The Way Out for China's Film Industry in the Context of Film Viewing Equity —Taking Cultural Equity as a Perspective

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Abstract

Cultural equity is the basic value pursuit of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The film industry is supposed to take care of cultural equity, so that the public has the channels, ability and conditions to enjoy the cultural achievements of film art. Since the reform and opening up, China's film industry has been developing and growing in the market economy environment. However, a considerable number of people have gradually turned away from movies due to various subjective or objective conditions, which has adversely affected the development of China's film industry and even the construction of cultural equity. This study starts from the reality of whether the general public can watch movies, and proposes five measures to help the disadvantaged groups, renovate township theaters, expand movie themes, improve the ticket price mechanism and combat piracy, in order to promote the solution of cultural equity in China's movie industry and help the sustainable development of China's movie industry.

Keywords

Film industry; Cultural equity; Fair viewing

Introduction

Cultural equity is the basic value pursuit of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and every Chinese citizen should enjoy cultural resources fairly. The film industry, which has a pivotal role in the cultural field, is supposed to take care of the cultural equity of the society, so that the public can have channels, abilities and conditions to enjoy the cultural achievements of film art.

Since the reform and opening up, the commercial and entertainment attributes of Chinese cinema have been gradually highlighted and strengthened by the market economy. However, in the process, many imbalances have emerged, resulting in large differences in the cultural attributes of cinema itself. The cultural resources enjoyed by people from different regions, classes, and identities are obviously divided, and this cultural equi-

ty problem is becoming more and more prominent. On the one hand, movie resources are concentrated in the more economically developed regions, and the consumption level of movie-going is constantly rising, making it impossible for a large part of the economically disadvantaged people in the other regions to watch movies; on the other hand, due to the limitations of the industrial development of movies and the rise of other alternative forms of entertainment, the market competitiveness of movies has encountered great challenges, and people's willingness to watch movies has also been reduced. The former is material-based and relatively objective, while the latter is concept-oriented and relatively subjective. The result of the interaction between the two is that people who want to watch movies do not have the corresponding conditions to watch movies, and even if they have the conditions to watch movies, they may lose their interest due to the loss of movie-going habits. And those who do not want to watch movies shift their entertainment consumption and reduce movie watching. Therefore, their shift in entertainment consumption is bound to affect the development of the whole film industry. Ultimately, regardless of objective conditions or subjective wishes, the fact that people do not watch movies will have a negative impact on the cultural equity of the entire film industry, resulting in a double imbalance of cultural resources and the entire film industry.

The above-mentioned problems are only the starting point of this paper's research; the goal is to solve the problems. Therefore, in order to promote the stable growth of China's film industry, we have to fully consider the rational allocation of film resources and the effective stimulation of people's interest in film viewing from the perspective of film viewing. And with practicality and maneuverability as the benchmark, corresponding measures should be taken to keep the film industry and cultural equity alive in dynamic development and continuous improvement. Ultimately, a more equitable film culture atmosphere will be formed, while further promoting the balanced development of China's film industry.

Helping Vulnerable Groups

"According to statistics, if we add up the urban and rural poor, urban unemployed and laid-off workers, the disabled, migrant workers and other people in relative disadvantage, the number of China's disadvantaged population is around 140 million to 180 million, accounting for about 11% to 14% of the country's total population." (Wang, 2017) For this large number of relatively disadvantaged people, watching movies is almost a luxury. They are far from being provided with film culture resources. Thus, for this special group, thinking about how to deliver film culture to them is indispensable to the construction of cultural equity in China's film industry.

Strengthen Support for Movie-watching Programs for Vulnerable Groups

"Starting from 2017, the School of Television of Communication University of China, together with Beijing Gehua Cable TV Network Co. and Oriental Jiaying TV Cinema Media Co. have jointly launched the 'Bright Cinema' project." (People's Daily, 2020) This is a project intended to serve the visually impaired, and the project has made it possible for the visually impaired to begin to experience the charm of cinema by "talking about cinema". "Since June 2019, the 'Cinema of Light' project has been extended to the whole of China, with the screening of barrier-free films in 30 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities, expanding the coverage of this project from first-tier cities to less developed areas. At the same time, the project relied

on provincial blind associations to establish fixed screening points, realize the regular screening of barrier-free movies in Beijing, Shanghai and Qinghai, and set up many 'Bright Cinema' fixed screening halls across the country, benefiting nearly 2 million people." (Guangdong Disabled Persons' Federation, 2020)

The "Bright Cinema" project is a precedent for delivering film culture to people with disabilities in China, and is a great example for building cultural equity in China's film industry. At the present time, special support programs like the "Bright Cinema" program, which focuses on socially disadvantaged groups, are still extremely limited. In addition to the visually impaired, other groups such as the disabled, the urban and rural poor, laid-off urban workers, and migrant workers all face great difficulties in accessing movies (Wang, 2005). Films naturally cannot exclude these groups. Therefore, it is necessary for government departments, social welfare organizations and other institutions to further increase the support for the "Bright Cinema" project, promote the construction of projects for the disadvantaged groups to watch movies, provide them with film cultural resources, and promote cultural equity in movie watching.

Increase the Number of Movie Screenings for Disadvantaged Groups

In addition to promoting the construction of specially supported movie-viewing programs, the number of special movie-viewing sessions about disadvantaged groups should be appropriately increased. Due to the differences in the distribution of cultural and educational resources in China today, different groups have different levels of understanding of film. Therefore, it is necessary to provide special screenings for the disadvantaged groups with relatively low cultural and educational levels, instead of delivering the current culture in a "one-size-fits-all" manner, which is more effective for building relative cultural equity.

At the same time, in areas with better movie-going conditions, some disadvantaged groups may not be able to enter theaters to share movie culture due to economic conditions and time constraints. For example, migrant workers and low-income families do not have enough time to watch movies, nor do they have the awareness to watch movies. In view of this, it is extremely necessary to increase the number of special screenings for disadvantaged groups. This can not only provide them with the appropriate conditions for viewing movies, but also create a more suitable cultural atmosphere for them to watch movies, thus stimulating their willingness to watch movies. Of course, this requires the support of the government or public welfare organizations, and theaters can also increase the concessions and other ways to make this part of the disadvantaged groups to experience the progress of social civilization and warmth.

The Transformation of Township Cinemas

Compared with urban cinemas, the market of township cinemas is extremely limited, and relying solely on their own development will undoubtedly further widen the existing gap between urban and rural areas, thus exacerbating cultural inequities. And completely rely on government support township theaters and difficult to obtain real independent development space, its operation will be increasingly rigid. In the face of this situation, it is necessary to coordinate the relationship between the government and the market on the one hand, and cultivate the interest of township residents in cinema viewing on the other, so as to improve the existing situation of township theaters through various measures.

Build a Government-led and Market-regulated Support Mechanism

For most of the township theaters and rural screening teams, they need to do is to clarify their own theater positioning. At present, except for a few provinces such as Zhejiang, Guangdong and Jiangsu, most of China's township cinemas and rural screening teams are still unable to compete with urban cinemas. For quite a long time, their positioning is still mainly public welfare cultural screening activities, so the role of the government is still indispensable. Relevant state departments should further improve their support policies, and local authorities need to establish corresponding special funds for the film industry, while coordinating with relevant taxation departments to formulate certain tax incentives to alleviate some of the pressure on township theaters. After the policy of subsidizing township theaters is introduced, the relevant departments should also implement specific supervision to ensure that the theater subsidies are effective and avoid "image projects".

Under the premise of government-led, it is also necessary to guide part of the social capital to enter, in order to further stimulate the vitality of the development of township theaters. In the relatively economically developed township areas can be properly incorporated into the city cinemas. And for the relatively backward economic development of the township areas can be combined with the existing public cultural services and industries to play a comprehensive cultural agglomeration effect.

Under the government-led, market-regulated support mechanism, the boundaries of authority and responsibility between different government departments and social funds should be clear, otherwise it is easy to make township theaters completely paralyzed in the market competition or lose vitality due to excessive reliance on the government. Only when the government and the market coordinate and cooperate with each other will it be possible for township theaters to develop healthily and allow more people to have the conditions to enter theaters, thus promoting a more equitable movie culture.

Cultivate the Movie-going Habits of Township Residents

The development dilemma of township cinemas and projection teams lies in the backwardness and lack of objective resources such as cinema environment and equipment on the one hand, and the lack of subjective willingness of the majority of township residents to go to the cinema on the other. In this way, even if the construction of the corresponding cinema and projection team, but also because of the decline of unattended, so another important issue in the construction of township cinemas is how to effectively cultivate the local residents' movie-going habits.

First of all, we need to improve the bottom-up film ordering mechanism and understand the hobbies of the people in townships. After all, they are different from urban consumers, and many commercial films are difficult to be understood by them because they are far from their living background. Only by adopting the mechanism of ordering films by township residents themselves, soliciting the types of films they are interested in and showing their favorite films, can we effectively stimulate their interest in watching movies.

Secondly, combining township theaters with other public cultural facilities to realize the gathering effect of township culture and entertainment. In townships, people's entertainment activities are relatively scarce,

and if the relevant entertainment locations are scattered, the number of people going to theaters will be even scarcer. Therefore, integrating theaters with other public cultural facilities and concentrating on places with a large flow of people can also provide a relatively stable entertainment and cultural place and social place for local residents. In this way, it can naturally cultivate the movie-watching habits of local residents, and at the same time drive other entertainment life of residents and promote the diversified development of local culture.

Expanding Movie Themes

With the growing strength of commercial films, other non-commercial themes, such as ethnic minority (Chen & Hu, 2012), rural and artistic films, are almost squeezed to the margins of the market, resulting in the cultural and artistic form of film being subject to commercial capital. This is the law of market economy. However, the excessive commercialization of the film industry will greatly damage the artistry and cultural diversity of films, thus affecting the cultural equity of the film industry.

Give Full Play to the Uniqueness of Marginal Theme Films

Commercial films are extremely competitive in the market, and it is difficult to fundamentally protect marginal films if they are rashly put into the market to compete freely with commercial films, or if commercial elements are injected into marginal films.

Therefore, films with marginal themes still need to develop their own uniqueness.Although it is difficult for them to compete with commercial films, as long as they adhere to their uniqueness and artistic standards, they will still have artistic and cultural values and will not be completely eliminated. Rural films need to truly reflect the current situation of contemporary rural life and reject the illusion of whitewashing. Ethnic minority films should focus on recreating the customs and feelings of their own ethnic groups rather than simply imitating commercial films. Artistic films should adhere to their artistic nature, and only under such adherence will these marginal films not be easily subjected to the commercial market because they have their own unique cultural and artistic values. At the same time, relevant government agencies, social welfare forces, as well as film festivals and film exhibitions should also provide some support to such films. With the help of these platforms, they can obtain certain financial support and creative recognition on the one hand, and achieve certain publicity effects on the other.

Optimize Art Film Theaters

At present, China has three types of art theaters, namely, “public interest art theaters represented by the China Film Archive Art Cinema, commercial art theaters represented by the Broadway MOMA Film Center, and art theaters represented by the National Art Film Screening Alliance” (Zhang, 2018). However, this development trend is still inaccessible compared to commercial cinemas, and its revenue channels are relatively single and limited, and its market competitiveness is weak.

Moreover, art theaters are mainly concentrated in first-tier cities, while the existence of art theaters in second-

and third-tier cities is difficult to see, and their webcasting mode has not been formally formed yet. Art theaters need to expand their business capacity in many aspects on the basis of seeking national policy support. First, the development of theaters can move from the downstream of the film industry chain to the upstream and midstream of production and distribution, and enhance their market competitiveness by extending their own industry chain. Secondly, art theaters can also join hands with film festivals and film shows, so that they can promote on a larger platform and obtain more film supply.

Art film theaters are an important way for art films to be disseminated through formal channels. Therefore, optimizing art movie theaters can provide a platform for the exhibition of many art films and prevent them from being widely distributed on the Internet in the form of pirated copies, which is important for promoting the harmonious development of the movie industry and building a good atmosphere of fairness in movie culture.

Improving Ticket Price Mechanism

"The high ticket price of movies has become an important factor that prevents audiences from entering cinemas to watch movies." (Tao, 2012) At present, in the market environment of Chinese movies, some regions have adopted certain differential pricing strategies. However, whether comparing the increase of ticket prices with the increase of residents' income level in the ephemeral state or the ratio of ticket prices to residents' disposable income level in the common state, if comparing China with European and American countries, it is easy to find that Chinese movie ticket prices show an unreasonable tendency of "luxury" and high ticket prices are inevitable. The trend of high ticket prices is inevitable.

Implement Reasonable Differential Pricing

In response to the tendency of "luxury" of Chinese movie ticket prices, it is necessary to implement reasonable differential pricing. The spatial structure should take into account the per capita income levels of different regions, and the timing should avoid the undesirable situation of overheated ticket prices during popular periods, leading to soaring prices.

In recent years, China's economy has been improving, but there is still a large gap between the income levels of residents in different cities, and this gap still exists in a large number of regions at this stage. Ticket prices should not be set simply according to the "one-size-fits-all" division of regions, but rather according to the per capita disposable income of local residents, so as to ensure that local ticket prices are within the acceptable range of residents.

At the same time, because the movie release time is mainly concentrated in the Spring Festival, Labor Day, summer vacation, National Day and other popular periods, the audience's consumption demand is relatively high at this time, and the movie ticket prices may rise. In many small and medium-sized cities and even some rural areas, "the ticket price of ordinary 2D movies is between 60 and 80 yuan, while the ticket price of 3D movies is more than 100 yuan" (Li, 2018). Once the popular season is over, ticket prices quickly retract. Such fluctuations in ticket prices can interfere with the normal operation of the movie market on the one hand, and

greatly affect audiences on the other, causing their willingness to watch movies to wane. Therefore, it is crucial to avoid unreasonable increase of ticket prices during the movie season to improve the movie ticketing mechanism.

Improve the Ticket Price Subsidy Policy

At present, there are many different levels of movie-goers in China, and audiences of different professions and identities have different degrees of sensitivity to movie ticket prices. People with higher income levels are less sensitive to differences in ticket prices, while students, retired seniors and laid-off workers with limited income levels are more sensitive to differences in movie ticket prices, and these different groups of people may be located in the same city or community. However, simply setting lower ticket prices for all consumer groups in the region will harm the revenue of film production, distribution and projection.Therefore, within the same region, the implementation of ticket subsidies and half-price tickets for specific groups is a relatively optimal choice for different classes and cinema box offices.

At the present stage, the half-price discount tickets are mainly limited to students, the main force of movie consumption, but the setting of such concessions is mainly based on commercial considerations rather than on cultural equity. As for the elderly, the disabled and the underprivileged, there are not many concessions or special tickets for them. Over time, this part of the population will be completely away from the cinema consumption. The relevant departments should introduce preferential policies for these groups, which should then be implemented by theaters, and the social groups can be monitored accordingly, so as to further promote the construction of cultural equity in China's movie industry.

Combating Piracy

In addition to infringement on movie copyrights, movie piracy also includes infringement on various rights brought about by the pirated distribution of movie works. Piracy of movies is repeatedly prohibited because there is a vast market for pirated movies, and their distribution channels have become increasingly powerful with the development of the Internet. However, the current lack of online media platforms that can confront online piracy channels has led to pirated movies hitting regular channels for movie viewing from the source, causing a series of cultural equity problems.

Integrating Platforms to Broaden Channels

Currently, pirated movies have the advantages of being convenient and free, with complete resources, and have firmly taken their place in online movie broadcasting channels, making it difficult for regular broadcasting channels such as online media platforms to seize the broadcasting channels of pirated movies.The reason for this is that there are many online media platforms, and the genuine movie resources they each possess are extremely scattered, and the number of scattered movie resources is far from the number of pirated movies on the Internet. In addition, the range of definition options for licensed movies is even more limited, and some movies with ultra-clear picture quality require membership services to watch. In this way, watching a genuine movie on the Internet requires not only downloading multiple playback platforms but also opening many

separate membership services. On the contrary, some improper online media platforms even allow users to upload pirated resources in order to gain user traffic.

All these show that the market for pirated movies is huge, and the root cause is the lack of online media platforms that should be convenient, free and complete in resources. Once the integrated online media platforms can solve the lack of movie resources, they will certainly seize the online distribution channels of pirated movies by virtue of their online media platforms' superiority over pirated movie downloading and transmission. In addition, it can also try to screen non-technical blockbusters in new online media platforms and form a timely screening mechanism according to the actual situation, so as to build new online screening channels for viewers whose objective conditions make it inconvenient to enter theaters, thereby increasing viewers' interest in watching movies. After the films shown in theaters are released, it is necessary to promote their multi-channel screening on online media platforms, provincial, city and county movie channels, and cell phone software such as WeChat and Jitterbug, in order to lower the threshold of movie viewing. In this way, we can cultivate audiences' interest in watching movies while regulating the public's viewing behavior through formal channels, thus promoting the smooth development of the movie industry.

Improve the Level of Copyright Regulation

The problem of pirated movies has become more and more serious because of two important reasons, in addition to its huge advantages of convenience and free access and complete resources. One is the existence of loopholes in movie key technology, and the other is the current lax legal regulation and lenient penalties.

To solve the problem of movie resource leakage, it is necessary to ensure that the movie key is always guaranteed not to be cracked from the time the movie is released. After the movie is released, watch the movie in other regular copyrighted movie distribution channels, and the movie resources also have the same key that cannot be cracked. While maintaining the convenience of watching movies, the key must be opened with a special player in order to open the key, otherwise it cannot be played. Through the enhancement of technology, in order to reduce the possibility of movie resources being spread by piracy and protect the copyright revenue of the platform.

At the same time, movie resources need to be strictly regulated, and laws and regulations need to be constantly improved, including measures such as strict penalties for all forms of copying of movie copyrights and recording at the theater management level, so as to thoroughly combat piracy. Not only should pirated movies be treated with serious law enforcement and resolute zero tolerance at the law enforcement level, but the amount of compensation in lawsuits, which is currently too low for pirated movies, should also be doubled and increased at the judicial level, thus curbing pirate parties as the source of pirated movies at the legal level. At the same time, integrated online media platforms should gradually replace pirated movie channels with their own advantages in a timely manner, and cultivate the public's awareness of copyright and interest in the viewing of movies on regular platforms.

By improving movie encryption technology and improving the copyright protection environment through strict supervision, and by eliminating pirated movie distribution channels through the integration of online media platforms and the widening of movie distribution channels, we can gradually cultivate audiences' habit

of watching genuine movies and thus promote cultural fairness in the movie industry.

Conclusion

Building cultural equity in China's film industry cannot simply be about transmitting film culture resources, but should be about cultivating audiences' interest in watching films through reasonable measures so that they can actively receive and actively seek film culture. Only in this way will the flow and transmission of culture be accelerated and enhanced, and the social environment of cultural equity will be built up more quickly. The development of social civilization requires continuous progress in cultural equity, and the progress of cultural equity in turn puts forward higher requirements for the optimization of the film industry. The author firmly believes that promoting cultural equity in China's film industry is not only conducive to the prosperity of the film industry, but also a concrete practice of implementing the guiding ideology of "people-centeredness".

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