

Performance Style under the Traditional Realist Director Concept of Chinese Films in the 1980s

-- Political Character under Ordinary Status

Fengao Yi

Department of Cultural Management, Shanghai Publishing and Printing College, Shanghai 200093, China

Abstract: Since the new era, Chinese films have been hovering between art and politics. While they are striving to find the subject status of film art, they are difficult to completely separate from politics. From 1979 to 1980, characters such as intellectuals, workers, and farmers in Chinese films lived as ordinary people in specific situations in the film, and they demonstrated the political character endowed by the times. An important feature of Chinese film performance culture under the concept of traditional realist directors is that the creation of intellectual characters has become mainstream, such as Fu Bin's identity as an ordinary reporter in *The Trill of Life* (1979), Qiu Shi's identity as an intellectual in the movie *Evening Rain* (1980), and group portraits of intellectuals in *Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (1980). Another important feature of Chinese film performance culture under the concept of traditional realist directors is the comedic expression of workers' identity politics, such as the portraits of workers in the movies *What a Family* (1979) and *Twins Come in Pairs* (1979). Chinese film performances under the concept of traditional realist directors have also created a number of peasant images with political characters, such as the peasant group in *The Plough* (1979) and Jiang Maofu in *Laughter in the Moon Village* (1981).

Keywords: Chinese Movie; Farmer; Identity; Intellectual; Political Character; Worker.

1. Introduction

Since the new era, Chinese films have been hovering between art and politics. While they are striving to find the subject status of film art, they are difficult to completely separate from politics. In the process of moving away from the political tool theory of "Cultural Revolution" films, realist performances under the concept of traditional realist directors of Chinese films represented from 1979 to 1980 try to give characters an identity that is close to reality, life, and the audience. This is used to implicitly convey political awareness. During this period, characters such as intellectuals, workers, and farmers lived as ordinary people in specific situations in the film, demonstrating the political character endowed by the times.

2. Political Character under Intellectual Status

An important feature of Chinese film performance culture under the concept of traditional realist directors is that the creation of intellectual characters has become mainstream. During this period, there emerged actors such as Zheng Changhe in *The Trill of Life* (1979), Gu Xiuming in *Pattering Spring-Rain* (1979), Fu Bin in *Troubled Laughter* (1979), Qiu Shi in *Evening Rain* (1980), Luo Qun in *Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (1980), etc. In the film, they insisted on fighting against the "Gang of Four" during the "Cultural Revolution". They were at the forefront, worried about the country and the people. They had obvious political characters and became the protagonists of historical reflection.

2.1. Fu Bin in Troubled Laughter

Troubled Laughter (1979) restored Fu Bin's identity as an ordinary journalist and demonstrated his honest character in his daily work. Although he looks dull on the outside, he is

rich on the inside. In the winter of 1975, political campaigns such as pursuing "Political Rumors" and "Fight back the Right Wind of Reversing Previous Correct Decisions" caused society to lose the ability to distinguish between truth, goodness and beauty, fakeness, evil and ugliness. Honesty becomes a rare quality. The film attributes this quality to the intellectual Fu Bin, making him the protagonist who fights against falsehood. However, when he faced political persecution such as house confiscation and arrest, he still believed in the future and insisted on honesty, and his character became political. *Troubled Laughter* (1979) accurately captures the emotional world, spiritual outlook and character traits of the "Cultural Revolution" intellectuals, and reveals the confusion and struggle of society by showing their shouts and struggles in political events. The honest character of intellectuals represented by Fu Bin has certain social significance. In this way, individual honesty is universalized into social honesty, and the identity of intellectuals is given a political character.

2.2. Qiushi in Evening Rain

Qiu Shi in the movie *Evening Rain* (1980) is an "active counter-revolutionary element" during the "Cultural Revolution", which laid the identity foundation for the formation of his political character. At the beginning of the film, people wearing red armbands on the pier forcefully shove leaflets into the masses, exaggerating the chaotic and terrifying political atmosphere of the "Cultural Revolution" and also pointing out the political environment of the era in which Qiu Shi lived. A debate arose on the ship over whether to let Qiu Shi go. This was essentially a heated debate on the attitude towards the "Cultural Revolution" and a reflection on politics. In this way, Qiu Shi's status as an intellectual is an object of deep exploration into people's spiritual realm, and has been abstracted into a "political victim." His rescue is the rescue of a class and the rescue of a country. The identity of

Qiushi intellectuals has universal social significance and extensive political significance. The film uses the ups and downs of a concrete poet's fate to elucidate a profound reflection on the national disaster of the "Cultural Revolution". Qiushi's status as an intellectual has long transcended the professional category, but has entered the political category as a symbol of power struggle, forming the intellectual's political character.

2.3. Portraits of Intellectuals in Legend of Tianyun Mountain

Legend of Tianyun Mountain (1980) amplifies "anti-rightism" as the historical background of the film's story, making the film naturally connected with politics. The film boldly reveals the historical tragedy caused by "Left" errors to a generation. The group of intellectuals in *Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (1980) is a typical representation of a class of Chinese society under the background of the "Cultural Revolution", especially the "Against the Right Deviation Movement". Their characters are products of the tragic era, and they are revealed in the tragedy of the era. This is "an extremely abnormal political life that has continued for many years, which has led to a large number of tragedies." [1] Luo Qun is rich in spirit and noble sentiments. In the face of political disasters, he still has firm beliefs and adheres to his authenticity. Feng Qinglan is loyal to love and brave in sacrifice. In the general political environment, her character shines brightly in Luo Qun's rough situation. In the turbulent era of the "Cultural Revolution", Song Wei's character was of the most universal significance during the political movement. The trajectory of her character is the imprint of the trajectory of political movement in the course of human life. In *Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (1980), the character of the intellectuals is deeply imprinted with the character of the times. In the historical context, the development of their political character is inevitable. At the same time, the analysis of his political character is essentially an examination of society and a reflection on history.

3. Political Character under Worker Identity

Another important feature of Chinese film performance culture under the concept of traditional realist directors is the comedic expression of workers' identity politics. While giving workers a political character, the films of this period also paid more attention to the portrayal of the characters' optimistic, positive, and enterprising physical characters. At the same time, the film's life-oriented, regional and contemporary expression skills are conducive to conveying political consciousness in a comedy atmosphere.

3.1. Portraits of Workers in What a Family

After the end of the "Cultural Revolution", Chinese society was brought order out of chaos, and various undertakings were waiting to be developed. People who have got rid of the repressive and depressing social atmosphere are full of enthusiasm and creativity in socialist construction. *What a Family* (1979) uses the style of life comedy to portray the positive and optimistic characters of Lao Hu, Jiaying, Yang Yulin, etc.; at the same time, it gives political themes such as bringing order to order and reform and innovation in the portrayal of workers' characters, which conveys the political character of worker identity.

In *What a Family*, the father, Lao Hu, is the workshop director of Shuguang Textile Factory. He works diligently and has worked for the country for half his life. He actively leads everyone to improve production, but his thinking is relatively conservative, and he often conflicts with young people who are engaged in technological innovation in the workshop. "Because Lao Hu has the limitations of small production due to historical and ideological reasons." [2] The representative figure of technological innovation happens to be Yang Yulin, the boyfriend of his eldest daughter Jiaying, and Yulin is the apprentice brought out by Lao Hu himself. The film's arrangement of character relationships in this way is conducive to the comedy effect of the plot in the "accidental" narrative mode, and it is more conducive to conveying the political character of worker identity in a comedic atmosphere.

In the film, Lao Hu's daughter Jiaying is a worker in a woolen textile factory, and she falls in love with Yu Lin, a repairman. Several young workers, represented by Yu Lin and Jiaying, took on the responsibility of improving product quality and reducing labor intensity, and this was inspired and encouraged by Lao Qi, who was the party secretary of the workshop. However, Lao Hu thought they were being lazy and taking advantage. The national political theme of reform and innovation is expressed in the dual character relationship between the identity of factory master and apprentice and the identity of family relatives. In this way, the workers' aggressive physiological character fits and conveys the inspiring political character of the times.

3.2. The Portrait of Workers in Twins Come in Pairs

Twins Come in Pairs (1979) also uses a dramatic style to portray the images of Yang Dalin, Gu Fangfang and other workers with lofty ideals and hard work. The national theme of the "four modernizations" construction after the end of the "Cultural Revolution" is projected in their respective work positions. Yang Dalin is a buyer at a certain research institute. He is enthusiastic and selfless in his work. Gu Fangfang is a laboratory technician at Pujiang Chemical Plant. She works hard and likes Dalin. They are the backbone representatives of the "four modernizations" construction workers. "Films should be educational and educational through entertainment." [3] They undertook the political task of conveying the shift of the focus of the party and the country's work to socialist modernization after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee.

Twins Come in Pairs (1979) breaks away from the shackles of "Cultural Revolution" films' political character portrayal, preaching and illustration. Through a series of life-oriented comedy plots, the audience can gain education and artistic enjoyment in a warm and joyful atmosphere. The film implants the national theme of the "Four Modernizations" into the daily work and life of the characters, and uses it to express the spiritual character of the workers represented by them who work selflessly and study hard for the "Four Modernizations". In this way, the character of the workers reflects the political nature of the era. The expression of the political character of Chinese film performance culture workers under the concept of traditional realist directors is manifested in their admiration for new life and praise of new fashions. This is expressed in a life-like comedy style in the film. At the same time, it integrates the political discourse of the times into the work and life of workers, pays attention to people's spiritual changes under the changes of the times, and

achieves the purpose of education through entertainment.

4. Political Character under Farmer Identity

Chinese films under the concept of traditional realist directors such as *The Plough* (1979), *In-Laws* (1981), *Laughter in the Moon Village* (1981), *Xu Mao and his Daughters* (1981), etc. have shaped the A group of farmers with political character.

4.1. Peasant Groups in The Plough

The Plough (1979) presents a serious political theme through the joys and sorrows of a family, which makes the peasant identity in the film naturally assume the task of revealing political character. "Politics is a vital matter in today's people's lives. It is impossible for a movie to write about people without showing political life." [4] The farmers in the film assume the identity of revolutionary explorers in rural China. The dramatic storyline between the characters more truly shows the social scene of northern Shaanxi at that time. The film does not impose the political symbols of the times on the character's character, but naturally presents the political character of the farmer's identity in the progression of the character's destiny, indirectly and implicitly venting a "political emotion" [5]. In order to truly reproduce the characteristics of farmers' identities and make the farmers' political characters consistent with their identity characteristics, the film attaches great importance to the selection of actors. "When selecting actors, we also paid special attention to the temperament of farmers. These actors may not be very beautiful, but they live on the Loess Plateau, and when they come out of cave dwellings, they are as natural as yams growing from the loess slopes (forgive me for being disrespectful). They are harmonious and authentic." [6] It can be seen that *The Plough* (1979) abandoned the creative inertia of "Cultural Revolution" films to illustrate political concepts. The film places the political character shaping of farmers in the natural development of specific themes, specific characters, and specific plots, which makes the political character of farmers' identities appear both real and profound.

4.2. Jiang Maofu in Laughter in the Moon Village

Jiang Maofu in *Laughter in the Moon Village* (1981) is hard-working, simple, and good at business, but during the chaotic years of the "Cultural Revolution" he became a political tool. In order to criticize Lin Biao's theory of "Prosperous Nation with Poor Civilian", he was regarded as an "advanced model". And for political needs, he was labeled as a "bourgeois upstart" and became the target of the class's "dictatorship." In this way, his political ups and downs directly affected his son Guigen's marriage. After the "Cultural Revolution", his fate was affected by national policies, and he finally completed the marriage of his son Guigen and Qingliang's daughter Lanhua. The agricultural civilization space in a mountainous area in the south of the Yangtze River is far away from the cities that represent industrial civilization. The farmers there are simple and honest, and Jiang Maofu is a typical example among them. Rural areas far away from the city were still seriously affected by the "Cultural Revolution", and you can see the hardships

that Jiang Maofu encountered. In the scene where the old man Jiang Maofu cries in the film, actor Zhang Yan used the original cries of ordinary farmers to create an image of a real Chinese farmer. The sad cry of the old man Jiang Maofu makes this farmer's character typical and vivid. What's more important is the exploration of the reasons behind the old man's cry, which allows the political theme of the film to be elucidated, and then reveals the political character of Jiang Maofu, an old man who is a farmer. In this scene, Zhang Yan's performance fit the prescribed situation and the character's identity, and he created Jiang Maofu's typical character traits. He also used the physical action of "crying" to express the helpless plight of farmers in an environment of changing policies, which also effectively conveyed the film's criticism of the ultra-left line. The interpretation of peasant identity as a political theme has become a directorial strategy to highlight the political implications of film performances cultural. And the political meaning of this performance culture is conveyed in a state where the actors' "performance is closer to life and more real" [7]. In this way, the peasant identity, which was originally full of life-oriented characteristics, has acquired an obvious political character.

5. Conclusion

Since the new era, Chinese films have been wandering between art and politics. In the process of moving away from the "Cultural Revolution" film political tools, the traditional realist director concept has returned. The political dimension of realist performance culture is also reflected in the political character of the characters under ordinary identities such as intellectuals, workers, farmers, etc. Characters such as intellectuals, workers, and farmers live in specific situations in the film as ordinary people, and they demonstrate the political character endowed by the times. Realist performance culture attempts to implicitly convey political consciousness by giving characters identities that are close to reality, life, and the audience.

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