

# Analysis of Sound in the Film Mountains May Depart

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**Abstract:** *"Mountains May Depart "becomes more classic because of its unique sound presentation. Media voice is linked with culture in a transmission value, carrying the voice in the audience's memory and fascinates the audience. Dialect is the embodiment of a family culture and root-seeking culture, and can meet demand for regional imagination consumption for audiences. The unique music design makes "Mountains May Depart " not only have cultural attributes, but also has the memory of the times. In conclusion, the film's unique sound setting makes the film more real, sincere and moving.*

**Keywords:** *Mountains May Depart; Sounds Art; Jia Zhangke*

## 1. Introduction

In 1991, when the "fifth generation" directors represented by Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige were famous in the entire film industry, a film innovation quietly appeared - "China's New Record Movement". In this film innovation, independent directors such as Wu Wenguang are the backbone, who discuss issues such as "independence" and "individuality" and advocate independent photography and independent directors. Under this film wave, the sixth generation (new generation) of directors represented by Zhang Yuan and Lou Ye was born. With a low budget and no advanced machines, they create and express themselves personally in a difficultly creative environment. Unlike the "fifth generation" directors who experienced the "Cultural Revolution", the "sixth generation" directors paid attention to practical problems and focused on the bottom and marginalized figures of society, such as Zhang Yuan's "Beijing Bastard", Lou Ye's "Weekend Lover" and Ning Hao's "Green Grass". In the sixth generation of directors, Jia Zhangke's image style is more unique, unchanged heroine, using different media to introduce the era in the film, using ordinary people to tell the story of the times, impressive background music, directly reflecting the life of ordinary people struggling, warm and cruel.

Jia Zhangke's unique image style and sound art have always been the focus of academic attention, and when I searched for information, this showed that no one analyzed the sound art in his work's "Mountains May Depart "in 2015.

So taking the film " Mountains May Depart " as an observation point to analyze the sound aesthetics in Jia Zhangke's films, Until June 2021, there have been 189 dissertations on the study of Jia Zhangke's film, but there are very few sounds involved, of which only two; The one is Capital Normal University Huang Ling's master's thesis "Research on the Aesthetic Style of Jia Zhangke's Films" in June 2006. She mentioned Jia Zhangke's sound aesthetics. Zhou Ying of Fujian Normal University made a detailed analysis of the dialect phenomenon in Jia Zhangke's films from the perspective of documentary aesthetics in her master's thesis "Dialects in Jia Zhangke's Films" in June 2018. In the field of journal research, there are 2308 journals related to Jia Zhangke's films, and only 12 are related to his film sound. From the above data and analysis, it can be concluded that the analysis of sound art in jia Zhangke's films is very limited. Director Jia Zhangke's 2015 film " Mountains May Depart " spans three eras, 1999, 2014 and 2035, telling the life of a Fenyang girl Shen Tao. When Tao was young, she faced marriage choices; In middle age, she face the death of your father, your marriage breaks down, and you can only miss your old age. The selection of theme music in the film and the unique use of dialects create a unique atmosphere of the film, promote the overall narrative, and are also an important embodiment of the documentary aesthetic style in Jia Zhangke's films, which sets off a different sense of the times and shows the passage of time and the sense of reality. [1]

## 2. Music Analysis: Lyricism and Ideography

Bazin mentions that "sound is a leap forward towards fully realistic cinema." [7] In his famous theoretical book what Is Cinema. Jia Zhangke was an explorer and successor to Bazin's film realist theory.

Among them, the music in Jia Zhangke's films not only has a strong role in reflecting the documentary film style, but also participates in the narrative of the entire film.

"Mountains May Depart" Spanning three eras and telling the life of Fenyang girl Tao, the film has two theme music, namely Ye Qianwen's music "Precious" from her album released in the 1990s and the song "Go West" sung by a villager band group around 1980. Both pieces of music convey some emotions that are difficult to express in words, conform to the tone and emotion of the whole film, create a certain sense of time and space, and take the audience into the era when the film story takes place. [2]

In 1999, it was the point of China's ushering in the new century, the people's living standards gradually improved, and the story in film told in the film happened at this time. A large number of people have received a lot of capital accumulation due to the operation of coal and oil in China's Shanxi province. The main character Zhang Jinsheng in the film is one of them. He was deeply infatuated with Shen Tao, but Liang Zi and Shen Tao also admired each other. Shen Tao is in a dilemma of relationship choice, and the three are in an awkward triangular relationship.

### 2.1 Ye Qianwen "Cherish"

"Cherish" is a song from Yip's 1990 album of the same name, a Cantonese song that appears five times throughout the film. The treasure also shows the theme that this film wants to convey - the treasure of the hometown, the treasure of the mountains and rivers of the hometown, and the treasure of the deceased. Express a unique sense of the times.

The first time the music of "cherish" sounded was in such a character relationship, the heroine of the story, Shen Tao, ran a music player shop, Liang Zi, Jinsheng and Tao were in the same room, and Jinsheng was very depressed because he saw Liangzi and Tao together. Customers came to audition, so the prelude to "Precious" and the first three sentences of the song sounded on the DVD player, and Tao immersed herself in the melody of the song.

Sudden silence air

Stopping on the way makes people look back at you again

Wet eyes soaked red

Sudden silence air

Stopping on the way makes people look back at you again

Wet eyes soaked red

The lyrics of "cherish" help present and explain the plot of the movie, the lyrics of "Silent Air" render the embarrassing atmosphere of the three people's silence, while promoting the development of the plot, "wet eyes soaked red" implies that Tao wants to make her choice between the two, describing Shen Tao's thoughts through music. The second time the music sounded is that Zhang Jinsheng ran out very angrily, took back the CD he had just played, and put it in the DVD player. The song "Cherish" continues to follow the last place it played.

I don't know how to talk about it for many years

Where still cares about you

Endless long nights for my company to miss you

It's getting cooler

The future may have snow flying

This lyric seems to be the heart of the character of Jinsheng, and the lyrics of "Endless Long Night to Accompany Me to Miss You" depict his heart, He adores Tao, silently caring about Tao. The song promotes the plot of Shen Tao's choice between two men in the next scene. The lyrics "The future or there is a snow white fly" "hint at the plot of the separation of the two in the future, through the lyrics of the music, the plot is partially supplemented and explained, reflecting the rhythm of the overall integration of music and the film.

The third time the music sounded is Tao walked alone on the streets, looking at in the street a car to come to car to go toward. This song "Cherish" faded in, creating a tangled state of mind in the movie Tao, the first three times this week, "Cherished" sounded as if telling the separation and preciousness

between Tao and Liangzi.

The fourth appearance of the song "Cherish" is the second part of the movie - in 2014, when the middle-aged Tao and Zhang Jinsheng divorced, and his son Dollar was taken to Shanghai by Jinsheng. The father of Tao died suddenly, the son Dollar came back from Shanghai to attend his grandfather's funeral, the mother Tao and son Dollar were in the waiting hall of train station, and the next shot turned to the two sitting on the train, and the song was played in the headphones. Mother and son sat on a slow car, the son was listening to an unfamiliar Cantonese song, but Tao found her youth and experience in this song, found traces of past days, and made a foreshadowing for the following, "Cherish" This song is a point in the vague memory of his mother after Dollar became an adult. The song reflects the love of mother and son, and it is also the rise of the connotation of the movie.

The last time the song appeared was the final part of the movie - in 2025, Dollar, who was far away in Australia, heard the Cantonese song "Cherish" played by his teacher Mia in class, he said that he felt familiar and did not remember where he heard it, and then the two talked about Dollar's mother. This time the music seems to bring the audience back to the film in 1999 and 2014, and the re-ringing of "Cherish" evokes the audience's recollection of past scenes and completes the construction of the entire film's time and space range. [3]

The song "Cherish" runs through the whole film and writes the life story of a generation. There are both the treasures of not saying goodbye when you are young; the preciousness of having no choice in middle age; and the cherish of finally crossing the ocean. The theme song sets off each other in the plot era, showing a unique sense of vicissitudes and desolation, touching the soul of the audience through music, and creating a unique sense of age.

## 2.2 "Go West"

"Go West" is a 1970 single by the Village People band group, which was once a passionate golden song in a Chinese disco. This song was banned for a long time and could only be circulated in the underground disco. The song has different connotations in different eras, and in the film in 1999 it mainly encouraged young people from the East to come to the West. The song only appears twice at the beginning and end in the film. The first time is Shen Tao dancing with a group of young people in the first part of the movie, and the second time is the end of the movie, the song "Go West" fades in, and Shen Tao, who has entered the old age, dances alone in the snow. The song represents people's pursuit and yearning for a better life, but in this process we also lose a lot, the same song, two scenes, giving people different feelings and thoughts.

We will go our way  
 (Together) We will leave someday  
 (Together) Your hand in my hand  
 (Together) We will make the plans  
 (Together) We will fly so high  
 (Together) Tell our friends goodbye

"Go West" was introduced to China in the 1990s and is the memory of the era. The lyrics are full of hopes and expectations for the future, just like Shen Tao and Zhang Jinsheng in 1999, for the future of the two. Finally, at the end of this song, Shen Tao's memory of the past is evoked, expressing Shen Tao's memorial to her youth and her thoughts about the deceased. The beginning and end of the film correspond to each other and constitute the integrity of the narrative. The film's transition from the youth of a group of people to the carnival of one person is a kind of sadness and reality.

"Mountains May Depart" uses two popular songs to enrich the theme of the film, express the mood of the characters, change the audience's understanding of the film art ontology, bring emotions to the audience, and bring a new way of expression to the image art. The two theme music participates in the narrative of the entire film, reconstructs the film narrative and the concept of time, and then changes the narrative rules of the film in a sense, giving the audience the space to understand the film in multiple dimensions. [4]

The music in Jia Zhangke's films can not only create a film atmosphere and promote the narrative, but also an important embodiment of the documentary aesthetic style in his films.

### 3. Media Sound Analysis: Memory Intertextual and Media Link

Jia Zhangke is the explorer and successor of Bazin's realist theory, he pays attention to the real life of people from different classes of society, "Mountains May Depart" is a relatively strong narrated in the films directed by Jia Zhangke, The documentary method in the film will be the normal performance of life. Different eras have unique media sounds, but also constitute the memory of different eras, forming the memory of different eras of intertextuality. In the 1980s and 1990s in China, with the continuous development of reform and opening up, a large number of popular songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan entered the Chinese mainland, and the unique musical style got popular throughout China for a short time. The above-mentioned "Cherish" is one of them, which is a song with a great imprint of the times, which represents the memory and perception of the Chinese at the end of the 20th century. The five appearances of "The Old Man of Mountains and Rivers" when "Cherish" are different broadcast media reflect different changes of the times and social development, and also show the changes of the times. The first time to the third time was in 1999, people used DVD players and CDs to play music, the director cleverly used the background sound to show the state of the characters, which is a kind of popularity and fashion; the fourth time in 2014, Shen Tao and her son took train to listen to the song "Cherish" on their mobile phones with headphones, which is a kind of nostalgia; the last time in 2025, Mia teacher and Zhang Zhile used the record player to play the vinyl record of "cherish", which is a kind of treasure for the deceased and for the mountains and rivers. [5]

The same song, played in three different mediums, is an important clue in the film and also makes the film paragraphs intertextuality. The song called "cherish" connect different times and different people.

The different mediums in "Mountains May Depart" set off different senses of the times, showing the passage of time and the sense of reality[6]; The same song was listened by different people at different stages of life, gives the audience a completely different feeling, and also makes the three time segments in the film have more connections. The combination of songs and different media makes the film more diverse, and also makes the emotional expression of the characters more three-dimensional, giving the audience a more immersive feeling.

In the whole film, it not only shows the passage of time and the change of the times through the different media of the song, but also expresses the sense of the times through sound and conveys the texture of different eras. In the first part of the movie, Shen Tao danced in the town every year when she was young. The street was noisy and the people who came to see it were crowded. More apparently, the sound of rubbing clothes with each other was very obvious, but it was not difficult to hear the familiar rural sound, thus creating a lively social atmosphere. China in the 1990s was a very changeable and varied era. The new atmosphere of development period was fully expressed in the film. For example, the voice from the loudspeaker: "Let us embark on a journey to usher in the dawn of the new century." "It's as if to pull people back to the end of the 20th century; In the first part of the film, people are curious about the new form of transportation-vehicle car, It is a funny lens that a group of people surround a brand new Santana and listen to the roar of the car. The sound of cars is rare and loud in this era, and it is unfamiliar to the people in the film.

The second part in the film is in 2014, Shen Tao's son dollar has grown up, and Shen Tao is also facing the pain of losing his father in life. The son dollar and his mother Shen Tao faced the river again, and the two were silent. Only the sound of river could be heard; this also foreshadowed the last part of the film, and the son dollar, who was far away in Australia, listened to the sound of the sea alone and said that he remembered his mother Tao. The sound provides connections and relationships for people across mountains and seas in different eras of the film.

The last part of the film is in 2025, Zhang Jinsheng and Shen Tao have been separated from each other in the ocean, and the memory of mother for dollar blurred. At this time, there are no more lively scenes. Some are just the loneliness of Jinsheng alone. At this time there is only the sound of the sea, and people have long been accustomed to the sound of cars roaring on the street. This is director Jia Zhangke's imagination about the future. Time is passing, and the background sound belonging to the times is constantly changing, shaping a unique sense of the times. Through the design of these sounds, the director Jia Zhangke expresses different senses of the times, which becomes an important connection between the characters and is also a clever foreshadowing of the development of the plot. In less than two hours of the film, music combines audio and video to portray the three eras with a strong memory reconstruction.

Different sounds and different playback media not only create a sad and nostalgic atmosphere style in the film, but also make the audience closer to reality, making the film truly have a sense of the times. Last but not least, the unique design of music help the character in the film to constantly arouse the

memories of the past.

#### 4. Dialect Analysis: Regional Spatial Imagination Satisfaction and Real Aesthetics

Jia Zhangke is a native of Fenyang, Shanxi, and the use of dialects in the film has always been a feature of his films, whether it is the early films "Xiao Wu" and "Platform", or the "Destiny of Heaven" and "Legend of the Sea" after the 21st century, dialect seems to have been a special symbol in Jia Zhangke's films, forming one of his maverick film styles, which is one of the reasons why the characters in Jia Zhangke's films are closer to the truth.

To some extent, Dialect is the embodiment of the region, and also satisfies the audience's imagination of another space except their own hometown. In "Mountains May Depart", Shen Tao, Liang Zi and Zhang Jinsheng live in Fenyang, Shanxi. In the course of the film's story development, they always have communication in Shanxi dialect, such as "nǐ zǎ de le (what's wrong with you?). " nǐ píng shá zhè yàng yào qǐ ú ǎi" "nà shì shén wèn tǐ (what is the problem)". So that the dialect makes the whole film has a strong Shanxi flavor, but also fully embodies the realist audiovisual style of director Jia Zhangke. In such a dialect design to narrow the distance with the audience, it has become a window for the characters in the film to express emotions, leaving a deep impression on the audience. At the same time, it also can reflect the attention to ordinary people's lives in the film directed by Jia Zhangke, the use of dialects is an important embodiment of Jia Zhangke's documentary style, with a "rough" aesthetic.

In the film, there are also the appearances of Mandarin, English and Shanghainese. In the first story, Zhang Jinsheng came out of a few words of English from time to time. For example, after he bought a brand new Santana, he said to Shen Tao: "é (means "I" in Shan Xi dialect) take you to America, to spend Dollar" This is the first use of English in this film; showing Zhang Jinsheng is like the theme song "Go West", taking full of imagination and expectation for the West; the name of Jinsheng's son is also closely related to English, it is the pronunciation of "dollar", Zhang Jinsheng spent the first half of his life dealing with money, and his son's name also be in English with dollars.

Dialect is the embodiment of China's "root" culture, and keeping one's own "roots" has been a Chinese tradition since ancient times. The use of dialects in the film reflects the culture of root-seeking. In the second part of the film, Tao's son Dollar came to Fenyang to attend his grandfather's funeral, Shen Tao used Shanxi dialect to let him call mama, Dollar answer "mommy", and then later in the communication between the two, Shen Tao had to use Mandarin to communicate with her son. Dialect is synonymous with hometown and the understanding of the "root" in Chinese's heart. The language conversion in the film shows the estrangement and strangeness between the two, but also reminds people not to forget their "roots", which is the director's transcendental aesthetic imagination; When Dollar and the stepmother chat with the tablet in the film, they speak Shanghainese. Mother Shen Tao could not understand, and she immediately angrily stopped the conversation between the two. Dialect is the embodiment of a familiar environment, and at this time, Dollar no longer has a lot of feelings for the small county town of Fenyang like the parents of the previous generation, giving the little Dollar a layer of unknown belonging. The same situation is for Shen Tao, whose son does not speak the dialect of Fenyang, and she does not understand Shanghainese totally. The relationship between the two has already reflected the estrangement in the language of communication.

Dialect is the aesthetics of homeland, synonymous with hometown. In the final stage of the film's story, although the adult Dollar and his father Zhang Jinsheng live together in Australia, the two can only communicate with Google Translation, showing the estrangement between the two generations. At the same time, Zhang Jinsheng had reached the West where he had his heart in mind and had freedom. But he still speaks a fluent Shanxi dialect in chatting with friends. In the last part of the film, 2025 is new and full of technology era. Although Zhang Jinsheng live overseas, his heart is full of thoughts about his hometown-shanxi. As he said, "Now I have a gun, but I don't have even one enemy." The conflict between father and son is reflected in English and dialects, Zhang Jinsheng also communicates with his son in Shanxi dialect, while Dollar only speaks English. Dollar not only does not speak Fenyang dialect, but even Chinese has forgotten in the period of growing up. This is Dollar's forgetting about his hometown, and he has lost his home forever. [8]

Over the course of three time periods throughout the film, multiple changes in language are testimonies to the changes of the times. The film "Mountains May Depart" explores hometown and wandering through the past, present and future. Language is the representative of regional space and the embodiment of time and space changes. Through several language changes, the film shows the relationship between the characters, the psychological transformation of the characters, and the changing

environment. Thus reflecting the director's thought on the culture of searching for roots, reflecting the aesthetics of director Jia Zhangke's aesthetic theory about home and contry.Lastly, dialect gives the audience a sense of reality.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, the structure of the sound level of "Mountains May Depart" can be concluded as follows:

First, the film uses music to pull up nostalgia and homeland: Music art once again reflects Jia Zhangke's documentary aesthetics, The two theme music in this film, "Go West" and "Cherish" show the theme of the treasure of the hometown, the treasure of the mountains and rivers of the hometown, the treasure of the deceased; The theme song participates in the narrative, shows the inner situation of the characters, and creates a film atmosphere. Through music, the film has partially supplemented and explained the plot, reflecting the rhythmic sense of the overall integration of music and film.

Second, the film uses different media to express sound, sets off a different sense of the times, shows the passage of time and the sense of reality, reconstructs the film narrative and the concept of time, and then changes the narrative rules of the film in a sense, giving the audience the space to understand the film in multiple dimensions, and better expressing and highlighting the theme of the film.

The third is that the film uses dialects and changes between languages to metaphorically transform the relationship between characters, which is also a window for the audience to understand the characters' hearts, reflecting the attention paid to the lives of ordinary people in Director Jia Zhangke's films, and increasing the documentary sense of the film through the grasp of details. The dialects in the film, the real sound and nostalgic sound work together to make the film constantly close to the truth. Got the so-called "movie is the asymptote of reality". Making the film truly have a sense of the times, it is the embodiment of Jia Zhangke's documentary aesthetics. At the end of the day, cinema is an audio-visual art. Listening is of great significance and role in rendering the atmosphere, creating a sense of the times, and strengthening the narrative. In the current era of technological development, how to listen to the real and treat listening as an art is what the film needs to do in the future technology era and industrial age.

The truth of listening is a sincere and universal aesthetic in "Mountains May Depart ". It is also this aesthetic that makes this work with a sense of the times, penetrating power, a sense of vision and the times and international resonance. By coincidence, the listening in film is through the whole story, and it is to create the movie's feeling. It is precisely for this reason that the director would be better for the need for truth, and attention to the times and the people in the era of technological, industrial, and civilizational changes. Perhaps, in the future, movies will become more and more virtual, but sound provides a medium channel and condition for movies to go from unreal, virtual to real, and to the heart.

The sound is endless, the visual is not stopped. We are looking forward to it!

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