

# The Iranian New Wave: Poetic Neorealist Cinema

Zhenzhen Li

Taylor's University, Subang Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia  
lizhenzhen@sd.taylors.edu.my, 849668782@qq.com

**Abstract:** This paper discusses Iranian cinema, its focus on neorealism and the use of real and fictional elements to create a deeper sense of reality. The author explores the choice of themes in Iranian cinema and highlights two prominent themes: children as protagonists and women's stories. Children's cinema often features a minimalist storyline, ordinary and trivial, but can evoke deep emotions. Women's stories focus on exploring the specific norms and challenges that women face in Iranian culture, often depicting their struggles under religious and patriarchal oppression. The paper discusses several examples of Iranian films that feature these themes, such as "Where Is the Friend's Home?" and "Became a Woman".

**Keywords:** Iranian New Wave; Neorealist Cinema; Iranian cinemas; Cinemas style; Open ending

## 1. Introduction

In the 1960s and 1970s, there was a "new wave" of cinema all over the world, and Iran was no exception [14]. The beginning of Iranian cinema can be traced back to the late 1920s, when an Iranian expatriate living in India, Abdol Hossein Sepanta, produced Iran's first sound cinema "The Lor Girl", which was also Iran's first feature cinema [1]. However, Iranian cinema fell into a slump due to the effects of World War II [14]. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that the first new wave of Iranian cinema finally broke out [13]. Before that, no country had paid attention to Iranian cinemas, and in some European countries, they knew nothing about Iranian cinemas [11]. 1969 was a pivotal year in the history of Iranian cinema [2]. Under the organization of director Abbas Kiarostami and others, the Development Association established a cinema division. Many of Iran's best directors have worked for the association, including "Downpour" director Bahram Beizai. The first work supported by the association was Abbas Kiarostami's debut work "Bread and Alley/Nan va kucheh", from which Abbas Kiarostami took the first step towards the shrine of the cinema master [2]. In this year, the famous Iranian director Dariush Mehrjui's second feature cinema "The Cow" initiated the Iranian native realism, and thus detonated the first wave of new Iranian cinemas [3].

The successful detonation of this new wave of movies is also due to the cultural accumulation in the early stage of the society. The cinema talents who returned from overseas studies have injected fresh blood into Iranian movies [4]. The Tehran Academy of Dramatic Arts is also a product of this period, nurturing many cinema talents in the second wave of new cinema [1]. The cinemamakers of the Pahlavi dynasty have a relatively loose degree of freedom of creation, and the state also has a certain financial support for the "Children and Adolescent Intellectual Development Association". During this period, many outstanding directors emerged, and Iranian cinema as an art has also been promoted to a certain level. Height [13]. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution led by Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty king. Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini was widely supported by the masses and regarded by Shi'ites scholars as a fighter for Islamic revival [11].

Since then, Iran's culture, economy, and politics have undergone sudden changes [3]. With the gradual development of Iranian society, the government has recognized the positive role and value of cinema, and has begun to support the cinema industry and teaching and research, so that it can serve ideology, social education and religious propaganda. The symbolic phenomenon is the number of movie theaters. Increase [11]. The introduction of foreign cinemas and the Iranian Youth cinema Association, which was established in the mid-1970s and developed rapidly after the mid-1980s, established offices nationwide, trained a large number of cinemamakers, and subsidized students to shoot a large number of short cinemas every year. Cinemas and TV stations cooperate in screening, and select outstanding works created by students to participate in various international cinema festivals [14]. For example, the 2000 cinema "A Time for Drunken Horses", which was well-known in the Iranian local and international cinema circles, was directed by Bahman Ghobadi, a graduate of the Youth cinema Association [4].

Based on local culture, new Iranian cinemas pursue authenticity and simplicity, and have gained a place in the international cinema scene with their unique style characteristics<sup>[13]</sup>. This article will explore the aesthetic characteristics of new Iranian cinemas from the perspective of history and culture, and explain the poetic creative style of new Iranian cinemas.

## 2. Neorealism: Real and Fiction

"Neorealism" mainly refers to the neorealist cinema movement that began in Italy in the middle and late World War II. Abbas Kiarostami became an important creative leader of Iranian cinemas during this period, and he was the most well-known director of Iranian New Wave cinemas. Akira Kurosawa even called him "the successor of Italian neorealism". Appeared widely in the creations of outstanding cinemamakers such as Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti, Christian De Sica, etc.

Real and fictional is when the cinema directly exposes the presence of the camera and director, while the other characters are kept in the dark. Jafar Panahi himself, the director, does not show up if the actor does not notice the presence of the camera. Then the movie is a fictional drama, and the audience can only imagine that what happened in the movie is real under a hypothetical situation. But because the camera manifests itself, the fiction is exposed, and the people and things that appear in the shot become more real. In this way, we treat the whole cinema as a documentary, which is a little novel by deliberately exposing the presence of the camera and the director. But this is definitely not the case. We all know that actors are non-professionals. But their dialogue was carefully orchestrated, perhaps with improvisational elements, so that it was fully captured by the camera. As in Abbas Kiarostami's *Untitled Abbas Kiarostami*, no matter how many "documentary" styles it exhibits, it should first and foremost be viewed as a drama. The same is true of Jafar Panahi's *Taxi*, everything is designed, but it takes the truth to a deeper level by exposing the fiction.

Reality and fiction in movies, in this type of images, it is revealed that fiction not only has no ability to dissolve realism, but instead makes the image more real. Likewise, placing an element of truth under the force of fiction can further lead the audience to question the legitimacy of fiction. We can call such cinemas "real and false images", which is a tendency of Iranian cinemamakers to create. Iranian cinemas have surpassed the rules set by "neorealist" cinemas and have risen to the stage of "exposing fiction". The reason for exposing fiction is likely to be too real. At the same time fiction is a path to a higher reality. For example, Abbas Kiarostami's *Nema-ye Nazdik* *Close Up*, *The Country Trilogy* (*Where Is the Friend's Home?*, *And Life Goes On*, *Through The Olive Trees*), *A Taste of Cherry*, "10 on Ten", "The Certified Copy" and more, "The Mirror", "Parde", "Taxi" and more by Jafar Panahi.

## 3. The choice of cinema themes

### 3.1. *Children are the protagonists*

Children's cinemas are a golden brand of contemporary Iranian cinemas, with a large number, high quality and great influence. Such as "Children of Heaven", "Rang-e khoda", "Badkonake sefid", "Where Is the Friend's Home?", "Willow and Wind", etc., all appeared in the Iranian cinema at the end of the century<sup>[9]</sup>. In the cinema, it is directly restored to the world of children, drilled into the hearts of children, using a minimalist storyline, ordinary and trivial, and some even looking for trouble, and then almost cinemaeed by the method of shooting a documentary. But it can dig out the deepest emotions of human beings from the most ordinary world. "Where Is the Friend's Home?" shows that little Ahmed escaped from his home and started his journey to find a friend's house in the afterglow of the setting sun along a winding and bumpy mountain road. The cinema is full of innocence and earthiness, shining with the brilliance of human nature.

### 3.2. *Women as the theme*

Iranian women endure humiliation under the yoke of religion and patriarchy, and live extremely difficult lives<sup>[9]</sup>. Contemporary Iranian cinemas also switch to these vulnerable groups in the shadows of society, exploring the special norms of women in Iranian culture<sup>[5]</sup>. Such works include "Became a Woman", "Dayereh", "Leila", "Buddha Collapsed out of Shame" and so on. *Became a Woman* tells the story of three women, in fact the story of a woman's life<sup>[5]</sup>. If on Hoor's ninth birthday, her mother and grandmother said solemnly to her, from today onwards, you are a woman. When you learn that you were born at noon, haggle with your grandmother and have an hour of free play before becoming a woman. The

heroine of the second story is a young woman named Ahoon who rides a bicycle race. After participating in the competition, she lost her husband, family and relatives, and was exiled by her family. The third story is that the old woman came to the big city and bought all the luxury items that she wanted to buy when she was young but could not afford it. Everything she wanted to buy had a knot in her hand in advance. She was the last A knot can't remember what to buy, in fact, it is the youth, freedom and independent personality of a woman that she has been deprived and can never buy back. At the end of the cinema, the old woman sits on a luxurious wedding bed and is pushed into the rolling sea by a group of children, which is a huge symbol, not so much a wedding as it is a funeral.

The unrelated stories of three women in "Became a Woman" have become vaguely a summary of the lives of all Iranian women. Lost freedom hastily in childhood. When they were young, they paid a heavy price for their pursuit. But in old age, when they finally get their own freedom and independence, they don't know how to face it.

### **3.3. Disaster themes**

Eight years of war and devastating earthquakes in the second half of the 20th century devastated the Iranian people, who have every reason to express this suffering and sorrow in their art [5]. However, the tenacious will to survive the Iranian people honed through hard training, and Islam's tolerant spirit to the suffering of the world, have created the Iranian nation's national spirit of bearing humiliation, optimism and open-mindedness. It is the foundation of this national spirit and culture that makes Iranian cinemas prevent the proliferation of sentimentalism.

"Blackboards" records the story of a group of children who smuggled their lives in exchange for knowledge in the middle of the artillery fire. Showing optimism and tenacious vitality is a consistent theme in Abbas Kiarostami's cinemas. "The Wind Will Carry Us" records how the people who survived the disaster faced life. After the earthquake, Iran was in ruins and people were homeless. Faced with dead relatives, people cry in despair. But the cinema shows the other side quietly, beautiful nature, the sun shines through the green leaves and shades, the blue sky is not cloudy and misty, but white clouds fluttering, outside the door frame that was shattered by the earthquake, the green trees are shady. Birds contend, the earth is like a huge green carpet, in fact, the director is using the vitality of nature in exchange for the vitality of the country and the nation. Through *The Olive Trees* expresses the young generation's respect and desire for knowledge. As well as the attitude towards life that requires equal pursuit of happiness, and the persistence and cherishing of life after major disasters [4].

### **3.4. Religious themes**

The ultimate answer of any religion is life and death, especially the interpretation and interpretation of death constitutes the entrance and core of all religions [6]. As an Iranian director who grew up in a strong Islamic religious atmosphere, metaphysical contemplation and torture of life is logical [5]. Such cinemas include *Scream of the Ants*, *Smell Of Camphor*, *Fragrance Of Jasmine*, *Derakhte Golabi*, *A Taste of Cherry*, *Gone With the Wind*, etc. [6]. Abbas Kiarostami was deeply influenced by the traditional Iranian poetry, especially the ancient Persian poet Omar Khayyam. However, unlike Omar Khayyam, Abbas Kiarostami gave up the lamentations of impermanence and shortness of life, and gave up the desperation and decadence of instant pleasures and drunken songs. Instead, he draws more on the positive and progressive side of Islam, which is shown in his cinemas that he always uses the vibrant nature and the young and fresh life to step down the scale of death.

The depressed and desperate middle-aged man in "A Taste of Cherry", drove from the city to the suburbs to find the man who buried him. He met three young soldiers who had just enlisted in the army, and a seminary student, the aged taxidermist. In fact, these three people are the three dimensions of Abbas Kiarostami's thinking about death, and the three people's orientation is the denial of suicide. Barty lay in the cave under the cherry tree, waiting for death to come. The next day it rained and the sky was fine, and the mountains were full of flowers. Abbas Kiarostami uses the front of life to deny and squeeze the reflection of death, and uses the black picture of death to reflect the beauty of life.

## **4. The movie has an open ending**

Most Iranian cinemas end with an open ending, leaving the audience room for thinking and imagination, which is also the most representative expression of the poetic documentary style of Iranian cinemas [12]. This open ending is very close to life, as life never tells people the results directly, but

requires people to explore <sup>[5]</sup>. For example, "A Separation" and "Blackboards" left open endings. "A Separation" won Best Foreign Language cinema at the 84th Academy Awards. This is a drama, and the theme of the story is the same as that of Asghar Farhadi's other cinemas, which revolves around divorce. Always reveal the truest human nature in ordinary life. Director Asghar Farhadi, a leading figure in the contemporary Iranian New Wave cinema movement, has won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language cinema twice and is considered one of the greatest cinema artists in the world.

He poetically interprets human social behavior with humanity beyond good and evil <sup>[4]</sup>. His stories are intricate and thrilling, creating a unique narrative aesthetic. Under the seemingly peaceful life of adults, an event stimulated by a separation storm triggers entanglements between human morality and religion. Adults are making a dilemma, but they are simply innocent children who are passively involved. The pressure on adults is unspeakable, and the wounds on children's hearts cannot be healed. There are no innocent people, no bystanders, and everyone is deeply involved. There is no such thing as a perfect good person, nor a heinous bad person, a real life that cannot be judged by moral standards. The ending of the Iranian cinema "A Separation" is an open-ended plot. People can set an ending through their own imagination. The cinema itself has already hinted at a tragic ending. But as long as there is faith, there is still hope.

The new Iranian cinema "Blackboards" is a story about teachers and students. This cinema occupies an important position in the Iranian cinema circle, and is even regarded by many as the first cinema that teachers must see. In the cinema, a group of homeless teachers each carry a piece of Blackboards, looking for students who can pay to study. Two of the teachers left the group and went alone, facing children who neither had money nor wanted to study. The two teachers insisted on following these coolie children and taught them during their breaks, but no one knew whether these teachers had the ability to change this group of children. In this one-and-a-half-hour-long cinema, a complete story is not told, but the audience can still feel the fate of these teachers and students in the plot. The cinema's creative ideals, expression techniques and ending patterns are three parts worth savoring in this cinema. An open ending can not only deepen the audience's impression of the movie, but also a good way to deepen the central idea of the movie. This ending method is very close to life, just as life does not provide answers, but requires us to slowly find out in time. A more realistic and convincing ending method is also one of the manifestations of the director's pursuit of cinema reality.

## 5. Use of empty shots and long shots

The use of empty shots and long takes is a traditional and characteristic shooting method in cinema shooting, which is very much loved by new Iranian cinemas <sup>[13]</sup>. The cinema "Where Is the Friend's Home?" is to use the camera to record the reality in a simple way, to record people's daily life, and these living conditions are precisely what people do not pay attention to and pay attention to <sup>[4]</sup>. The cinema begins with more than a minute of empty footage, the classroom door is closed, and the noisy voices of children on the other side are heard <sup>[13]</sup>. At this time, the audience is left with a period of imagination. If this empty scene only lasts for about 10 seconds and ends, then the audience will certainly not have any imagination about this empty scene <sup>[12]</sup>. However, if this empty scene can last as long as thirty seconds, then the movie will not bring short-term imagination to the audience, but a greater confusion, which will make the audience feel that this empty scene is superfluous. However, Abbas Kiarostami's consistent style allowed him to achieve this empty shot for more than a minute, so how important this empty shot is to the rendering of the environment <sup>[4]</sup>. The beauty of the style of the new Iranian cinema is the daring use of empty and long takes. This way of staying on an empty lens for a long time not only uses the empty lens to add a poetic humanization to the work and conveys a profound artistic conception, but also leads the audience into thinking <sup>[11]</sup>. In addition, when the protagonist Ahmad is on his way to find his friend Nemazadi's house, there is a long shot of Ahmad running along the winding path on the hillside. The audience has been witnessing the protagonist running from the foot of the mountain to complete this twisty mountain road. This alludes to the difficulty and legend of Ahmad's workbook process. At the same time, the state of the protagonist's "running" is interspersed in the cinema, and he goes to almost every destination in the way of "running". Therefore, as a specific symbol, "running" appears repeatedly in the cinema, highlighting the moral significance that Abbas Kiarostami insists on in his creation. Powerful to watch, but also worrying about his own powerlessness, because he will disappear into the next shot of transition <sup>[12]</sup>.

The shooting time of a single shot is long, and one shot can complete the narrative function of several shots, which allows the audience's thoughts to fly freely in this relatively complete shot. In the thinking of the cinema's story, sufficient time can allow the audience to gain a unique understanding of the cinema

[11]. Secondly, it can clearly show the deep and deep scenes in the picture to the audience, providing the audience with a complete narrative space, which is also one of the techniques to enhance the documentary sense of the cinema [11]. "Blackboards" mostly uses long takes to tell the story. There is a scene where the teacher chases a child through the fleeing crowd. In this narrative scene, both the foreground and the background are the fleeing crowd. The subject is sandwiched by these people. While showing the level of the picture, the director is implying that teachers and students are coerced by the social environment of the times and cannot escape. The two documentary-style shooting techniques used by the director are not only the practice of her realistic creative ideals, but also resonate with the audience. Especially for Iranian audiences, this sense of sympathy has a great impact on their hearts.

## 6. Conclusion

The biggest feature of new Iranian cinemas is the documentary nature, non-professional actors, open-air shooting, natural lighting, and does not hide the darkness and sadness of life. The second is that some movies use open endings, which are implicit and infinite. Contemporary Iranian new cinemas are unique in their unique image style. They are noisy and impetuous in the world, and our senses are filled with violent and pornographic cinemas. Iranian cinemas return to their basics, with almost manual workshop-style production, fresh and simple, tranquil and warm and full of poetic video style, with the long-lost themes of friendship, tolerance, love, and harmonious coexistence. It confirms a famous saying, the more the nation, the more the world.

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