

# The characteristic implication and style change of Jia Zhangke's film aesthetics

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**Abstract:** *Jia Zhangke's films have the characteristics of regional culture and bottom culture, and have a unique aesthetic perspective, which occupies an important position in contemporary Chinese films with its unique documentary and realistic style. With the commercialization of Chinese films, Jia Zhangke's film aesthetic style has also undergone the forwarding of subject, space and symbol. This paper explores the charm and value of Jia Zhangke's films through in-depth analysis of his aesthetic characteristics and stylistic changes.*

**Keywords:** *Jia Zhangke; Film aesthetics; Characteristics of implication; Style changes*

## 1. Introduction

As a way to record the material reality, no matter what kind of expression skills and techniques are used, the content expressed by the film cannot be separated from the "beauty".<sup>[1]</sup> As a member of the "sixth generation" of directors, Jia Zhangke's films are full of personal pursuit of beauty. His works always focus on the political, economic, cultural and other developments in China in the past 20 years. He focuses on the marginalized people at the bottom and insists on describing a past era with his personal experience and memory in a documentary attitude. However, with the reform of Chinese film system and the development of film marketization and commercialization, Jia Zhangke's films have undergone some changes in narrative mode and form, which is the main content of this paper.

## 2. Overview of Jia Zhangke's films

Jia Zhangke is one of the representatives of the sixth generation of Chinese directors, who started making films in 1996. The "Xiao Shan Goes Home" made him figure out "how to make movies and how to look at the world in a way that can never be separated." His style is intensely personal, smoky and dusty, and he tries to show life as it really is, looking at the changing times through the eyes of small people. "This is my attitude and my direct experience of grassroots folk life," he said in "A Grass-roots Folk Director from China" (Dialogue). I cannot deny it because it has no romance." The aesthetic style presented in his films is completely documentary, so it can be said that his films contain documentary aesthetics.

Jia Zhangke focuses on the bottom marginalized groups and puts some stories of small people on the screen to record the reality of "the present". Through the image expression of marginalized people, Jia Zhangke's humanistic concern for the real life conditions is reflected, which also better reflects the characteristics of authenticity of his works. Created in 1998, "Xiao Wu" tells the story of an "artisan" who is arrested after experiencing family affection, friendship and love, and retains the "rough" edge feeling of real life greatly in the film. In his images, he used more long lenses. "The use of long shots is considered to be the best way to record the truth", so in the "Platform" (2000), we see his distinctive shooting technique again, showing the story of a small person from the search and return.<sup>[2]</sup> During the ten years from 1979 to 1989, China was in the period of great changes of reform and opening up. Countless "Fen Yang" were forgotten in the development, and countless small individuals curled up and tried to grow in the edge. Jia Zhangke insists on recording the current events with an objective attitude, so that he can become an "attender". He tries to record everything in the camera while combining his own experience. Under constant polish, Jia Zhangke's works have entered the public horizon with documentary aesthetics, and his subsequent films, such as "Unknown Pleasures"(2002), "World"(2004), "Still Life"(2006), "Dong" (2005) and "Mountains may depart" (2015), show people's inability to cope with the real world in the new century. Infiltrate the power of the heart to attack.

### **3. The characteristic implication of Jia Zhangke's film aesthetics**

The characteristic implication of Jia Zhangke's film aesthetics is mainly discussed from two aspects of regional culture and bottom culture.

#### ***3.1. Regional culture***

In Jia Zhangke's humanistic films, regional culture features are obvious, and it can even be said that it is deeply rooted in county seat of Shanxi, which has an important relationship with his own experience. Jia Zhangke believes that "in China, knowledge from such a background may not have special significance for a person from such a background as me only because of personal factors." He believes that "without such a face and attitude, Chinese modern art will lose contact with the land -- just like what some young artists do now, which becomes a very partial and narrow private discourse." He would such an attitude incisively and vividly show in the film, in fact, he doesn't care about the location of the shooting is a big city or small town, because in a sense, the whole of China is in itself a savage growth and dynamic large county, what he did is the region through the lens of the changes in the real.

#### ***3.2. The underlying cultural***

Since the 1990s, the low-level narrative began to rise, which refers to the use of literature to show the living conditions of marginalized people and reflect the hard life of the low-level people. In the "A Touch of Sin," Jia zhangke bluntly reveals the huge gap between rich and poor in Chinese society. The film consists of four stories, four outright tragedies. In the "A Touch of Sin," Jia zhangke bluntly reveals the huge gap between rich and poor in Chinese society. The film consists of four stories, four outright tragedies. The film opens with a scene in which San, played by Wang Baoqiang, kills the robber, setting the stage for the film's violent narrative. Dahai, played by Jiang Wu, tries to fight against the huge evil system as an individual, but in the face of power and money, he is hit spiritually and physically again and again. Finally, the insulted man like Jia Zhangke decides to practice justice in the most primitive way, shooting, and the villain falls in a pool of blood. Violence and repression are everywhere, and Jia zhangke's works restore the real living state of the bottom people to the greatest extent, and this bottom culture is the most prominent element in his film aesthetics.<sup>[3]</sup>

### **4. The development and change of Jia Zhangke's film aesthetics**

Jia Zhangke's film aesthetics has always been in a dynamic process of change, from "underground production" to "mainstream society", from the first film "Xiao Shan Goes Home" to "Three plays in Hometown", from the "World" after release to the "Mountains May Depart", Jia Zhangke's film style has always maintained concern for the real society. However, with the constant changes of society, Jia zhangke's career and thoughts also change with The Times and social development. He said, "I am not immutable. I should take pictures of myself at this moment, even if I am not thoughtful and not fully understood."

#### ***4.1. A shift in narrative mode***

Jia Zhangke's films have some changes in narrative structure, subject and object. From the perspective of narrative structure, it has experienced a change from fragments to plates. In his early films, the focus of narration was on some complicated life fragments, narrating the details of life in a peaceful way, and stitching together some occasional fragments. Taking the "Xiao Wu" as an example, the movie chooses to use many long shots and dialogues, and connects what is completed by a fragmentary character with the movie through capturing details. However, in his works after the "World", Jia Zhangke paid more attention to using the block structure to represent the characters. For example, he deconstructed the film through the four characters of "smoke", "wine", "sugar" and "tea" in the "Still Life".<sup>[4]</sup> In the selection of subjects, Jia Zhangke began to change from marginal figures to ordinary people; In terms of object selection, his films focused more on the spiritual world in the early stage and recorded some characters and elements of The Times by observing details of life. In the later stage, with the improvement of life experience and shooting skills, his works began to pay more attention to the external living situation. Jia Zhangke constantly combines his own experience to reflect the living environment and space of the bottom marginal characters as realistically as possible under the current of The Times.

#### 4.2. A change in symbolic style

In the transformation of Jia Zhangke's film aesthetic style, symbolic style is an important feature. In the early stage, he paid attention to the documentary records, and in the later stage, he paid attention to the surreal spiritual symbols. In his films, we can see the transformation of diverse cultures, such as the transformation of spatial symbols from county to city, the transformation of time coincidence from past, present and future, and the transformation of music elements selection. With these elements, Jia Zhangke better reflects the inner changes of characters and their thinking on culture. In his "Hometown trilogy", Jia Zhangke uses audio-visual symbols to present us with a highly realistic aesthetic style. In movies, scenes such as dance halls and dilapidated factories have become the most prominent environmental symbols, which actually implies that under the rapid economic development, these contents are regarded as important symbols of marginalized people. In the "Still Life", he added some "virtual" elements to foil and express the theme; In the "24 City", the plot and characters are "true and fictional". Then in the "World" he added some animation to better express the mood of the characters. In this way, the unreal sense of the world is displayed. The director tries to separate the narrative subject from the realistic environment. In the "Mountains may depart", spiritual symbols are added to express thoughts on culture and emotion.<sup>[5]</sup> These changes in symbols are an important reflection of Jia Zhangke's style changes in film creation.

#### 5. Conclusions

Under the change of times, Jia Zhangke's film aesthetic style has been criticized to some extent, especially some people think that his observation of life is not sensitive, and he has lost the vitality of youth. But Mr. Jia said, "Reality is a rock. It stands there naked and will not move." His films still insist on highlighting the reality and presenting the most objective life of the bottom people from a documentary perspective. At the same time, Jia Zhangke's films are constantly expanding the field of self-expression and changing the style of films. The transformation of narrative mode, the development of symbolic style, and the transition from realism to the combination of the virtual and the real all contain obvious characteristics of The Times. The analysis of the development and change of Jia Zhangke's film aesthetic style can provide more diversified thinking space for Chinese film creation.

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