

# Improving Production Quality through Project Management: Lesson from Small-budget Films in China

Xiaolu Lu  
Hugo Yu-Hsiu Lee<sup>+</sup>

## ABSTRACT

China's film industry is moving toward industrialization. Small-budget films, which account for the largest proportion of Chinese film production, face the most problems in production management, particularly quality loss. This study explores key factors that affect quality of film production so as to provide solutions that effectively reduce the loss of quality in the production stage. The analysis utilizes information from in-depth interviews with nine veterans in the industry and observations of six small-budget film crews. For the first time, quality control issues in the filming process of small-budget films are explained from the perspective of project quality factor. Among the six factors affecting film quality during film production management – costumes, makeups, props and set-ups, scenes, production, and actors – actors play the key role.

**Keywords:** Project Management, Production Quality, Film Industry, Small-budget Films in China

## INTRODUCTION

Chinese film industry was born as early as 1905. Yet, the concept of commodities or market economies was not present in the industry throughout the entire 20th century (Lei, 2011). Film production in the conventional planned economy period was unable to meet the increased demand for culture and entertainment that accompanied the country's economic reforms and opening up to the world. It was not until February 1, 2002, that the new "Management Regulations on Administration of Films" became effective. The new regulations were established to support and improve the development of the cultural industry. They helped modernize the Chinese film industry. (Liu, 2012).

Since then, the market of small-budget films in China has continued to expand and the production of such films has continued to soar (Nie & Du, 2017). But at the same time, there has remained confusion in the production management of these small-budget films, which has directly resulted in deterioration in the artistic and commercial values of the films, reduced profits or increased costs, and wastes of resources. More importantly, several films ceased production because of chaotic management of their crew. Therefore, small-budget films constitute a high-risk industry. There has been no effective management model in the field thus far. Everyone involved in the management process of small-budget films is led by their intuition. Furthermore, prior work has yet to conduct a systematic exploration into the production management issues of small-budget film projects.

The quality of a film determines its commercial value and artistic value. Films are an important spiritual and cultural consumer product. The judgment on the quality of films is generally abstract and implicit, which is mainly based on that whether the film content

<sup>+</sup> *AU Journal of Management*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2019). © Assumption University. All rights reserved. ISSN: 1686-0039.

Xiaolu Lu is a PhD student at the International College, National Institute of Development Administration, 19th Floor, Navamindrachiraj Buliding, 118 Moo 3, Serithai Road Klong-Chan, Bangkok, Bangkok 10240, Thailand, E-mail: 178874136@qq.com. Hugo Yu-Hsiu Lee, PhD is an assistant professor of applied linguistics at the International College, National Institute of Development Administration, E-mail: YL15@umail.iu.edu.

is genuine and appealing to the audience, moves the audience, makes the audience aesthetically pleased in the process of viewing, and has a certain reflection on the philosophy of life after seeing, and subtly affects the way of thinking and behavioral patterns of the audience.

The quality of the film should be viewed from several aspects. First and foremost, the national policies and regulations have to be taken into consideration. The State Administration of Radio and Television has clear regulations on the basic quality conditions of the films that are displayed in the cinema, for example, the size of the picture frame, the sound quality and color modulation. There are another series of related basic requirements for online release. The requirements for such release are lower than those for cinema films. The fundamental quality of films is mainly determined by the conditions of equipment. The production of large-budget, medium-budget and small-budget films need to follow these rules.

The script is also instrumental in the quality of films. To some extent, the quality of the script is the most critical factor in determining the quality of a film and the success or failure of the film. The script illustrates the storyline, which is considered the innate condition of the film. A film is relatively easy to succeed if it has a innate script of high quality. The production process of small-budget films is relatively simple in, let alone the use of high-tech or big-budget production. The uppermost concern of small-budget films is to tell stories, especially to achieve excellent storytelling. Thus, the role of the script is prominent.

Between the two factors, the macro regulations depict the basic standard that every film and its production must meet. The script is typically determined during the project financing development. The quality control of small-budget films is relatively simple and it has a great impact on the overall quality of the film industry. The quality management of such films thus is the focus of this article. The main quality control of production management is mainly concerned with setting up the crew, making plans, and controlling the quality of the filming process (Zhou, 2010).

In the film production process, the quality control of films can be divided into two levels. One is the artistic expression level. For example, various applications of the lens and presentations of the scenes in a play can bring different visual feelings to the audience. Moreover, different expression forms of the dialogue in lines result in different performances. For example, if the dialogue needs to be expressed in a sad form, then the degree of sadness depends on the actors and directors' understanding and interpretation of the artistic work. The application, expression and selection of light in the scene are also important. The brightness of light affects the tune and tone of the environment and atmosphere in the scene. These issues are influenced by artistic creation thinking. Its quality judgment is abstract and perceptual. There remains no unified quality standard, but the final artistic quality still exists objectively. Whether the audience accepts and approves is the main reference and evaluation criterion. However, this can only be a reference criterion, because the artistic quality cannot be completely determined by the audience. The other level comes to be the responsibility of each component in the production process. The problems at this level are visual and obvious and also are what the crew managers are mainly concerned with. In this article, these problems are the main research object concerning quality management in small-budget films (see Figure 1).

The aim of this article is twofold. First, it enables the film production management team or the small-budget film practitioners to have a better understanding of the factors affecting the film quality during the production stage and comprehend the attributes of each factor so as to make the production managers' behaviors, methods, choices, and

others gradually improved in the process of practice, and thus effectively reduce the damage of quality that occurs during the production stage. Moreover, this article can also be applied into the production management of television shows and online videos to a certain extent. (Note that unless specified, the small-budget films mentioned in this article refer to those in China, and the currency mentioned in the paper is the Chinese yuan, typically abbreviated “CNY.”)

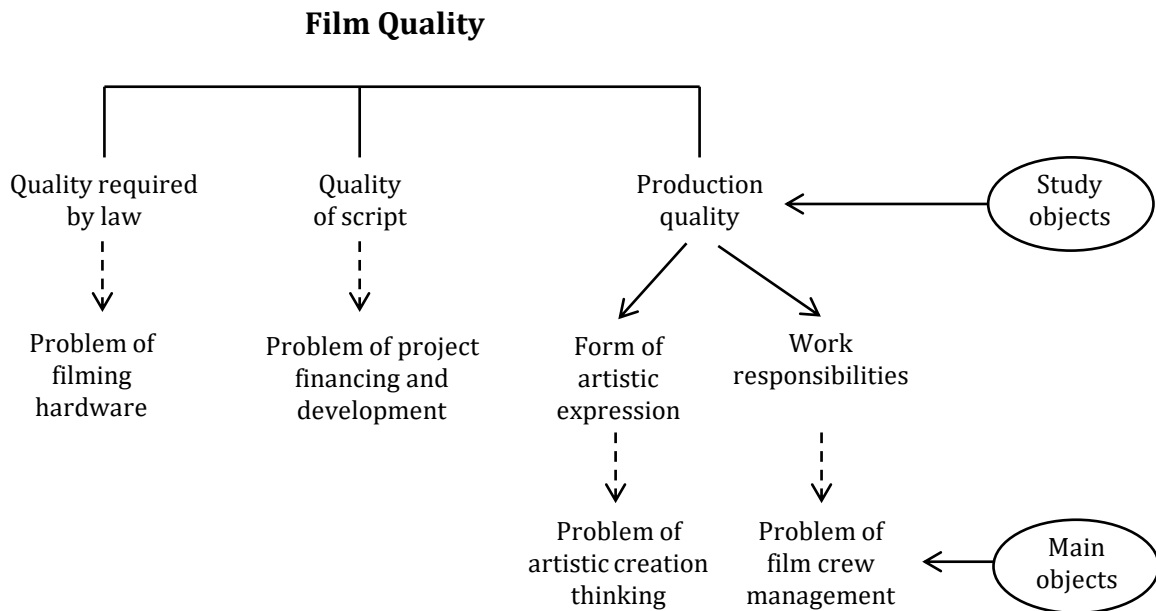


FIGURE 1  
Study Objects of Project Quality Management

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Project quality management plays a key role in the survival of a project in today's competitive social environment (Gvozdenovic, Miljanovic, Jegdic & Crnogorcic, 2008). The standards for project quality management are not the same internationally, but the ultimate goal, that is meeting or exceeding consumer expectations, is shared (Drob, 2013). The quality management of any project includes the quality policy, objectives and responsibilities so as to enable the project to meet the predetermined standards (Project Management Institute, 2013). Organizations are often unable to accurately define quality, because quality mostly depends on the subjective psychological feelings of users. The standard criterium, ISO 9000, defines quality as “a collection of characteristics of the products or services that can meet the regulations or potential needs” (Kerzner, 2013). The production quality management of film projects is to ensure film projects to meet the needs under the conditions of scope, time and cost, and achieve the goals of these projects (Gong, 2007). The balance between artistic quality and commercial quality should be paid more attention to in the quality control of film projects in order to achieve desirable operation of the projects (Cao, 2011).

As one of the non-verbal communication means of films, costumes play a great role. It can not only locate the identity background of the characters, but also highlight the disposition of the characters, create a unique atmosphere of the time, control the rhythm of

the whole film and promote the development of the film plot. The management of the costumes must be strictly controlled to ensure the relevance of the character image and the suitability of the occasion, etc. The final film under rational costume management can help the audience trigger emotion resonance and develop real rich aesthetic taste (Huang, 2011). Film costumes is an important part of fashion design. Different from general clothing, the design of film costumes should be subject to the specific time, environment, and plot and role identity of the drama. Film costume management is an indispensable part in film production. Rational costume management is closely correlated to the quality of the entire film (Liu, 1992).

Film makeup modeling, which can also be called character modeling, is a kind of artistic makeup modeling. Film makeup modeling is to shape the film characters according to the needs of the plot, and logical and appropriate makeup can greatly improve the quality of the film (Wang, 2017). Makeup artists are responsible for shaping the facial images of the characters. It should be said that the work of the makeup artist is also to create the film language, which is one of the main performances of the film art. Accurate makeup is a realistic consideration for makeup management. The failure in makeup management will directly lead to a decline in the quality of the film (Lin, 2010).

Performing art is inseparable from props and this requires the management and design of props to both strive to be accurate in geography and location, and correct in the background of the era. Based on the storyline, characters, environment and the actors' movements, the props of a film should help the actors to portray the image and psychological personalities, and create a specific atmosphere (Ouyang, 2008). The control over the setting-ups in the film is very important. Inappropriate setting-ups will lead to fake effects of the film. Sometimes, the setting-up does not match the current environment. Therefore, the setting-up in the film is a heavy and complicated task (Wu, 2002). Props and setting-ups are the cornerstone of film and television work and the basis of forming unique styles and modeling of the film (Zhang, 2013).

The scene is an indispensable part of film artistic creation. Its status and role are irreplaceable. As one of the essential elements of film art, it also relates to the artistic quality of film work. Although the advancement of science and technology is accelerating, the scene as the basic element is still a necessary element of film and a guarantee of quality (Wu, 2017). Putting up scenes is affected by many factors. The problems in putting up scenes are related to each aspect of the crew. Therefore, the control over the scenes is also an integral part in the film production management (Dai, 2010).

The object of film production management is to monitor the whole process of film production. The internal and external environment of film production should be taken into account and the work of various departments should be coordinated in order to achieve the purpose of improving the efficiency and quality of film production. Film production management includes life issues, outreach issues, on-site issues, co-ordination issues, finance issues, and vehicle issues, etc. Film production management plays a planning, commanding, and controlling role in the whole process of film production. The specialization degree of film production management personnel determines the quality of the entire film (Nie, 2013).

When it comes to the management of the actors and their performance ability, namely, whether they have received professional education, etc., should be specifically differentiated. The personality and characteristics of the actors and roles must be matched. In the management of the actors, the actors' shaping and grasping of the characters is the embodiment of their acting skills, also the demonstration of their profession training. The image and the morality and artistic cultivation of the actor are crucial to the management

in film creation (Xiao, 2001). Not all actors can succeed in performing. Excellent actors are likely well self-cultivated. Each successful actor must have his or her own characteristics and own charm to attract the audience. Excellent actors should develop their own understanding of the roles and should repeatedly simulate the psychological activities of the roles to perform according to the situation and strive to be the most natural, appropriate so as to ensure the quality of the film. This requires the management and selection of actors to be professional and rational (Gao, 2014).

## DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In this study, practical observations and in-depth interviews, as shown in Table 1, are applied to collect data for a qualitative research analysis.

**Practical Observations.** One of the authors (henceforth the observer) worked along with the film crews in six small-budget films and carried out careful observations of the quality issues of the crews to form a multi-case study based on replication logic. Multi-case studies are developed by exploring iterations of phenomenon in different environments to make conclusions more robust, rational, reliable and general (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

The use of an observational method is more appropriate for studies into the interpersonal factors in management and artistic creation, as well as the existence of disputes and issues that are not easily understood by people (Waddington, 1994). When observing and collecting data, the researcher usually has three roles: (1) as an observer participating; (2) as a participant observing; and (3) as a non-participating observer (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The roles of the observer in observing and researching process are thus as a participant observing and as a non-participating observer.

The observation by participants is not widely applied in the field of management science, while is more common in the field of art research. As a kind of action research methods, it refers to that the researcher personally goes to the specific practice unit with his own research questions, and personally engages in the management of relevant aspects, so as to obtain corresponding empirical data or field notes, and convert it into the text form. The observer thus served as the casting director in one of the six small-budget films, *Youth Hey Up* (2016). He was responsible for the recruitment of actors during the preparatory stage and the management of the actors during the filming. He also worked as the assistant production manager in the film, *Crazy Chef* (2016) and was responsible for the management of the entire crew from the preparation to the end of the entire process.

On the other hand, observations conducted by non-participants are not uncommon in qualitative research in management science and art. It refers to that the researcher personally goes deep into the specific institution with his own research questions, and experiences the whole process of management and artistic creation of others, with an aim to obtain corresponding empirical data or field notes and convert them into the text form. The observing author also worked as an actor in the following small-budget films *Kiss Kiss Da* (2017), *Mama's Taste* (2017), *I am a Good Therapist for Love* (2016), *The Goddess Encountered the Paparazzi* (2016). He personally observed and experienced the operation and performance of various management and artistic creation personnel in the crews of these films, as well as various inevitable implicit and explicit industry rules.

**In-depth Interviews.** The observer additionally conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with veterans of the production management teams of the nine small-budget films. The quality of the film crews exhibited hidden features, and the experienced crew members had an intuitive and visual feeling about such hidden features.

In-depth interviews encourage interviewees to share relevant events, their experience of successes and failures, and enable both interviewees and researchers to interact with each other and to better inquire into the researched questions (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). In-depth interviews in management science and art are widely used for qualitative studies. The observer conducted face-to-face, in-depth interviews with those who have years of experience in film production management and artistic creation in the production of small-budget films. Among the interviewees were a few authorities in the industry. The voice recorder was openly seen by the interviewees to record the entire interviews. The interviews were centered around the research questions based on semi-structured and open-ended questioning methods. In addition to recording the text content of the interviews, the observer carefully observed what and how the interviewees were acting and saying during the interview process, and performed on-the-spot recording or brain memory on the tone, facial expression, expressions through their eyes, and speech rhythm of the interviewees, so as to summarize deeper and more implicit implications with combining the text content.

TABLE 1  
Data Collection Methods

Object	Practical observation	In-depth interview
A	Film << Youth Hey Up >>	Mr. Zhou Yi (scene filmmaker, producer) Interview length: 69 minutes
B	Film << Crazy Chef >>	Mrs. Zhou Yulan (producer) Interview length: 69 minutes
C	Film << Kiss Kiss Da >>	Mr. Wu Weidong (coordination filmmaker, unit production manager) Interview length: 42 minutes
D	Film << Mama's Taste >>	Mr. Lei Qing (life scene filmmaker) Interview length: 61 minutes
E	Film << I am a Good Therapist for Love >>	Mr. Jin Shuang (scene filmmaker) Interview length: 43 minutes
F	Film << The Goddess Encountered the Paparazzi >>	Mr. Ma Yong (director) Interview length: 61 minutes
G	N.A.	Mr. Ma Yi (unit production manager) Interview length: 61 minutes
H	N.A.	Mr. Zhou Dayan (unit production manager) Interview length: 90 minutes
I	N.A.	Mr. Yuan Ailin (planner) Interview length: 45 minutes

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We explore quality control issues in the filming process of small-budget films in six perspectives: costumes, makeups, props and set-ups, scenes, production, and actors.

### The Narrative Analysis

#### *Costumes*

When viewing the film, what the audience first notices is the costumes of the actors, and the suitability of the costumes has an impact on the quality of the film. The costumes of any film is often in the total control of the film's costume designers. Major costume issues are: improper size, unsuitable style, inconsistency with the script, inadequate hygiene management of the costumes, and poor quality of costumes.

**Improper Size.** Except modern urban plays in which the costumes can be replaced by the actors' own clothing, other film genres need the costume designers to purchase the costumes or design the necessary clothing themselves. The purchase of costumes involves many actors. In addition to the leading and supporting roles, sometimes special actors and even extras are also involved. The costume crew in small-budget films is usually composed of only two or three people. They collect clothing size information first, which can be obtained through measuring the actors on the spot or from the prepared sizes reported previously by the actors. The costume crew then purchases or makes costumes according to the size information. The costume designers have to be careful. When purchasing costumes, the actors' peers are the best choice. The costume designers of most small-budget film crew are college students or less experienced designers. Tailor-made costumes inevitably lead to mistakes caused by lack of skills. It is difficult for some special costumes to achieve the expected standard of clothing styles, and the costume designers do make some finished costumes that fail to reach the expectation.

**Unsuitable Style.** The style problems mostly occur in the communication between the director and the costumer. The style is expressive, and each person has his or her own different understanding of the same style or role. Hence, there are inevitable differences of opinions in the process of communication. In addition, similar to the size issue, the costumer must be careful about the styles when purchasing costumes, and it is not pleasing when dealing with the costume style that requires more special requirements.

**Inconsistency with the Filming.** The costume designers should clean or adjust the state of costumes based on the filming schedule and completely mastering the script. For example, the cleanliness of the same set of costume is different on the scene of the coal kiln on the previous day and on the scene of a banquet on the next day. If the costume designer is inattentive in the process or lacks understanding of the script, it is very likely to cause differences in the former and latter frames.

**Poor Sanitation and Hygiene.** During the filming process, the costumes go through the same filming process with the actors, such as being splashed, falling, etc. If a set of costumes is used frequently in the film and is not cleaned due to limited time, then the costume will emit an odor, which will affect the beauty of the frame as well as the performance state of the actors. Therefore, as far as this case happens, the ability of the costumer to meet and handle the emergency is presented.

**Poor Quality.** Costumes of poor quality will affect the effects on the mirror and have a shorter lifespan. Sometimes it is difficult to find the same if the costume is damaged. Sometimes the costume designers cannot find high-quality costumes, and such circumstances are inevitable. However, it should not be overlooked whether the costume designer has the possibility of encroaching on funds in the process.

## ***Makeups***

In the quality management process of small-budget film production, makeup is relatively simple compared to costumes. In many cases, these two departments are combined to work together. In terms of quality control, the problems existing in these two departments share similarities.

**Poor Quality Cosmetics.** Poor quality of the cosmetics will cause the actors' skin color to unappealing, as well as harm the actor's skin, causing allergies and itching, which interfere with the performance of the actors. The makeup artists know about the quality of the cosmetics better. There are only two possible causes of bad cosmetics. First, the crew approves the use of an inferior cosmetic in order to save money. However, the possibility of this is small because the cost of cosmetics is not that large. Secondly, the makeup artist wants to keep the remaining payment for him or herself by reducing the costs of cosmetics. All members in the crew are not an expert on cosmetics except the makeup artists.

**Unsuitable for the Role.** The makeup does not match the style of the role. There is a gap between the makeup and the director's positioning of the role. Such a situation results from the makeup artist's incompetence. When the makeup artist and the director have different understanding of the role, the makeup artist should communicate with the director.

**Too Rough Makeup.** The makeup is too rough, which directly affects the beauty of the frames, resulting in unaesthetic pictures. There are two sources of rough makeup, namely, the makeup artist's incompetence and ill attitude toward work.

**Inconsistency with the Filming.** There are differences in makeup before and after filming. This causes inconsistencies in the status of the characters, which is also equivalent to wearing a gang. For example, the makeup of a role just getting up in the room in the morning is obviously distinct from that of the role coming out of the forest. That the makeup in two frames is opposite or the makeup is unacceptable can be explained as the occurrence of previous costume problems. Carelessness, ill attitude toward work and inadequate understanding of the script and the production plan by the makeup artist give rise to such results.

## ***Props and set-ups***

Props and set-ups in small-budget films are usually provided by one department. Props are items used by the actors during their performance, while set-ups are the arrangement of the whole filming location. The props and the set-ups are all designed to bring the audience into a real story situation. If these two aspects are not in place, the audience cannot be brought into the story. The following problems may occur in the process.

**Mismatches.** First, props or set-ups are not suitable to meet the director's requirements of the style and gradation. This can be caused by the ill work attitude of the property manager and the art director, as well as insufficient communication between themselves and with the director.

**Look Too Fake.** Fake-looking props or set-ups also can be a result of ill work attitude. Mostly, the professional competence of the art director affects such a situation. Many props, especially the set-ups need the property manager and the art director to custom make them, which requires competitive craftsmanship and skills. Sometimes, it is impossible to find perfectly suitable props and set-ups as they are difficult to be made. Under



such conditions, close-up of the props will expose them to be too artificial to the audience at a glance.

**Poor Quality.** Poor quality of props or set-ups are unaesthetic in the frame and also easy to be damaged during the shooting process. It is very troublesome to restore them after the damage. This poses a big threat to the quality of the film. The property manager and the art director know about the quality of the props and set-ups better. Such concerns are brought about by insufficient funding of the crew and difficulties in finding the props or set-ups. However, the biggest factor leading to these concerns is that the property manager and the art director want to keep the unused budget for themselves with reduced costs on props and set-ups.

**Inconsistency with the Filming.** Inconsistent props or set-ups in two frames can result from the property manager's and the art director's ill attitude toward the work and their inadequate understanding of the script, similar to the cases of costumes and makeups. In addition to the property manager and the art director, there are script girls in charge of checking and storing the props and set-ups and recording the relevant issues. These girls' negligence may contribute to the errors.

## *Scenes*

Usually, the scenes in small-budget films are relatively concentrated, rarely involved with large and frequent transitions. It is due to this scene constraint that the quality of small-budget films is limited to a certain extent. Effective quality control on the scenes under such constraint can also keep the quality of the films from becoming worse, which is also an important part of the overall quality control. The following problems should be avoided in the process.

**Unsuitable Scenes.** Having an unsuitable scene for the film means that the scene that the artist finds does not meet the requirements of the play. In this case, the artist is required to study the script again, or communicate with the director again. In addition to these two cases, that the artist is not suitable for this position can account for the unsuitable scene.

**Ineffective Scenes.** The scene may meet the requirements of the script and the plot, and may also conform to the logic of the story development. Nonetheless, it cannot bring a stunning visual experience to the audience. In other words, the film cannot yield a high degree of viewing evaluation by the audience. This is very common in all kinds of small-budget films, and it is the core difference between small-budget films and blockbusters. Such ineffective scenes are likely a result of the artists' work competence and work attitude. A competent artist has enough work experience to be able to offer better quality scenes. Artists with a good work attitude and an attentive trait will have a strong sense of responsibility and will repeatedly research and compare until he or she is satisfied with the scenes.

In addition to the competency and work attitude of the artist, ineffective scenes are often a result of limited time and budget. Some scenes can be recommended by an acquaintance, and hence are practically free. Some individuals or units also provide their scenes for the film crew to promote themselves, and thereby the film crew can reduce the costs of the scenes, or even get an advertising revenue. However, in most cases, time and budget remain one of the biggest problems in small-budget films. The crew of small-budget films cannot spend a lot of time and a large amount of money on changing the scenes like that of a blockbuster. For example, in the film *Red Cliff*, it took three days to complete the empty shot with the length of only 5 seconds. The empty shot was about grassland, on which the crew had stayed for three days with the camera propped on the

grassland to wait for the optimal skylight in that moment. With such a skylight, the whole scene was perfect for the director.

**Limited Filming Time.** The scene owner sometimes limits the filming time of the crew, or intervenes in the daily filming time, which may mess up the whole crew's filming rhythm. As a result, the best artistic effect cannot be guaranteed. This problem could have been ameliorated if the outreach producer was adequately competence to work out a desirable agreement with the scene owner. Furthermore, the rigid schedule of the crew can be a result of the poor overall arrangement of the crew.

**Limited Filming Conditions.** The scene owner may impose certain restrictions during the filming process. For example, some areas of the scene cannot be photographed. Perhaps, a large number of people or equipment cannot enter some areas; and loud sounds or strong lights cannot appear in some areas. All of these put restrictions on the filming, thus affecting the final frame quality. In addition to the objective factors of the "limited filming time" and the negotiation skills of the outreach producer, the coordination between the crew and the scene owner on the filming site also plays an important role, which depends on the coordination competence of the production director and the producer on the scene.

### ***Production***

Among the many factors affecting the production management quality of small-budget films, the influence of production is the most indirect. The problems and shortcomings in production will decrease the enthusiasm of the overall team. That most people are in a negative state must deeply affect the quality of production. The negative state is a result of the following.

**Poor Living Conditions.** The most basic requirement about accommodation is cleanliness and the bathing is convenient. On this basis, pleasing hotel services and environment can increase the comfort. It shall be ensured that everyone has enough food to eat and the food quality also reaches the corresponding standard. The standard price of each meal ranges from CNY15 to 20 per meal, and the standard price of breakfast shall range from CNY10 to 15. Rich dishes increase the comfort. In short, the accommodation is fundamental, and the producer should try to be considerate in this regard, because thoughtlessness will affect the fundamentals of the filming work. In addition, the producer should pay more attention to the crew and give "humanistic care" to the members, such as providing everyone an additional meal if the filming continues to enter into the late night. If the weather is too cold or too hot, the crew should consider measures to protect the members from the cold or the heat, and pay more attention to those who are sick or injured. Otherwise, if someone develops negative emotions toward the work, this negative emotion spreads into the team, because life issues involve the interests of all.

**External Communication Problems.** Outreach negotiations of scenes are aimed to reach the agreement fast with a high success rate. This will make the overall shooting plan more proactive, because a large number of comprehensive factors should be taken into the consideration of developing daily shooting plans. Efficiency in the setting up of the scenes will help make a more rational shooting plan.

**Site Problems.** The on-the-scene producer should grasp the rhythm of dining and transition according to the shooting plan of the day. Unlike the regular enterprises or project teams that always determine the meal time in advance, the meal time of the film crew is based on the shooting progress. In addition, reasonable rhythm arrangement can save time and expenses, but also effectively mobilize everyone's enthusiasm, so that all can devote themselves into the shooting with the best state. Mobilization of staff is also

very important, which is especially significant for the actors. Keeping the actors waiting with wearing makeup in the studio, but not entering the filming will lead to a poor state of the actors after long-term physical exertion. When the crew arrives at the shooting scene, the on-the-scene producer must control the rhythm from the preparation of all departments to the shooting so as to avoid being overwhelmed by emergency. Emergency on the scene mainly occurs in the intense shooting. Unpredictable people or events suddenly getting involved in the shooting will force the filming to pause or postpone. The on-the-scene producer should coordinate the two aspects of work at the same time. On one hand, the on-the-scene producer should try their utmost to ensure the filming to continue. If the filming stops, losses in all aspects can be hard to estimated. On the other hand, the parties involved in the emergency should be kept out of the shooting scene to facilitate communication and coordination. At this time, the outreach producers should also carry out their duties, because the outreach producers are mostly locals and their communication shall be more convenient and encouraging. All departments should make every effort to ensure the shooting not to be interrupted.

**Coordination Problems.** Reasonable and integrated arrangement can make the overall shooting smoother and more convenient. The daily integrated planning can be made as soon as possible so as to enable all departments to prepare for the next day's work and rest early to ensure adequate energy for the next day's work.

**Financial Problems.** The monetary compensation of the crew members is usually paid in phases, which is common in most films. Overdue salary causes all staff to feel depressed, which is the same as submitting an expense account without getting speedy reimbursement. When the process of submitting an expense account is completed, the actual reimbursement can also be dragged. The former affects everyone's feeling, while the latter influences the one who paid in advance. The actual work is affected by the emotional atmospheres, because some departments are not able to carry out the work due to no financial support. Therefore, the financial staff should be cautious on these two issues.

**Motorcade Problems.** The drivers serving the crew usually have numerous social habits, and they are unlike professional performers or managers who have their own ideals, careers, beliefs and other factors to support their work, and possess a certain amount of education. In contrast, most drivers are less-educated and do not have permanent jobs. They have neither vision nor belief in the film industry. What they want is to spend the least amount of time to complete daily work with the least amount of energy. When the work that can be done at one time is divided into multiple pieces, the drivers are dissatisfied and have ill emotion. Sometimes when they drive the crew, some of the crew members will request to stop at places in the name of having no prior agreement. When the shooting time of the crew lasts too long, the drivers will be discontent if they have no assignment but require to wait on the scene. Of course, not all drivers of the crews act like this, but there were such drivers in the six small-budget films in this study. Interviews with the film crew members has illustrated that such people are common.

## ***Actors***

Contrary to the production, the actor has the most direct influence in the quality control of small-budget film projects. The audience first comes into contact with the actors in the play. Most viewers even choose to see a film based on the main or the only one actor of the cast. Usually, A-listers or big names rarely participate in small-budget films. Putting the actor's popularity factor set aside, the actor's influence on production quality is relatively straightforward in terms of management.

**Poor Performance.** The actors may have poor performance because they lack sufficient acting skills in creating or portraying characters. Usually, this results from that the actors have no professional learning experience in colleges or universities, and lack theory or practice. It is difficult for them to create a true and natural character image. There is also a big difference between the performance styles of the actors and the styles of the characters in the play. For example, if Arnold Schwarzenegger were invited to play the role of Jack in Titanic, the character he performed in the film would not be believable by the audience although his professional competence is unquestionable. Some actors may have excellent professional competence and are able to play many types of roles, but if their understanding of the characters is different from that of the directors and the writers, it is also impossible to interpret the characters perfectly.

**Unsuitable Physical Appearance.** The images of the actors may not be suitable for the characters. That is, there is a gap between the appearances and the physiques of the actors and those of the characters in the play, which is not a result of unfit performance style. For example, if Chow Yun-fat was invited to act as the former Chinese president Deng Xiaoping, the desired effect on the screen would not be achieved because of the great difference in their appearances.

**Unattractive Appearance.** The actors may have unattractive appearances. Good-looking actors better fulfill the aesthetic needs of the audience, which is determined by the characteristics of people's aesthetic emotion tendency. Generally, appearance includes facial appearance, figure and temperament. But here the appearance here mainly refers to facial appearance. The actor's so-called "score in appearance" depends on how good-looking the actor is and his or her charisma. The main measure of the female actor is whether she is beautiful and the main measure of the male actor is whether he has charisma. Stars like Tom Cruise and Sun Honglei are all outstanding actors with charisma. Although Sun Honglei is not the best-looking actor, he is widely called "yan wang" (meaning having the highest score in appearance) by the audience because of his charisma. Of course, some of the actors are considered "handsome young boys" for their good-look appearances

**Poor Work Ethics.** An actor's work ethics is an important criterion when selecting an actor. An actor with ethical issues may bring great trouble to the filming work of the crew, causing some challenges and loss to the quality of the film due to the negative effects on the shooting work and the performance of the actors themselves. These actors usually have some experience in shooting performances, but do not reach a certain level. Usually they are self-righteous and consider themselves to be superior. They are eager to get some distinctive respect and treatment in the crew. Naturally, they always look down upon others. To satisfy their desire and vanity, the crew has to pay more manpower and material resources to accommodate them. When the crew is dissatisfied with a shot, the crew cannot arbitrarily give critiques. If the discipline problems are serious, such actors are often late for shooting and let the whole crew wait. Sometimes, they go out of the shooting without asking for leave. Drinking, playing cards, and others lead to dark circles and poor performance on the next day, which results in poor shooting effects or unusable shots. The private life of the actors may also cause interference to the overall shooting of the crew, and even seriously hinder the shooting. Such incidents happen occasionally, which results in bad performance in shooting.

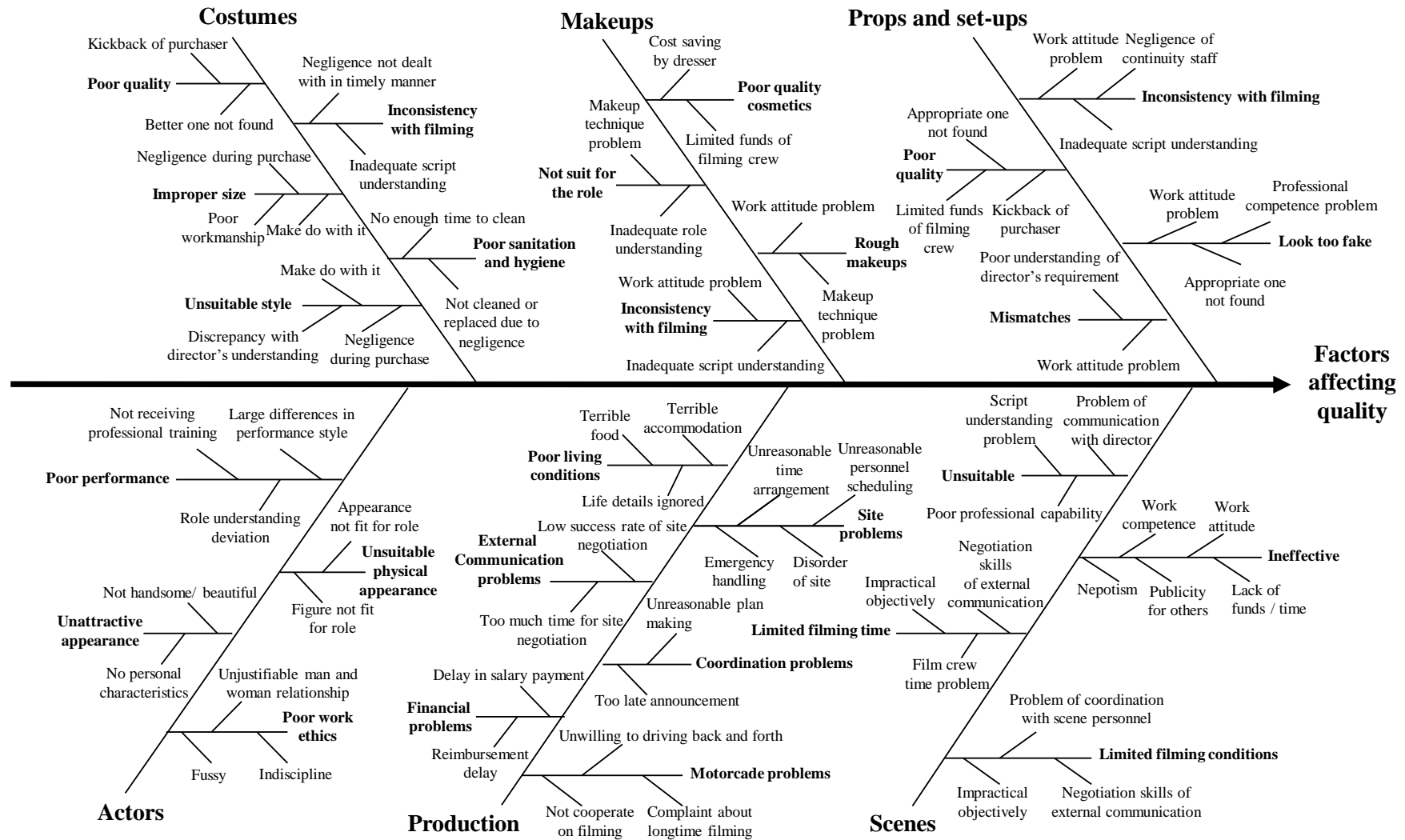


FIGURE 2

Factors Affecting Filming Quality of Small-budget Films

## **The Fishbone Diagram**

From the narrative analysis of the production quality control in small-budget films, a fishbone diagram (Figure 2) is used to systematically summarize the causes influencing the quality. The diagram can help any managerial personnel think and reflect on the quality issues so as to develop corresponding measures to more effectively control on the quality as follows.

The film quality management factors that influence the quality of small-budget film production are in six main aspects (primary level): costumes, makeups, props and setting-ups, scenes, production and actors. The impact of actors on the film quality is divided into four aspects (secondary level): poor performance, unsuitable physical appearance, unattractive appearance, and poor work ethics. The impact caused by poor work ethics is divided into three aspects (tertiary level): unjustifiable man and woman relationship, fussiness, indiscipline. Therefore, the root causes of the film quality problems can be presented. Conversely, when the kickback of purchasers (tertiary level) occurs to the costumes in the film crew, there may be poor quality of actors' clothing (secondary level). Accordingly, the quality of the film may be influenced by the costumes (primary level).

This study can thus help small-budget film producers to promptly resolve the film quality problems so as to avoid the quality loss and to prevent similar situations. The production management team can also take corresponding measures in advance to ensure the quality of the film.

## **CONCLUSION**

The quality control of the production process of small-budget films is divided into the control on the means of artistic expression and the control on management. The control on management is the focus in this study. In terms of quality, management control is mainly concentrated in six aspects: costumes, makeup, props and set-ups, scenes, production and actors. Among them, costumes, makeup, props and set-ups are specifically presented in the movie frames. Their quality directly affects the sense of reality of the plot and the perfection of the movies. Moreover, the quality of these three aspects is artificially controllable. Although the scenes are also presented in the frame, the evaluation criteria of them are abstract, and sometimes the quality of the scenes is inconsistent and uncontrollable given available manpower. The work of the production department is not directly reflected in the frame, but the quality of the production directly influencing the emotions of each individual and the production conditions of the crew, and indirectly affects the quality of the film. The influence of the actors on the quality of the film is the greatest, because the main focus of the film is the performance of the actors. The control over production quality is more about the work attitude and moral quality of the staff. If everyone only thinks about dredging for money or work negatively, the quality of the film is bound to come down. As for the actors, the control of production quality involves many complicated factors which include the actors' own behavior, the managers' choice and improper implementation. However, the performance of the actors is much important and is the most direct one among the involved factors.

## REFERENCES

- Cao, L. Q. (2011). *Research on application of project management in video recording of movie & television* (Unpublished master's thesis). Tianjin University, Tianjin, China.
- Crabtree, B. F., & Miller, W. L. (Eds.) (1999). *Doing qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Dai, D. G. (2010). Scenes: A method of quantitative analysis of film narrative. *Film Art*, 55(3), 110-115.
- Drob, C. (2013). Overview about project quality management. *Studies and Scientific Researches. Economics Edition*, 18, 231-236.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25-32.
- Gao, J. (2014). On the performing arts of film and television actors. *Brand*, 7(12), 106.
- Gong, J. C. (2007). *Project management of film and television production*. Shijiazhuang, China: Hebei Education Press.
- Gvozdenovic, T., Miljanovic, M., Jegdic, A., & Crnogoric, Z. (2008). Bodies of knowledge in project management and project quality management. *International Journal for Quality research*, 2(1), 69-76.
- Huang, Y. B. (2011). Analysis of the role of costume in films: A case study of the film in the mood for love. *Movie Literature*, 54(13), 144-145.
- Kerzner, H. (2013). *Project management: A systems approach to planning, Scheduling and controlling, 11th edition*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Lei, L. (2011) *Studies on the development of small-budget films in China* (Unpublished master's thesis). Shaanxi Normal University, Xi'an, China.
- Lin, Y. P. (2010). A study into the makeup in film and television works. *Music Life*, 54(1), 58-59.
- Liu, Y. (2012). Application of time management theory on film production: A case study of "correspondence teacher." *Journal of Beijing Film Academy*, 29(2), 99-104.
- Liu, Y. F. (1992). Discussion on the film and television costume. *Art & Design*, 35(2), 9-11.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Nie, H. T. (2013). Reflections on the management of film and television works production. *Journal of Jilin Radio and TV University*, 26(2), 127-128.
- Nie, W., & Du, L. (2017). The analysis of the creative power of domestic small and medium-budget movies produced in recent years. *Journal of Zhejiang University of Media and Communications*, 24(1), 72-81,165.
- Ouyang, D. (2008). A study into the important role of props in film and television arts. *Art*, 58(2), 88.
- Project Management Institute. (2013). *A guide to the project management body of knowledge* (5th ed.). Newton Square, PA: Project Management Institute, Inc.
- Waddington, D. (1994). Participant observation. In C. Cassell., & G. Symon (Eds.), *Qualitative methods in organizational research: A practical guide*. London, UK: Sage.
- Wang, B. F. (2017). Analysis of the application of makeup in film and television plays. *Survey of Education*, 6(17), 140-141.
- Wu, X. (2017). Analysis of the basic elements of scene design of film and television art. *West China Broadcasting TV*, 38(21), 116.
- Wu, Y. T. (2002). A study into the role of props in film and television art space. *Culture Spacetime*, 1(4), 73-74.
- Xiao, J. (2001). On the cultural literacy and basic skills training of film and television actors. *China Television* 20(8), 55-57.

- Zhang, J. Y. (2013). *Information convey from scene and property in film and television works* (Unpublished master's thesis). Shenyang Aerospace University, Shenyang, China.
- Zhou, C. (2010). *The study of TV dramas production management based on total quality management* (Unpublished master's thesis). Hunan University, Changsha, China.