

# Research on the History of Hou Hsiao-hsien's Film Creation

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## Abstract

As a leading figure in Taiwan's "new film movement", Hou Hsiao-hsien perfectly integrated the Western author's film art tradition since the Italian neorealist film with the aesthetic purview of traditional Chinese culture and created the Chinese author's film style. Hou Hsiao-hsien's film works are very rational and connotation, with a strong documentary style and a sense of social distress, full of local flavor, and containing concern for Taiwan society. The film works have distinct personality and unique style, creating "Hou's" artistic style through the lens language. This article will analyze Hou Hsiao-hsien's film creation history from two aspects: the theme change and film style characteristics.

**Keywords:** Hou Hsiao-hsien, film theme style characteristics

## 1. Introduction

"A director who is accustomed to speaking with the lens, the charm of his theme expression mainly comes from his meaningful and profound cultural heritage, in this sense, they are called 'thinkers who express themselves with video narrative'". Hou Hsiao-hsien is one of many thinkers, but he is the best among them. His passion for film makes him stand out with high creative passion and superb film talent and become a "film writer" with personal style.

## 2. The Profound Theme of Change

Since he began directing films independently in 1980, Hou Hsiao-hsien has made more than 20 films up to 2015's *The Assassin*. If his early works are based on the plain and popular dramatic theme, which does not go beyond the scope of mainstream commercial films, then from the

middle and late stages, Hou Hsiao-hsien began to try a unique way of telling, making the theme of the film more clearly identifiable — focusing on the small and medium-sized people in life, and still loving life in the cold reality.

### 2.1 Personal Youth Complex

In 2002, Hou Hsiao-hsien integrated *All the Youthful Days*, *A Summer at Grandpa's*, *The Time to Live and Time to Die* and *Dust in the Wind* under the title of *Youth Defection Incident Book*. These four films can be called Hou Hsiao-hsien's memories and memorials to the past, telling the story of his youth and beauty. At this time, Hou Hsiao-hsien abandoned his familiar mainstream commercial film route, choosing "youth" as a prelude to commemorate the most memorable days of his life.

However, the difference between his works and

other youth films is that in Hou Hsiao-hsien's films, the lack of family and blood relationship becomes an invisible barrier when young people grow up, the estrangement of relatives, the longing for love, the ignorance of the outside world... Through these works, Hou Hsiao-hsien's love and passion for traditional family life are reflected. A little boy, a big boy with everything he felt woven into a whole farewell to the past song.

## 2.2 The Historical Vision of Localization

Starting in 1989, Hou Hsiao-hsien, then in his 40s, began to show a larger picture through the lens and tried to enter Taiwan's history. Hou Hsiao-hsien's "tragic trilogy" reflects the historical changes of Taiwan from its beginning as a Japanese colony since the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895.

Fifty years of colonial culture has left a deep imprint on the hearts of the Taiwanese people, but it has also sown the seeds of friendship between the Taiwanese and the Japanese. In *A City of Sadness*, the Japanese minister Kamikawa bid farewell to the affectionate Li Tianlu before leaving, although the change of nationality makes Japan and Taiwan become antagonistic, but the relationship between people is still beyond the boundary of nationality. The director's tolerance and kindness make the aggressor's sadness and nostalgia appear on the screen.

Hou Hsiao-hsien created a new realm of Taiwanese films — "plain reading", deeply hiding personal emotions, objectively presenting the original life, using details rather than plot structure stories, showing the texture and charm of ordinary life, in order to arouse the audience's deep recognition.

## 2.3 A Defamiliarizing Urban Experience

In 1987, the appearance of *Daughter of the Nile* marked the beginning of the creation of works with urban background and regional characteristics different from traditional rural areas. The film borrows the adult triad force's whim to the youth's private party, showing their eagerness to transition to the adult world, showing the restless character of young people, indicating the edge of the new city film. Ten years later, Hou Hsiao-hsien turned his eyes back to the increasingly changing city, from *Good Men*, *Good Women* to *Goodbye South, Goodbye* and *Millennium Mambo*, Hou Hsiao-Hsien completed the third major transformation of his film theme,

that is, from history to reality, to the ever-changing reality.

Hou Hsiao-hsien's fascination and attachment to the countryside are repeated and deepened in most of his films, even those reflecting urban life. The train in *Goodbye South, Goodbye* leads us in a busy but confused state with the people living in the cracks, and these are the precursor to the collapse of traditional agricultural civilization.

## 3. The Display of Poetic Style

Compared with the film directors of the same period, Hou Hsiao-hsien's film works show more typical Eastern aesthetic characteristics in narrative style and have a stronger poetic flavor. It mainly focuses on the poetic exploration of the film lens and the poetic creation of the atmosphere. As one of the most important concepts in the traditional Chinese aesthetic system, "artistic conception" has played a crucial role in thousands of years of poetry, calligraphy, painting and other literary and artistic creations. Artistic conception, as a literary concept inherited for thousands of years, is essentially an aesthetic scene formed by the close connection between the realistic scenes depicted in the works and their true feelings. It is characterized by depicting feelings with the picture and setting off the picture with the emotion, so that the work can achieve a state of integration of scenes. From the perspective of creation, artistic conception is the concrete expression of the author's noble pursuit of life. From the aesthetic point of view, artistic conception is an important criterion to identify the ideological state of works.

### 3.1 Poetic Exploration of Lens

Hou Hsiao-hsien, who claims to have realized the true meaning of directing from Shen Congwen's autobiography, has long been the "positive" mark of his works by following the aesthetics of fixed camera position long shot. The long shots in Hou Hsiao-hsien's films not only bear the function of presenting and transmitting information, but more importantly, the audience can experience the unique charm and poetic feelings in his creation of long shots.

#### (1) Fixed long lens gentle and long

*Flower on the sea* is the most frequently used long shot in Hou Hsiao-hsien's film creation. In a 110-minute running time, only 39 shots are used to show the partying and complex emotional

entanglements of the late 19th century British concession in Shanghai. The film opens with an eight-minute long shot: In the Changsan building, the waiter and the guests sit around drinking and punching, joking and chatting, and the long shot is almost stagnant to show the dialogue process between the characters. The use of long shots not only makes the overall rhythm of the film become relaxed and slow, but also adds a poetic charm to the long shot of this documentary.

(2) Depth of field long lens has a lot of implications

Under the basic framework of medium and long distance shots, the quiet scenery and lyric stories in the empty shots complement each other, and the natural scenery is given a unique meaning. The deep focal length and large vistas "not only add poetic spirituality or historical stagnation to the film, but also show the unique relationship between heaven and earth, man and the environment on screen." (3) In the fighting links of the film *The Assassin*, the most stylized long shots are used to show the fighting between the characters, highlighting the emotional entanglements and inner contradictions between killing and not killing. In addition, when Yao Qi went to Tian Yuan's appointment, the sun passed through the gap of the woods, and the mottled light and shadow fell on Yao Qi, and the solitude and martial art of Yao Qi were fully displayed.

### 3.2 Poetic Creation of Atmosphere

Artistic conception is the combination of "emotion" and "scenery". The objective natural scene depicted in artistic works contains the subjective emotion of the author. First, emotion and scenery are the two most basic and important elements of artistic conception. The emotion in literary and artistic works is the creator's thought connotation, namely "meaning"; The scene is the realistic picture presented in front of the eyes in the process of creation, that is, "environment". But at the same time, the two elements of emotion and scenery also have their primary and secondary relations in the formation of artistic conception. In short, the display of scenery in literary and artistic creation will eventually sublimate to the abstract situation, that is, the center of the concept of artistic conception is the emphasis on spiritual thought.

Second, the combination of emotion and scenery

is the basic way of composing artistic conception. From the "thought and environment" put forward by Si Kongtu to the modern esthetician Zhu Guangqian said, "the scene is born and fits each other perfectly, and the emotion is just called the scenery, and the scenery is just able to convey the emotion." Although the writers and aestheticians of the past dynasties did not form a unified and standardized definition of the concept of artistic conception, they all regarded the mutual correspondence between emotion and scenery as the basic way of composing artistic conception. Only through the mutual exchange of "virtual" emotion and "real" scenery can literary works reach the highest aesthetic realm. The Swiss thinker Amir once said that a natural landscape is a realm of the mind. In Hou Hsiao-hsien's films, we can see that his emotions are hidden in the natural scenery, and through the creative techniques of lyricism and scene blending, he creates an artistic atmosphere that conforms to the theme of the film, which is very poetic.

(1) The expression of space on artistic conception

The fate of the characters in the Tragic City is as sad and miserable as the social living environment in Taiwan at that time. In the film, Kuan Rong and ideological progress of young people drinking freely heard the song of "Songhua River" came: "918, 918! From that miserable time, to leave my home, to abandon that endless treasure, to wander..." Accompanied by the song, the camera is turned out of the window, rolling mountains and the sky are connected, the sea fog makes the mountains appear, the sound of music bursts of percussion, as if waves of heavy percussion people's hearts, can not help but let people ponder the corruption of the current government, its sad, desolate feeling is born in vain, lasting for a long time.

(2) The creation of artistic conception by objects

Hou Hsiao-hsien has publicly expressed his fascination with the train, the train is not only an important symbol of the agricultural society into the industrial society, but also the origin of the urban dream of young people and the carrier of spiritual return. In *Son's Big Doll*, children with Kun tree clown equipment running next to the train tracks, the train is roaring, those well-dressed conductor, students reading books and wearing funny Kun tree, thin hungry yellow

children form a sharp contrast, the social survival between urban and rural contradictions highlighted.

#### 4. Epilogue

In the 1980s, Hou Hsiao-hsien and other young Taiwanese film directors launched the Taiwan New Film Movement. They shot a series of films with realistic tendency and humanistic concern in content and form, which promoted the reform and innovation of Taiwan film. Deeply influenced by Oriental traditional culture, Hou Hsiao-hsien presents poetic features in his image style and implicit features in his emotional expression. As the standard-bearer of Taiwan's new film movement, he has dedicated one classic work after another, always insisting on a unique narrative style, and enjoys a good reputation in the domestic and foreign film circles.

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