

# Suspension of Artistic Expression: A Study on the Generation Mechanism of Actor Crisis in the Film Industry

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**Abstract:** The suspension of artistic expression is becoming a symptom of the crisis that actors are currently suffering in the film industry. Through the purification of the theory of cultural industrialization, this paper analyzes and explains the actor crisis from the three perspectives of industrial technology, industrial capital, and industrial society. The excessive use of industrial technology has led to the marginalization of actors and the decisive intervention of industrial capital has deprived them of the right to choose their film roles. Moreover, the "McDonald's" production of film art that has been caused by industrial society has made actors lack an in-depth understanding of reality. Experience, the compound effect of these three elements, has finally led to a crisis for Chinese actors. According to the study, in response to the actor crisis, the diversified production of films, resistance to the colonization of capital, and immersion in real life, can be used to form a multi-party effort to fight against the crisis of film from the perspective of the ideal pursuit of film.

## 1. Introduction

From last century's "Red Sorghum," "Farewell My Concubine," and "In the Heat of the Sun", to today's "Ordinary Heroes," "Home Coming," and "Nice View," the mainstream categories of the film market have changed. Under the influence of cultural industrialization, the artistic expression of films is gradually becoming increasingly homogeneous and shallow, and film quality is also gradually declining. Whether judging from box office data or public evaluation, the positive connotation of movies has gradually disappeared, replaced by the proliferation of comedy elements and the over-use of big scenes, which has generated a severe issue – a crisis in the development of films. Among them, the most significant influencing factor is the actors. Stereotypes in film have caused the marginalization of actors; the intervention of capital has led to the loss of their right to choose roles; and the short-adaptable-fast mode of production has suspended actors in society. This has also elucidated a strange phenomenon, which is that there are countless actors, but good actors are rare. This phenomenon is the specific manifestation of the crisis of actors, which is the inevitable result of the industrialization of the film production mode, and this has further led to the Chinese film crisis.

## 2. Literature Review

The primary source of film industrialization is cultural industrialization. The culture industry began at the close of the 19th century and continued through the beginning of the 20th century. After culture entered mass production, Horkheimer and Adorno of the Frankfurt School in Germany made a profound analysis and criticism of the culture industry. The term "culture industry" reveals that their object of study is the planned production of cultural products tailored for mass consumption and, to a large extent, to determine consumption patterns. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) also noted that the culture produced by the "culture industry" was not derived from mass demand, but rather from its creators imposing it upon the public from the top down, specifically in pursuit of commodity profits according to the needs of capitalist commodity production. Culture replaces the original artistic culture of individuality, by instilling various false needs in the public, and thus shaping the cultural interests of the masses. Through this process, the ruling class's ideology is effectively instilled in the minds of the masses.

Although there are criticisms of the "culture industry" theory, both with its development and use, many studies still use this concept to analyze today's cultural communication. Foreign studies predominantly focus on gender, race, ethnicity, and other areas. For example, Cashmore (1997) believes that exaggerating the importance of commercialized "black culture" may be counterproductive in the struggle for racial justice. Bielby (1996) elucidated that the salient features of the culture industry show that female cultural workers face considerable obstacles to their career development. Lie (2012) chose to start with Korean pop music (K-pop), the main influence of South Korea's cultural expansion of their national identity upon the world. China mainly focuses on the criticisms of the culture industry, analyzing its negative impact on cultural products and society. For example, Zeng Yiguo (2016) noted that, with the help of the culture industry theory and its inherent critical theory, the complete manipulation of people by the culture industry has become a modern reality, and has developed from similarity, unity, and replication into an analogous, virtual, and surreal cultural industry. Shen Tianyi and Lan Jiang (2022) regard network platforms as an extended product of the culture industry, arguing that they have deepened the "integration of economy and society" referenced in the culture industry theory. Fang Zheng (2022) regards "culture" and "ideology" as the structural relationship of "external and internal" and proposes "cultural ideology." He notes that, under the ideological control of the culture industry, any struggle means the destruction of the "rationalized" order will be rejected from the political and economic system of advanced industrial society. This also emphasizes that the culture industry has become a probational tool used by the ruling class to integrate the social order. In addition, Xia Kaifeng (2022) and Mei Jinghui (2021) have connected the culture industry with ideology, focusing on an analysis of the construction of consciousness and ideological discourse power in the culture industry.

The analysis objects of the studies referenced above are macroscopic, and there is little analysis of a fixed culture industry or cultural product. In analyzing films and actors through the culture industry, certain researchers only superficially focus on the so-called technical development generated by the culture industry, without an in-depth analysis of the nature of the technology generated by the culture industry and its impact on the film-adverse effects from production and cast. For example, Zhou Shuhong and Wang Chuanling (2022) regard the culture industry as the path of film development. They argue that the new mainstream form of film organically integrates mainstream cultural values and aesthetics with the market-oriented operation and industrial production mode, realizing political and artistic aims unified with commercial achievement. Wang Xiaoxu (2015) realized that actors are integral to film culture. However, his interpretation focuses on the culture of film stars and fans in the era of new media, and he is aware of the actor crisis and the elements that cause it. As actors are an essential part of film production, it is critical for the future development of films to explore their development crisis and its causes under the cultural industrialization of the new era. Therefore, three aspects of analytical logic can be extracted from cultural industrialization to analyze today's actor crisis: industrial technology; industrial capital; and industrial society.

### **3. Actor Crisis in Film Production**

#### **3.1 Confused Actors: Loss of Centrality**

Adorno (1991) emphasizes that the concept of technology in the culture industries and the concept of technology in works of art are only the same in a literal sense. From the beginning, the technology of the culture industry is a technology of circulation and mechanical reproduction. It is parasitized in the material production technology of commodities that are external to art, regardless of its obligation to the inner artistic whole implied by its objectivity, and without regard for the formal laws required by aesthetic autonomy. The result is a physiognomy of the culture industry which is a mixture of both: the streamlined, photographic precision on the one hand, and the remnants of personality and sentimentality, that have been rationalized and adapted to romanticism, on the other. According to this explanation, the production process of most films in the current film industry is an industrialized production mode, and mechanical replication assembly line operations

produce similar films. For example, "My Love," "Love Will Tear Us Apart," "Ten Years of Loving You," and "I Really Hate Long-Distance Relationships," as well as numerous other love stories aimed at younger audiences, often have a high degree of homogeneity in plot content, mainly relying on the so-called "abuse point", which creates a tear-jerking plot to compose a love story.

Another example is the "Wolf Warriors" series, "The Wandering Earth," "Lonely on the Moon," and other sci-fi movies, all of which use big scenes and big productions as their "selling points." The story itself, the narrative, and the performances are no longer the focus of the audience's attention. These films focus their energies on becoming a so-called great picture and on high-tech impact.

In this streamlined film production, with mechanical reproduction caused by culture industry technology, the performance of actors is no longer the central pillar of film expression. Moreover, the quality of performance is no longer the core factor of film production, but rather has been downgraded to an element of production. One of the connections, which in turn leads to the loss of the actor's subject status, is the loss of performance initiative, and the actor's positioning becoming blurred. Affected by this, the current group of actors has a fault phenomenon, the personality of the new generation of actors is eliminated, and the performance is modeled. In addition, the threshold for actors has gradually "disappeared," and many people have changed from other occupations, such as singers and hosts, into actors. The performance of these actors who lack systematic training is like "opening a blind box." They can only rely on talent and feeling. At the same time, the understanding of the story within the actor group has declined, and they no longer need to understand the story of the film; they can perform the entire process simply by listening to the director's instructions. The "withering" of the actor group also restricts the development of art films and encourages the continuous expansion of assembly-line films in the film market.

### **3.2 Controlled Actors: Lack of Choice**

Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) believed that the goal of the culture industry is economic. Moreover, the reason for its development is that "it stems from the enterprise's pursuit of profit maximization in the economic sense", and that it can only be described as a business "like any other kind of business." Others believe that the cultural field has been monopolized by capital. Zipes (2002), a scholar influenced by Adorno, once criticized the large-scale commercialization and corporate hegemony behind the Harry Potter series. The music critic Ross (2014) stated that Adorno's work has taken on new importance in the digital age: "Pop supremacy is almost complete, with its superstars ruling the media and wielding the economic might of tycoons...It seems more monolithic than ever, with a few giants — Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon — presiding over an unprecedented monopoly."

The same is true in the domestic film industry. Internet giants such as Tencent, Alibaba, and Baidu have intervened in the film market, treating the film industry as a commercial product, and ultimately commercializing films, directors, actors, and other roles. In this case, capital is not seeking out personalized actors, but rather is searching for de-personalized and cashable "commercial tools" that meet their commercial needs. The choice of capital leads to actors losing their right to choose the script actively. Excellent actors with substantial autonomy, initiative, and high idealization cannot choose the work and the roles that they must play; the "actor" selected by capital can only be used as a capital subsidiary. The capital requirements of a film undoubtedly affect the film's quality. In addition, out of the consideration of maximizing commercial interests, capital often selects particular actors who have acting skills and agree to capital operation to "share weal and woe" in the form of a "gambling agreement," investment, and so on, and package them as "one good and one bad." Form, in order to ensure that the film attracts as many audiences as possible to obtain more box office, and the film is ultimately reduced to a commodity.

### **3.3 Actors in a Vacuum: The Absence of Real Life**

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) once stated that the most distinctive innovations of the culture industry are "nothing but the continuous improvement of mass production methods." The purpose of mass-produced entertainment, by its very nature, is to appeal to a broad audience. However, the

consumer demand for cultural products is not oriented to the audience's needs, but rather towards an add-on for commodity circulation produced by capital-driven mechanical reproduction technology. When cultural products are regarded as commodities by capital and inserted into the market in order to generate profit, the ultimate goal of capital is to "introduce its energy into the collective consumption of standardized goods (Thompson, 1988). "The high degree of attention of the audience means a "good price." Therefore, to attract as large an audience as possible and promote consumption, capital "stimulates" consumers through fast food and short-term production methods, forcing them to indulge in the false happiness and satisfaction created by capital. The entirety of society has fallen victim to McDonaldization. After being stimulated by this positive emotion, the audience will pursue this false happiness more actively and deeply, and will accordingly pay its price. Society is currently the equivalent of adding bricks and tiles to the expansion of capital's "industrial empire" and a vast industrial society has been formed.

The same is true of the logic chain followed by capital in film production. In the film industry, to stimulate consumption more quickly, when multiple roles such as narrative, story, director, actor, and producer lose their sense of voice and initiative, this limits their capabilities. The capital chooses to "make stars", and through "fast-moving" marketing that fits with the "fragmentation" of today's new media era, quickly establishes the external image of the actor, attracts the audience, and forms a fan base. At this point, the capital begins to "harvest" benefits. In this fast star-making chain, actors are entirely isolated from society. Not merely due to the short-term and fast film production mode and fragmented publicity methods, meaning that the actors in question have no time to experience real life; but also because, in today's Internet era, once a fan group is formed, actors will be "criticized" and praised by fans, forming a vacuum within society so that the actor's affiliation will become even more suspended. In this state, the professional strength of actors has little time, but also cannot be improved. The contribution of excellent performances to movies becomes imaginary, and excellent or even qualified film work becomes empty talk.

#### **4. Suggestions**

Under the influence of the factors noted above, the talents of actors are gradually withering, and the development of Chinese films is gradually moving towards a crisis point. In order to revive the development of film, actors, one of the essential components of film art, changes must be made. One such change is to fight actively against the invasion of industrial technology. In the case of the flood of stereotyped films, we still pursue literary films that can better show the art of film, the beauty of stories, and the acting skills of the actors themselves. For example, the actress Tan Zhuo, who has acted the leading role in "Spring Fever", "Mr. Tree", and other works, and who has contributed excellent acting skills. However, they are not entangled with "the popular actors who are not popular", but rather filming silently or even mechanized and templated movies can rely on their interpretation to give the movie added luster. For example, the actor Zhang Yi, whether it is the TV series "Be Reborn" with its script flaws, or the movie "Home Coming," can use his interpretation to rationalize the unreasonable plots. This is undoubtedly due to his paramount acting skill. The second is to resist the invasion of industrial capital and strengthen the actor's right to choose. For example, the actor Wang Baoqiang, from the "Soldiers Sortie", the "Lost on Journey" series, and the "Detective Chinatown" series, has an obvious casting type as an actor and knows the type of story that suits him, so he only chooses scripts that subscribe to this type. In addition, actor Zhang Yu is another example of an actor who insists on choosing his script and has successively performed in excellent films such as "Dead by the Day", "An Elephant Sitting Still", and "Dying to Survive". The third is to fight against the commercial packaging of industrial society, to go deep real into life, and to settle down to interpret film works seriously. For example, actor Duan Yihong plays a blind person well and went to a school for the blind to experience it; to play a person with a mental health condition he lived in a mental hospital. He made the choice to deeply live and truly experience the real version so that he could seriously commit himself to the acting.

Whether it is against industrial technology, industrial capital, or industrial society, the most crucial factor is persistence. Persistence in taking an interpretation as one's profession and ideal is

precisely what today's film and television industry lacks. Only when this so-called persistent pursuit of idealization and professionalism infiltrates all parties involved in the film and television industry, such as directors, screenwriters, and producers, can they form a joint force that cannot be ignored, in order to resist the colonization of the film and television industry by the culture industry. This choice is a possible path to regain the brilliance of film as art.

## 5. Conclusion

Celebrity actors are famous, affecting film art's production and development. Therefore, in this sense, the crisis of actors deserves attention. This article uses the theory of the culture industry to address the phenomenon that actors are "declining comprehensively," and that celebrity actors have become the mainstream. It analyzes the formation of the actor crisis from the three logical perspectives of industrial technology, industrial capital, and industrial society. The primary argument of this article is that, with the support of cultural industrialization, this is the first time to have allowed a focus on the impact of the actor crisis on the film crisis, and this article elaborates on its formation process in the hope of providing a reference for film research. However, relevant research is still required to provide a fundamental solution to the current film crisis. The factors affecting the development of films are diverse, and they can be analyzed from multiple perspectives, such as screenwriters, directors, producers, editors, and audiences, in the hope that, finally, a comprehensive solution can be formed.

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