychology of the audience, forming a psychological stereotype, presenting a "cliché" inertial language expression, such as the humorous tone of the Northeast dialect, and the catchphrases in the cross talk performances. And the fixed language expression in the job and so on.

In the black comedy movie "Crazy Stone", Bao Shihong, chief of the security department, speaks Chongqing local dialect, international thief Mike speaks Hong Kong dialect, and Xie Xiaomeng switches back and forth between Chongqing dialect, Mandarin and Hong Kong and Taiwan accents. The classic catchphrase "I'll blow your lungs!", "Is there a public toilet, come and go as you want", etc., which amplify the personality traits between different characters, and build a disordered situation in language. Enhanced the comedy of the film. Word metaphor is to combine the superficial meaning of words with the actual meaning behind them, so as to produce a comic effect based on rational cognition. The combination of the rigid "clichés" of the language and the absurdity of the language - including allusions as well as glaring contradictory words and syntax errors - completes the comicality of the language itself. "Inserting absurd concepts into clichés yields funny language." [18] In the black comedy film "Big Boss", the patients in the mental hospital talk about real estate projects, and the content of the characters' conversations and the momentum are like successful businessmen, "However, the feast in the mental hospital is still the same, and people still talk without thinking The topic is new, and the language is so familiar that it reminds people of everything around them." [19] The director combines the idiomatic voice of successful people in reality with the identity of a mental patient, presenting a sense of absurdity and the absurd joy of language.

3.2. Laughing Skills of Characters

The core of comedy revolves around people, "There is nothing funny outside the scope of what really belongs to people" [20]. For comedy works, creating typical and plastic characters and distinctive characters is an important criterion for judging the level of art. The humorousness of the scene and language is mainly displayed through the image and character of the characters. "The comic of language follows the comic of situation, and it will melt into the comic of character." [21] Therefore, how to construct comic characters is the key to making black comedy movies laugh.

At the level of character creation, Bergson believes that to achieve the effect of comedy, it is necessary to use comedy techniques to separate the emotions of the audience from the emotions of the characters, so that the audience can achieve a state of no emotion. "Usually what is accompanied by laughter is a kind of the mental state of not being emotional." [22]. In order to achieve emotional isolation at the character level, it is necessary to show the exaggerated and rigid characteristics of the characters. The rigidity of the characters can be portrayed as going their own way that is incompatible with social life, thus cutting off the connection between the individual and the group. "Laughter has social meaning and content. Funny first of all means a serious lack of social adaptability." [23] Can also be portrayed as a facial makeup of a character, exaggerating to highlight the stereotyped posture and habitual behavior of a class of characters in daily life. When the audience focuses on the shortcomings of the character and posture, the empathy between the audience and the characters is interrupted, and an emotional isolation is created between the audience and the characters. There are a large number of anti-heroes in black comedy movies. These characters are all on the fringes of society, and there are certain "flaws" in the character of the characters, which cannot be well integrated into social life, and their out-of-fit behaviors have produced a strong comic effect. The guards in "The Great Buddha Plus", the teachers in remote areas in "The Donkey Gets the Water", the farmers in "Charlotte on the Plain", etc., the film focuses on the little people, through the life and helplessness of the little people Conveying absurd joy and humanistic care. In addition, Bergson believes that tragedy is to create individual characters, while comedy is to capture the commonality of characters. In black comedy movies, most of them show a group of people with distinctive characteristics. They belong to the small people in the market. Their shortcomings in character and behavior make people laugh, but their tenacious character makes people awe-inspiring. It is worth noting that the "flaws" here do not specifically refer to the shortcomings of marginalized characters

in society. Sometimes the "advantages" of characters' personalities can also become a kind of joke. For example, a character has characteristics in terms of professional expertise or status, but has corrupted virtues, resulting in a sudden drop in morality, incompatible with the usual thinking of society, and causing unexpected jokes. In the black comedy movie "No Problem", Ding Wuyuan, the old director of Chongqing Shuhua Farm, does not understand technology but is good at human relations. The new director, You Daxing, is a doctor who has returned from studying abroad. He wanted to improve the efficiency of Shuhua Farm by relying on standards and requirements. The moral flaws of the old director Ding Wuyuan and the stubbornness of the new director You Daxing form two extremes. The collision of the two rigid characters of softness and rigidity provides the film with humor.

Although Bergson's comedy theory has the imprint of the times, it mostly focuses on the stage of drama. However, the above analysis demonstrates the applicability of the comedy skills in Bergson's comedy theory in Chinese black comedy films in terms of situation, language and character. It shows that Bergson's comedy theory can be applied to the analysis of Chinese comedy films, and provides reliable theoretical guidance for the development of Chinese black comedy films.

4. The social value of black comedy films

4.1. The social discipline of black comedy

Based on his philosophy of life, Bergson regards society as a continuous and dynamic existence, but there are many rigidities in it. "Laughter is the weapon used by society to eliminate this rigidity and restore vitality." [24] Laughter caused by comedy has a significant social function, "Laughter punishes centrifugal behavior through the fear it arouses, and at the same time restores flexibility to all things that may be rigid and rigid on the surface of the social body"[25], it is the "social gesture" of comedy and laughter that Bergson emphasizes to break rigid bad habits and revitalize people through laughter. People reflect on themselves in the process of laughing, so as to eliminate their rigid habits and bad behaviors, so that the social function of comedy is highlighted with laughter. The embarrassment of the "anti-hero" characters in black comedy movies on the road to crime makes the audience laugh, but also allows the audience to have a deeper understanding of the mechanical stereotypes related to crime, and to alert themselves, so as to stay away from crime .

On the basis of affirming Bergson's theory of social posture, Xiong Fuxi, a Chinese comedy theorist, strengthened the research on the social function of comedy. Xiong Fuxi believes that "the more complete and ingenious one is Bergson's statement"[26]. Under the influence of Bergson's social posture of laughing, Xiong Fuxi believes that laughter is the guide of society and the standard of distinguishing right from wrong, which reflects a strong sense of social responsibility. Different from Bergson who regards comedy as a sanction for the centrifugal behavior of social members, Xiong Fuxi takes the social function of comedy a step further and regards it as the "textbook" of society. Comedy should not only let the audience know what not to do, but also let the audience the audience knows what to do. This change in social function thinking is related to the differences in national aesthetic psychology. In addition, Xiong Fuxi also proposed that we should pay attention to the national aesthetic psychology, and believed that artists should engage in literary and artistic creation on the basis of national traditions. Focusing on black comedy movies, compared with foreign black comedy movies that focus on funny and funny, Chinese black comedy movies have a stronger aesthetic meaning. Take "Two Smoking Barrels" and "Crazy Stone" as examples. The two have similarities in narrative style and content themes, but they are different from "Two Smoking Barrels" in the black with an open ending in the style of "Crazy Stone", the ending of "Crazy Stone" shows that justice has been done. This reflects the social discipline and aesthetic education functions of Chinese black comedy films under the national aesthetic psychology.

4.2. Comedy Aesthetics of Chinese Black Comedy Films

Behind the national aesthetic psychology displayed by Chinese black comedy movies is the Chinese comedy aesthetics of "blending joy and sorrow". On the basis of sorting out the core laughing skills of comedy, Bergson further delineated the difference between tragedy and comedy, and believed that there is a strong dividing line between comedy and tragedy. "Tragedy describes personality, comedy describes type." The purpose of tragedy it is to make the audience empathize with the characters, while comedy prevents the audience from empathizing with the characters through type characters, and produces laughter through their own rational games. Chinese esthetician Zhu Guangqian commented on the comedy theory of Bergson and others in the book "Literary Psychology", and on this basis put forward the concept of "tragedy humor" with the aesthetic appeal of Chinese comedy. "The "tragedy" in the "tragic humor" here mainly refers not to tragedy as one of the basic types of drama, but to a tragic fact in life." [27] Bergson's comedy theory conveys how to achieve a state of being happy without cruelty for the purpose of reason, while Zhu Guangqian's "tragedy humor" proposed on this basis is a kind of tragic fact in life. It is a form of comedy that is "tragedy", embodying grandeur and harmony. Different from Bergson's view that laughter is a game of reason, the starting point of Zhu Guangqian's "tragedy humor" is emotion. Appreciators can also feel emotional empathy in the reason of laughter. As the saying goes, "tears in laughter, sympathy in sarcasm." This concept has a great influence on Chinese comedy, whether it is literature, drama, movies or TV sketches, most of them run through this concept of comedy. Therefore, the humor of Chinese black comedy films generally shows the characteristics of tragedy and comedy.

5. Summarize

Chinese black comedy films combine Bergson's deconstructed universal comedy techniques with black elements and tragic themes to meet the psychological needs of the public in pursuit of excitement, and the combination with my country's traditional narrative mode and national aesthetic psychology gives the public a sense of familiarity. Comfort and reality. It can be said. The tragic theme, comedy form, small character perspective and benign ending in Chinese black comedy movies not only satisfy the public's consumption psychology of relaxing entertainment under the pressure of real life and the public's pursuit of intense and exciting consumption pleasure, but also bring black comedy to life with a pioneering attitude. The integration of elements and national aesthetic psychology has dispelled the heaviness of socially sensitive topics, showing the unique style and appearance of Chinese black comedy.

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