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# Narratives of Home and Country, Emotional Awakening, and Strategic Innovation in New Mainstream Cinema: A Path Analysis of “My People My Homeland”

Ziyi Mo<sup>\*,1</sup>, Jingyang Li<sup>2</sup>

1. Shanghai Film Academy, Shanghai University, Shanghai, 200072, China

2. Business School, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, 2052, Australia

**Abstract:** With the continuous improvement of the Chinese film market and the trends of political, economic, and cultural diversification, integration, and globalization, new mainstream cinema has emerged as a form accepted by the mass market. “My People My Homeland” continues the episodic and anthology style of “My People, My Country,” using five story units to reflect major contemporary issues. This paper analyzes “My People My Homeland” from the perspectives of structural paradigms, narrative angles, and strategic innovations, exploring the development of new mainstream cinema.

**Keywords:** New Mainstream Cinema; Narratives of Home and Country; Emotional Awakening; Strategic Innovation

## 1. Introduction

The impact of the pandemic in the year of Geng Zi has dealt a heavy blow to the film industry. After missing out on the Spring Festival and Labor Day Golden Week, Chinese cinemas finally welcomed the National Day holiday box office as they resumed operations. Moviegoers, who had long been suppressed, flocked to theaters to experience the long-lost joy of watching films.

As a key tribute film on poverty alleviation supported by the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, “My People My Homeland” premiered on October 1, 2020. By October 8, 2020, the film’s box office had exceeded 1.8 billion yuan, with daily earnings surpassing 200 million yuan for seven consecutive days. From October 3, it topped the daily box office chart for six consecutive days. Featuring seven directors with distinctive styles, the film tells hometown stories from five major regions of China in an anthology format. Through a narrative perspective resonating with common people, the film showcases China’s poverty alleviation achievements and evokes sentiments of home and country through visual storytelling. It connects individuals, society, and the nation while constructing social memory, quietly awakening emotions of home and country through symbolic representations, and aligning mainstream ideological communication with audience aesthetics.

## 2. Fragmentation: Constructing “Hometown Sentiment” through Anthology Narrative

The popularity of short videos has shifted audience preferences towards short stories, influencing their aesthetic tastes and film consumption habits. Consequently, audiences accustomed to short videos are more receptive to “patchwork films” with multiple short stories and high dramatic density. In “My People My Homeland,” structured around the theme of “hometown,” directors Ning Hao, Xu Zheng, Chen Sicheng, Yan Fei, Peng Damo, Deng Chao, and Yu Baimei each showcase their comedic styles, creating five story clusters. Through an entertaining approach, these stories depict the new landscape of changes in hometowns during the “xiaokang era” (moderately prosperous society).

Building upon the segmented narrative structure of “My People, My Country,” the film “My People My Homeland” leverages the transition style of short videos to traverse spatial domains, depicting five key themes: healthcare, technology, education, ecology, and poverty alleviation. This approach expresses the sentiments of people from various regions toward their hometowns. In “Beijing Good Man,” directed by Ning Hao, the comedic presentation highlights the improvement of rural healthcare conditions. “A UFO Fell from the Sky,” featuring the “Tang Detective” combination, explores “crazy aliens” in Guizhou, presenting a rural magical drama. The character Huang Dabao, inspired by internet celebrity “Handcraft Geng,” elucidates the significance of technology in supporting rural development and economic growth. “The Last Lesson” is the most touching story, depicting the plight of Old Fan, an Alzheimer’s sufferer whose memories are confined to his teaching days in Wangxi Village. His students recreate the past to help him regain his memory, elevating the emotional tone of the entire film with a

poignant mix of sadness and joy, reconciling memories of the hometown with its present reality. "The Road Home" juxtaposes an eccentric rural tycoon with a pragmatic e-commerce queen, highlighting ecological protection and e-commerce assistance to agriculture amidst humor. "Magic Pen, Ma Liang" maintains the witty humor of the "Happy Twist" team, incorporating elements of "West Red City," using laughter as a prelude and artistic expression as the foundation, vividly narrating the story of rural rejuvenation.

It's not difficult to observe that through spatial narrative, the film seamlessly links the theme of "My People My Homeland" by utilizing five different story clusters. Each vivid and authentic character dissolves the grand narrative of traditional ideological films, cleverly avoiding the rigid seriousness of traditional ideological films. The collective storytelling structure gathers diverse perspectives, allowing the characters' stories to converge towards a unified mainstream value system within the segmented and anthology-like narrative structure.

### 3. Seeing the Big Picture in the Small: Presenting the "Chinese Dream" from a Populist Perspective

Over the past decade, the influence of the commercial film market on mainstream ideological films has led to the gradual formation of a new landscape in which national mainstream cinema and mainstream commercial cinema coexist. Efforts have been made to harmonize the logic of national consciousness with that of commercial cinema, shifting towards marginalized social groups. This transformation has elevated ordinary individuals experiencing the changes of the times into narrative subjects, portraying their daily lives and genuine emotions from a populist perspective. Within the narrative, mainstream ideology, patriotism, and collectivism are subtly infused into the storyline, resonating with the audience in a quiet and unobtrusive manner, thereby achieving empathy between mainstream ideological films and the audience.<sup>[2]</sup> The diversified independent narrative approach breaks the sense of emptiness brought by grand narratives. The film's portrayal of ordinary individuals—a chauffeur, a peasant inventor, a rural teacher, an internet celebrity e-commerce entrepreneur, poverty alleviation officials, etc.—all rooted in real life, feels close at hand. The genuine populist narrative perspective, coupled with down-to-earth dialect expressions, allows the audience to empathize more deeply and follow the characters' love for their hometowns in various regional environments.

In the trend towards realism in mainstream ideological films, much of the content is adapted from true stories, reflecting the current development context of our country more accurately. In "My People My Homeland," the character of Old Fan, an ordinary teacher, represents rural educators. The storyline transports the audience back to the rural learning environment of the 1990s, allowing them to experience the simple and profound friendships between classmates and teachers. The inclusion of real-life photos at the end of "The Road Home" section amplifies the film's emotional impact. In tackling desertification control projects, the film illustrates how even a small spark can ignite significant change. This populist narrative perspective focuses on ordinary people, using popular comedy to explore grand topics such as poverty alleviation, ecological protection, and the comprehensive building of a moderately prosperous society. By highlighting the lives of ordinary people and expressing empathy and compassion, this "seeing the big picture through the small" approach strengthens the empathy mechanism between mainstream ideological films and ordinary audiences. From films like "Operation Mekong," "Operation Red Sea," "The Captain," "The Eight Hundred," to "The Sacrifice," mainstream cinema conveys great sentiments and positive energy through the life experiences of ordinary individuals. The shift towards a more realistic and populist narrative perspective aligns with contemporary audiences' demand for self-expression in cinema.

### 4. Mutual Reflection: Depicting "Home and Country" Through Comedy Techniques

"New mainstream cinema integrates mainstream values with genre aesthetics, diversifies and deepens Chinese mainstream values at the thematic level, employs typified writing expressions at the formal level, adopts a heavy industrial production mode at the production level, and strives to cater to popular demands at the dissemination level."<sup>[3]</sup> While upholding mainstream values, new mainstream cinema utilizes comedic elements to showcase directors' personal styles and entertainment factors, satisfying the dual demands of mainstream ideological and commercial films.

Overall, compared to "The Eleventh Chapter" with its dark humor and satire, "My People My Homeland" takes a more heartwarming approach, focusing primarily on humor and comedy. The two films demonstrate the distinction between comedic genres, showcasing both humor and satire within modern comedy. "My People My Homeland" belongs to the humorous comedy represented by the "Happy Twist" series, characterized by its overall lightheartedness and humor. Breaking away from the solemn and didactic tone of traditional ideological films, "My People My Homeland" adopts a comedic narrative style, thereby alleviating the sense of oppression associated with the term "hometown." The seven directors come together to seamlessly integrate the five short films with positive and uplifting humor. Ning Hao showcases the humor of ordinary people with his signature "dark humor," Chen Sicheng continues with his investigative-style comedy, Xu Zheng creates a touching comedy that brings tears to the eyes, while Deng Chao and Yu Baimei's road trip comedy and "Happy Twist" use geographical displacement to create a romantic comedy about urban-rural "long-distance relationships." These comedies are not only humorous and lighthearted but also address profound real-life issues and current topics. They allow audiences to release the suppressed emotions brought on by

the pandemic while experiencing firsthand the progress and changes in both "country" and "hometown" during the National Day holiday. This also reflects the innovation and improvement in the creative concepts and strategies of filmmakers<sup>[4]</sup>.

The fusion of "main theme + comedy" represents an experimental approach in the creation of ideological films, satisfying audience demands while actively promoting socialist core values and national ideology. This blend allows audiences to deeply reflect on themselves and their hometowns through segmented storytelling and richly developed characters, thereby triggering cultural, emotional, and value-based identification.

As a representative work of new mainstream cinema, "My People My Homeland" has achieved both social and economic success. As an exemplary film within the context of ideological cinema development, its storytelling and values prompt creators to reflect on narrative strategies that emphasize upholding mainstream values while focusing on the fate of ordinary people. As a tribute film, it actively engages the public and evokes nostalgic memories and emotions. Through a narrative strategy intertwining personal and national experiences, the film's structural paradigm and innovative strategies—such as "seeing the big picture in the small," "fragmentation," and "mutual reflection"—provide a robust framework for telling Chinese stories and perpetuating the Chinese spirit in new mainstream cinema.

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