

Chinese Reception of Magic Lantern During the Late Qing Dynasty: Study of the Name Change from Huandeng to Yingxi

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Abstract: This paper illustrates the changing of Magic Lantern's Chinese name after its landing in China. Magic Lantern, as an ancient precursor of the modern cinema, experienced a long-term development that plays an increasingly important role in our modern life. The change of its Chinese name shows the Chinese perception of this apparatus. People neglected the alternative paths of "cinema" when the cinema becoming into an entertainment stereotype for the public. This paper will look back to the beginning of the perception history of this apparatus, rethink the history writing method, and try to discover an alternative approach to understand cinema.

1. Introduction

Starting with a simple question: when audiences watching films, does their understanding of the moving image effected by their unconscious educated culture? This phenomenon should not be ignored that the international film festival are getting increasingly popular among the Chinese audiences. The enriched group in China are becoming an important part of film-making industry and even media culture. But it does not mean that the selected film by different film festival really acceptable by all audience. Comparing with the perception of the international film nowadays, the root of the moving image perception of the early visual apparatus- Magic Lantern- in China will explain well the question at the beginning. The acceptance of the screening mode of this predecessor of the film is different, which has affected the aesthetics of the current film.

The magic lantern originated in Europe and was an early optical toy [1]. European countries took the lead in launching the industrial revolution, making it extremely convenient and rich, it was gradually commercialized and started spread to the world with modernization and globalization.

The movie became popular all over the world after the magic lantern was invented centuries, and it was one of the inventions of optical devices in the 19th century [2]. Movies and magic lights have a certain inheritance relationship in the development of moving images. Film was behind some of the most influential and popularized machines, techniques, skills, exhibition and experimentation for a long time. Thus, therefore, the research on the magic lantern becomes a different approach to review the reception of film, which may help properly explain the delay of the Chinese made film

industry. With regard to the failure of magic lantern in China has its importance on clarifying the film aesthetics nowadays, and developing more multiple possibility of cinema in the future.

As an important invention that affects European and even global viewing culture, the magic lantern as a medium is regarded as an important research object by the growing research direction, cultural studies and media studies. Media archaeology [3] is one of the most important methods. As for media archaeology, its historical perspective is the basic theoretical perspective, which emphatically rebuilt an epistemological of the future by reconsider the past in an alternative way. It is advisable to be cautiously optimistic about "failed media" and place them in the depths of history to understand nowadays and rebuilt the future. It is seeming that cinema has inherited the distinction of the magic lantern as an apparatus, which makes this topic more necessarily as least for the development of film aesthetics and industry, especially in a specific country, China. More specifically, the referential name of a device can better reflect how people in a place understand a foreign culture. This is often not only an intrusion of knowledge on the outside, but more importantly, how does local people understand the foreign objects based on their existing experience and knowledge. What's more, this denoting name will change over time and a more thorough understanding of the foreign device.

2. Literature Review

Among the academic content out of China, the research of Magic Lantern is rich. The first category is the brunches digging research of this early devices' appearance and foundation. Terry and Deborah Borton [4] tracked the career path of slides artist Joseph Boggs Beale (1841-1926) in CW.Briggs Company, which shows the Magic Lantern has already turn to the commercial entertainment of the public, and it's part member- slides- even got can be seen as a platform for the image art. This kind of researches broaden the modern eye of the old apparatus' imagination and fever. Later, more media researcher awarded the importance of its neglected device meaning to the new approach to get into the new history concept. This concept was talked by Walter Benjamin's theories many times, which illustrated the importance of the failed history in the life experience and unconscious learning of human being. The concept has been used to the film study broadly in the recent year in academy field. It can be seen a reasonable approach to study film theory and history. But there's a few outcome relating to Chinese early devices study. It will lead to the following facts: firstly, the limitation of nowadays English based research of Magic Lantern, even other early apparatus and devises. No one could deny that there's interactive impact between Chinese early science and culture background with early devices invention; secondly, the bare understanding of the importance of the early apparatus to the Chinese academy field.

The existing domestic research on the Magic Lantern in China has emerged without a long history. Besides, it is relatively fragmented, which includes some foreign studies on the history of the Chinese early device as Magic Lantern. Japanese scholar Sugawara's article is based on the cultural aspect based on the history of Shanghai's film acceptance, and supplements the history of acceptance of science and technology, of education and of urbanization [5]. The characteristic of the two aspects of education and entertainment developed by the Magic Lantern is the sprout of ornamental aesthetics that is about "understanding". The apparatus offered a easier entrance for art and knowledge, alongside the privilege of the educated people who can reading and writing by words. The Magic Lantern brings the Magic Image, which massively broaden the eyes of citizen at that time when education resources were limited. Sun Qing's research [6] is that under the background of the globalization, the technology development, circulation and application of Magic Lantern in China are investigated, and the teaching mode evolved from the Magic Lantern has been transformed into the discourse power of Chinese intellectuals, which also had a huge impact among people learning something new from image. There is also a series of in-defining discussions on the

origins of Chinese films, such as a series of studies showing that the history of Chinese film should be oriented to earlier roots. Tang Hongfeng [7] tried to prove that the visual culture of slides was the origin of the visual culture of movies, which laid the foundation for the rapid formation of the "spectacle and illusory aesthetics" of Chinese movies, which is a typical sign of Magic Lantern showing the image of the other countries landscape or the painting of a strange story.

3. The Inter-effect Between Chinese Early Device and Magic Lantern

The overall effect of Magic Lantern has to be involved to fascinate the viewer, trying to attract more observers, which is similar to characteristics of traditional opera and exhibition in ancient China [8]. Leather-shadow show, having a 2000-year history since the Western Han Dynasty (207BC-25AD) , is typical in Shanxi Province. It's popularity went across the board in the Song Dynasty (890 AD-1279 AD) [9]. It is a spectacle of amusing story-telling. People who perform behind a white cloth screen control the props to make moving images, accompanied by lights, ballads and lyrics with percussion and stringed music [10]. The formulaic and grandiosity of such a traditional opera shows the preferences of the Chinese people. The content of these stories is defamiliarizing life instead of simulating real life. Under the influence of the Chinese opera, the magic lantern exhibition is in full accordance with the opera concept [11].

Initially, audiences at home and broad considered the Magic Lantern to be terrifying. People feared the illusion of moving images and its technique, who couldn't hold an innocence attitude towards distinguishing the realistic images from the ones. Afterwards, researchers in the west showed great interest in its ability to represent daily life and spoke highly of it. In contrast, the charm and astonishment of the projected glass sides showing foreign landscapes were the most attractive to the Chinese people. During that period, there were many articles about the reactions of the Chinese people to the show in newspapers, among them were some that reported the Chinese audience's unwillingness to sit in the dark auditorium. In the dark environment, the images were enlarged and countless changes made them lifelike, thus creating a deprivation effect. The showman's projector was named as a "magic box," which invented the ghost story [12].

So the logic here is that, Chinese early device given some tips to the story telling of Magic Lantern presenter (of course Chinese Leather-shadow shows is not the Magic Lantern's guys' only inspiration resources). Experienced growing and improving, Magic Lantern became the more convenient device to spread worldwide. When it came back to China, there was some developing level for audience to accept. First stage, Chinese audience regard the Magic Lantern as a blandly new invent of the Western people. Second stage, after the first touch, Chinese audience could find the link between Leather-shadow show with Magic Lantern show quickly. Huangdeng is the direct translate of Magic Lantern, with the growth of understanding, Yingxi became more popular.

4. Magic Lantern Show in Tea House, as an Entertainment Approach for Chinese audience

The function of Magic Lantern in China used to be multiple. But the missionary purpose was comparatively higher than other path. Slides and glass negatives make up the fundamental elements of the magic lantern, and it also demonstrates that the missionary duty to properly exemplify the Visual Anthropology during the China Inland Missions work [13]. And it's guessed that the translated literal name, Huandeng, was given by the priest's translator.

In terms of its purpose, Magic Lantern shifted from merely serving as a tool of mission into a public business entertainment exhibition alongside this movement. Following the government's and some institutions' sending a great number of students to study abroad, people's translation capability increasingly improved. Yingxi was the paraphrasing when the Chinese people realized the essence of the Magic Lantern, which made people paid more attention to its output.

Nevertheless, it also reflected the great weakness of the Westernization Movement, that is, applying the western technology without a fundamental knowledge of the underlying philosophical and cultural connotations. Compared with the Meiji Restoration in Japan, studies of the Western world made by Chinese advocates of the Westernization Movement tended to be superficial. The renowned Japanese ideologist Fukuzawa Yukichi proposed a proper way of understanding culture of the west. He believed that it should be exceedingly hard at the beginning if you want to take in the European civilization. In other words, studying technology is easier than making a change to people's mindset [14]. The traditional thinking pattern, monopolized by Confucian philosophy, led Chinese to regard the Magic Lantern as an entertainment tool, which thus slowed down the advancement of Magic Lantern technology in China.

Chinese people's idea of the magic lantern started difficultly, which might be underlined by the fact that spectators were often hired to attend the exhibitions in the beginning. For instance, an Englishman set up a film theatre in Hong Kong, but the locals were so superstitious and frightened by the moving figures on the screen [15]. In order to ameliorate Hong Kongers' anxiety, the Englishman paid some people each day to attend his playhouse for three consecutive weeks until they became more comfortable with motion pictures [16]. After that, audiences had to spend money watching the shows. "Such a new spectacle caught eyes of plenty of local audiences who were curious despite the expensive fees" [17]. Later, the exhibition fees witnessed a sharp decline, reducing from "three jiao per person" (jiao is a fractional money unit in China) in 1886 to "one jiao per person, half price for child tickets" in 1887. It's can be easily seen that people's reception to these shows changed in a very short time.

The early paying audiences thought that such visual culture belonged only to the upper class who were watched when enjoying the play. They were contented with being involved in the culture and held that it indicated their social class privilege. However, this trend was altered after the exhibition venue was shifted from the one's own theatre garden to the teahouse. It's worth being noted that teahouses in China back then didn't just serve tea and stage opera performances. In contrast, the garden belonged only to the elite classes of the late Qing Dynasty.

5. The Reveille of the Modern Chinese Technology Awareness

Several optical toys were invented in Europe before Magic Lantern, including the phenakistiscope and thaumatrope [18], which were developed based on the idea of visual retention found by Prato. Magic lantern exhibition transformationally went from a single painting picture through a moving image. The apparatus could hold over four slides or platform discs in the meantime. The motion was finished by pushing and pulling the slides or turning around the discs. Moreover, the two-headed lantern could perform more sophisticated moving commands. After Muybridge and Marey upgraded the photography, Magic Lantern began to be able to show moving photos [19]. Different from the principle of Chinese Shadow Show, Magic Lantern added biological knowledge such as visual residue, which made a move for the Chinese Leather-shadow show. And this move bring more fun to the audiences and more opportunity to the Chinese creators.

After the Opium war, under the control of Zeng Guofan, who was the founder of the Westernization Movement, many Western ideas and scientific devices were being introduced to China with support of the governmental, which made a vibe that increasingly Chinese people noticed the importance of device's principle, the importance of efficiency, and the importance of machine [20]. Suzhou are a good example that some Chinese studied this technology and made it into the business.

England's Industrial Revolution opened the gate of the modern technology spreading, war and globalization. Magic Lantern and its generation heritage (other kind of projector) became the main entertainment way for the audience in many region. In modern China, which was extremely short of

materials, the introduction of Magic Lantern brought new blood to the visual experience of Chinese audience. Photography was invented as the Magic Lantern reached China; therefore in addition to the traditional themes of magic lantern (featuring with boxing, tricks, repeated action and dance performance), the pictures reflecting real scenes and people became the new members of the slides in the “magic box”. It was easier for the Western group to understand the representation of the real world. For Chinese, however, the “representation” was another wondrous spectacle instead of a basic reconstruction of everyday life. Initial lantern shows focused on two major aspects existed in China: tricks and daily routine. And the adorable machine had been become the reveille of the first generation of artist and researcher combining the image art with the light/shadow and continuously story telling.

6. Conclusion

This paper discussed the name change of the Magic Lantern after it was introduced into China, and found that the Chinese people’s reception has been seen as a crucial reason resulting in this change. During the period of enlightenment in China, the Chinese people were astonished and appealed to by the miraculous technology of the many machines, including Magic Lantern. Considering the emblematic characteristics of the Magic Lantern and uniquely distinctive Chinese culture, the brand-new Chinese name of the Magic Lantern was totally different from the original name. The mingled magical aesthetics and technology confuse Chinese people in their perception of the principle of moving figures and dramatic visual impact. The study of apparatus enrichment involving several disciplines has been interrupted by such an interpretation. However, by the analysis of the causation distributed in various elements, it is not so much hard to discover how technological science and the philosophical way of thinking affected the advancement of the Magic Lantern. Based on the influence exerted by the emerging visual technology, both the movie and the lantern demonstrate a foundation alike in a distinct technological and historical background. The Magic Lantern entertained the Chinese people for nearly a century, but faded out after e-film was accepted. Nevertheless, the interrelations among the film, the Magic Lantern, early visual-conveying medium and technological growth, can be seen by virtue of archaeology research. Moreover, Yingxi, name of magic lantern, indicates that early movie, and Dianyingxi (Electric Shadow Opera) are the predecessor of the modern Chinese way of naming of films, Dianying (Electric Shadow).

Because there is an old gathering show called shadow play entertainment in China before the Magic Lantern was introduced, it is easier to be accepted by the public when the later one were firstly shown in mainland of China. Once it been introduced, it can be directly summarized as a story-based entertainment method. The reason is that Chinese spectators were familiar with this kind of show. Probably at many cultural regions, they reflect on their technology and use it as a new platform for artistic expression to create media. The difference in aesthetic principle leads to very different original intentions between different cultural background. It is very one-sided to standardize China's film and its aesthetic theory based on the current evaluation mechanism of major film academy in the world. This is not only an antidote for Chinese young people who blindly pursue niche films from foreign film festivals to show their aesthetic taste, but also maintain cultural self-awareness, cultural self-confidence, and recreation under the concept of globalization with the filmmakers from other culture background.

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