

# Chinese Aesthetics in Film and Television: A Case Study of Zhang Yimou and Jia Zhangke's Movies

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**Abstract.** Chinese films have undergone six generations of changes, and many popular works have made Chinese films go abroad and go global. In particular, the fifth generation of directors who shouldered the banner of China's contemporary film and the "new generation" of the sixth generation of directors in the film art reached the peak and made great contributions to the development of Chinese film. Due to the different circumstances of the times, the film aesthetics of the fifth and sixth generation directors in the works of art are very different. This article takes the fifth-generation director Zhang Yimou and the sixth-generation director Jia Zhangke as an example, combining the characteristics of the times, discussing the differences between the two directors in the narrative style, artistic image and film theme, analyzing the film and television aesthetics of the two directors, and expecting the future. The development and trend of China's film and television industry will give certain enlightenment.

**Keywords:** Film and television; Aesthetics; Zhang Yimou; Jia Zhangke; Film style; Aesthetic performance.

## 1. Introduction

With the official appearance of the first film "Dingjun Mountain", Chinese film has experienced a century of development since 1905. In this period of more than a century of history, a group of talented film directors have emerged. It is because of their firm belief and unremitting efforts in obsessing with art that the development of Chinese film Great progress has been made; it is also because of their immortal contribution that they have been able to leave a splendid sum in the history of Chinese film development.

The fifth-generation film director in China refers to the director group of the 1982 graduates of the Beijing Film Academy. Its main members are Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, Wu Ziniu, Tian Zhuangzhuang, etc., as an unprecedented and even special film group. Their works were at that time. The effect of vibrating feedback is generated. The fifth generation of films represented by the above-mentioned directors have demonstrated different aesthetic tensions, which have brought Chinese films to the market and the world, and injected a fresh blood into the artistic atmosphere of Chinese films. At the same time, they have also strongly promoted The world's cognition of Chinese cinema has brought Chinese films into line with world cinema; making full use of the international influence of the film [1-2].

The sixth generation of directors refers to a group of young directors who entered the historical stage in the 1980s and 1990s. Most of them were born in the 1960s. They graduated from the Beijing Film Academy and the Central Academy of Drama. The main representatives are Jia Zhangke and Wang Xiaoshuai, Zhang Yuan, Yan and so on. The sixth generation of film and television works represented by the above-mentioned directors are mostly outside the system, trying to show the survival status of the social marginal groups in the period of social development and change through the real restoration of social life. Its aesthetic style reflects the strong color of "documentary aesthetics" and "postmodernism", but also highlights the strong humanistic sentiment. Documentary aesthetics fills a gap in the history of Chinese film development, forming a new cultural landscape of visual media aesthetics.

## **2. Zhang Yimou's Aesthetic Expressions of Film and Television Works**

As the fifth-generation director, Zhang Yimou started from the award of "Red Sorghum" and created one myth in the world of light and shadow. His unremitting artistic exploration opened the door to the world art palace for domestic films. Zhang Yimou has gone beyond the simple film category and has become a striking cultural landscape in contemporary times.

### **2.1 The use of Color with Great Performance Tension**

In all colors, Zhang Yimou prefers red. For this, he once explained: "This is related to the fact that I am from Shaanxi. The soil in Shaanxi is red, and the folks in Shaanxi are very good. There are many things in Shaanxi and Shanxi, Shaanxi and Shanxi. The red color will be used. Their custom affects me, giving me a preference for red color, and then I will show this red color in turn." The film "Red Sorghum" sings a song of life, the whole film uses the flamboyant red tribute to the freedom and warmth of life. In addition to passing the filter to make the color of the work partial to the infrared, sometimes it uses exaggerated techniques to perform. For example, when the nine children are shot down, the blood red on the screen appears. Sorghum, bloody red sun, bloody red sky, they merge into a red trend, permeating the world.

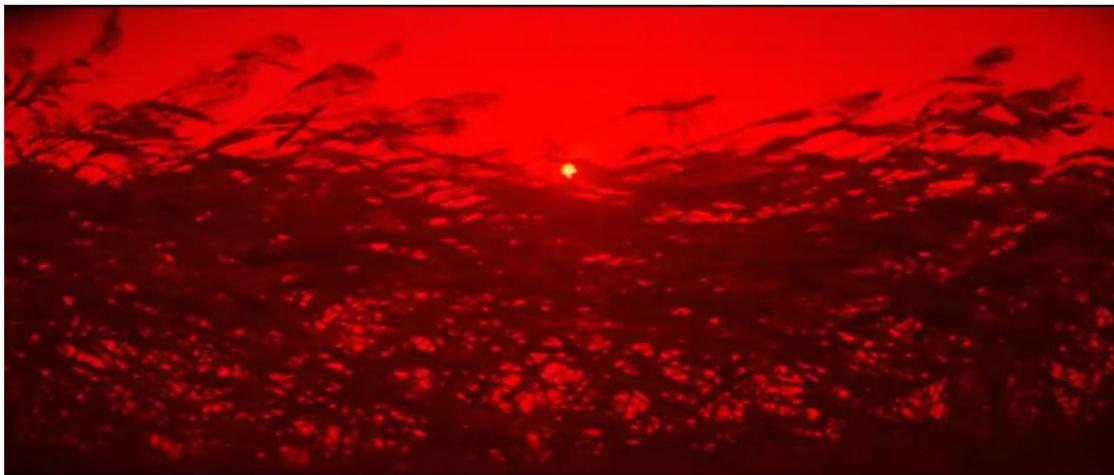


Fig. 1 End of the film "Red Sorghum"

The film "Hero", like the passage of Ruyue and Feixue in populus euphoric forest fight, the director used an exaggerated red to show the hatred between them and the love and hate of the inner world. In the duel, Feixue spurs in Ruyue, when it turns into a blood red in the eyes of Ruyue, the fire-like red color of the golden populus ekphratic forest and the blue sky, showing the fierce fighting between them and Ruyue the pain inside the heart after the stab. This color processing not only vividly shows the inner feelings of the characters in the play, but also gives the viewers a strong appeal, but also increases the entertainment of the film. Color has become one of the important methods of Zhang Yimou's film. Zhang Yimou is using the use of color to sway the soul strings of the audience [3]. His film "exhibits the psychological power of color, which causes the tremor of the spirit."

In "Yellow Land", Zhang Yimou served as a photographer. The film was dominated by warm and calm earthy yellow, intertwined with other colors, forming a full and dignified harmonious pedigree to highlight the warmth of motherhood in the barren land. Give strength and hope. Or enthusiastic, or fresh and beautiful, or deep and handsome, or simple and plain, and the tension of this color, the impact of visual effects from " Raise The Red Lantern " to " Curse of the Golden Flower " has been deducted to the extreme.



Fig. 2 Zhang Yimou film excerpt

## 2.2 Fascinating Background Music Selection

The music was fully demonstrated in Zhang Yimou's essays. In "Red Sorghum", "Bacchus" and "Girl, just go ahead" all use the tones of folk songs to express the straightforward and pungent national character of the tough guys and brave women in the high places. "Raise The Red Lantern" with the rhyme of the change of the fate of Lian, which shows that people's right to speak has been deprived and can only be expressed in metaphorical non-verbal ways. "Ju Dou" mourns the sorrowful Xiaoyin and the folk songs that are repeatedly sung, all of which produce emotional effects that are difficult to express. Even if the documentary film like "The Story of Qiu Ju" goes out, every time Qiuju goes out to complain, there is a saying that "Wow wow--", because of the Qin cavity, it is no longer a single tablet, it is very sacred and discouraged. The scene of "Heroes" fights is integrated into the aria and singer of Peking Opera. The sound comes from far away and echoes in the empty mountains and valleys, which adds traditional charm and poetry to the martial arts. Music played a role in the expression of emotions in Zhang Yimou's films [4].

## 2.3 Actor Role Positioning Accuracy

"Zhang Yimou's Girl" is the overall title of the female character chosen by Zhang Yimou's director. It turns out that the actress of Zhang Yimou's work chooses to add a lot to the film, and "Zhang Yimou's Girl" has made Zhang Yimou. Zhang Yimou himself said that the actress must be beautiful. When he chose the actor, he paid great attention to his external conditions. The Dong Li, Zhang Ziyi and Dong Jie, which he started, can be described as natural beauty. However, when Zhang Yimou chose a role, he also paid attention to the role of the actor and fully explored the original ecological performance of the actor. For example, in "The Story of Qiu Ju", the director not only used the sneak shot technique, but also chose to use the role of the local peasant in the selection of the cast, among which the younger sister of Qiuju was a middle school student there. Zhang Yimou not only let them speak on the screen, but also let them play some important figures in the drama. This is indeed an artistic breakthrough. In "The Love of the Hawthorn Tree" director Zhang Yimou seems to be interested in returning to the long-lost innocence and the "original" love, the overall rhythm of the story is very calm and soothing, choose Zhou Dongyu who was under 18 years old. In the quiet autumn, with a full of free and easy and childish character positioning, record the love of this young man, in a plain narrative of a beautiful past.



Fig. 3 " The Love of the Hawthorn Tree "

### 3. Jia Zhangke's Aesthetics of Film and Television Works

The film of the sixth-generation director Jia Zhangke won the international award again and again with his unique artistic charm. He became the representative of the sixth generation of directors. His films " Pickpocket", " Plaisirs Inconnus ", "The Platform" and "The World" are all based on the bottom of the small people, showing their living conditions in a real picture that resembles life itself. His film aesthetics differs from the fifth-generation director's pursuit of gorgeous metaphors. He pursues the restoration of life phenomena and puts some real life hidden by ideology and mass fashion, especially the real life of small people in marginalized state. It is presented in a whitewashed manner, giving the audience an unfamiliar and shocking artistic effect.

#### 3.1 Struggling in the Crack: Historical Process and Irony of the Times

Narrative ethics refers to the discourse morality and writing position of the artistic text itself. The narrative ethics of Jia Zhangke's film refuses to make too rational, simplified, and single-valued sociological judgments on the world; more emphasis on the exploration of those vague, ambiguous, complex, and ambiguous areas of existence, "the coat of social reality" Underneath, there is another reality hidden. It is a potential existence and a reality that has not yet entered the public consciousness. One of the writer's missions is to explore and discover this reality." Based on this, Jia Zhangke magnified the individual experience and spiritual journey in the cracks that were ignored or abandoned by the mainstream ideological group [5].

"The Platform" of the "Hometown Trilogy" has an epic style. The film's time background is from 1979 to 1989, and this decade is a period of earth-shaking changes in China. The weightlifting of the film uses the popular things at the time to describe the social process of the Chinese land, from bell-bottoms, perm, old-fashioned tape recorders, songs by Deng Lijun, Su Rui, Zhang Di, Luo Dayou, the film "Wanderer", "Garrison Death Squad"... The popular things in the metropolis are flooding into the small cities of the mainland. In the popular songs, "the melody of music reflects the lonely town, creating endless embarrassment, which is conveyed to the audience and evokes their memories of the past, so this one Resonant youth sentimentality makes "The Platform" a spiritual autobiography of a generation of young people and historical memory.

#### 3.2 The Edge of the Edge: The Civilian Perspective and Compassion

The first part of the "Hometown Trilogy" is "Pickpocket". "Pickpocket" tells the quest and loss of the three emotions of the thief Xiaowu. Xiaowu is a city edger who goes from rural to urban areas by stealing. He wears big black-rimmed glasses and a large suit that is not fit. He wanders all day in the city of Fuyang. At the beginning, he portrayed the hero's unrelenting spirit. The protagonists in Jia Zhangke's films include thieves who wandered in the streets of the county, third-rate actor in the

county cultural and art troupe, unemployed young people who are idle and idle, wild models who walk around, migrant workers who have left their hometown, security guards in the world park, and young dance halls. and many more. They don't have a fixed place to live, they live like a duckweed, their love is often vulnerable, they rarely feel the love from their families, their friendship is fermented by factors such as money and social status. They will eventually disappear; they will endure the white eyes and contempt of others, and sometimes they will be forced to sell their bodies for their livelihood; they have neither great ideals nor enthusiasm, they just hope that they will continue to build themselves. In the process of value, get a sense of social identity and belonging.

The film "The World" is the first attempt by Jia Zhangke to focus on the transition from an underdeveloped Chinese township to a metropolis in the context of industrialization. This is a movie featuring migrant workers who come to work in cities. It vividly reflects the real situation of a group of migrant workers who have left their hometowns and are working in Beijing in the context of industrialization. The film "World" sets the background of the story in Beijing World Park, where the world's famous miniature landscapes are gathered [6], from the Eiffel Tower to the Big Ben, from the Leaning Tower of Pisa to the Taj Mahal." The brilliance and prosperity of the Chinese people are designed to allow Chinese people who are unable to enter and exit the country at that time to "go out of Beijing and travel the world." Such intentions undoubtedly reflect the hope of the Chinese community at that time. Accepting and eager to join the world system; similar wishes also appear in Cheng Taisheng and others: this group of migrant workers left the poor and poor hometown and flocked to the bustling metropolis like Beijing, work and life. In the "World Park", which is like the "Peach Blossom Island", it is extremely eager to be accepted by this city. However, in this hypocritical world, the illusory light scattered everywhere shrouds every person in it, making them completely in the maritime lip building built on the illusion of self, which will surely end their end. A tragic result that is not accepted by the real world.



Fig. 4 "The World"

### 3.3 Lost and Looking for: Who can “be Free”

The young people on the edge of the society reflected in Jia Zhangke's works, in essence, are actually a group of lonely lost wanderers; after encountering different life encounters, they are forced to lose their previous insistence. The spiritual paradise, when we have to face the cruel reality that the old world has collapsed and the new world has not yet been established, even they themselves can't say what tomorrow will be, and where are the future hopes? The confusion, the sorrow, the lost embarrassment began to search, they are eager to find the beauty that belongs to them, and in the process of constantly searching for the diagnosis of the meaning of life itself.

Similar to "Pickpocket", the protagonist in "Ash Is Purest White" is as always in a morally ambiguous zone, or even a criminal. After he was released from prison, he first went to the Three Gorges reservoir area to find Guo Bin, who was investing in and managing the hydropower station here. He was prepared to make a comeback. After being refused to meet, he intended to go to Xinjiang

to make a living and finally returned to his hometown Datong. In the process, she was stolen by the passers-by of the passers-by, and the wife who went to Guangdong to work in Guangdong for one year did not return to the motorbike driver. She was claimed to be a tourist developer. The train master of the commissary shop was cheating all the way to Xinjiang... After a series of "human comedies", she also found her own way of making a living and began to touch all the middle-aged greasy men who looked rich in the hotel. Copyright is owned by the author, please contact the author in any form. Unlike the previous works [7], Jia Zhangke found a familiar life texture in the "Ash Is Purest White", and the symbol of the disease has been greatly reduced. Instead, they are very lively and representative figures. And events. Their emergence shows that money has fundamentally subverted the values of Chinese people, and then disintegrated the relatively stable emotions and families in traditional society.

## **4. A Comparative Study of the Aesthetic Styles of 4 Zhang Yimou and Jia Zhangke's Movies**

### **4.1 Aestheticism and Documentary**

Aestheticism is an important aesthetic style of Zhang Yimou's late films. Of course, it should be pointed out that this has also been shown in his early works. Many of the pictures in "Red Sorghum" and "Raise The Red Lantern" are very Visual impact, rich in aesthetic effects. In the recent release of "Shadow", Zhang Yimou tried to propose a new aesthetic concept, we can call it "Yin and Yang Aesthetics", because in the film, the yin and yang opposition and unity can be seen everywhere, in the form of Chinese painting, Show beautiful effects. Director Jia Zhangke focuses on reality, and all works are close to life and close to the ground. What he is pursuing is to reflect the realism of an era through his own works, including the reality of material reality such as houses, streets, clothing, pop songs, etc.; including the invisible state, psychology, emotion and society. The inner truth that can only be felt by feelings.

### **4.2 Legend and Life**

In the early days of his creation, Zhang Yimou preferred to choose historical themes that are far from real life. The design of the works in the theme of excavation, environment setting, plot arrangement and so on makes the film legendary. Its purpose is to express the original experience and natural life forms, re-recognize the national self, activate the profound national spirit, explore the relationship between the original life sentiment and the modern human life form, and inject the original blood into the body of the nation. "Promoting a tough life ideal. And Jia Zhangke has taken a different approach in his own field. He turned his attention to the small people living in the bottom of society, paying attention to their survival experience and life course. China has about one billion people. In rural areas and small towns, the turbulences they encounter in friendship, love, career, etc. are more universal. Under the lens of Jia Zhangke, neither exaggerating whitewashing nor demeaning, but recording with the most realistic attitude Under their most real life, we saw a kind of humanistic emotional care and affirmation of small people. He tried to dig the light of humanity hidden behind them, and actively thought about what is behind this bustling world. Man made the greatest contribution to this society and paid the most. He used his own film to answer. Because he imaginatively used the film media to correctly and realistically depict the social and moral alienation in the process of modernization.



Fig. 5 "Ash Is Purest White"

## 5. Conclusion

The difference in the aesthetic style of film works is the result of the different artistic choices made by the two generations of film directors when expressing their respective artistic ideas. This difference undoubtedly reflects the bold pursuit of art and the unremitting attempts of the two generations of film directors. It is these aesthetic breakthroughs that have been achieved with high artistic value and social value. The different aesthetic styles of the two will certainly bring some enlightenment to the development of Chinese film aesthetics, and also provide an invaluable reference and reference for the diversified development of film aesthetics in the future.

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