

# Mirror Scanning of Inner Mongolia National Films Since the New Century

## -- Personal Portrait, National Discourse and National Spirit

Jing Deng, Yating Zhang

Graduate University of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

### Abstract

**With the trend of economic globalization and under the background of China's film industry reform, Inner Mongolian films have ushered in a new transformation space since the new century. The focuses of Inner Mongolian films have gradually been to watch the local ethnic culture, describe the pains and anxieties brought about by social transformation, and pay attention to the spiritual world of human beings. Among the description of personal memory, the reappearance of national discourse and the examination of the depiction of national spirit, Inner Mongolian films have shown their own image characteristics, different national characteristics and colorful national customs, which make Inner Mongolia national films possess their own charm while presenting their local temperament.**

### Keywords

**Inner Mongolia; National Film; Mongolian Theme Film.**

## 1. Introduction

Since the new century, the development of Inner Mongolia national films has reflected the pain brought by the rapidly changing social environment faced by the ethnic minority areas to a certain extent. Modernization, national construction, ethnic discourse, national spirit and other contents have become the core proposition of Inner Mongolia national films. In response to the changes of the times, the creative aesthetic concept of Inner Mongolia national films has undergone profound changes, from the simple shaping of ethnic landscape to the deep description of ethnic culture, from the macro narration of ethnic groups to the attention to the personal emotion of life noumenon, and from the single side of ideology to the attention to the film noumenon. The Inner Mongolia national films not only maintain the relatively mellow local characteristics and artistic characteristics, but also form a unique artistic pattern.

## 2. The Development of Inner Mongolia National Films Since the New Century

After entering the new century, the reform of the film system has shown an unprecedented trend that a large number of private capital has poured into the film market to try to get some benefits and the development of ethnic minority theme films with high-quality but unpopularity is in the severe situation such as the restriction of shooting funds and the poor film booking office. In this context, the Inner Mongolia national film, which speaks for the national culture and keeps the words and images for the times, has found its own new development direction. Being not vulgar, not philistine and not kitsch has become its eternal adherence. Whether it is creative ideas or aesthetic exploration, the Inner Mongolia national films since the new century have presented a discourse feature different from other times and successfully walked out of a new road that belongs to itself and profile China.

At the turn of the new and old centuries, the backbone of Inner Mongolia national film creation -Inner Mongolia Film Studio has ushered in the moment of transformation and upgrading, that is, in 2020, Sai Fu became the new director of Inner Mongolia Film Studio. To a certain extent, Sai Fu, who once directed a series of films that are renowned at home and abroad, such as Four Horsemen, the Sorrow of Brook Steppe, Heroes Returning to Homeland and A Brilliant Man, Genghis Khan, served as the factory director, which ensured the image quality of Inner Mongolia national films. To live up to expectations, the Inner Mongolia Film Studio with Sai Fu as its director produced many excellent films in 2000 alone. These films also bloomed in major film festivals, showing the eternal adherence of Inner Mongolia national films in the field of art, in the era of change and "entertainment first". The Story of Zhula won the 2001 national journalists association "Top Ten Feature Films" award and A New Bride of the Kang Family won the Shortlist of Excellent Films of the Chinese film "Huabiao Film Awards".....

However, it must be mentioned that since the new century, Inner Mongolia national films are extremely short of production funds, which leads to some difficulties in the investment of new films and the publicity and distribution of existing films. With the efforts of the factory director, Sai Fu, the National Radio and Television Administration approved RMB 4.3 million yuan of film and television production expenses for "Key Films" to Inner Mongolia Film Studio. Then the creation of Inner Mongolia national films began to show a new trend with the support of these expenses and a batch of films such as Grassland Mother, Green Dream and Heavenly Grassland were born. To a certain extent, these films have become the direction of exploring the new situation of Inner Mongolia national film creation. For example, the film Grassland Mother is popular. It is no longer confined to the traditional grassland theme film shooting methods, but deeply integrates the quintessence of Beijing Opera and film, resulting in Inner Mongolia national film in the sense of Beijing Opera. The Inner Mongolia national film with exploring nature has further enriched the film types and left a heavy mark in the history of film art. However, when the creation of the film presents a thriving scene, the financial constraints on the publicity and distribution are becoming more and more obvious, which directly leads to the poor film boxing office. Heavenly Grassland, as the most outstanding film of this period, won more than 20 awards at home and abroad, but its publicity poster is a picture of grassland downloaded from the Internet. There is no doubt that this has a direct impact on the film boxing office. However, it is admirable that the Inner Mongolia National Film Studio rose to the challenge among all the difficulties, with its films ranked second in the national film studio in 2003, which is undoubtedly commendable for the studios in ethnic minority areas. Since then, Inner Mongolia Film Studio has produced many more films, which have also blossomed in major film festivals at home and abroad. The joint guarantee of quantity and quality has made Inner Mongolia national films a brilliance in the film history.

In 2009, Inner Mongolia Film Group was established. As a large state-owned cultural enterprise directly under the autonomous region, Inner Mongolia Film Group is a major innovation in the development of Inner Mongolia film industry. After the establishment of the film group, the creation of Inner Mongolia national films has entered a rapid development. In the production of feature films, Inner Mongolia national films have started another round of artistic exploration. Mother, Xilingol & Wenchuan, Siqin Hangru, the Mother's Airport and other films have not only won gold and silver in domestic Golden Rooster Award, Huabiao Film Awards, Golden Horse Awards and other festivals (exhibitions), but also bloomed in the selection activities of major film festivals and exhibitions in the United States, France, Germany, Mongolia, Iran and other countries. It can be said that since the new century, the commercial atmosphere and scientific and technological elements of the film industry have not led to the creation trend of vulgarity and kitsch in Inner Mongolia national films. On the contrary, the writing of history for the nation and the nation's voice making for the era have become the theme and purpose of the creation of Inner Mongolia national film. When entertainment and the market have become the goals

pursued by the film market, Inner Mongolia national films have begun to trace back to the depth of national culture, have been made to explore the new forms of artistic expression and vigorously show the survival picture of ordinary people in historical circumstances. These films have written the life outlook and spiritual situation of ordinary ethnic minorities under the background of the era, and have shown the face of ethnic groups in border areas in the new century.

It is worth mentioning that since the new century, in addition to Inner Mongolia Film Group (Inner Mongolia Film Studio), many film production institutions have pointed their shooting proposition to Inner Mongolia, a batch of Inner Mongolia ethnic themed films produced by other film institutions have begun to emerge and a number of young directors from Inner Mongolia have begun to create their own national films, which have made Inner Mongolia national films develop by leaps and bounds. Films such as the Coffin in the Mountain, Old Beast, the Summer is Gone, A Simple Goodbye and Wrath of Silence have attracted the attention of academia and the industry, and have won the recognition of major film festivals while gaining boxing office reputation. These films are devoted to reflecting the current practical problems, showing the individual's survival dilemma and spiritual dilemma from the perspective of the era. This group of young directors "revealed the survival essence of the public through self search and excavated the rich and true face of ethnic culture from the daily life of the common people to reflect the pulsation of the situation in Inner Mongolia from the perspective of the times", [2] and their films have become a new benchmark for the creation of Inner Mongolia national films.

### **3. Personal Portrait: the Modern Explanation of Personal Emotions**

Since the birth of the first ethnic minority them film in New China Victory of Mongolian People, Inner Mongolian national films have undertaken the functions of publicizing policies and educating the people, or showing the peculiar scenery of ethnic regions and the rich history of national culture. At that time, A Brilliant Man, Genghis Khan, the Sorrow of Brook Steppe, Four Horsemen, Heroes Returning to Homeland and other "immediate action on horse back" came out one after another, these films both won awards at domestic and overseas film festivals, which were loved by the audience on the screen, so the Inner Mongolian national films gradually showed their own image characteristics, and the grassland scenery and earthshaking history became synonymous with the Inner Mongolian national film art style at that time. Naturally, these films all have a major narrative feature that is the grand historical narrative, which will miraculously make the history and culture of the Inner Mongolian grasslands quickly recognize the public and make the public proud of the national history.

Since entering the new century, the creative style of Inner Mongolian national films has also changed with the rapid changes in China's film industry. Whether they are the traditional filmmakers Sai Fu, Lisi Mai, Hasichaolu, or the new generation of directors Degena Yun and Zhou Ziyang, they do not create films in the background of grand historical events. Instead of the narrative of individual care, the inner Mongolian national film director turned their attentions to the descriptions of personal portraits and projected the impact of social reality changes into the individual by paying attention to personal growth and destiny vention and looked the fate of small people at the pulse of the era. Separately, the film's function of presenting the essence of society and reflecting social change was gradually highlighted. And a group of young directors from Inner Mongolia have brought the personal explanation of the characters' emotions to the utmost in recent years, who pay attention to the present and the ethnic minority groups in the process of urbanization, and gaze at the locations where ethnic minorities live with cold eyes, so the films from a private perspective begin to appear in large numbers. Naturally, in details, we can not only see the impact of agricultural civilization and

industrial civilization on minority areas, but also see the national spirit of Mongolian people, intervene in the narrative of the film from a self-perspective. Therefore, portraying the appearance of self-growth and expressing personal feelings as well as personalizing the national narrative have become a new trend for the young directors of Inner Mongolia national film to direct the narrative of the film. It can be said that this personalized narrative method is more likely to resonate with the public, which is a kind of affectionate concern for the people living in the border areas, and there is no doubt that the way to tell stories with personal experience can get the "empathy" of the public.

#### **4. National Discourse: the Paradigm Construction of National Cinema**

Since the beginning of the new century, there are many complex and majestic new problems in society begun to emerge, and ethnic minority gathering places and ethnic minority people have been unsurprisingly involved in this tremendous change. Whether it is modern civilization or urbanization, or commodity economy, it has had an impact on the ancient grassland civilization that the original way of life of living by the water has become a daydream and the urbanization process has forced the ancient grassland to start modernization. At this time, Inner Mongolia national films have become an important carrier for recording the way of national survival and carrying the expression of ethnic discourse and the expression of national culture and living conditions has become the position adhered to by Inner Mongolia national films. Since the beginning of the new century, Inner Mongolia national films have all focused on the transformation of Chinese society and the development situation of Inner Mongolia ethnic civilization from the perspective of social reform. A number of Inner Mongolian national film directors such as Hasichaolu, Ning Cai, Zhao Guohua, and Bayin have continuously explored and tried in a new historical and cultural context, and Inner Mongolian ethnic films have created a new paradigm construction of national discourse.

On the one hand, Inner Mongolian ethnic films present a trend of cultural roots and cultural reflection, focusing on the difficulties faced by the Inner Mongolian nation under the circumstances of the times and looking for a spiritual homeland. Tradition and modernity have become one of the themes of film directors' constant chanting, which shows the inner Mongolia national film directors' speculation and personal feelings about reality. Since the beginning of the new century, films have become more and more in-depth thinking about the living conditions and survival situations of the Inner Mongolian nation, and these film works have become an important window for Chinese people to gain insight into the lifestyle of the people of Inner Mongolia in the wave of modernization.

On the other hand, in the face of the deepening degree of marketization of films, Inner Mongolia national films have also begun to try market-oriented production methods and began to shoot commercial blockbusters independently or cooperatively. After all, the commodity attributes of the film determine that it must earn the box office income in order to obtain corresponding exposure and profits, and only with a substantial box office income can it have funds to further create films. However, the film *ARAVT*, which was created in 2012, has achieved good performance, and the film has not only won five awards for best film director, cameramanship, art and music at the Ulaanbaatar Film Festival in Mongolia, but also set a precedent for distributed the Mongolian national film in many overseas countries and achieved good economic and social benefits. The commercial creation of the national history and culture as well as the re-grafting of commerce and art allows film industry practitioners to see the determination of Inner Mongolia's ethnic films to move from the fringes to the market center, which also provides a new model for the marketization process of Chinese ethnic minority films.

## 5. National Spirit: The Grand Chapter for Feelings to Family and Nation

From the perspective of film function, Chinese minority-themed films must undertake the functions of "carrying the Tao" and "instructing" since its birth, which is imprinted in the blood of ethnic films. When it comes to the Inner Mongolian national films after entering the new century, they strive for "depoliticization" to a certain extent at the beginning, as evidenced by the transformation from grand narrative to private narrative. However, the development of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and the national policy orientation share a common destiny, which has inextricable link with politics for many literature and historical materials since the founding of the People's Republic of China. That is why the efforts made to "depoliticize" for Inner Mongolian national films ultimately are integrated into the construction of the subject of the national image in a metaphorical way.

Inner Mongolian national films after entering the new century are not simple politics and policy narratives, but pursue the expression of national cultural values, explore the transformational forms of Inner Mongolian national cultural expression, and call for the modernized Inner Mongolian national cultural spirit on the basis of the combination of the background of national policies of the times. Siklingeilei, Wenchuan tells the story of "great love without borders" between different regions, different ethnic groups and different families after the Wenchuan earthquake. A common feature of these films lies in that they incorporate the relationship between the country and the nation is put into a new narrative framework to reveal the social reality faced by people in a specific era, enhancing the identification of relevant ethnic audiences with history and culture. This has become a new way for Inner Mongolian national films to explore the expression of the main theme in films from the perspective of historical review to describe the emotional changes of individuals participating in the national historical process from the perspective of historical retrospect.

In terms of the specific expression of feelings to family and nation, Inner Mongolian national films no longer tell stories in the stereotyped form, but transform the national spirit into the expression of maternal love, delivering the feelings contained in the deepest part of the national culture are expressed with the emotions that are most easily accepted by the audience in the world. "Telling Chinese stories well through ethnic minority films is not just a policy task, but it is more of a mission to regulate the relationship between ethnic minority culture and mainstream culture, and to build a true multi-ethnic national identity." [4] In this sense, Inner Mongolian ethnic films, as a genre of minority-themed films, have found their own path in the expression of the national spirit.

## 6. Conclusion

It's not that these films are no longer popular. Today, minority-themed movies are marginalized, but Inner Mongolian ethnic movies are not vulgar. In the context of the development of the new century, Inner Mongolian national films have gradually formed their own style and characteristics. It can be said that after entering the new century, the realistic creation style of Inner Mongolian national films has gradually become prominent. When the film industry is in a state of impetuosity, it has never disappeared or left to take the in-depth exploration and make expression for the national culture. The depiction of the history of the lovely land and the hearts of the people has always been the focus of the film expression. Inner Mongolian national films have found a path suitable for self-development in the new century from the stereotyped account of national ideology and the grand depiction of grassland history in the early days, to the expression of the current national reality culture and the fate of the people. In addition, the film not only pays attention to the lives of local people and observes the mental state of ethnic groups, but also strives to find a balance between commercialization and marketization. There is a long way to go for the commercialization of Inner Mongolian ethnic films, though this

exploration has played a certain positive affect on the commercial creation of Chinese minority-themed films. In the new era, Inner Mongolian national films, relying on the broad national spirit, will certainly have a broad impact on social development.

## References

- [1] Zhou Xiangdong. The Evolution of Inner Mongolia's National Film Creation Art within 70 Years Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China [J]. *Movie Literature*, 2019(22):13-17.
- [2] Chen Ying. The Impression of the Grassland in Childhood: An Analysis of the Children's Perspective in the Movie Heavenly Grassland [J]. *Movie Review*, 2009(14):35-36.
- [3] Zhou Xiangdong, Zhang Yating. The Value and Fetters of Ethnic Minority Movies in the 21st Century [J]. *Movie Literature*, 2018(22): 24-27.
- [4] Lin Lin. Ethnic Minority Films in the New Century and the Expression of "Chinese Stories" [J]. *Studies of Ethnic Literature*, 2019, 37(01): 74-81.