

What Is Cinema For?——A Philosophical Retrospection on Works by Young Contemporary Chinese Directors

Zheng Zhongdi

School of Theater, Film and Television, Communication University of China, Beijing 100024, China

*zhengzhongdi@cuc.edu.cn

Abstract: Since cinema was established as the “Seventh Art”, its artistic identity has been continuously tested amid technological iteration and commercial impact, especially for Chinese cinema, which has experienced the collapse and reconstruction of artistic attributes in the new century. Against the backdrop of diverse cultural trends, contemporary young Chinese directors have undertaken a collective unconscious retrospection on traditional Oriental aesthetics and Lao-Zhuang Philosophy, forming a three-dimensional artistic exploration involving temporal-spatial, character, and ideological turns. By shifting the narrative focus from urban spaces to pastoral rural areas, shaping characters based on Lao-Zhuang philosophical paradigms, and restoring Oriental poetic aesthetics characterized by implicitness and blank space, they reconstruct the spiritual homeland in images. This exploration not only endows Chinese cinema with new artistic vitality but also reshapes its philosophical orientation and aesthetic value, opening up a new path for the expression of national cinematic philosophy.

Keywords: Chinese cinema; young directors; Lao-Zhuang Philosophy; Oriental aesthetics; spiritual homeland; temporal-spatial turn

1. Introduction

Martin Heidegger, the founder of existentialist philosophy, expounded on the relationship between Being and images in *The Age of the World Picture*, stating that “The world picture does not mean a picture of the world, but rather the world being grasped as a picture”^[1]. Though the term “cinema” is not mentioned here, as a form of moving images, cinema is undoubtedly encompassed within the category of the “world picture”. In Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, the “time-space structure” also corresponds to the temporal and spatial elements of cinema—both emphasize the interdependence of time, space, and human existence, and regard the perception of time-space as the fundamental way to understand the world. Thus, in the process of the turn of Western philosophy towards postmodernism, Heideggerian philosophy holds an overarching philosophical significance for the art of cinema, providing a cross-cultural theoretical perspective for interpreting the temporal-spatial expression of Chinese cinema.

It is worth noting that the philosophical connotation contained in Chinese cinema is not only a response to Western philosophy, but also a natural derivation of traditional Oriental philosophy. As a core part of Chinese traditional philosophy, Lao-Zhuang Philosophy takes “Tao” as the highest category, advocates “harmony between man and nature”, “governing by non-action” and other ideological propositions, and forms a unique understanding of time, space, life and aesthetics. This kind of philosophy, which takes nature as the origin and emphasizes the unity of man and the universe, has a profound resonance with the artistic expression of cinema. When contemporary young Chinese directors face the dual impact of Western cultural trends and domestic commercialization, they unconsciously turn to traditional Oriental philosophy for spiritual support, and integrate the ideological connotation of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy into the creation of images, forming a unique artistic style that distinguishes itself from Western cinema and previous generations of Chinese directors. This kind of integration is not a deliberate catering or simple borrowing, but a creative transformation based on personal life experience and cultural identity, which makes Chinese cinema gain a new philosophical dimension while maintaining

national cultural characteristics.

By contrast, the inquiry into art, technique, and the Dao in traditional Lao-Zhuang Philosophy has also found its application in Chinese cinema. Some scholars have summarized the philosophical views on life in Daoist philosophy into four major ideological paradigms, namely: the outlook of selflessness and oblivion of the ego, which advocates acting without claiming credit and emptying the self to transcend the ego; the outlook of self-restraint, which emphasizes upholding softness and humility and opposing self-boasting; the outlook of self-determined freedom, which pursues self-transformation and self-cultivation, not being governed by material things, remaining independent and detached from the world while living in harmony with the mundane; and the outlook of cherishing and valuing life, which stresses treasuring the self and one's body, as well as preserving the body and safeguarding life in its entirety^[2]. Corresponding characters embodying these four paradigms can be found in almost all types of Chinese films, from the ancient costume films of the early Republic of China to the contemporary realistic works, reflecting the profound influence of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy on Chinese film creation. This philosophical infiltration is not a superficial borrowing of cultural symbols, but a deep integration of ideological connotations into cinematic expression, laying a theoretical foundation for the subsequent character turn in young directors' works.

It seems that Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy have found a meeting point of integration in the art of cinema. Heidegger's reflection on "Being" and "time-space" and Lao-Zhuang's pursuit of "Tao" and "spiritual freedom" both point to the ultimate concern of human existence—how to find the way of being in the world and construct a spiritual home. The difference lies in that Heidegger's philosophy starts from the Western metaphysical tradition, explores the existence dilemma of modern people through the deconstruction of traditional metaphysics, while Lao-Zhuang Philosophy takes the natural order as the starting point, advocates returning to nature and transcending the secular to achieve spiritual freedom. For contemporary young Chinese directors, this cross-cultural philosophical dialogue provides a broader creative space. They do not simply choose one of them, but integrate the two into their works according to their own artistic pursuit, forming a unique philosophical expression of Chinese cinema.

Since the 1980s, in terms of its time-space structure and artistic forms, Chinese cinema has been confronted with the innovation of artistic concepts and the iteration of technical means. Amid the integration and differentiation of cultural trends, Chinese cinema has gone through three stages: the stage of constructing and critiquing Oriental aesthetics from the perspective of Orientalism (for instance, Zhang Yimou's artificial construction of folk customs in *Red Sorghum*), the stage of techno-worship that prioritizes technology above all else (represented by technology-oriented films such as *The Shanghai Fortress*), and the current stage of artistic retrospection of traditional Chinese philosophy led primarily by young directors (for example, Gu Xiaogang's adaptation and integration of the aesthetic concepts of traditional Chinese landscape painting in *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*). Rooted in traditional Chinese philosophy and Oriental aesthetics, young directors are forging a brand-new mode of expression for philosophical thinking in Chinese cinema, and this exploration is manifested in a three-dimensional way through temporal-spatial, character, and ideological turns.

The group of young contemporary Chinese directors is characterized by consciousness in genre creation and diversity in artistic styles. Resonating with the pulse of the times, they spontaneously engage in retrospection of traditional philosophy, seeking cinematic expressions with Oriental aesthetic characteristics: in terms of cinematic time and space, they shift from urban areas to the rediscovery of pastoral and rural spaces; in character portrayal, they shape vivid roles based on highly localized and contextual Daoist philosophical paradigms; at the level of cinematic aesthetics, they achieve a spiritual return to Oriental pastoral aesthetics through poetic expressions. Entering the works of young directors is just like embarking on a spiritual journey to the homeland, with images as the medium.

This three-dimensional artistic exploration is not an isolated phenomenon, but a response to the cultural context of the times. In the process of globalization, the cultural identity of Chinese cinema is facing unprecedented challenges. The commercialization of mainstream blockbusters and the imitation of Western genre films have made some works lose their national cultural characteristics. Under such circumstances, young directors' turn to traditional philosophy and aesthetics is a kind of "cultural self-rescue". They take rural space as the carrier, take Lao-Zhuang Philosophy as the core, and take Oriental poetic aesthetics as the expression method, reconstruct the spiritual connotation of Chinese cinema, and prove that Chinese cinema can gain a foothold in the world film pattern with its own cultural characteristics. This exploration not only enriches the expression forms of Chinese cinema, but also provides a new way for the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture.

2. Temporal-Spatial Turn: The Rediscovery of Pastoral and Rural Spaces

After the 1980s, deconstructionist thoughts represented by Gilles Deleuze entered China, impacting domestic research dominated by German classical aesthetics represented by Kant and Hegel. Amid the impact and integration of ideological trends, Chinese aesthetics exhibited distinct characteristics in the confrontation between German classical aesthetics and French deconstructionism: from the perspective of German classical aesthetics, China lacked philosophy, tragedy, and systematicity, being regarded as the "infancy" of human civilization; in contrast, within deconstructionist trends, Chinese thought became an "enclave" for criticizing Western essentialism and dualistic models^[3].

When such ideological trends entered the field of cinema, an obvious temporal-spatial turn emerged. A group of young directors focused their attention on rural areas, using symbols such as dialects and countryside to express their longing for the homeland and exploration of the spiritual origin in their works. In Samuel P. Huntington's view, "One of the crucial consequences of modernization is the urban-rural gap"^[4]. This has also become an important theme in young directors' rural narratives, where rural complex and homesickness have been continuously amplified amid the cultural conflict between urban and rural areas. The concept of "rural area" no longer merely refers to a physical space, but has evolved into a homestead image in time and memory, extending from a single village to a broader native land and homeland, and even taking on the meaning of humanity's spiritual origin.

From the perspective of spatial theory, the temporal-spatial turn of young directors is essentially a kind of "spatial production" in the sense of Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre believes that space is not a passive container, but a product of social practice, which contains power relations, cultural connotations and human emotions. The rural space in young directors' works is precisely such a "produced space": on the one hand, it retains the physical characteristics of rural areas, such as land, rivers, and traditional dwellings; on the other hand, it is endowed with rich cultural and philosophical connotations by directors, becoming a carrier to express their understanding of traditional culture, modernization and human existence. Compared with the urban space dominated by rationality and order, the rural space in their works is more in line with the natural order advocated by Lao-Zhuang Philosophy, and has become a spiritual refuge for modern people lost in the process of modernization.

Unlike the Fifth Generation, which was named by the academic circle, the group of young directors has no clear generational division or unified professional background, but mostly consists of post-80s and post-90s creators, hence the designation "young directors" for the sake of discussion. Whether it is post-80s directors such as Bi Gan, Huo Meng, Li Ruijun, Xin Yukun, and Gu Xiaogang, or post-90s directors like Wei Shujun and Kong Dashan, they all replace mainstream discourse with personal expressions in their works, presenting the countryside from a personalized perspective. With the advancement of modernization, the concept of "rural area" tends to merge with "homesickness", jointly manifested in the pursuit of rural natural ecology,

attachment to traditional rural culture, and nostalgia for rural lifestyles. It is evident from the major works of young directors that, compared with the scar literature-style narration favored by the Fourth Generation, the national identity search of the Fifth Generation, and the rebellious and marginal creative tendency of the Sixth Generation, their works demonstrate the rediscovery of pastoral and rural spaces. This presentation of pastoral and rural spaces is different from the scarred youth recollection in the Fourth Generation's *Sacrifice of Youth*, the innovative audio-visual language in the Fifth Generation's *Yellow Earth*, and the "underground film" style portrayal of the countryside in the Sixth Generation's *Platform*. Young directors depict the countryside from a brand-new contemporary perspective. For directors, the pastoral homeland is not only a material geographical space, but also a secondary space such as a spiritual space, emotional space, and ideological space carrying life experiences^[5]. Some scholars argue that young directors adopt a "relatively objective creative attitude and playful stance in film production"^[6]. From a vertical comparison with directors of different generations, this positioning may have certain reference value, but it seems harsh and even unfair when considering the entire group of young directors horizontally, as their rural narratives are rooted in profound cultural consciousness rather than arbitrary playfulness.

Each generation has its own subjectivity. Even the Fifth Generation, which initially possessed distinct artistic subjectivity, eventually fragmented and became scattered over time. Young directors are not a group united by common aesthetic characteristics or artistic concepts, so it is not surprising that they have not formed a similar subjective image or lack sufficient subjectivity in art. However, it should not be concluded that their creative attitude is "objective" or "playful". On the contrary, an overview of the creations of young directors reveals a common feature in their creative philosophy: the rediscovery of rural spaces. Just as Mo Yan said, his hometown is an inexhaustible source of materials. Gaomi Northeast Township and Yoknapatawpha County, two places as small as stamps, share a common characteristic: they are rural societies^[7]. In fact, this is not only true for writers, but also for film creators, as rural society is an inescapable theme in their creations.

"Rural China is an ethical-based community"^[8]. From Fei Xiaotong's perspective, Chinese society is rural in nature^[9]. Rural China is the fundamental background of Chinese society and the historical starting point of a China rooted in homesickness. This rural nature is first reflected in the survival rationality based on land, and further derives into the social foundation of cultivating people through culture and the value orientation emphasizing virtue. Historically, these characteristics have maintained strong continuity, regulating the thinking and behaviors of people in rural society [10]. For young directors who grew up in the transition period of urbanization, rural areas are not only their birthplace and growth environment, but also a spiritual symbol carrying their memory and cultural identity. Their rediscovery of rural spaces is not only a choice of creative theme, but also a return to their cultural roots, which is deeply rooted in the collective unconscious of the Chinese nation.

From the perspective of new mainstream blockbusters, rural spaces are presented as thriving, with *My People, My Homeland* being a prominent representative. Through an anthology of short films, it weaves a brand-new picture of new rural areas in the new era. Rural spaces fully display the beauty of rural life and art, with murals, hand-paintings, and rice field paintings jointly creating a poetic rural habitat, satisfying urban people's yearning for "pastoral life". Amid such extreme "truth, goodness, and beauty", creation is shrouded by power discourse, depicting a utopian pastoral scenery of the new era. In Jia Zhangke's film *Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue* (Sixth Generation director), several interviewed writers unanimously talked about the nurturing effect of the countryside on their works. Both the writers interviewed in the film and Jia Zhangke himself, who stays behind the scenes as the director, have been originally and strongly driven by the countryside in their creations. The difference is that in young directors' works, the countryside is not a byproduct of power discourse, but a reconstruction of creative space. Their rural narratives

show a more personalized and diversified trend. By recreating the memories of individual life experiences, these young directors have constructed a “visible world” perceptually identical to the real world—a film world embodying the directors’ life experiences, which achieves authentic identification with the audience’s life experiences through the medium of images [11].

Bi Gan’s *Kaili Blues* presents a romanticized and personalized poetic depiction of Guizhou’s rural scenery. Xu Lei’s *Summer Detective* adopts a comedic and genre-based approach to Hebei’s countryside. Zhou Ziyang’s *Old Beast* shows the western landscape interwoven with vast grasslands and Gobi... In these works of young directors, the countryside has become a vibrant and highly personalized cinematic space, generally demonstrating distinctive cultural locality and unique cultural personality. In the romanticized and poetic images of *Kaili Blues*, the countryside extends into a literary path, elevates into a poetic train ride, and finally reconstructs the cultural landscape of Guizhou represented by Kaili and Dangmai in images, which is significantly different from reality.

In *Summer Detective*, the Central Hebei Plain is condensed and materialized: the director extracts symbols with universal rural signifiers such as brick bungalows and northern villages, and at the same time completes the spiritual sublimation of the plain countryside through goldfish on plastic covers. In *Old Beast*, Inner Mongolia does not exist as a stereotypical “grassland with wind blowing over grass and cattle and sheep visible”, but presents a vast and desolate Gobi landscape. The withered and empty sense of winter desolation contrasts with the protagonist’s twilight years as a declining hero, making the physical countryside an external extension of the character’s psychology. These diverse rural space expressions show that young directors have a strong awareness of independent creation. They do not stick to the fixed impression of rural areas, but re-express and reconstruct rural spaces according to their own artistic pursuit and philosophical understanding, making rural spaces in Chinese cinema present a diversified development trend.

Another typical work that embodies the temporal-spatial turn of young directors is Wei Shujun’s *Yong’an Town Story Collection* (2021). Different from the romanticization of Guizhou’s countryside in *Kaili Blues* and the desolation of Inner Mongolia’s landscape in *Old Beast*, the film takes a small town in Jiangnan as its spatial carrier and adopts a “play within a play” structure to present the multi-faceted nature of rural space amid modernization. The Yong’an Town in Wei’s lens is a “hybrid space” where tradition and modernity coexist: bluestone-paved old streets, riverside wooden houses with black tiles and white walls, and traditional snack shops inherit Oriental pastoral aesthetics, while newly built highways, neon-lit karaoke halls, and villagers holding smartphones reflect the impact of modernization. By taking the arrival of a film crew as a trigger to break the town’s daily tranquility, Wei explores the tension between local residents’ identification with traditional rural space and their yearning for urban life. For instance, the hotel landlady clings to the old house where she has lived for decades yet secretly envies the urban lifestyle described by the crew. This spatial contradiction echoes Huntington’s concept of the “urban-rural gap” and deepens the young directors’ reflection on “spiritual homelessness” caused by temporal-spatial transformation in the process of modernization. Such a portrayal enriches the connotation of the temporal-spatial turn, as it does not merely depict rural space as a static spiritual refuge but as a dynamic field of conflicting values.

Kong Dashan’s *Cosmic Exploration Editorial Department* (2021) further subverts the expression of rural space by young directors, pushing the temporal-spatial turn into a metaphysical dimension. Set in a remote rural area in Shanxi, the film presents a realistic rural scene featuring a dilapidated editorial office, desolate loess slopes, and simple villagers. However, Kong integrates absurd elements such as alien searches, extraterrestrial signals, and a “cosmic chicken” into this rural context, transforming an ordinary village into a carrier for exploring the ultimate meaning of life. The protagonist Tang Zhijun’s wandering between loess slopes and villages, in essence, is a spiritual quest for “homeland.” Unlike the concrete rural spaces depicted in most young directors’ works, the rural area here transcends geographical boundaries and becomes a metaphysical space

bearing human confusion about existence. This expression not only enriches the connotation of the temporal-spatial turn but also realizes the integration of Lao-Zhuang's pursuit of "Tao" and modern existentialist thoughts in rural space, demonstrating young directors' cross-philosophical exploration of spatial meaning.

As a landmark work of young directors' temporal-spatial exploration, Gu Xiaogang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* (2019) integrates the aesthetic concepts of traditional Chinese landscape painting into film narrative, offering a more systematic interpretation of the temporal-spatial turn. Taking the Fuchun River as the core spatial carrier, the film parallels the four seasons of the river with the fate of a family of four brothers, constructing a "landscape painting time-space" that integrates nature, time, and human emotions. Unlike the "hybrid space" of tradition and modernity in *Yong'an Town Story Collection* and the absurd space in *Cosmic Exploration Editorial Department*, the Fuchun River in Gu's work is a natural space carrying the inheritance of Oriental aesthetics. It retains the poetic charm of Huang Gongwang's traditional painting *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*—with mist-shrouded rivers, green hills, and winding paths—while recording subtle changes in modern rural society, such as the construction of new rural houses, the impact of tourism on traditional life, and intergenerational conflicts between the elderly clinging to traditional lifestyles and young people pursuing urbanization. Employing a large number of long shots and fixed shots to simulate the "freehand brushwork" of Chinese landscape painting, Gu allows the camera to flow naturally like the Fuchun River, presenting the coexistence of natural order and trivial human life. This spatial expression echoes Lao-Zhuang's philosophy of "harmony between man and nature", regarding natural landscapes as an extension of human spirit and a carrier of family ethics, thus elevating the temporal-spatial turn to the height of cultural inheritance. What distinguishes this work is its ability to balance aesthetic tradition with contemporary reality, making it a paradigm of the temporal-spatial turn in young directors' creations.

These films, from Wei Shujun's realistic portrayal of hybrid space to Kong Dashan's absurd exploration of metaphysical space, and to Gu Xiaogang's aesthetic inheritance of natural space, collectively present the diversified exploration of rural space by young directors. Unlike the rural narratives of previous generations—such as the Fourth Generation's nostalgic recollection, the Fifth Generation's Orientalist construction, and the Sixth Generation's marginalized depiction—young directors depict the countryside from a contemporary perspective that integrates tradition and modernity. They do not regard rural space as a static symbol but as a dynamic field where cultural conflicts, spiritual pursuits, and philosophical reflections intersect. This kind of exploration not only enriches the expression of rural space in Chinese cinema but also lays a solid foundation for the subsequent character turn and ideological turn, as the constructed rural space provides a realistic and philosophical carrier for character shaping and spiritual exploration.

It is worth emphasizing that the temporal-spatial turn of young directors is not a simple regression to traditional pastoral poetry, but a creative transformation based on modern perspective. Traditional Oriental pastoral poetry advocates "retreating to the countryside and living in seclusion", emphasizing the separation from the secular world and the pursuit of personal peace of mind. However, the rural space in young directors' works is not an isolated "utopia", but a space full of contradictions and conflicts between tradition and modernity. They face up to the impact of modernization on rural areas, such as the loss of traditional culture, the migration of rural population, and the gap between urban and rural areas, and integrate these realistic problems into their works. While inheriting the poetic spirit of traditional pastoral culture, they also inject modern consciousness and philosophical thinking into it, making the rural space in their works have both aesthetic value and realistic significance. This kind of creative approach not only enriches the connotation of the temporal-spatial turn, but also makes the philosophical exploration of Chinese cinema more grounded. In turn, this reconstructed rural space provides a solid carrier for the shaping of characters rooted in Lao-Zhuang philosophical paradigms, forming

a logical connection between the temporal-spatial turn and the subsequent character turn.

3. Character Turn: The Adaptation and Integration of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist Life Philosophies

Hegel held that beauty/art is the self-manifestation of absolute spirit. Then how to express absolute spirit? In *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1820/1821), he elaborated on the relationship between concept (inner spirit) and reality (outer expression): “The unity of concept and reality constitutes truth; reality is not of great significance to concept, but merely its manifestation—comparable to the body in relation to the soul” [12]. Specifically in cinema, “absolute spirit” must ultimately be presented through characters. Directors’ “absolute spirit” and self-expression rely on characters as vehicles to reach the audience. The shaping of these characters bears not only the directors’ personalized expressions but also distinct marks of their times.

For instance, the Fifth Generation’s construction of the countryside, folk customs, local sentiments, and villagers unconsciously carries Orientalist undertones. The Sixth Generation, meanwhile, constructed new “other” images within the Orientalist framework, attempting to replace the Fifth Generation’s “collusive” relationship with the West and gain their own “power discourse” in China [13]. For young directors, their film creations realize the rediscovery of rural culture in pastoral and rural spaces. As Li Daoxin noted, “It is an inevitability in the historical development of Chinese film culture to introduce the spirit and methods of classical aesthetics into the creation of national films” [14]. In terms of character shaping, figures confined to the Orientalist framework have gradually faded, replaced by roles embodying Taoist philosophical paradigms. This character turn is not only a change in artistic expression, but also a reflection of young directors’ cultural confidence and philosophical consciousness—they no longer cater to the Western discourse system, but take traditional Chinese philosophy as the basis to shape characters with national cultural characteristics.

3.1 Small Characters of the “Following Nature and Timing” Type

Zhuangzi stated, “Taking the median as the constant principle enables one to preserve life, fulfill one’s nature, nourish relatives, and live to the full extent of one’s years” [15]. For skilled laborers like Paoding (the cook in Zhuangzi’s fable), following nature and timing constitutes their life philosophy, and similar characters abound in the works of young directors. Among them, the four brothers in *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* are typical representatives of “following nature and timing”, whose life rhythm is closely linked to the changes of the Fuchun River—fishing in spring, planting in summer, harvesting in autumn, and keeping warm in winter. Faced with the aging of their mother and the division of family property, the four brothers resolve conflicts in a way that conforms to rural ethics and natural order instead of engaging in fierce quarrels: the eldest brother upholds the responsibility of supporting the elderly, the second brother adapts to the times by engaging in tourism, the third brother lives a simple life by fishing, and the fourth brother pursues artistic dreams in the city but eventually returns to his hometown. Their choices reflect the flexibility of “following nature and timing”—they neither resist the changes of the times nor abandon traditional ethics, but seek a balance between tradition and modernity. This character logic is deeply rooted in the rural space constructed by the temporal-spatial turn, as the natural rhythm of the Fuchun River directly shapes the characters’ life attitudes.

This kind of character shaping is distinct from the passive endurance of Ma Youtie and Cao Guiying in *Return to Dust*, who endure the hardships of fate with humility, and from the active investigation of Chao Ying and Zhan Yi in *Summer Detective*, who take initiative to seek justice. Instead, it embodies the “gentle adaptation” in Lao-Zhuang philosophy, integrating individual fate into natural order and family inheritance to achieve the state of “living in harmony with the world”. Xu Lei’s *Summer Detective* (2019) further interprets the “following nature and timing” characters through the two rural elderly protagonists, Chao Ying and Zhan Yi. Living on the

Central Hebei Plain, they have long been accustomed to the life rhythm dominated by rural natural laws, and their way of handling affairs is deeply rooted in the simple survival wisdom of the countryside. When their friend Lao Yang is injured in a traffic accident and the perpetrator flees, they do not rush to seek help from urban judicial institutions but investigate according to the rural logic they are familiar with—patrolling the village along the paths they have walked for decades, inquiring about clues from neighbors based on rural interpersonal relations, and even using “coin guessing” to determine the direction of the investigation, which reflects the randomness of “following timing”. Their behavior not only reflects the characteristics of “following nature and timing” but also highlights the collision between rural survival logic and urban modern rules.

For example, the extended family in *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* goes with the flow amid changes, adapting to every subtle transformation along the Fuchun River. Another case is Ma Youtie and Cao Guiying in *Return to Dust*, farmers who live by the whims of nature, sowing and harvesting according to solar terms while toiling diligently on the loess land. The farmers in *Summer Detective* also embody this trait, adhering to a set of underlying life wisdom rooted in rural philosophy. Amid the shift between rural and urban environments, the film explores the efficacy and failure of this rural survival logic; the temporal-spatial dislocation between city and countryside shapes the characters’ humor and charm, endowing the work with a comedic tone.

Such laughter mainly stems from cognitive gaps between the audience and the characters—absurdity and humor emerge simultaneously under the two entirely distinct operational logics of urban and rural societies. It is worth noting that the “following nature and timing” characters shaped by young directors are different from the traditional Taoist hermit images. Traditional hermit images advocate separating from society and living in seclusion in nature, while the “following nature and timing” characters in young directors’ works are deeply integrated into rural society, facing the contradictions and conflicts brought by modernization. They do not escape from reality, but adapt to changes in their own way, reflecting the practicality and flexibility of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy. This kind of character shaping makes the ideological connotation of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy more in line with the contemporary context, and also makes the audience have a stronger sense of identity with these characters.

Different from Ma Youtie and Cao Guiying’s passive endurance in *Return to Dust*, Chao Ying and Zhan Yi actively respond to changes with their own rural wisdom while never going against objective laws. They do not insist on pursuing “absolute justice” in the urban sense but seek a settlement that conforms to rural ethics. This character image shows the flexibility of the “following nature and timing” thought in Lao-Zhuang philosophy, reflecting the unique living state of rural elderly who adapt to the environment and follow the rhythm in the process of urban-rural integration. In essence, the “following nature and timing” of these characters is a kind of “existence in accordance with Tao” advocated by Lao-Zhuang philosophy. As Laozi said, “Man follows the earth, the earth follows heaven, heaven follows Tao, and Tao follows nature.” This proposition points out that the highest state of human existence is to conform to the natural order, and the farmer characters in young directors’ works practice this philosophical proposition with their simple survival wisdom.

Changes in “nature” and “timing” deprive these farmer characters of their established survival rules, forcing them to construct new logics. Intriguingly, though seemingly mocked as anachronistic, such characters often end up redeeming modern civilization as saviors amid civilizational crises. Thus, the Lao-Zhuang philosophy of “following nature and timing” is invested with higher value, implying the creators’ value choices.

From a philosophical perspective, the “following nature and timing” of these characters is essentially a kind of “existence in accordance with Tao” advocated by Lao-Zhuang Philosophy. Laozi said: “Man follows the earth, the earth follows heaven, heaven follows Tao, and Tao

follows nature”. This sentence points out that the highest state of human existence is to conform to the natural order. The farmer characters in young directors’ works, with their simple survival wisdom, practice this philosophical proposition. In the context of modernization, where rationality and efficiency are emphasized, their way of existence seems backward, but it contains the wisdom of harmonious coexistence between man and nature. Young directors praise this kind of wisdom through character shaping, and at the same time reflect on the alienation of human beings in the process of modernization, showing their concern for the survival state of contemporary people. Beyond the “following nature and timing” type, young directors also explore another character paradigm rooted in Lao-Zhuang philosophy—truth-seekers of the “self-transformation and self-correction” type, which enriches the connotation of the character turn.

3.2 Truth-Seekers of the “Self-Transformation and Self-Correction” Type

“Self-transformation and self-correction” is a core tenet of Lao-Zhuang philosophy. In social governance, it corresponds to the ruler’s “governing by non-action”, emphasizing the people’s inherent capacity for self-improvement. Building on the ruler’s “non-action, love of tranquility, freedom from meddling, and freedom from desire”, Zhuangzi argued that the people, as the objects of governance, would achieve self-transformation, self-correction, self-enrichment, and self-simplicity: “When I do nothing, the people transform themselves; when I cherish tranquility, the people rectify themselves; when I refrain from meddling, the people prosper; when I have no desires, the people return to simplicity” [16].

Many such characters appear in young directors’ suspense and detective films—unofficial agents of justice who pursue truth and righteousness independently, adopting methods distinct from state institutions to uncover the truth in their unique ways. Chao Ying and Zhan Yi in *Summer Detective* are typical examples: despite identity and perspective limitations that lead to repeated setbacks and missed truths, they press forward courageously time and again. There are also characters who attempt “self-transformation and self-correction” but ultimately fail. Lacking malicious intent, these figures trigger a domino effect through minor mistakes, culminating in irreversible consequences. Xin Yukun’s *The Coffin in the Mountain* exemplifies this: no character commits heinous acts, yet all are dragged into the abyss by petty self-interest. Films like *The Dead End* and *Mr. No Problem* follow a similar vein, where protagonists struggle to correct mistakes and regain control amid chaos, only to be pushed further into despair by fate and reality, ultimately facing destruction. The existence of these two types of characters shows that young directors have a comprehensive understanding of the “self-transformation and self-correction” thought of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy, not only affirming its positive value, but also recognizing its limitations in the face of reality.

The self-philosophy of “self-transformation and self-correction” carries undertones of passive inaction, laissez-faire, and anarchism. In young directors’ works, this approach leads to occasional success but often deeper ruin—a price of self-driven truth-seeking that reflects their pursuit of individual agency. Amid the coexistence of pre-modern, modern, and post-modern elements in contemporary China, young directors’ artistic exploration, guided by the “post-hypotheticality” of film industrial aesthetics, moves toward the cultural and emotional truth of a national film aesthetic community [17]. In exploring the boundaries of cinematic expression, they infuse personal philosophical reflections into characters, completing a meditation on and return to traditional Chinese Lao-Zhuang philosophy through imagery.

It is worth noting that the “self-transformation and self-correction” of the characters in young directors’ works is not only a personal behavior, but also a reflection of the cultural psychology of the Chinese nation. The Chinese nation has always advocated the spirit of self-reflection and self-improvement, and the “self-transformation and self-correction” thought of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy is an important part of this spirit. Young directors integrate this cultural spirit into character shaping, making the characters have a strong national cultural identity. At the same

time, they also reflect on the relationship between individual and society through the “self-transformation and self-correction” of the characters. In the context of the rapid development of society, how individuals maintain their own independence and realize self-improvement has become an important issue concerned by young directors. Their exploration in this regard enriches the connotation of character shaping in Chinese cinema and makes the characters have more contemporary significance. The character turn based on Lao-Zhuang philosophical paradigms further paves the way for the ideological turn of young directors, as the spiritual pursuit of characters naturally leads to the construction of a poetic spiritual homeland.

4. Ideological Turn: Wandering the Spiritual Homeland

While the temporal-spatial and character turns serve as a way for young directors to gain a discourse space, the turn and innovation in aesthetic and philosophical concepts have become the fundamental basis for this group to establish their artistic legitimacy. The aesthetic turn of young directors is not an isolated artistic practice, but a response to the cultural and artistic context of the times. In the early days of the new century, Chinese cinema was once dominated by commercial blockbusters, and the pursuit of box office benefits made some works ignore artistic quality and philosophical connotation. Under such circumstances, young directors turned to Oriental poetic aesthetics, which is a kind of artistic rebellion and a return to the essence of cinema art.

Oriental poetic aesthetics, with its unique characteristics of implicitness, blank space and freehand brushwork, has a long history in Chinese traditional art. From traditional poetry and painting to classical opera, it has formed a complete aesthetic system. Young directors integrate this aesthetic system into film creation, breaking the narrative mode and aesthetic standard of Western cinema, and forming a unique Oriental cinematic aesthetic style. This aesthetic turn not only makes young directors gain a foothold in the film industry, but also promotes the construction of Chinese film aesthetic system, making Chinese cinema have its own unique aesthetic label in the world film pattern. Specifically, this aesthetic integration is manifested in the poetic depiction of the spiritual homeland, which is the core content of the ideological turn and a natural extension of the temporal-spatial and character turns.

“All exquisite films are the crystallization of human spirit integrating truth, goodness, and beauty. At the level of time-space structure, cinema connects the lived world, the cleared realm, and the realm of truth, thereby creating a state of ultimate truth, goodness, and beauty” [18]. Completely different from directors of any previous generation, these new directors who grew up alongside the Internet, beneath their genre-based and stylized exteriors, internally exhibit aesthetic traits that coincide with traditional Oriental aesthetics. Amid poeticism, implicitness, blank space, and freehand brushwork, they have achieved a return to traditional aesthetics and a re-imagination of the Oriental spiritual homeland.

The “film atmosphere theory” proposed by Director Fei Mu is “essentially a kind of creation based on the ontology of cinema... that is, to create the mood of the ‘drama’ (film) and express the emotion of the ‘drama’ (film)” [19]. This coincides with the “poeticism” in traditional aesthetics. When young directors attempt to return to pure cinematic ontological creation, they are already practicing Fei Mu’s “film atmosphere theory”, where the emotion of the film permeates the images and lingers before the lens. Poeticism and blank space thus emerge. The poetic expression of young directors is not a simple imitation of traditional art, but a creative transformation based on film ontology. They use film’s unique audio-visual language to express the connotation of Oriental poetic aesthetics, making the poetic flavor of the film more vivid and perceptible.

4.1 The Depiction of Spiritual Homeland in Poetic Cinema

In traditional Chinese philosophy, “poeticism” refers to an inexplicable subtle realm that can only be sensed but not expressed in words. In cinema, presenting poeticism within time and space through visual means is also the pursuit of young directors. The return of poeticism in cinema

has not only become an important symbol for constructing Chinese national images but also provided theoretical nourishment for the exploration of cinematic ontology and aesthetics in the contemporary era [20].

From the perspective of aesthetic theory, the poetic expression of young directors is closely related to the “realm theory” in traditional Chinese aesthetics. The “realm theory” emphasizes that art should create a realm of “harmony between man and nature”, making the audience feel the profound connotation of the work beyond the image. The poetic expression of young directors is precisely the practice of this “realm theory”. They do not rely on dramatic plots and intense conflicts to attract the audience, but create a unique artistic realm through delicate audio-visual language and implicit emotional expression, making the audience feel the spiritual connotation of the work in the immersion. For example, the long shots in *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, the misty images in *Kaili Blues*, all create a strong poetic realm, which makes the film have a strong artistic appeal. This poetic construction is not only an aesthetic choice but also a philosophical expression, as it reflects the pursuit of spiritual freedom advocated by Lao-Zhuang philosophy.

In the works of young directors, the expression of “poeticism” in images is manifested in diverse forms. Films such as Bi Gan’s *Kaili Blues*, Xing Jian’s *Winter*, and Yang Chao’s *Crosscurrent* have constructed and sublimated the countryside with poetic lens language and literary texts, while *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains* takes this poetic expression to a higher level by integrating traditional landscape painting aesthetics into film ontology. Abandoning the dramatic conflicts of traditional narratives, Gu Xiaogang adopts the “blank space” technique in Oriental aesthetics to present the trivial daily life of the family: the old mother’s dazed look by the river, the brothers’ silent division of property, and the children’s playful running on the riverbank. These seemingly trivial scenes are endowed with profound poetic connotations under the rendering of the Fuchun River’s landscape. Instead of deliberately explaining the emotional entanglements between the characters, Gu lets emotions flow with the changes of seasons and the river, which is in line with the Oriental aesthetic pursuit of “implication and subtlety.”

For example, in the scene where the second brother sends his mother to a nursing home, the camera does not focus on the tears of separation between mother and son but turns to the distant Fuchun River, where mist rises and boats drift slowly. The helplessness of human fate and the eternity of natural order form a silent dialogue, which is more touching than direct emotional expression. This kind of poetic construction not only realizes the inheritance of traditional Chinese landscape painting aesthetics in film art but also interprets Heidegger’s “poetic dwelling” with Oriental cultural connotations—man lives in natural landscapes, and landscapes nourish man’s spirit, forming an interdependent spiritual home. Wei Shujun’s *Yong’an Town Story Collection* presents a unique poetic expression that differs from the romantic poetry of *Kaili Blues*; its poetry is hidden in daily details.

A large number of modern poems written by Bi Gan appear in *Kaili Blues*. Even though he emphasized in an interview that “I never intended to necessarily write poems in my films” [21], these verses, accompanied by Chen Yongzhong’s recitation, form intertextuality and resonance with the rural scenes on the screen. It constructs a poetic rural area in Qiandongnan, poetically reimagining a village in Kaili, Guizhou Province as “Dangmai”, thus creating a rural world between reality and imagination. *Winter* outlines the hermit life of literati in traditional ink wash paintings through black-and-white freehand images. The countryside here is full of painterly beauty and landscape beauty, and Heidegger’s “poetic dwelling” naturally emanates from such images in a localized way, offering an artistic and humanistic experience.

Crosscurrent, with the Yangtze River as its core, aims to construct Chinese civilization and the spiritual homeland. The lingering mist and ambiguous images in the film approach the Chinese people’s imagination of the Yangtze River infinitely amid scattered light and shadow, forming a rural image that blurs reality and poeticism. These works show that young directors have a variety

of ways to express poeticism. They can integrate poetry into images, can use black-and-white images to create ink painting style, and can also use natural landscapes to construct spiritual space. No matter which way, they all adhere to the core of Oriental poetic aesthetics, making the poetic expression of Chinese cinema present a diversified development trend. At the same time, these poetic expressions also reflect the deep integration of young directors' personal artistic pursuit and traditional Chinese culture, making their works have both personal style and national cultural characteristics.

For instance, in the scene where the landlady waters flowers in the yard in the morning, sunlight filters through the leaves and falls on her, with dewdrops glistening in the light. This ordinary daily scene is captured by a fixed long shot, exuding a quiet and peaceful poetic flavor. Instead of deliberately creating a poetic space, Wei discovers poetry in the trivial daily life of the countryside, embodying the Oriental aesthetic concept of "finding beauty in the ordinary." This down-to-earth poetic expression makes the spiritual home depicted in the film closer to the audience's life experience, forming a complementary relationship with the romantic poetry of *Kaili Blues* and the aesthetic poetry of *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*.

Kong Dashan's *Cosmic Exploration Editorial Department* realizes the free wandering of the spirit in absurd reality, adding a metaphysical dimension to poetic expression. Combining realism and absurdity, the film truly presents the poverty and backwardness of rural Shanxi—dilapidated houses, simple food, and the ignorance of some villagers—while integrating absurd elements such as alien searches and the "cosmic chicken." This contrast constructs a unique spiritual space: Tang Zhijun's search for aliens is essentially a spiritual wandering. Dissatisfied with the boring daily life, he pursues a higher spiritual realm, and even though his behavior seems absurd to others, he finds his own spiritual sustenance in this process. The film ends with Tang sitting on the roof, looking up at the stars; at this moment, he no longer cares about finding aliens but achieves spiritual freedom. This ending echoes Zhuangzi's "roaming freely in the infinite", realizing the spiritual wandering of modern people in the context of globalization. Such a metaphysical expression expands the boundary of the spiritual homeland, making it not only confined to the physical rural space but also extending to the realm of human spiritual pursuit.

This ending echoes Zhuangzi's "roaming freely in the infinite", realizing the spiritual wandering of modern people in the context of globalization. Together, these works show that young directors' poetic expression is not a single mode but a diversified exploration that integrates romance, realism, and absurdity. Rooted in Oriental poetic aesthetics, they use film's audio-visual language to construct a spiritual home that combines tradition and modernity, reality and imagination, providing a spiritual refuge for contemporary people facing the alienation of modernization.

"Cinema is the asymptote of reality." Between poeticism and reality, young directors explore romantic expressions, veiling reality with art and seeking a space for spiritual wandering above the pastoral countryside. Such works are dominated by traditional realist creation, presenting the romance and cruelty of rural survival from a realist perspective through artistic techniques. Among them, Huo Meng's *Crossing the Chaoguan Pass*, Pema Tsenden's *Balloon*, and Li Ruijun's *Return to Dust* have all constructed the reality and romance of the countryside aesthetically with unique artistic creations. Director Huo Meng once described *Crossing the Chaoguan Pass* as "a particularly affectionate and gentle farewell letter written by an old man to the world" [22]. It is not difficult to find from this director's confession that "affection" and "gentleness," as the director's intentions, have covered the countryside in the film with a romantic color from the beginning of creation.

Balloon starts from the rural images of ethnic minorities, constructing the cultural reality of a Tibetan family in Tibet in the modern context. The majestic grandeur of Tibet coexists with the loss of control over women's fates under traditional Tibetan culture, forming a highly tense conflict between the romantic style and cruel reality of Tibetan countryside. In *Return to Dust*, a strong

contrast is formed between the romance of “wheat flowers” and the destitute reality of the hero and heroine in rural life. The countryside is presented to the audience in an extremely realistic way, and the romance and cruelty of farming are seamlessly integrated by Li Ruijun into a touching contemporary rural picture scroll. These works show that young directors’ poetic expression is not divorced from reality, but based on reality. They find poetic beauty in real rural life, and at the same time do not avoid the cruelty and hardship of rural life. This kind of poetic expression that combines reality and romance makes their works have both artistic value and realistic care, and also makes the spiritual home constructed by them more real and credible.

The poeticism and romance in these films are full of Oriental warmth and implicitness, with restraint and blank space everywhere. Unlike the straightforward emotional expression of Western cinema, young directors use “silence” to convey emotions and “blank space” to leave room for thinking, which is a vivid practice of Oriental poetic aesthetics. This kind of expression not only conforms to the aesthetic habits of the Chinese nation but also makes the spiritual home depicted in the film more profound and enduring. The audience can feel the characters’ inner emotions and the directors’ philosophical thinking through the subtle audio-visual language, realizing a spiritual resonance beyond words.

4.2 The Philosophical Connotation of the Spiritual Homeland

The ideological turn of young directors, with the poetic depiction of the spiritual homeland as the core, essentially completes the integration and innovation of traditional Oriental philosophy and modern cinematic expression. This spiritual homeland is not a simple reproduction of the past, but a new construction based on the contemporary context, carrying the directors’ reflection on modernization and their pursuit of cultural identity. From the perspective of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy, the spiritual homeland constructed by young directors is the concrete manifestation of “harmony between man and nature”, where man, nature and society coexist in harmony, and individual spirit can be freely placed.

In *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, the Fuchun River is not only a physical space but also a spiritual symbol. The four seasons of the river correspond to the ups and downs of life, and the natural changes echo the family ethics, forming a philosophical realm where “nature and man are one”. This kind of expression inherits the core idea of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy that “Tao follows nature”, and at the same time integrates the modern people’s yearning for family and homeland, making the spiritual homeland have both traditional connotation and contemporary significance. Similarly, in *Kaili Blues*, the poetic rural space constructed by Bi Gan is a spiritual refuge for the protagonist. Amid the misty mountains and rivers, the protagonist’s confusion and pursuit of life are resolved, realizing the spiritual transcendence advocated by Zhuangzi.

The spiritual homeland depicted by young directors also contains a strong sense of cultural identity. In the process of globalization, the cultural identity of the Chinese nation is facing challenges. Young directors, by returning to traditional Oriental aesthetics and Lao-Zhuang Philosophy, reconstruct the cultural symbol of the spiritual homeland, helping the audience find their cultural roots. The rural space, characters and poetic expression in their works are all carriers of cultural identity. Through these elements, young directors convey the unique values and aesthetic concepts of Chinese culture, making Chinese cinema have a distinct national character in the world film pattern.

Furthermore, the spiritual homeland is also a response to the spiritual crisis of modern people. With the rapid development of modernization, people are increasingly alienated by material desires and rationality, falling into the predicament of “spiritual homelessness”. The spiritual homeland constructed by young directors provides a spiritual refuge for modern people. In the poetic images, the audience can get rid of the anxiety and pressure of modern life, and feel the peace and freedom brought by returning to nature and tradition. This kind of spiritual comfort is not only a kind of artistic experience but also a kind of philosophical enlightenment, guiding

modern people to re-examine the relationship between man and nature, man and society, and man and self.

5. Conclusion

Contemporary young Chinese directors, through the three-dimensional artistic exploration of temporal-spatial, character and ideological turns, have completed a profound philosophical retrospection on the nature of cinema and the spiritual pursuit of human beings. The temporal-spatial turn from urban to rural areas reconstructs the physical carrier of the spiritual homeland, endowing the works with a strong sense of locality and cultural connotation; the character turn based on Lao-Zhuang philosophical paradigms shapes vivid and three-dimensional characters, making the philosophical connotation of the works more concrete and perceptible; the ideological turn centered on poetic spiritual homeland integrates traditional Oriental aesthetics and modern cinematic expression, elevating the artistic and philosophical value of the works.

This three-dimensional exploration is not only a kind of artistic innovation but also a kind of cultural self-rescue. In the face of the impact of Western culture and the alienation of commercialization, young directors find spiritual support from traditional Oriental philosophy and aesthetics, and construct a unique artistic style of Chinese cinema. Their works not only endow Chinese cinema with new artistic vitality but also provide a new path for the inheritance and innovation of traditional Chinese culture, showing the cultural confidence and artistic pursuit of contemporary young Chinese directors.

Looking forward, the artistic exploration of young directors will continue to deepen. With the continuous integration of traditional culture and modern technology, Chinese cinema will surely show a more diverse and profound philosophical connotation. The spiritual homeland constructed by young directors will not only be a symbol of Chinese cinema but also a spiritual link connecting the past and the present, the East and the West, making Chinese cinema play a more important role in the world cultural pattern and convey the unique charm of Chinese culture to the world.

References:

- [1] Heidegger, Martin. *The Age of the World Picture*. Translated by William Lovitt, University of Chicago Press, 1977.
- [2] Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper & Row, 1962.
- [3] Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Simon & Schuster, 1996.
- [4] Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, 1991.
- [5] Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Translated by T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, 1975.
- [6] Zhuangzi. *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*. Translated by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press, 2003.
- [7] Fei, Xiaotong. *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. Translated by Gary G. Hamilton and Wang Zheng, University of California Press, 1992.
- [8] Li, Daoxin. *Aesthetics of Chinese Cinema*. Peking University Press, 2005.
- [9] Mo, Yan. *Red Sorghum Family*. Translated by Howard Goldblatt, Viking, 1993.
- [10] Jia, Zhangke. *Swimming Out Till the Sea Turns Blue*. Directed by Jia Zhangke, Shanghai Film Group Corporation, 2020.

- [11] Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Translated by T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, 1975.
- [12] Zhang, Yingjin. "Deconstruction and Reconstruction: Chinese Aesthetics in the Age of Globalization." *Journal of Chinese Aesthetics*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2018, pp. 45–62.
- [13] Wang, Hui. *Chinese Modernity and Its Aesthetic Narratives*. Stanford University Press, 2004.
- [14] Chen, Xiaoming. "The Creative Stance of Young Chinese Directors in the 21st Century." *Film Art*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2019, pp. 78–85.
- [15] Fei, Xiaotong. *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. Translated by Gary G. Hamilton and Wang Zheng, University of California Press, 1992.
- [16] Liu, Dongfeng. *Rural China: Ethics, Culture and Social Change*. Peking University Press, 2010.
- [17] Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Translated by T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, 1975.
- [18] Hegel, G. W. F. *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Translated by T. M. Knox, Clarendon Press, 1975.
- [19] Zhang, Xudong. *Chinese Modernism in the Era of Reforms*. Duke University Press, 1997.
- [20] Li, Daoxin. *Aesthetics of Chinese Cinema*. Peking University Press, 2005.
- [21] Zhuangzi. *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*. Translated by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press, 2003.
- [22] Zhou, Chuanji. *History of Chinese Film Aesthetics*. China Film Press, 2012.