Ethical Reflection on Youth Films from the Production Perspective

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Abstract
Films, as an external manifestation of audio-visual art, have multiple attributes defined from the levels of economy, art, and ideology, and follow the production rules of material products, intellectual products, and artistic products. Affected by factors such as the development of cultural industry, the innovation of new media technologies and the stimulation of market competition mechanisms, youth films in China are confronting conflicts in terms of professional production and popularized production, audio-visual symbol and humanistic value, as well as commercial benefits and artistic attribute. From the production perspective, ethical reflection is conducted based on the production subject, contents and purposes of youth films in this study, attempting to explore problems in the production of youth films.

Keywords
Production Perspective; Youth Film; Ethical Reflection.

1. Introduction
The revolution in new media technologies enables the audiences to access to information from more channels, and drives the shift from the one-way, fixed, linear and passive reception of information to the two-way, circulating, non-linear and active targeted search of information. In order to meet the information requirements of the audience, the market gradually breaks the barriers of communication set by professionalism, systematization and high threshold, so as to realize the popularization of high art and elite culture, and the personalization of information production and dissemination. "Culture does not care about how to work and how to make achievements any longer, but cares about how to spend money and lead a life of pleasure." [1] The right consciousness of the subject of consciousness drives the individualized, fragmented and marginalized consumer behavior habits of the public. The demand-oriented market competition mechanism promotes the production of culture to satisfy the public demands as the only orientation, thereby subverting the traditional value scale, aesthetic standards, and philosophical standpoint. This will lead the mass production of consumer-oriented cultural products that combine media symbols with sensory stimulation.
"Art is rooted in a specific social context. The really excellent arts are often the reflection and forebode of the social life of the times. The vitality and aesthetic value of the art lie in the interaction and conversation with the real society." As an artistic form of cultural dissemination, films have a mode of existence that is consistent with the consumption tendency of the contemporary public for information and cultural products, becoming one of the popular cultural consumer goods. Market competition and profit distribution have forced the measurements of film production in China to change from artistic value, humanistic value, and social value to market share, economic benefits, and commercial value. "We do not conclude that production, distribution, exchange and consumption are the same thing, but that they constitute every link of a whole, and the differences within a unity." [2] Marx argued that
production does not exist independently, but exists in a unified system together with other elements (distribution, exchange, consumption) as interrelated differentiated subsystems. [3] Film is a special artistic form of intellectual products. Its production should have the production rules that conform to the attributes of cultural products while being subject to the universal law of production. Culturally speaking, the film production in China plays an important role in cultural advancement, resource integration, cultural dissemination, conflict resolution and ideological unity. Taking the youth films in the contemporary era as an example, is the production of youth films able to meet the audience’s demand for recreational consumer goods while realizing the dissemination of youth culture? Does it can promote the development of the youth film market? These are undoubtedly urgent problems to be solved in the production of youth films.

2. Production subject: A disordered competition between professional production and popularized production

Marx emphasized the unbalanced relationship between artistic production and material production, and regarded artistic production activities as a special social practice that is differentiated from traditional material production activities. Film is an industrialized production that combines art and technologies. It satisfies the material and spiritual needs of people, and exists in market, commercial and recreational environments. Youth films take the young as their objects of artistic expression, and focus on social practices at multiple levels, such as life, career and family of the young individuals. These endow the significant attributes of youth culture to youth films, making youth films play an important role in carrying and transmitting youth culture. The production of youth films is directly or indirectly affected by multiple relationships such as cultural rules, market mechanisms, social benefits, and commercial economy while conforming to the universal law. In particular, the market competition mechanism and the popularization and facilitation of production technologies are driving the transformation from the traditional professional closed production of films to the modernized popular and open production. The openness and low threshold facilitate the creation of a large number of youth films. But multi-dimensional problems appear to film productions due to the uneven professional attainments and skills of the creation subjects. Presently, the production subjects of youth films can be divided into the following categories based on whether they have received professional education. The first category is the professional creation subject, consisting of well-known professional directors, producers and their teams. The second category is the trans-disciplinary creation subject, consisting of those who involve in the film creation after being known to the public as actors, singers, authors or otherwise. The third category is the civilian creation subject. It is a form of film creation focusing on the basic level of the society, which is developed by the public based on their dream of film creation. The market competition among multiple creation subjects leads to the paradox between modern art and traditional art. Enslaved by benefits resulting from commercial competition, the artistic products produced by these creation subjects are thrown into a dilemma in the proliferation of and isolation by popular art and cultural products. As a result, the creation subjects have to cater to the demands of market and audiences during the creation of youth films. Further, youth films in China are measured by box offices, and are mainly propagated via film marketing, showing a trend of homogeneity, pan-entertainment, fast consumption and popularity. For example, many youth films such as Yesterday Once More, You are the Apple of My Eye, My Old Classmate, So Young, and Fleet of Time were set in schools, and focused on study, life and love between young individuals, attempting to highlight their sentimental and ignorant campus romance in the form of films.

"Responsibility", originated in the ancient Rome, refers to the things that should be done and the consequences resulting from things that are not done well. For the mass media,
responsibilities are mainly reflected on two levels: responsibilities shouldered by the mass media; "responsibility request" made by other authorities such as governments and courts on the mass media. Zheng Zhengqiu, one of the earliest film screenwriters and directors in China, paid special attention to the social responsibility of film directors. "He advocated that the reformatory and educational roles of films, and insisted that films should be educative besides the recreational role." As one of the mass media and a carrier of a special form of the informative texts, films have the responsibility to serve social benefits: devote to the building of a harmonious society, carry and spread positive energy via its cultural text, ideology, and value concept. The openness, pluralism and competition of film market leads to the dilution of sense of responsibility and the division of responsibility during the film creation by the multiple subjects. Creation subjects blindly cater for the demands of audiences in order to improve their market awareness, market occupancy and popularity, giving rise to the production of a great number of vulgar and flattered film productions. Creation subjects of youth films give particular portrayals of violence, bloodiness, sex, gambling, drugs, and decadence to make films more eye-catching and gain higher box offices. For instance, the youth film Ever Since We Love portrays the romance between men and women from the angle of "sex". A lot of shots are given to the body and lust between Qiu Shui and Bailu, and between Qiu Shui and Liu Qing. In the film, the behaviors of individual youth are totally controlled by hormones in the adolescence. As a result, the rational love is replaced by lust out of emotional desire, and the view of love of young individuals is shaped as the release of desire, the escape from traditional and the infatuated love. In addition, sex is blended with plots in some films such as A Story of Lala's Promotion, Lust, Caution, and Cherish Our Love Forever. These films show the emotional relationship between men and women with fleshliness, strengthen the desire for lust, but pay less attention to the pure love. To gain high box offices and wide popularity, creation subjects seek to meet the curiosity of the public about the growth of others, which causes youth films to win the market competition by designing eye-catching, exposed and gossip plots and figures.

3. Production contents: The paradox between audio-visual symbol and humanistic value

In the information society, audio-visual symbols have become the most popular information dissemination carrier by virtue of its intensive appeal, stimulus, and attractiveness. Audio-visual symbols can satisfy the public with their fragmented, marginalized, and personalized behavioral habit of receiving information, and can receive information via portable mobile carriers anytime and anywhere. Audio-visual symbols encode information using symbols into the main target productions of social consumption, such as graphics, audio, and video. They also map the main ways of the audio-visual cultural life of the public. Cassirer proposed that man is symbolic animal. Culture is a symbolic form. The essence of the social practice activities of human is the "symbolic" activities. The society is a cultural world constructed from the people connected by symbols. Language, art, science and mythology are all made up of symbols. Particularly, art is the symbolized human experience in social practices, and a way of understanding, identification and communication for human beings, as well as an expression of nature and life. As an imaging manifestation of living environment and conditions of individual youths during their growth, youth films reveal the life form of cinematic art via audio-visual symbols, and interpret the existence and growth of individual youths through the splicing of image symbols. The cultural symbols of youth films tend to be visual, consumptive and insignificant due to the market competition. While audio-visual symbols look like the subject and object of life, the essential role of symbols as the carrier of humanistic value has been worn out in the process of coding-decoding-recoding-redecoding. The focus is shifted to the consumptive, violent and desire-driven youth.
The mass production of youth films brings the various fantasies of youth in the film world to the real market, resulting in the blurred lines between reality and virtuality. The revelry, prank and absurdity in the virtual world abet the young individuals in the real world to rebel and run away from home. Youth films use audio-visual symbols to narrate the growth of individual youths, presenting a status that the real life is encircled and suppressed by virtual visions compiled in films. This incites the off-track of individual youths in the real world during their growth. For example, the Tiny Times series takes the emotional entanglements between individual youths as the narrative line, and is filled with the self-centered life paradigm. Luxuries such as LV, Hermes, and limited edition sneakers can be seen at multiple levels, including growth, emotion and chase of dream of young individuals in the film, transmitting the view of luxury consumption and money worship. This goes against the self-cultivation and frugality advocated in the traditional Chinese culture, causes the mood of extravagance, and foments teenagers who are affected by the textual information of youth films to keep up with the trend.

Saussure emphasized that human beings in social practices would, consciously and unconsciously, use the relative "formal system" in the process of understanding, expressing and transmitting the surroundings and themselves. The commonality of this system is to express and reflect the subject and object at different levels. Combining speech acts and individual life activities, youth films show the distinguished growth process of individuals through their differences in personality, habits, hobbies, and behaviors. Innovative film technologies enrich the changes and connotations in the world of films, and motivates individual youths to construct youth images through speech symbols, behavior symbols, etc. However, the audio-visual symbols of youth films in the context of consumption are replicated because of the mass production of youth films. They are invading the realistic society in ways of the active acceptance by the public and the dissemination. The public is obsessed with the illusory world constructed by films, accepts the values created by symbols in films, but becomes indifferent and evasive to the reality. The flash connection between lines and lines, or lines and frames, or frames and frames leads to the drain of aesthetics and the elimination of memories of youth. The audio-visual symbols are mixed as meaningless symbols of the frame impact and the visual and sensory stimulus. Creation subjects only focus on the retrospection of the green years and the recollection of past memories in youth films, but ignore the original intention of creating youth films, presenting the paradox between audio-visual symbols and humanistic value. In Naught Girls, a film focusing on the school life of young individuals, the scenes such as smoking and fight are magnified. The values related to study, dream and progress that should be manifested in the school space are totally replaced with decadence and shiftlessness in the adolescence, and the recklessness, wantonness, and vagrancy are highlighted. In youth films such as Girlfriend Boyfriend, Mr. Six, Brides War, Chongqing Hotpot, and The Ex-File, the symbolic significance carried by audio-visual symbols of love, family affection and friendship contrasts sharply with humanistic value of youth advocated in the real life. Conscious behaviors such as lust, violence, sheer cunning and falsehood, and gambling are presented in an artistic manner through audio-visual symbols, while the positive and healthy attitudes in life and study are paid with less attention, resulting in the failure in spreading correct values and life outlook in youth films.

4. Production purpose: The conflict between commercial benefits and artistic attributes

Bozeman held that media have a suggestive power, and can define the real world. The specifically inclined text contents included are used to shape the cultural characteristics. In the realistic society, the right of speech of the public tends to be presented in a recreational manner
by virtue of the accessibility and convenience granted by media, thus becoming a popularized cultural spirit; and religion, news, and education will gradually evolve into appendages to entertainment. Films are a modern media that meets the audio and visual requirements of the public with continuous frames. Driven by film production technologies and commercial capitals, the nature of films is changing from the cultural and artistic product to the goods for cultural and artistic consumption. Films are involved in the commercial competition. Youth films put emphasis on the growth of individual youths, and highlight their life process through capture and reproduction, feeling and portrayal. The invasion of the commercial tide impels the production of youth films to be oriented by market acceptance. The industrialization, commercialization and marketization of youth films lead to the contradiction between the commercial benefits and artistic attributes carried by film products, thus putting the planning, investment, shooting, production and marketing of youth films under the control of commercial capitals. As a result, the influence of culture and art on youth films gradually decreases, presenting the massification of high art, the commercialization of art productions, and the entertainment of cultural productions.

The commercial pursuit of youth films has contributed to the prevalence of hedonism, money worship, and egocentricism in artistic products, resulting in youth films being wrapped in commercial elements. The productions placement, viral advertising and the like have weakened the cultural and artistic attributes of youth films. This is a deconstruction of the artistic connotation for the creation of youth films, and the cultural fracture, cultural stratification and materialization appear. The creation of youth films oriented by box offices and film schedule weakens the public's self-understanding of individual youths, resulting in the swing between youth rationality and sensibility. Individuals ignore the boundary between social reality and film virtuality. For example, in A Smile is Beautiful, a film narrating the love story between the hero and the heroine in the context of thematic games, the emotional entanglements of individual youths in the real life are blended with the relationship of game characters in the virtual space of games, which blurs the line between the real world and the virtual world, and confuses the identification of figures in fantasy love of modern cities and in the virtual space. Films such as I Do and Personal Tailor weaken the artistic attributes of youth films, but customizes film plots based on the carrier form of films. Specifically, productions advertising is taken as the major objective of films, and the essence of films as a cultural and artistic productions is ignored, resulting in over-commercialized and market-oriented youth films.

Nowadays, youth films are inundated with gimmick marketing. Films deliberately evade the reality but create the illusion of audio-visual revelry. Ideological values are subverted in sarcasm, and the boundary between culture and art and commodities is blurred. A social atmosphere is created where individual youths unbosom, untangle and satisfy themselves in the consumption context featuring all-people entertainment, so as to maximize commercial benefits. In the Chongqing Hotpot, the traditional upright, principled, tall and strong hero image is replaced by the ruffian-like, unruliness, cynical and unprincipled young individual image. The commercial benefits have induced creation subjects to produce artistic texts of youth films with jokes, spoofs, ridicules, and games, and expand plots in absurd and ridiculous ways such as inversion of time and space, plot stitching and story parodies. Youth films are addicted to the public revelry and the fantasy. Films such as The Breakup Guru, Devil and Angel, Goodbye Mr. Loser, and Never Say Die ignore the cultural and artistic attributes of youth films, but mirror the growth in the adolescence with a recreational and jocular postmodern performance in a humorous and parodic way, presenting a fancy growth of individual youths under consciousness of revelry.
5. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, the economy, culture, politics and society have been changed in different levels. The concepts and behaviors of the public are also deeply affected, and their attitude towards one-way and passive information acquisition is transformed into the two-way and active search of information. Youth films are in the context of rapid economic development, cultural diversity, and social openness and inclusiveness. Its production subjects are not limited to elites and professionals, and the public begins to engage in it. Multiple subjects are involved in the production and market competition of youth film products. The cultural and artistic production are exposed to internal (creation subject, image technology, industrial structure, etc.) and external (market competition, diversified cultural and artistic product, information technology, etc.) environments. The production pattern of youth films is confronted with the deconstruction in reality, and the difficulty in reconstruction. Films play the historic role of cultural carrier, so its production should comply with its unique attributes while being subject to universal laws. "The ultimate proposition of ethics is not a question of good and evil, but a question of justice. The reason why justice is more important than good and evil is that justice is an ultimate ethical issue that can cover individuals, families, ethnic groups, society, and even humans, rather than an issue of a single person's moral cultivation, psychological traits, and behavioral orientation. No matter at the real society level or the virtual art level, the core issues of ethical issues will ultimately be justice, although they may have different ways of existence and expressions and diverse connotations." From the ethical perspective, the production of youth films should emphasize the national culture, social rules and humanistic care based on the inheritance of local culture, so as to pay attention to the brand creation of Chinese youth films from the perspective of culture and emphasize the tenet that focuses on brand awareness and brand concept. The investment and return of youth films should be linked up with the cultural connotation, industrial value chain, film value-added services, and social influence based on brands. More supports should be given to the organic integration of professional and civilian creation subjects to make the best of the both worlds and optimize the configurations at the level of film creation. At the content level, youth films should focus on the unification of audio-visual symbols and humanistic values, and convey the truth, the good and the beauty that the film art pursues, so as to highlight the thoughts and emotions, ideal pursuits, and mainstream values during the growth of individual youths. The themes and contents of Chinese youth films should be enriched, and the national fine traditions should be advocated in the coding of value and ideology of film art productions, so as to weaken the commercial tendency. The commercial benefits should be blended with the artistic style, humanistic value and cultural quality under the youth film brands, thereby driving the economic benefits by the appeal of brands, and facilitating the healthy development of youth films.

References