

# The Empathy Phenomenon in Bi Gan's Movies from the Perspective of Auteurism

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**Abstract:** *The auteurism originated in the 1950s. With the rise of the French New Wave, André Bazin, François Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard put forward their personal academic viewpoints one after another, and their theoretical interpretations were continuously improved and harmonized. François Truffaut mentioned in "Cahiers du Cinéma" that tomorrow's films are autobiographical, and this view has influenced the construction of Chinese film director Bi Gan's secret and wet image world, he relies on the blurred narrative of the boundary between dreams and reality, and uses experimental long-lens metaphors to present images of surreal poetic texture, highlighting the eye-popping creative ambition and unique lens language. This article studies the Empathy Phenomenon of Bi Gan's Movies from three perspectives: the main idea, poetic narrative and authorship of Bi Gan's films.*

**Keywords:** *Bi Gan; Film aesthetics; Auteurism; Empathy Phenomenon*

In 1954, the famous French director Truffaut put forward the auteurism for the first time in "A Certain Tendency of French Cinema", a classic basic theory that takes personal factors as the standard of artistic creation. Since then, the film criticism academia has followed his claim, advocating individual-oriented independent-style films, and the criteria for defining "author films" have become specific. American film critic Andre Saris believes that a director must meet at least three basic requirements to become an "author": First, the director needs to have basic film skills, second, the director's continuous personality shown in the film, and third, the film must have some inner meaning". Andre Bazin emphasized the importance of lens and depth-of-field lens in the article "What is Cinema", and advocated the use of documentary shooting techniques to maintain the authenticity of objective things.<sup>[1]</sup>

The budding of "auteurism" in China can be traced back to the 1940s. Fei Mu is one of the earliest directors with author consciousness in China. He believes that "a director is the author of a film, and it is best to complete the form and content by one person, and to unify the thinking and the technique." Since the Economic Reform and open up, Lou Ye, Zhang Yuan, Jia Zhangke and other China sixth-generation directors have become the representatives of the new generation of Chinese filmmakers. Bi Gan is inheriting some of the auteurism: pursuing the authenticity and artistry of personal feelings, as Jia Zhangke said: "We pay attention to the situation of people, and then pay attention to the situation of society."<sup>[2]</sup> He infiltrated independentism into his films, empathizing with realistic themes in a hallucinatory way, and making vague and imagery uses of experimental long-shots and sound-effect dialogues.

In 2015, the 26-year-old Chinese director Bi Gan's debut film *Kaili Blues* won Golden Montgolfiere at the Festival of the 3 Continents, Best New Director at the Golden Horse Awards, Best First Feature at the Locarno International Film Festival, and The Gold Award at the Istanbul Independent Film Festival in Turkey, the Best Director Award at the UNAM International Film Festival in Mexico and the Gold Award at the Las Palmas International Film Festival, a total of seven international awards.<sup>[3]</sup> He was rated as "one of the world's most watched young directors by the famous film website Indiewire. Bi Gan's two feature films and four short films have a poetic aesthetic style, which presents a new wave style of surrealism. "A man who writes poetry with images".

## 1. The Empathy Phenomenon of Bi Gan's Film Themes

The difference between an auteur and an ordinary director in a movie is whether it can pour a fixed aesthetic and personal will into the movie, so as to bring a consistent label and impression to the audience. For example, in Roman Polanski's films "doubt, depression, violence" and Hitchcock's films "Thriller, Cognition, Awakening", and Bi Gan left the symbols of "poetry, fantasy, independence"<sup>[4]</sup>. First of all, time and memory is the core of Bi Gan's films. The Buddhist sutra in the *Diamond Sutra* at the beginning

of the movie *Kaili Blues* showing the mysterious oriental view of time and space, and at the same time guiding the entire story in content that is in the framework of time and space. Inside, thinking about individual existence, death, and emotion. The male protagonist Chen Sheng (played by the director's uncle Chen Yongzhong) is the prototype himself. Chen Sheng's character contains a negative image of imprisonment, and also has romantic characteristics such as a country doctor and a poet. In Dang Mai, he sang the songs that learned in prison to his wife, and he was still willing to look for his nephew in the face of his indifferent younger brother Lao Wai. During the journey, when the train passed the sleeping Chen Sheng, the clock of Wei Wei's painting on the wall also started to reverse, and Chen Sheng entered the "land that no one knows". Bi Gan explores the past, present and future in dreams and reality, and tells about the self-salvation of "wanderers". Secondly, farewell is another theme of the film. The doctor entrusted Chen Sheng to bring a tape and a floral shirt to her past lover to complete the farewell and Chen Sheng re-acquainted his wife at Dangmai's barber shop, in the same time he met Wei Wei who had grown up in a dream. Chen Sheng completed the parting in the two dimensions of reality and dream. In Bi Gan's film *Secret Goldfish*, a piece of time is added, Wei Wei is confused by the punishment of his playmate's water gun for losing the table tennis. Longing to go back to the past, Chen Sheng uses poetry as a narration to describe another time and space, and the film also uses words from the *Diamond Sutra*. This kind of time-space overlapping empathy contains a strong belief in the Chinese concept of "reincarnation", which achieves the aesthetic narrative construction of romantic and tragic.

## 2. Non-dramatic narrative and poetic expression

The narrative of the film can be understood as the reproduction of memory. Bi Gan introduces a personal perspective and a new time mechanism into the story, emphasizing the causality of events. Andrei Tarkovsky mentioned in "Sculpting Time: "Poetry is a kind of understanding of the world and is a special way of narrating reality, so poetry is a kind of philosophical guide to life." This view Films considered poetic do not take the world as an objective existence but as a participant in thinking. The plot of conventional films often follows logic, while poetic films follow self-thinking. The participation of personal emotions makes films infinitely close to poetic reality, which is the closest artistic expression to life itself. The fourteen-minute short film *A Short Story* tells the story of a black cat's journey in search of treasure from the perspective of a black cat. Bi Gan still uses flow narration, adding flashbacks and interludes to the film to make the chaotic film structure clear. Give the viewer a de-dramatic narrative with a non-dramatic plot.

The movie *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is divided into two narrative time and space, dream and reality.<sup>[5]</sup> The audience decodes the clues left by the lens. In the dream space, Luo Hongwu met Bai Mao, a boy he had never met but felt close to in the mine. As the plot deepens, the audience will find that Bai Mao has many similarities with Luo Hongwu and the unborn child. For example, in reality, Luo Hongwu once promised Wan Qiwen to teach their children to play table tennis, and the boy in the dream also mentioned letting Luo Hongwu teach himself to play table tennis. In the wild grapefruit karaoke hall in the depths of the dream, Luo Hongwu met a red-haired woman who had many similarities with his mother. In the real world, his mother eloped with the beekeeper. The red-haired woman and the beekeeper in the dream were Husband and wife, it can be seen that the real world provides story material for dreams. The film ends when Luo Hongwu and Kai Zhen kiss affectionately, and the open ending shows the director's respect for the audience's subjective initiative.

*Kaili Blues* is defined by the Cinema Manual as a "self-lost" film. The film uses an intricate story line to construct a narrative framework and naturally connect many characters. Chen Sheng, the heroine who lost his wife, runs a township clinic with an elderly woman after his release from prison. In order to fulfill his mother's last wish, Chen Sheng embarks on a journey to find Xiao Weiwei. 80% of the plot of the movie consists of the dialogues and memories of the characters. In this 110-minute journey to find people, Chen Sheng revolves around his past life trajectory and encounters the most important people in his life again in the shuttle of time and space. The disappearing past, the flashing memory and the possible future are intertwined into a Mobius dream.

Bi Gan mentioned in an interview with Film Manual: "The transition from dream to reality should be divided into three parts, starting with swimming in imagined dreams, then entering the part that flows between dream and reality, and finally everything Become stable and realistic. If you pay too much attention to the boundaries between dreams and reality, you will not experience this feeling of flow." The use of a lot of foreshadowing and poetry makes Bi Gan's films quite dreamy, although the director in the narrative process, each time and space transition will not be clearly prompted, but the audience can also intuitively feel the film's subtle emotional tone and poetic order.

### 3. Surrealist Expression and auteurism Theory Remodeling

Surrealism originated in the European literary and art circles during World War II. It is committed to exploring the subconscious of human beings and advocates breaking through the logical view of reality. Surrealism advocates Freudian unconscious creation and divides human consciousness into three levels: "surface consciousness, preconsciousness, and subconsciousness"<sup>[6]</sup>. The subconscious mind contains the individual's instinctive impulses hidden in the depths of memory, it is difficult to be noticed by oneself, but it can be revealed through dreams. French surrealist writer Breton believes: "closed windows and doors are the connection point between reality and dream, the mystery and the unknown." Surrealist films abandoned linear narrative and emphasized the dream meaning of irrational behavior. In the groundbreaking work *An Andalusian Dog*, absurd plots such as cutting the eyeball with a knife, pulling a dead donkey with a piano, and growing ants on the palm of the hand subvert people's rational cognition. The film achieves the authoritative reshaping of the film through the aimlessness and illogicality of action relations.

The arrangement of Luo Hongwu's dream in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* is in line with Freud's subconscious theory. The protagonist wears 3D glasses to the stage of opening the mine gate, which belongs to the transition before and after the dream. As the wooden door opens, it enters the subconscious (the door is used as a narrative symbol to connect the time and space of consciousness). As the dream deepened, Luo Hongwu's position continued to sink. (The reason for such a sunken design is that Kaili, Bi Gan's hometown, is located in the subtropical zone, and the terrain fluctuates greatly). Visually, the terrain changes with each scene change: Luo Hongwu met the little white cat in the billiard hall on a motorcycle, met the red-haired woman in the iron fence of the square, met Kaizhen in the revolving room scene, and the dream gradually came to an end.

At the end, through the lens of God's perspective, Kaizhen and Luo Hongwu are shown kissing in the house. Visual elements such as clocks, lamp balls, and trains appear in the picture, as well as auditory elements such as dialect narration, poetry and songs, and the soundtrack of the times. The two work together to create a rich and humid surreal dream space. The dialect poems replace the music to convey the emotion, which runs through all of Bi Gan's works, and achieves the correspondence between the emotional level and the image space, and reshapes the auteurism expression through the surrealist style. The 2018 film was released, followed by polarized perception reviews.

### 4. Conclusions

We can't help thinking how should the artistic and commercial aspects of films be integrated. Today, when movies are dominated by box-office center theory, insisting on personal style expression is essentially competing with the market, which also makes Bi Gan's adherence to personal artistic style even more valuable. His artistic success has provided a new possibility for Chinese filmmakers, that is, art films can also stand out in the commercial environment and write their own frontiers.

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