14 Priest and director Alex Kendrick

The “manual workshop” and film industrialization

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Alex Kendrick is a pastor in Georgia. Since 2003, the plain pastor has constantly surprised the mainstream film market in the United States. He not only made gospel films with a small investment, achieved a box office miracle with a return rate of 102 times, but also has been a director, actor, screenwriter, film editor, film photographer, and even composer in the films' production. If the development of film industrialization makes all departments and links related to film tend to be independent subsidiary industries, then the “manual workshop” makes the industrialized and separate independent departments return to a unified and simple production mode. This mode of production brings unique aesthetic effects and industrial characteristics to the gospel film, which is a return to unity.

A “manual workshop” is a handicraft production unit in the feudal society of the Middle Ages. It takes manual labor as its main source. Generally, it does not employ workers, and there was no wage for helpers or apprentices, but only a small wage for subsistence. That is to say, a “manual workshop” has two factors: one is manual labor, the other is non-payment and non-employment. The term “mode of production” does not seem to have a substantial connection with the film industry. However, when we remove the form of manual labor, we find that the “manual workshop” is essentially a non-employment mode of production, behind which is non-profit or low profit self-sufficiency. In Alex Kendrick's gospel films, he and his brothers Harry Kendrick and Stephen Kendrick jointly undertook the work of directing, producing, writing, editing, photographing and even composing music for the films. Most of the actors were unpaid, and they did not view commercial success as the primary objective of the film. This kind of modern “manual workshop” mode of production has left behind the historical background of the feudal era. Although it is not in the lexicon of modern filmmaking, it can never stay out of the film business, which gives the gospel film dual attributes in the process of production.

Actors and composers: the “manual workshop” and professional commercialization

Films did not need professional actors, editors or even screenwriters at cinema's very beginning, just simply recording the content. This manual production method formed the original ecological workshop style of the film industry, without too much division of labor and refinement, and no industrialization. This kind of characteristic gave film double identities from the beginning. On the one hand, film had the function of non-practical, self-sufficiency expression, on the other, it had the beginnings of a commercial operation. With the development of the film industry, this form of “manual workshop” has been constantly challenged, and professional directors, actors, screenwriters, and cinematographers, etc. appeared. Commercial interests as a mode of operation stepped into the film business. Especially in the stage of film industrialization, the commercial interests and market returns became not only the important contents to be evaluated before film production, but also were the important index to evaluate the film's value after a film's release. When commercial operation started to take the key role in the film industrial chain, the non-practical self-sufficiency expression function became less important and even was sucked into being an element of commercial operation.

Film actors as business labels and as ordinary professionals

Charlie Chaplin was known as one of the five richest actors in the film industry back in his time in the 1920s. According to media reports, Chaplin made US\$10,000 a week in 1916, equivalent to the current US\$219,000. This considerable income amount did change the artist's lifestyle, he did not really live like his role in *Modern Times*. This historical anecdote indicates that Hollywood actors have become one of the biggest beneficiaries, besides film studios, in the process of the industrialization of the film industry, and the rapid growth of this kind of interest made actors directly develop into “stars”. In 2018, *Avengers 3: Infinity War* ranked number one in the global box office. And its star, Robert Downey Jr. is a typical “second generation of stars” with countless fans. His father, Robert Downey, is one of an older generation of film and television stars in the United States. In a film with a total investment of about US\$500 million, Robert Downey Jr.'s salary will be US\$100 million. From the beginning of the *Iron Man* series, Robert Downey Jr. became a box office miracle. In *Iron Man*, his salary was US\$500,000, with a global box office of US\$5.85 million. In *Iron Man 2*, his salary was US\$10 million, with a global box office of US\$620 million. In *Iron Man 3*, his salary was US\$50 million, with a global box office of US\$1.22 billion. By the time of *The Avengers*, his salary was more than US\$80 million, and the global box office totaled US\$1.5 billion. In ten years, Robert Downey Jr.'s salary has increased nearly 200 times, and the global box office of his films have also increased several times, which is really amazing (see Table 14.1).

Table 14.1 Top 10 global box office in 2018 (US\$100 million)

<i>Title</i>	<i>Distributor</i>	<i>Domestic box office</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Foreign box office</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Global box office</i>
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	Buena Vista Pictures Distribution	6.8	33.2	13.7	66.8	20.5
<i>Black Panther</i>	Buena Vista Pictures Distribution	7.0	52.0	6.5	48.0	13.5
<i>Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom</i>	Universal Pictures	4.2	31.9	8.9	68.1	13.0
<i>The Incredibles 2</i>	Buena Vista Pictures Distribution	6.1	49.0	6.3	51.0	12.4
<i>Venom</i>	Columbia Pictures	2.1	25.0	6.4	75.0	8.5
<i>Mission: Impossible - Fallout</i>	Paramount Pictures, Inc	2.2	27.8	5.7	72.2	7.9
<i>Deadpool 2</i>	20th Century Fox Film Corporation	3.2	43.4	4.2	56.6	7.3
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	Buena Vista Pictures Distribution	2.2	34.8	4.1	65.2	6.2
<i>Bohemian Rhapsody</i>	20th Century Fox Film Corporation	1.8	29.3	4.2	70.7	6.0
<i>Ready Player One</i>	Warner Bros. Entertainment, Inc.	1.4	23.5	4.5	76.5	5.8

Source: Box office mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com/).

The nature of stardom is the commercialization of an actor's identity. Acting as a profession has developed into a subsidiary part of the film industry chain to maximize its interests in the film industry. In this sense, actors have now huge commercial value. This kind of value tag not only makes the actor's value professional and market-oriented, but also promotes the industrialization of the film industry. Many audiences are attracted to the cinema by some "idols," which becomes an important factor in realizing the value of the film industry.

When we turn our attention to the gospel films directed by Alex Kendrick, certain differences are obvious. Maybe it is because he has been a pastor, and has suffered huge difficulties, even misery, in his past. Or maybe he focused on the doctrine of God's words when he was a pastor. Alex Kendrick seldom played the role of church pastor in his films. He played a role in the comedy *Moms' Night Out* in 2011 as a stiff-faced, lifeless pastor. Besides this, most of

his other roles are ordinary people with different careers. The salesman in the first film *Flywheel* in 2003 was Alex Kendrick's first performance as an actor, in which he appeared to be dull and inflexible. In 2006, the movie *Facing the Giants* was a box office miracle. Alex Kendrick's role was a rugby coach, which did not bring him much success in his acting career. Maybe Alex Kendrick is not very satisfied with himself as an actor. In 2008, he did not appear as an actor in *Fireproof*. In 2011, however, in the film *Courageous*, Alex Kendrick delivered a remarkable performance by fully impersonating the character. His role as a policeman is associated with his father's identity. Hence, he was able to fully and profoundly show the father's emotion when he lost his daughter in the film. Especially at the end of the film, his speech on behalf of his father made many audiences cry. In *War Room* in 2015, Alex Kendrick grew a beard and looked like a businessman. Watching his work, we can see not only the development of the realistic theme of the gospel films, but also the maturity of a pastor's acting career, as the Bible states, "So we are not afraid. Although the outer body is destroyed, the inner body is like a new day."

In addition to Alex Kendrick, in these gospel films, at different times, the same actors often appear in different movies. For example, the black fire officer in *Fireproof* plays the role of a policeman in *Courageous*. The husband in *Mom's Night Out* plays the father of a Jewish family in *Courageous*, and so on. Perhaps limited by the theme of the gospel films, many actors are believers, members of the church, and most of the actors indeed play themselves without any payment. That is to say, in Alex Kendrick's films, actors have no commercial value tag. This kind of performance with non-commercial interests is like the apprentice in the "manual workshop." Everyone comes together because of the common faith and dedicates the work to God to complete God's mission. At this time, the production mode of the company's operation is based on family cooperation, greatly reducing the investment costs of a gospel film. But at the same time, the production mode of the actor's dedication is weak in market development, especially for the overseas market, and the actor agency company is much better at promotion of films.

Music: pop songs and hymns

Music has the power to directly touch people's soul. And music melodies are immersive and very often touch audiences emotionally. Film scores add a strong and powerful impact to cinematic images. The famous Oscar-winning song "Auld Lang Syne" is a typical example. The song was originally a poem by Scottish poet Robert Burns that praises sincere and lasting friendship. In 1940, the Hollywood movie *Waterloo Bridge* used this song as its theme song. Today, nearly a century later, though that movie might have been forgotten by many people, this song has spread all over the world, affecting generations of people. In addition to "Auld Lang Syne," there are many songs which make music and composition an important chain in the process of movie industrialization and bring great value. The theme song, "My Heart Will Go On," for

the movie *Titanic*, won the Best Original Song award at the 70th Academy Awards and the 55th Golden Globe Awards. It has achieved global commercial success, with music sales of more than ten million. The single was number one in the music charts of 18 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, Denmark, and Belgium.

Even in *Titanic*, a blockbuster produced by 20th Century Fox, there are elements of Christian music. When the ship is sinking, the violinists play two pieces of music with Christian themes: one is “Nearer My God to Thee,” the other is pastor H. F. Lyle’s “Abide with Me.” The great commercial success of *Titanic* is related to the perfect use of music. But when we appreciate the episode in the film *Facing the Giants*, with music composed by Alex Kendrick, it brings different emotional feelings. The main melody of the whole movie is slow, in which four hymns are interspersed, and it does not form a unified overall style. Especially in the most important final scene of the football match, the 20-minute screen images accompanied by the theme music are indistinct and even noisy. The use of music plays a key role in the film. If one considers only the use of music, even the non-professional audience can be touched by the unprofessional use of music by Alex Kendrick. However, this film, despite having such a problem, has made a 102 times box office return, which has to be recognized as a “miracle.” In Alex’s view, music is made to worship God, just as in the movie *Praise God for Victory* and *Praise God for Failure*. It is this kind of hearty worship that takes the film to another level: the sincere joy of believing in new life and infinite admiration for the great power of God.

Stars and the film score are only two of the important business factors in the film industry chain. The expanding industry chain absorbs more factors and gradually realizes the maximum value. The “manual workshop” mode of production of a gospel film is different from the professional commercial mode of Hollywood mainstream filmmaking, as it demonstrates the director is the principal creative decision-maker. Today’s film directors are more like art product merchants, or even entrepreneurs in the operation of art products. No matter from the aspects of investment, cost control, financial management, market management, risk aversion or team operation, the directors’ identity has a new connotation of a financing operation. This new connotation is not only the result of industrialization, but also the further promotion of industrialization.

The gospel films show that Alex Kendrick is more of a pastor, who values the salvation of the soul and to preach the value of the gospel: “the power of continuous prayer in suffering, the guidance of the cross in loss, the glimmer of hope in destruction, the sincere praise and reverence in winning.”

The operation of production companies and the film festival: the gospel film in industrialization

In every film directed by Alex Kendrick, the logo and credits of Sherwood Pictures are the last to appear in all cast lists of production companies. The

signs of the cross and the elliptical arc are like the sky and horizon. The name of Sherwood Pictures and the logo come from the Baptist Church in Sherwood, Georgia. The publicity image of the church inadvertently opened the door to the industrialization of the gospel films.

Sherwood Pictures and the six production companies

In 2003, deputy pastor Alex Kendrick was in charge of the Baptist media in Sherwood, Georgia. He set up Sherwood Pictures with US\$20,000. That year, the gospel films began to change the pattern of the film market in North America and even the world. When Sherwood Pictures was born, North American films were controlled by a number of major studios, such as 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros., Universal, Buena Vista (Disney), Paramount, and Sony. Each production company has an operational organization and chain ranging from actors' agencies, film studios to distribution companies. They keep the film industry and global audiences firmly under the control of their own networks. As Figure 14.1 shows, the global market share of the six major film companies accounted for 69 percent in 2003. Among them, Buena Vista (Disney Company) has the largest market share, reaching 16.2 percent, and Sony company ranks second with 13 percent market share. Three years later, Sony Pictures Entertainment Company's global sales volume reached US\$10 billion in 2006, accounting for 18.6 percent of the global market, becoming the world's largest film company.

Although the gospel films directed by Alex Kendrick have some characteristics of an independent film, in terms of production mode and capital operation, they are not completely independent films. On the one hand, the copyrights of the gospel films produced by Sherwood Pictures do not belong to the director. On the other hand, they are a co-production

Figure 14.1 Global market share of the six major film companies in 2003 and 2006.

Table 14.2 Ranking of return on investment of gospel films with realistic themes in North America (US\$10,000)

Movie title	Director	Investment amount	Global box office	Return on investment (%)	Distributor
<i>Facing the Giants</i>	Alex Kendrick	10	1024.3	102.43	Sherwood Pictures
<i>Fireproof</i>	Alex Kendrick	50	3345.6	66.9	Columbia Pictures
<i>God's Not Dead</i>	Harold Cronk	200	6466.8	32.33	Pure Flix Entertainment
<i>War Room</i>	Alex Kendrick	300	6779.0	22.60	Columbia Pictures
<i>The Passion of the Christ</i>	Mel Gibson	3000	61190.0	20.40	20th Century Fox Home Entertainment
<i>Brave</i>	Alex Kendrick	200	3452.2	17.26	Columbia Pictures
<i>I Can Only Imagine</i>	The Erwin Brothers	700	8348.2	11.93	Roadside Attractions
<i>Heaven Is for Real</i>	Randall Wallace	1200	10133.3	8.44	Sony Pictures Entertainment
<i>To Save a Life</i>	Brian Baugh	50	382.3	7.65	Sherwood Pictures
<i>Miracles from Heaven</i>	Patricia Rigen	1300	7388.3	5.68	Columbia Pictures

Source: Box office mojo: www.boxofficemojo.com/.

with Sony Company. In 2006, Sherwood Pictures released the film *Facing the Giants*. Its co-production companies include not only independent film companies (destination films and Samuel Goldwyn films), but also companies whose main content is Christian belief (Provident Films). Therefore, the original intention of Sherwood Pictures' films does not seem to be to explore the global market.

Co-production is the method of film production and distribution adopted by many film companies. On the one hand, it can partially reduce and solve the investment pressure, and the burden of human and material resources for film production. On the other hand, it can share in the division of the global economic interest chain in the global market. The co-production with Sony Company not only provides Sherwood Pictures a huge distribution market space, but also becomes the unique gospel label of Sony Company among the six major film companies. Compared with other companies, Sony has a higher share in the distribution of Christian films, and it has also reaped considerable benefits. In Table 14.2, we can see that of the top ten Christian films with the highest return on investment (ROI), Sony's films accounted for half of the total. As time goes by, Sony's distribution characteristics have

Table 14.3 Top 10 world famous international film festivals

<i>Name of the film festival</i>	<i>When established</i>	<i>Dates of operation</i>	<i>The highest award</i>
Cannes International Film Festival	1939	May 10–21	The Golden Palm Award
Berlin International Film Festival	1951	February 7–18	Golden Bear Award
Venice International Film Festival	1932	August 30–September 9	Golden Lion Award
San Sebastian International Film Festival	1953	September 21–30	Golden Shell Award
Tokyo International Film Festival	1985	October 28–November 5	Golden Unicorn Award
Moscow International Film Festival	1959	July 16–29	Golden St. George Award
Karlovy Vary International Film Festival	1946	July 5–15	Crystal Globe Award
Cairo International Film Festival	1976	November 7–18	Pyramid Award
Shanghai International Film Festival	1993	Early June	Golden Goblet Awards
Montreal World Film Festival	1977	August 25–September 4	The American Awards

gradually given it a potential advantage and have an impact on the global film pattern.

The celebration of the Christian film festival and the global film festival

In 1932, the International Film Festival started in Venice, Italy. By 2018, there are more than 700 film festivals around the world, about 50 of which are approved by the International Federation of Film Producers Association and have high quality entrants. According to the data published on the official website of the International Federation of Film Producers Association, there were 15 Competitive Feature Film Festivals in the world by 2015, including the Venice International Film Festival in Italy and the Cannes International Film Festival in France (Table 14.3). It means that there are film festivals almost every month of every year. Some 60 percent of them are mainly distributed in Europe and about 20 percent in North America. More than 30 film festivals have been held in more than 20 cities in the United States, which has become an important place for film exchange activities. Returning to the original intention of the film festival, its love for art and freedom broke through the barriers between countries. Culture, art, politics, economy, and trade collide and cooperate to realize the internationalization of the market in the process of the internationalization of exchange and cooperation.

At film festivals, many movie stars in gorgeous designer dresses and directors appear on the red carpet under the spotlights. This is an exciting moment for film. And it is an exciting moment to test their wisdom and hard work. Also, it embodies the different history of film development and records the important nodes of each stage. It promotes the in-depth development of the film industry chain. If we say that in the cinema, audiences are only watching the film, then at film festivals people watch reality shows. If audiences buy tickets because of their love for film art, then film festivals are the grand events of the global film industry chain. It promotes the rapid globalization of the film industry and the global film market, and extends the industrial chain.

Compared with the large number of established film festivals, the number of Christian film festivals is significantly smaller and less noticeable. According to the Christian film database (CFDB), there are currently 39 Christian film festivals around the world. Ten of them are in Canada, Australia, Brazil, the Philippines, India, Britain, Italy, and other countries, while the remaining 29 Christian film festivals are in 23 US states. Among them, the Global Christian Film and Music Festival held in Florida in May every year, the Christian Youth Film Festival held in California in March every year, and the online Christian Film Festival held in Virginia on the last Saturday of every month. That is to say, the Christian Film Festival held in the United States accounts for nearly three-quarters of the world's total. This is quite different from the distribution of non-Christian film festivals. The United States, as the Christian film base, has been influencing and radiating all over the world. Like many passionate and globally responsible Americans, director Alex Kendrick and his two brothers hold their own film festival in Franklin in March each year. Although no relevant records are found on the CFD database, they also warmly invite colleagues engaged in Christian film shooting around the world to participate in exchanges and appraisals. Compared with the international film festivals of commercial films, most of the Christian film festivals do not have a large number of media articles and do not have gorgeous star shows but quiet gratitude, praise, and worship. Although the Christian Film Festival offers exchanges and discussions, its industrial value and commercial value are not obvious.

Alex Kendrick practices his faith with his special gospel film works and Sherwood Pictures' film industrial communication form. Therefore, he was able to step into the film industry and achieve his position. As a pastor, his bold and persistent attempt not only changed his life, but also promoted the globalization of the gospel film. At the same time, he has also influenced countless people who pursue their faith.

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