

# The Representation of Tragic Elements in Comedy Films

-- A Case Study of Mahua FunAge's Creations

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**Abstract:** Mahua FunAge's comedy films have forged a distinctive artistic aesthetic through the "comedy +" hybrid narrative strategy, emerging as a leading exponent of Chinese domestic comedy film production. This paper first traces the origins and intrinsic characteristics of comedy and tragedy, clarifies the connotative hierarchy and logical relationship of "tragic elements", "tragicity" and "tragic core" in comedy films, and sorts out the development context of the fusion of comedy and tragedy as well as the evolution of tragic representation in Chinese domestic comedy films. Taking Mahua FunAge's classic comedy film works as the research object, the paper systematically analyzes the specific expression forms of tragic elements from four dimensions: character shaping, plot setting, theme expression and scene design, and reveals the stage characteristics of Mahua FunAge's tragic representation from human nature excavation to social issue discussion. Furthermore, from the multiple perspectives of text creation, reception aesthetics and film industry, this paper explores the creative value of integrating tragic elements into comedy films, including promoting plot development, revealing social phenomena, enhancing emotional resonance, highlighting character traits, upgrading aesthetic experience and driving industrial innovation. Finally, the paper reflects on the practical dilemmas in Mahua FunAge's creative process, such as the lack of tragic core in individual works, and points out that the deep integration of comedy and tragedy based on real life and local culture is the core path for the innovation and development of Chinese domestic comedy films. This research enriches the academic research dimension of comedy film tragedy representation, and provides practical reference for the creation of domestic comedy films with both entertainment value and artistic depth.

**Keywords:** Comedy Films; Mahua FunAge; Narrative Strategy; Tragic Elements; Tragicity.

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## 1. Introduction

Comedy films have always been a mainstream genre in the film market due to their light and humorous artistic articulation, which can bring joyful viewing experience to the audience. In the development of Chinese domestic cinema, comedy films have gradually broken away from the simple entertainment-oriented creation model and moved towards a deeper artistic expression that combines laughter and reflection. The fusion of comedy and tragedy elements has become an important creative trend of contemporary domestic comedy films, elevating comedy films from mere vehicles of entertainment to mediums that reflect social reality, explore human nature and trigger audience thinking.

Mahua FunAge, founded in 2003, has been engaged in the comedy sector for over two decades, with the mission of "Providing Entertainment for the Public". It has gradually expanded from stage play production to film and television production, and its first film *Goodbye, Mr. Loser* released in 2015 became a phenomenal domestic comedy film, grossing 1.45 billion RMB at the box office and laying a solid foundation for its position in the film industry. Since then, Mahua FunAge has launched a series of classic works such as *Mr. Donkey*, *Never Say Die*, *Hello, Billionaire*, *Moon Man* and *Claw the Doll*, among which *Mr. Donkey* was lauded by mainstream media and received a high score of 8.3 on Douban, and *Claw the Doll* achieved a box office gross of over 3 billion RMB, becoming a new benchmark in the "Xihong City Universe". Mahua FunAge's comedy films have formed a unique creative style with witty language, ingenious plot

design and exaggerated performative devices, and more importantly, they have always woven profound tragic elements in the comedy narrative, forming an artistic effect of "laughter with tears".

In the existing academic research on Mahua FunAge's comedy films, scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on its narrative strategy, artistic characteristics and market communication, and some studies have also touched on the representation of tragic elements in its works. However, most of the existing researches lack a systematic and multi-dimensional analysis of the expression forms of tragic elements, and the discussion on the creative value and industrial significance of integrating tragic elements is not in-depth enough. Based on the above research gaps, this paper takes Mahua FunAge's comedy film works as the research object, takes the representation of tragic elements as the core research perspective, combs the theoretical connotation of the fusion of comedy and tragedy, and systematically analyzes the specific expression paths of tragic elements in Mahua FunAge's works from the dimensions of character shaping, plot setting, theme expression and scene design. At the same time, this paper explores the multiple values of tragic elements in comedy film creation by combining interdisciplinary perspectives such as reception aesthetics and film industry, and reflects on the development dilemma of Mahua FunAge and the innovation path of domestic comedy films, in order to provide a new research perspective for the study of domestic comedy films and practical reference for the creation of domestic comedy films.

This paper is organized as follows: the second part traces the origins and characteristics of comedy and tragedy,

clarifies the core concepts related to tragic representation, and sorts out the development context of the fusion of comedy and tragedy in Chinese domestic comedy films; the third part analyzes the specific expression forms of tragic elements in Mahua FunAge's comedy films from four dimensions and summarizes its stage creative characteristics; the fourth part explores the creative value of integrating tragic elements into comedy films from multiple perspectives; the fifth part reflects on the practical problems of Mahua FunAge's creation and puts forward the development path of Chinese domestic comedy films; the final part is the conclusion, which summarizes the core research results of the paper and points out the research significance and future research direction.

## **2. The Fusion of Comedy and Tragedy and the Development of Tragicomic in Chinese Comedy Films**

### **2.1. Origin and Characteristics of Comedy**

Comedy, as a classic dramatic genre, originated from the carnival parades in honor of Dionysus during the grape harvest season in ancient Greece. The paraders performed impromptu skits with witty jokes, funny imitations and playful banter, which became the embryonic form of comedy with the distinctive feature of ludicrousness. From 487 to 486 BC, comedy was officially accepted by the City Dionysia and became one of the main dramatic forms recognized by the Athenian government, which marked the formalization and institutionalization of comedy production.

Aristotle put forward a classic definition of the characteristics of comedy in *Poetics*, pointing out that "Comedy imitates men worse than the average", while tragedy imitates men better than the average [12]. Here, "worse" does not refer to moral evil in the general sense, but to a form of ugliness with ludicrousness, which is the core aesthetic feature of comedy. Hegel criticized the theory of irony of the Romantic school, arguing that genuine comedy is a vivid manifestation of the dialectical movement of contradictions [1]. In general, the basic characteristic of comedy is to follow the artistic law of absurdity and humor, and use various laughter-inducing expression methods and techniques to make all links of the drama, such as language, movement, character appearance, interpersonal relationship and plot, ludicrous. The contradiction and incongruity between the subjective wish and the objective result create a funny and playful artistic effect, which is the core of comedy's aesthetic expression.

### **2.2. Origin and Characteristics of Tragedy**

Tragedy shares the same origin with comedy, both emerging from the Dionysian sacrificial activities in ancient Greece. In the early stage of Dionysian sacrifice, people expressed their reverence and praise for Dionysus through choral singing. With the development of sacrificial activities, narrative elements were gradually integrated into the chorus, and the singers began to tell the legendary stories of Dionysus and other Greek heroes, and played different roles in the stories with dance movements and emotional expressions, which gradually formed the embryonic form of tragedy with performative characteristics.

Tragedy has a profound ideological connotation and strong emotional appeal. Its core connotation is to show the inevitable frustration or failure of just struggles under certain historical conditions, the destruction of beautiful ideals and

noble personalities, and to eulogize goodness and condemn evil through the tragic fate of characters, thus giving the audience inspiration and spiritual motivation. Lu Xun, a great Chinese writer, made a concise and in-depth summary of the core of tragedy, pointing out that "Tragedy shows the destruction of what is valuable in life". The destruction of valuable things in tragedy will arouse the audience's feelings of regret, sympathy and indignation, trigger in-depth thinking about human nature, society and life, and has distinct humanistic educational significance and aesthetic depth. The tragic character is usually close to the real life, with noble personality and complex emotions, and their tragic fate is often the result of the combination of personal character and social reality, which makes the tragedy have more profound realistic connotation.

### **2.3. The Fusion of Comedy and Tragedy**

Comedy and tragedy are not two opposite and isolated dramatic forms, but an interdependent and dialectically unified whole in the artistic expression of drama. Comedy is produced from the absurd and misplaced contradictory conflicts, which are often the external manifestation of the tragic predicament of human survival, social reality constraints and human weakness [2]. From the perspective of the essence of artistic creation, the laughter of comedy is often based on the sadness of reality, and the ridiculousness of comedy is the external expression of the tragedy of life. Therefore, excellent comedy works are never separated from the support of tragic elements, and laughter is only the external artistic form, while tragedy is the real response to reality and life.

The Renaissance was an important development stage for the fusion of comedy and tragedy elements. In this period, the ideological emancipation movement represented by humanism broke the rigid boundary between traditional tragedy and comedy, and writers began to try to integrate the elements of tragedy and comedy in their creations, making the work present a complex artistic effect of both joy and sorrow. Nancy Klein Magaly pointed out in *Tragicomic* that "Tragicomic means tragedy has a happy ending", which reveals the basic aesthetic feature of the fusion of comedy and tragedy: the alternation and integration of tragic scenes and comic scenes, and the coexistence of good and evil, joy and sorrow in the work [13]. Shakespeare is a master of the fusion of comedy and tragedy elements in the Renaissance. His tragic work *Hamlet* not only has gloomy and terrifying tragic scenes such as the appearance of ghosts and the murder of the king, but also has comic secular dialogues between Polonius and his son Laertes, which eases the tragic tension and makes the work more layered. His comedy *The Merchant of Venice* embeds profound tragic elements in the comic narrative: under the social background of hostility and prejudice against the Jewish nation, Shakespeare does not portray Shylock as a purely evil allegorical figure, but describes the discrimination and oppression he suffered while condemning his revenge, revealing the resentment and hatred behind his "evil", and indirectly pointing out the religious root of the character conflict with realistic writing techniques, making the comedy contain profound tragic connotation.

From the perspective of Chinese local cultural context, Chinese traditional opera has a long tradition of "the fusion of comedy and tragedy". Different from the clear boundary between Western tragedy and comedy, Chinese traditional opera often integrates tragic and comic elements in the same

work, forming an artistic style of "tragedy with a happy ending" or "comedy with a tragic core". For example, *The Injustice to Dou E*, a classic tragic opera of the Yuan Dynasty, takes Dou E's tragic fate as the core, showing the darkness and injustice of the feudal society, but designs the ending of "Dou E's injustice being redressed" in the end, which eases the tragic sadness with a comic ending, and the tragic core is more prominent under the contrast of joy. As Lin Yutang observed in his discussions on Chinese humor, the nation's humorous tradition is often rooted in a profound tragic sensibility, creating an effect of 'laughter with tears'. This local cultural tradition of the fusion of comedy and tragedy has laid a profound cultural foundation for the creative practice of the fusion of comedy and tragedy in Chinese domestic comedy films.

#### **2.4. The Development of Tragicity in Chinese Domestic Comedy Films**

Since the new century, with the rapid development of Chinese film industry, comedy films have become one of the most popular film genres among the audience with their strong entertainment and close to real life, and their creative style has become increasingly diversified and in-depth, and tragedy has gradually become an important core to enhance the aesthetic value and realistic significance of comedy films.

As early as the 1930s, Chinese domestic comedy films had already started the creative practice of "embedding tragedy in comedy". Works such as *Street Angel* and *Old and New Shanghai* showed the living predicament and tragic fate of the bottom people in the form of comedy, and *Crossroads* and *Sparrow and Crow* made a sharp satire on the social reality of the Kuomintang-ruled areas with a humorous artistic style. These works "deal with tragic content with comedy techniques", creating a unique relaxed and humorous comic atmosphere under the heavy tone, reflecting the filmmakers' deep humanistic care for social reality and showing their creative method of "embedding tragedy in comedy" [13]. Since the 1990s, the tragic consciousness has gradually taken root in the production of Chinese domestic comedy films, forming a creative style of "laughter with tears" that is loved by the audience. Stephen Chow's "nonsensical comedy" portrays the growth tragedy of the grassroots, showing the struggle and helplessness of the bottom people in the absurd and funny narrative; Feng Xiaogang's "Feng-style comedy" integrates the living helplessness of urban people in the playful banter, reflecting the social changes and human feelings; Ning Hao's "Crazy Series" shows the human game tragedy with black humor, revealing the greed and weakness of human nature; Xu Zheng's "Lost Series" explores the essence of life in the road comedy framework, showing the confusion and reflection of modern people in the journey. These works mark that Chinese domestic comedy films have officially entered the stage of "tragicomedy" production with the fusion of comedy and tragedy [14].

In recent years, the creative concept of the fusion of comedy and tragedy in Chinese domestic comedy films has been further deepened, and a number of high-quality works with both box office and word-of-mouth have emerged. *Hi, Mom* confronts the impermanence of life with comedy, and writes the tragic life of a mother with an open mind, creating a box office record of 5.4 billion RMB; *Lighting Up the Stars* faces the major issue of life and death from a comedy perspective, wrapping sadness, heroism and compassion in a humorous shell, triggering the audience's in-depth thinking

about life and death [13]. *Mahua FunAge*, as a representative of domestic absurd comedy, inherits the creative tradition of the fusion of comedy and tragedy in domestic comedy films, and realizes the diversified representation of tragic elements through the "comedy +" hybrid narrative strategy, integrating tragic elements with black humor, science fiction, family education and other types, and becoming an important sample of the development of tragedy in Chinese domestic comedy films.

In this paper, tragic elements refer to the concrete tragic designs in comedy films, including the tragic fate of characters, tragic conflicts of plots, tragic atmosphere of scenes and other concrete artistic expressions; tragicity is the aesthetic characteristic extended from tragic elements in comedy films, which is manifested as the artistic effect of seeing reality in absurdity and hiding bitterness in laughter; tragic core is the spiritual nucleus of comedy films, which is the in-depth reflection of reality, human nature and society through the expression of the fusion of comedy and tragedy. The three form a progressive relationship of "concrete design - aesthetic characteristic - spiritual nucleus", which together constitute the complete tragic representation system of comedy films.

### **3. The Specific Expression of Tragic Elements in Mahua FunAge's Comedy Films**

*Mahua FunAge's* comedy films inherit the creative tradition of the fusion of comedy and tragedy in Chinese domestic comedy films, and combine the narrative characteristics of stage play with the current social reality, making the tragic elements realize a multi-dimensional and in-depth expression in the comedy narrative. The representation of tragic elements in *Mahua FunAge's* works runs through the whole process of creative design, from character shaping to plot setting, from theme expression to scene design, all of which weave profound tragic connotations, breaking the superficial expression of pure comedy and making the tragedy the internal support of the works. From the perspective of creative development, the representation of tragic elements in *Mahua FunAge's* comedy films shows clear stage characteristics: works such as *Goodbye, Mr. Loser* and *Mr. Donkey* focus on the excavation of human nature, with black humor as the main expressive technique; works including *Hello, Billionaire* and *Almost a Comedy* focus on reflecting urban reality and class differences, with absurd comedy as the main expressive technique; works like *Moon Man* and *Claw the Doll* focus on the in-depth discussion of social issues, with the "comedy + science fiction/family education" hybrid narrative as the main expression technique. The expression techniques of tragic elements are constantly innovating, and the core connotation is constantly deepening, which reflects the creative consciousness of *Mahua FunAge* to keep pace with the times and pay attention to reality.

#### **3.1. Tragic Color in Character Shaping**

E.M. Forster divided characters in literary works into "flat characters" and "round characters" in *Aspects of the Novel* [10]. Flat characters, also known as character characters or cartoon characters, have a single and fixed image feature, which is easy to summarize; while round characters are three-dimensional and plump, with complex and changeable

personality traits, and their characters will change with the development of the plot and the change of scenes, which is more in line with the characteristics of real people in life. In recent years, film and television production has gradually abandoned the rigid flat character setting of "pure good or pure evil", and Mahua FunAge's comedy films deeply integrate the shaping of round characters with the representation of tragic elements, burying tragic foreshadowing in the complex personality of characters, and at the same time setting a tragic fate for characters through name metaphor and fate portrayal, making the tragic color run through the whole process of character shaping.

Aristotle emphasized in *Poetics* that tragic characters should be similar to real people in life, with kind and appropriate personality traits rather than extremeization [12]. In the construction of character personality, Mahua FunAge's comedy films take into account the "dark side of good people" and the "tender side of bad people", making the characters show complex and multi-dimensional personality traits under the logical of reasonable character development, and laying tragic foreshadowing in the character traits. Mr. Donkey is a model of this creative technique, in which the shaping of Zhang Yiman and Zhou Tienan shows the complexity of human nature and the profoundness of tragedy incisively and vividly. Zhang Yiman is a typical female tragic round character, and her personality can be accurately described as "pursuing freedom excessively and adhering to the bottom line of dignity with limits". She is afraid of being bound by emotional relationships, so she refuses Pei Kuishan's confession and says that she finally found a place where no one controls her; but she shows a casual and absurd attitude when getting along with the coppersmith, which makes the audience feel that she is a dissolute woman. The film does not explain Zhang Yiman's past experience, and the audience does not know what happened to her that she was helped by the principal and came to this remote mountain village, but it can be felt from the details that she has a kind and warm heart, and has more human touch than other characters. She is a typical person with a "sharp tongue but a soft heart", who uses an indifferent tone to cover up her inner sadness and helplessness. Facing the coppersmith's wife who came to the door, she did not continue to deceive the coppersmith, but let him see the reality with cruel words; after the coppersmith left sadly, she squatted on the ground, picked up the lock of hair she cut for him, and whispered an apology. For the Sanmin Primary School, she also devoted herself with her own way: in order to get the teacher's subsidy and realize the principal's dream of subsidizing students, she took the initiative to persuade the coppersmith to stay and take photos; she stood up and admitted her mistakes to the coppersmith's wife; she faced the coppersmith's crazy revenge alone. When encountering difficulties, she always rushed to the front to solve problems for everyone, but she was treated with indifference and betrayal by everyone: Pei Kuishan's abusive insults and deliberate difficulties, Zhang Tienan's indifference after his cowardice, the principal's cruelty under repeated hypocrisy, and the most terrible thing is the coppersmith's order to cut off her hair. Hair is an important symbolic element in the film, which symbolizes Zhang Yiman's proud feminine charm. The coppersmith praised her curly hair for being beautiful, and she cut a lock and gave it to him. The destruction of Zhang Yiman's hair by the coppersmith caused the final collapse of her inner world, and she became a mad woman. In the end of the film, Zhang Yiman made five neat

school uniforms needed for the new semester, completed her final contribution to Sanmin Primary School, and then picked up a pistol and left the world forever. Her tragedy is not only a personal character tragedy, but also a social tragedy of women's pursuit of freedom and dignity being destroyed under the male chauvinist context.

Zhou Tienan is another typical round character with profound tragic color in Mr. Donkey, showing the tragic characteristics of "outwardly strong but inwardly weak" and being a microcosm of the tragedy of bottom intellectuals. In the early stage of the film, he is fearless of anyone, dares to resist directly when he is not convinced, and portrays an image of a man who is not afraid of power, brave and just. However, after a bullet grazed his face and he escaped from death, his inner cowardice and timidity were completely exposed. It is better to say that he has changed into his real appearance. His inner cowardice and timidity are fully revealed in the face of life and death. Especially when Zhang Yiman is about to be violated, Zhou Tienan dare not reach out to save her and pretends not to see it, which brings the audience a strong sense of fragmentation and contradiction. In this black humor film, the portrayal of Zhou Tienan is vivid and vivid, showing the helplessness of bottom intellectuals in the face of power incisively and vividly. His kneeling and begging the special commissioner not to shoot is the complete loss of the dignity of intellectuals, and the absurd story is full of strong tragic color.

In addition to the in-depth shaping of round characters, Mahua FunAge's comedy films also lay a tragic foreshadowing for the character's fate through name metaphor, showing the character's misfortune with playful language, and making the tragic color of the character from the beginning of creation. In *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*, the name of Ma Dongmei has a sad origin: her father is Ma Dong, and he left when she was born, so she is called Ma Dongmei. A simple origin of the name hides the tragic fate of the character who lacks fatherly love since childhood. In *Too Cool to Kill*, the male protagonist Wei Chenggong's name forms a strong contrast with his life experience. He has never been successful in his life before. Facing the opportunity to act, he wants to grasp it firmly and do his best. He is both compromising and stubborn, but the result is always unsatisfactory. The name metaphor makes the character's tragedy have a strong symbolic meaning, and the playful language makes the tragic connotation more profound under the contrast of joy.

It is worth noting that while shaping the tragedy of characters, Mahua FunAge's comedy films also pay attention to depicting the growth and transformation of characters in the tragic conflict, making the characters show the sublimity of human nature in the face of tragedy, and making the tragedy not only a kind of sadness, but also an opportunity for character growth. In *Moon Man*, Du Guyue seems unreliable, but he risks his life to turn around and save the kangaroo that accompanies him when he is about to leave the moon, completing his self-salvation in the lonely space. In *Hello, Billionaire*, Wang Duoyu, who loves money, finally chooses to give up 10 billion RMB to save others after the test, breaking the tragedy of "being trapped by money" and showing his precious character of valuing friendship and justice more than money. In *Almost a Comedy*, Sun Tong abandons his Beijing hukou and stable job, no longer covers up Zheng Duoduo's mistakes, and bravely chooses to be sincere, getting rid of the life tragedy of "compromise and attachment". The growth and transformation of these

characters make the tragic elements in the film have a positive value of inspiring people, and also make the character image more close to reality, arousing the audience's deep emotional resonance.

### 3.2. Tragic Conflict in Plot Setting

Aristotle listed plot as the core of the six elements of tragedy in *Poetics*, pointing out that plot is the foundation and soul of tragedy [12]. This view is also fully applicable to comedy films: plot is the narrative nucleus of comedy films and an important carrier for the representation of tragic elements. Mahua FunAge's comedy films are closely linked to the reality of urban society, depicting the life of small urban people with exaggerated and absurd techniques, setting sharp tragic conflicts in the comic plots, making the ridiculous plots contain the survival sadness and helplessness of small people, and at the same time satirizing the bad social phenomena through the tragic conflicts, making the tragedy of the plot have profound realistic significance.

The tragic conflicts in Mahua FunAge's comedy films are first reflected in the living predicament of small people, depicting the helplessness of ordinary people in life, work and emotion, and arousing the audience's strong empathy. In *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*, Xia Luo, as a middle-aged man, has an unrealistic dream of music, but he is incompetent and relies on his wife Ma Dongmei to make money to support the family. The comic plot of him making a fool of himself at the wedding of his secret love object Qiu Ya hides the life tragedy of his career failure and marriage neglect. Ma Dongmei appears as an "unattractive wife" from the beginning, putting down her dignity to save Xia Luo. In Xia Luo's dream, she still loves Xia Luo deeply, and even willing to follow hooligans into the woods to protect him. Her dedication and being ignored form a strong tragic conflict, making the audience feel sympathy beyond laughter [1]. In *Hello, Auntie!*, the protagonist Huang Canghai, as a small office worker, is forced to play Li Cha's aunt in order to keep his job, and is tired of running back and forth between different identities. The absurd plot hides the helplessness of bottom office workers in the face of bosses and interests, showing the survival predicament of small workplace people. In *Almost a Comedy*, Sun Tong, as a Beijing drifter, relies on Zheng Duoduo's help to obtain a Beijing hukou and a stable job, and is in a dilemma between love and reality. His love with Mo Mo is repeatedly hindered by class differences and realistic constraints. Even though they get back together at the end of the film, the differences in their ideological concepts and social classes are still a problem they have to face in the future, and the plot implies the emotional and survival tragedy of urban young people.

Secondly, Mahua FunAge's comedy films satirize the money worship and egoism in society through tragic conflicts, integrating the weaknesses of human nature and the bad social phenomena into the plot design, and making the comic plots have the value of social criticism. In *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*, Qiu Ya finally chooses to marry a rich tycoon instead of Xia Luo, whom she once had a crush on, and her choice of "disliking the poor and loving the rich" directly satirizes the dissolution of emotion by money worship. In *Hello, Auntie!*, "auntie" has become a symbol of money. The male characters in the film all believe that "whoever has the auntie has everything". They fight for the favor of the auntie and make a fool of themselves. The girl Huang Canghai has a crush on refuses him even though he has lost weight, just because the other party is rich,

making the protagonist's efforts meaningless. The absurdity of the plot is a profound criticism of money worship. In *Hello, Billionaire*, the heroine's ex-boyfriend immediately reveals his true colors in the face of huge wealth and abandons his once "true love", showing the hypocrisy of egoists. In *Mr. Donkey*, the teachers lie that a donkey is a "Mr. Donkey" teacher in order to get an extra salary, which leads to a series of farces. They continue to make up new lies to cover up the old ones, and finally lead to the distortion of human nature and the occurrence of tragedy. The development of the plot exposes the greed and egoism of human nature, and also satirizes the loopholes in the education system. These plot designs combine tragic conflicts with social reality, making comedy films no longer just a simple entertainment, but a carrier to reflect society and criticize reality.

### 3.3. Tragic Core in Theme Expression

Theme is the soul of a film, which is the thought and viewpoint that the creator wants to convey to the audience through the work. Mahua FunAge's comedy films abandon the entertainment theme of pure comedy, and set the tragic core hidden in the humorous and joyful atmosphere with the theme setting of "outward joy and inward sadness". Through the discussion of human nature, society, education and other issues, the works have profound realistic reflection value and realize the breakthrough and sublimation of the theme of comedy films. After *Dying to Survive*, more and more Chinese domestic films begin to pay attention to social issues, and Mahua FunAge combines social issues with comedy forms and tragic cores, making the audience think deeply about real problems in laughter.

The tragic core of Mahua FunAge's comedy films is first focused on the excavation of human nature, showing the complexity and weaknesses of human nature through absurd plots, and making the audience reflect on themselves in the tragedy of human nature. *Mr. Donkey* is a classic work of human nature excavation. The film takes the farce of a rural primary school as the clue, depicting a group of teachers who seemingly have educational ideals, and gradually expose the weaknesses of human nature such as greed, cowardice, hypocrisy and selfishness in the test of reality and interests: the principal compromises repeatedly to keep the school, Pei Kuishan becomes bitter and mean out of love and hatred, Zhou Tienan loses his backbone in the face of power, the coppersmith becomes arrogant and vengeful after being respected, and Zhang Yiman becomes a victim of the weaknesses of human nature. The film shows the fragility and distortion of human nature in the face of reality through the transformation of characters, making the audience see the tragedy of human nature in the absurd plot and arouse reflection on the essence of human nature.

Secondly, the tragic core of Mahua FunAge's comedy films is reflected in the discussion of urban reality and class differences, depicting the living predicament and spiritual confusion of contemporary urban people. *Almost a Comedy* unfolds around the emotion and life of Sun Tong, Zheng Duoduo and Mo Mo, and discusses the life proposition of "sincerity and compromise": Zheng Duoduo, as a rich second generation, acts recklessly by virtue of his family background, and has no guilt for being unfaithful in love; Sun Tong, as a bottom Beijing drifter, has to attach to Zheng Duoduo for the sake of realistic interests, and wavers between sincerity and compromise; Mo Mo adheres to the life principle of sincerity, forming a sharp contrast with the other two. The film shows

the constraints of social class differences on young people and the self-loss of some young people in the face of reality through the personalities and fates of the three people, and its tragic core is the dilemma of urban young people between material and spirit. Hello, Billionaire discusses the relationship between money and human nature with the absurd plot of "getting rich overnight". Wang Duoyu is faced with the choice between family affection, love and money in the test of 10 billion RMB. The film reveals the truth that "money can change life, but cannot determine happiness" through his experience, satirizes the blind pursuit of money by some people in the current society, and also depicts the spiritual tragedy of people under the coercion of money.

Finally, the tragic core of Mahua FunAge's comedy films extends to the in-depth discussion of social issues. Represented by Claw the Doll, the film focuses on Chinese family education, exposing the drawbacks of Chinese education in the form of comedy, and making the tragic core have more extensive social realistic significance. As a new work of the "Xihong City Universe", Claw the Doll tells the story of Ma Chenggang, a wealthy man, who implements a "poor upbringing plan" in order to cultivate his son Ma Jiye into a qualified successor: he moves his son from a luxury house to a shabby hutong, lies that the family is poor, invites educational experts to play the role of grandmother, and controls his son in an all-round way in the name of "love". He even installs monitors in the toilet, making Ma Jiye's life a carefully designed "The Truman Show". Ma Chenggang, in the name of "for the good of the child", lies to the child that his legs are bad and he can't learn sports, and that his grandmother died of a serious illness, depriving the child of the right to choose his own life, making Ma Jiye grow up in a false environment and his thinking is seriously imprisoned. The overall atmosphere of the film is humorous and joyful, but it is full of tragedy when thinking carefully: Ma Jiye seems to be a carefully cultivated "elite", but in fact he is a "puppet" under the control of his parents' desire for control. He lost his childhood, freedom and real life in the process of growing up. The easter egg at the end of the film is more ironic: Ma Jiye repeats his studies and is admitted to a sports university. In the marathon, he excitedly runs to pick up the bottles thrown away by the contestants. This behavior is the result of Ma Chenggang's "poor upbringing education" and has become a deep spiritual trauma engraved in the child's bones. The film criticizes the drawbacks of "excessive control" and "utilitarian cultivation" in Chinese education in the form of comedy, and its tragic core directly points to the real problems of Chinese family education, making the audience reflect on the essence of education after laughter — the core of education is to cultivate an independent personality, not to shape the child into what the parents want.

### 3.4. Tragic Atmosphere in Scene Design

Scene design is an important part of film narrative and a hidden expression carrier of tragic elements. Mahua FunAge's comedy films pay attention to creating a tragic atmosphere through the closure, contrast and extremeization of scenes, strengthening the tragedy of characters, making the scenes echo with the character's fate, plot development and theme expression, and making the tragic elements get an intuitive embodiment at the visual level. Compared with the explicit tragic representation of characters, plots and themes, the tragedy of scene design is more subtle, but it can make the audience produce emotional resonance in the visual

experience and enhance the tragic appeal of the work.

Closed scenes create an isolated spatial atmosphere, strengthen the tragedy of characters, and lay the groundwork for the outbreak of tragic plots. The Sanmin Primary School in Mr. Donkey is located in a remote countryside, with a shabby and simple scene and no people around, forming a closed spatial environment. This closed space makes the teachers isolated from the outside world, which not only allows them to temporarily stay away from the disturbances of the secular world and carry out teaching with educational ideals, but also makes them lose external support when encountering power and crisis, and can only compromise with each other and hurt each other internally. The arrival of the special commissioner makes this closed space a "trial field" for human nature. The weaknesses of human nature are infinitely amplified in the closed environment, and finally lead to the occurrence of tragedy. The closed scene of the rural primary school perfectly echoes the human tragedy of the characters, creating a strong tragic atmosphere.

Contrast scenes form a visual and psychological contrast through the difference of space, strengthening the fate tragedy of characters and the tragedy of the theme. In Claw the Doll, the shabby hutong and the luxurious mansion form a sharp spatial contrast: the hutong is a false living environment created by Ma Chenggang for Ma Jiye, narrow and shabby, full of life's distress; the mansion is Ma Jiye's real family background, spacious and luxurious, with everything one needs. The constant switching between the two scenes makes Ma Jiye's "controlled life" more ironic, and also strengthens the tragedy of Chinese family education — parents create a false world for their children in the name of love, depriving them of the right to experience real life. In Almost a Comedy, the rented house in Beijing and the high-end apartment also form a sharp contrast: the rented house is Sun Tong's living environment, small and crowded, representing the living status of the bottom Beijing drifters; the high-end apartment is Zheng Duoduo's living environment, spacious and luxurious, representing the comfortable life of the upper class. The difference between the two scenes directly implies the class gap between Sun Tong and Zheng Duoduo, and also provides a spatial foreshadowing for Sun Tong's survival and emotional tragedy, making the audience intuitively feel the constraints of class differences on young people.

Extreme scenes amplify the living predicament and spiritual loneliness of characters by placing them in an extreme spatial environment, strengthening the tragedy. Moon Man sets the story background on the empty moon. The cold, empty and boundless moon desert forms an extreme lonely scene. Du Guyue is left on the moon by accident and becomes the "last human being in the universe". The extreme loneliness of the moon infinitely amplifies his living predicament. His interaction with the kangaroo is full of comic effects, but it always covers up the loneliness and helplessness behind it. The strong visual contrast between the grandeur of the moon and the smallness of the character makes the audience feel the comic effect and also feel sad for Du Guyue's survival tragedy. The extreme scene of the moon also makes Du Guyue's self-salvation more powerful. His behavior of sticking to hope and saving the earth in loneliness perfectly integrates tragedy and sublimity, enhancing the aesthetic value of the work.

## 4. The Creative Value of Integrating Tragic Elements in Mahua FunAge's Comedy Films

The in-depth integration of tragic elements and comedy forms in Mahua FunAge's comedy films is not a simple innovation of creative techniques, but makes tragic elements the core support to enhance the artistic value, realistic significance and market appeal of the works. The integration of tragic elements not only promotes the narrative development of the film, but also makes comedy films break away from the superficial entertainment expression, with profound ideological connotation and emotional power, and also provides an important reference for the production of Chinese domestic comedy films. Their creative value manifests in the following six aspects.

### 4.1. Promote Plot Development and Enhance the Theatricality of Films

Tragic elements can increase the tension and conflict of comedy films, break the relaxed atmosphere of comedy, make the story development more layered and gripping, and become an important driving force to promote plot development. Aristotle believed that plot is the core of tragedy, and for comedy films, the tragic plot conflict is also the core of narrative, which can make the film avoid superficial laughter and form a ups and downs narrative rhythm.

Mahua FunAge's comedy films often design tragic plots such as love breakdown, survival crisis and human conflict in the plot, which become important turning points in the plot and promote the growth of characters and the development of the story. In *Mr. Donkey*, the tragic plot of Zhang Yiman's hair being cut is an important turning point in the film, which directly leads to the collapse of human nature: the coppersmith changes from a simple farmer to an arrogant avenger, the principal compromises repeatedly to cover up the lie, Pei Kuishan's meanness reaches its peak, Zhou Tienan's cowardice is completely exposed, and the story escalates from an initial relaxed farce to a profound human tragedy. In *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*, the tragic plot of Xia Luo losing Ma Dongmei in his dream promotes his self-reflection, from the initial unrealistic and neglectful of family affection, he gradually realizes the preciousness of ordinary life, and finally completes the growth of the character and ushers in a warm ending of the story. In *Moon Man*, the tragic plot of Du Guyue finding that the earth has not been destroyed makes him fall into despair from the initial hope, which becomes an important turning point in his survival process and also lays the groundwork for the subsequent plot of self-salvation and saving the earth.

The design of tragic plots keeps the audience in a tense mood and pays attention to the fate of the characters, and also significantly enhances the theatricality of the film, making the narrative of comedy films no longer just simple laughter, but with a complete plot logic and strong theatrical tension .

### 4.2. Reveal Social Phenomena and Trigger Audience Reflection

The core of tragic elements is the reflection on reality. Integrating tragic elements into comedy films can make the film have profound social criticism and realistic reflection value besides laughter, and guide the audience to think deeply about the themes discussed in the film. Mahua FunAge's comedy films reflect social reality in a humorous way, and the

addition of tragic elements strengthens the intensity of this realistic revelation, making the film's criticism of social phenomena more penetrating.

*Goodbye, Mr. Loser* makes the audience reflect on the value of life through Xia Luo's dream experience: Xia Luo realizes his music dream and has wealth and beauty in his dream, but finds that he has lost the most precious ordinary life. His confusion in the dream and regret in reality make the audience reflect on "what is real happiness" and learn to cherish the present life. *Mr. Donkey* exposes the weaknesses of human nature such as greed, cowardice and hypocrisy through the absurd farce of a rural primary school, and also satirizes the loopholes in the education system and the oppression of human nature by power, making the audience reflect on themselves in the human tragedy and pay attention to the real problems in society. *Claw the Doll* criticizes the drawbacks of Chinese family education in the form of comedy, making parents reflect on the boundary between "love and control" and think about whether the essence of education is to cultivate children's independent personality or to shape them into what they want. Almost a Comedy makes the audience reflect on the impact of class differences on society and how to adhere to sincerity and self in the face of reality through the emotional and survival predicament of urban young people.

The integration of tragic elements makes Mahua FunAge's comedy films no longer just a "tool for laughter", but an artistic carrier to reflect society and trigger reflection, making the audience think deeply about life, human nature and society while receiving entertainment experience, and realizing the improvement of the ideological value of comedy films.

### 4.3. Enhance Emotional Resonance and Create Emotional Contrast

Tragedy is the artistic form that can touch the deepest emotions of people. Adding tragic elements to comedy can make the audience produce a more complex emotional experience, from simple joy to the interweaving of laughter and tears, thus enhancing the emotional resonance between the audience and the film. Mahua FunAge's comedy films depict the life and fate of small urban people, and their tragic elements are all derived from the real experience of ordinary people, which can arouse the audience's strong empathy and make them feel the joys and sorrows of the characters.

In *Moon Man*, Du Guyue's life on the moon is full of comic effects: funny interactions with the kangaroo, clumsy survival attempts, absurd self-rescue behaviors, which make the audience laugh, while his loneliness in facing the moon alone, despair on the verge of death, and longing for the earth and family make the audience feel sad. The interweaving of laughter and tears makes the audience easier to empathize with the character, feel his helplessness and bravery in survival, and form a strong emotional resonance with the character. In *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*, every bit of Ma Dongmei's dedication to Xia Luo is presented in a comic form, but the audience can feel the deep affection and sadness behind it. When Dongmei's husband shouts "Ma Dongmei, I'll give you everything, you give me Dongmei back", the comic atmosphere turns to tragedy in an instant, making the audience realize the preciousness of ordinary love in moving. In *Mr. Donkey*, Zhang Yiman's funny lines and free and easy personality make the audience like her, while her final tragic ending makes the audience fall into sadness. This emotional

change makes the audience have a strong empathy for the character's tragedy, and also makes the emotional expression of the film more powerful.

At the same time, the combination of comedy and tragedy elements can form a strong emotional contrast, bringing a huge psychological impact to the audience and making the audience's impression of the work more profound. In a relaxed and humorous atmosphere, the sudden appearance of tragic plots will make the audience's mood change from joy to sadness in an instant. This rapid emotional change can enhance the appeal of the film and make the emotional expression of the work more rich and real.

#### **4.4. Highlight Character Personalities and Increase the Credibility of Characters**

Tragic conflict is a "touchstone" for character personalities. By letting characters experience tragic events, their inner world and personality traits can be fully displayed, making the character's personality no longer an empty setting, but a concrete embodiment through specific plots, thus highlighting the character's personality and making the character image more three-dimensional and plump. At the same time, the integration of tragic elements makes the character's experience more close to reality — people in real life are often a mixture of joy and sorrow, experiencing setbacks and pains, which makes the characters in the film no longer a "perfect image" with a smooth life, but with real human nature, increasing the credibility of the characters.

In *Never Say Die*, Ai Disheng encounters the tragic setback of being framed and faking boxing, and his life falls into a low ebb. It is this tragedy that makes him let go of his former impetuosity and utilitarianism, gradually find himself in the body swap with Ma Xiao, stick to his boxing dream, and finally realize his self-proof. The foil of tragic elements makes Ai Disheng's tough, brave and unyielding personality more distinct, and also makes the character's growth more convincing. In *Hello, Billionaire*, Wang Duoyu is faced with a tragic choice of "saving his girlfriend or giving up wealth" under the temptation of 10 billion RMB. It is this choice that highlights his personality of valuing friendship and justice and adhering to the bottom line, breaking the audience's stereotype of "rich second generation". In *Almost a Comedy*, Sun Tong's tragic struggle between love and reality, sincerity and compromise shows his inner contradiction and cowardice incisively and vividly, and his final decision to choose sincerity shows his brave side, making the character's personality three-dimensional and plump in the tragic conflict.

If the characters in a comedy film are always smooth and have not experienced any setbacks and pains, such character images will appear thin and unreal. The addition of tragic elements makes the experiences of the characters in Mahua FunAge's comedy films more rich and diverse, more close to the experiences of real people in life, making it easier for the audience to believe and accept these characters, and also making the character images more vibrant.

#### **4.5. Upgrade Aesthetic Value and Realize the Upgrading of Aesthetic Experience**

From the perspective of reception aesthetics, the integration of tragic elements has significantly improved the aesthetic value of comedy films, making the audience's aesthetic experience upgrade from a simple "entertainment experience" to a "aesthetic experience of the interweaving of laughter and tears". The core of comedy is to bring joy, while

the core of tragedy is to bring aesthetic reflection. The fusion of the two makes comedy films have dual aesthetic value, which can not only make the audience obtain a relaxed entertainment experience, but also make the audience complete aesthetic reflection and emotional sublimation in tragedy.

Traditional pure comedy often focuses on entertainment. The audience obtains joy in the viewing process, but lacks in-depth aesthetic experience and emotional aftertaste after watching. Mahua FunAge's comedy films, through the creation of the fusion of comedy and tragedy, make the audience feel the weight of tragedy in laughter and realize the beauty of human nature in sadness, forming an aesthetic experience of "laughter with tears and reflection in tears". In the viewing process, the audience can not only obtain a relaxed entertainment feeling, but also think deeply about life, human nature and society under the touch of tragic elements, realizing the dual sublimation of emotion and spirit. This upgrading of aesthetic experience makes comedy films no longer just a simple entertainment consumer product, but a work with aesthetic value and artistic depth, improving the status of comedy films in film art.

#### **4.6. Break the Creative Dilemma and Promote Industrial Innovation**

From the perspective of the film industry, the integration of tragic elements is an important means for Mahua FunAge to break the creative dilemma of Chinese domestic comedy films, and also provides an important idea for the industrial innovation of Chinese domestic comedy films. For a long time, Chinese domestic comedy films have had creative problems such as "emphasizing laughter over connotation", "stereotyped and vulgar", some works deliberately create vulgar laughs in order to pursue comedy effects, lack deep theme and emotional support, leading to the double failure of box office and word-of-mouth, and also making the audience have aesthetic fatigue of domestic comedy films.

Mahua FunAge's comedy films combine tragic elements with the "comedy +" hybrid narrative strategy, making comedy films have both entertainment and ideology, marketability and artistry, and breaking the creative dilemma of Chinese domestic comedy films. Its works can not only attract the audience and obtain good market box office with the humorous comedy form, but also obtain the audience's word-of-mouth and the recognition of professionals with the profound tragic core and realistic reflection. The success of works such as *Goodbye, Mr. Loser*, *Mr. Donkey*, *Moon Man* and *Claw the Doll* proves that tragicomedy films can meet the needs of both the market and art at the same time, providing a replicable reference path for the production of Chinese domestic comedy films.

At the same time, Mahua FunAge's creative practice has also promoted the industrial innovation of Chinese domestic comedy films, making more creators realize that the core of comedy films is not simple laughter, but the reflection of reality and the excavation of human nature. More and more Chinese domestic comedy films begin to integrate tragic elements and discuss social reality and life issues, such as *Hi, Mom* and *Lighting Up the Stars*, which all adopt the creative technique of the fusion of comedy and tragedy and achieve a double harvest of box office and word-of-mouth. The formation of this creative trend has promoted the upgrading of the Chinese domestic comedy film industry, making Chinese domestic comedy films gradually get rid of the

creative dilemma of vulgarization and stereotypization, and develop towards a more in-depth, diversified and artistic direction.

## 5. Conclusion

Mahua FunAge has been engaged in the comedy sector for over two decades, from stage play production to film and television production, and has always adhered to innovation and breakthrough. Its comedy film works have become a representative sample of Chinese domestic comedy films with a unique artistic style of the fusion of comedy and tragedy. The success of *Goodbye, Mr. Loser* in 2015 opened the door of the film market for Mahua FunAge, and the appearance of *Mr. Donkey* made Mahua FunAge establish the creative core of "comedy + tragedy". Since then, the works have continuously explored the diversified representation forms of tragic elements, from human nature excavation to reality reflection, from class discussion to social issue attention, making tragic elements the core support of Mahua FunAge's films.

Of course, Mahua FunAge's creation is not perfect. Since *Hello, Auntie!* in 2018, its comedy films have fluctuated in box office and word-of-mouth, and *Wonder Family* has even received bad reviews from the audience due to shoddy production. Fundamentally, the failure of such works lies in the lack of tragic core: they only pursue superficial comedy effects and deliberately create funny scenes, but lack in-depth tragic core and realistic reflection, the character shaping returns to flatness, the plot setting is absurd without restraint, and the theme expression is empty and meaningless, losing the artistic effect of "laughter with tears" that Mahua FunAge has always adhered to. This also sounds the alarm for Mahua FunAge's subsequent creation: the innovation of comedy films can never be separated from the essence of content, and even more cannot abandon the in-depth excavation of reality and human nature .

In the future creation, Mahua FunAge needs to abandon the mindset of simply pursuing box office, return to the essence of script creation, and under the "comedy +" narrative framework, deeply explore the integration mechanism of tragic elements and different types, making the tragic core more suitable and natural with the comedy form; it needs to continue to base itself on the real life of small urban people, excavate the various aspects of people's lives, make the tragic elements originate from reality and close to reality, and arouse the audience's empathy; it needs to avoid falling into the trap of stereotyped creation, constantly innovate the representation forms of tragic elements, and keep the works fresh and in-depth.

Mahua FunAge's creative practice provides an important idea for the development of Chinese domestic comedy films:

the fusion of comedy and tragedy is an important path for comedy films to break through the development bottleneck and enhance artistic value. The future of Chinese domestic comedy films requires creators to abandon the pure entertainment creative thinking, base themselves on local culture and real life, deeply integrate tragic elements with comedy.

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