

# The Traditional Aesthetic Characteristics of Long Shot in Chinese Films

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## Abstract

The long shots in Chinese films reflect profound traditional cultural connotations with their unique aesthetic style, especially forming distinct aesthetic features under the influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. From the realistic tendency of Confucianism, to the Taoist view of "non action" in nature, and to the Buddhist pursuit of "artistic conception", long shots are not only an artistic means of film narrative, but also a contemporary interpretation of cultural traditions in Chinese cinema. Based on this, this article first elaborates on the long shots of Confucianism Chinese cinema reflecting reality, then analyzes that the long shots of Taoism Chinese cinema are mostly panoramic long shots with fixed camera positions, and finally analyzes the realm of long shots in Buddhism Chinese cinema for reference.

## Keywords

Long shot, Chinese Film, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhists, Aesthetics.

## 1. Introduction

The long shot can be traced back to the birth of cinema in 1895. It was only the simplest inheritance of photography, and filmmakers had not yet developed a conscious awareness of the camera. Early works such as "Factory Gate" and "Train Arrival" are typical representative works. Subsequently, whether it is Italian neorealism, Andre Bazin's "ontology of images", Cracow's "restoration of material reality", or Viltov's "film eye theory", they all emphasize that the camera can objectively and realistically depict the face of reality, that is, the long shot is the best shot segment to maintain the integrity and unity of time and space. With the continuous development of technology, the invention and application of various devices such as zoom lenses and Nikon have greatly promoted and innovated the aesthetics of long lenses. Since entering the era of digital technology, digital technology has completely overturned the way long shots are generated, and many scholars have begun to redefine long shots. The long shots of Chinese films showcase unique artistic features and aesthetic implications in world cinema.

## 2. Confucianism - Long shots in Chinese Cinema Reflect Reality

### 2.1. The Core of Confucian Aesthetics: Realistic Care and Ethical Expression

As an important cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism emphasizes the social values of "benevolence" and "propriety". The spiritual core of this value system, which focuses on real life, runs through the development of Chinese cinema. Long shots, as a unique narrative technique in the field of film art, can extend the special attributes of time and space realism, and analyze and present complex social landscapes and individual living conditions within them. Looking back at the 1930s, Chinese society was in a difficult period of internal and external troubles. Against this backdrop, the left-wing film movement emerged. During this period, film creators were deeply influenced by Confucianism and held a deep concern for social reality. They aimed their shots at the lower classes and cleverly used long shots to deeply explore and showcase their suffering. Taking the classic film "Street Angel" as an example, in the long shot,

elements such as narrow and crowded streets, dilapidated houses, and ragged people are intertwined, vividly and authentically reproducing the difficult lives faced by the lower classes of the old society. This hardship is not only reflected in material scarcity, but also in spiritual repression.

## **2.2. Realistic long shots in mainstream movies**

The reform and opening up, like a spring breeze, has brought earth shattering changes to Chinese society, and the Chinese film industry has gradually entered the stage of main melody creation under the influence of this spring breeze. During this period, mainstream films were not only artistic works for entertaining the public, but also important carriers for reflecting the spirit of the times and inheriting national culture. Directors widely used long shot segments. Taking the classic "Sons and Daughters of Heroes" as an example, this film presents a magnificent historical picture to the audience through long shots of battle scenes. Under the use of long shots, the smoke of gunpowder fills the air, the flames of war fly, the brave postures of the soldiers charging forward, the tense scenes of intense fighting, and the scenes of tacit cooperation between comrades, making the audience feel as if they were there, deeply experiencing the waves and hardships of the revolutionary era. The expressions of every soldier, the roar of every gun, and the details of every battlefield are infinitely magnified in the long shot, allowing the audience to deeply experience the cruelty of war and the enormous sacrifices made by revolutionary predecessors for the country and the people.

## **2.3. Continuation of Realism and Long Shot Expression in Contemporary Films**

With the continuous development of the times, long shots have been widely used in typified realism films in recent years, continuing the tradition of realism. In director Wang Xiaoshuai's "Eternal Love", long shots have become an important tool for revealing the conflicts between factory life and family. The film is set in a factory and meticulously depicts the internal environment through long shots. Viewers can see outdated machines, busy workers, and the industrial atmosphere permeating the air, laying a solid foundation for the development of the subsequent story. At the same time, long shots also demonstrate a unique charm in depicting family conflicts, from eye contact between family members to subtle tone changes in daily conversations, vividly portraying the complex and subtle conflicting relationships in the family. Based on the long shot film, it presents the struggles and helplessness experienced by ordinary people in the face of social changes. Hou Hsiao hsien's "City of Sadness" is also a classic work that uses long shots to depict realistic themes. This film is set against the backdrop of modern Taiwanese history and uses long shots to depict the fragmentation of Taiwanese society and the changes in families during this historical transformation. In the film, long shots shuttle through the streets and courtyards of Taiwan, capturing the living conditions of people from different social classes. In addition, in the work "Platform" by the renowned contemporary director Jia Zhangke, the changes in the lives of young people in small towns are calmly recorded through long shots. The camera follows the footsteps of the young people, from simple karaoke bars to dilapidated train platforms, from casual conversations on the streets and alleys to trivial matters in families. Each scene records the traces left by the changes of the times on these young people.

## **3. Taoism - The Long shots in Chinese Films are Mostly Fixed Camera Position Panoramic Long shots**

### **3.1. The Concept of "Taking the Way" and Natural Presentation in Taoist Aesthetics**

The concept of "governing by inaction" advocated by Taoist thought deeply reflects the emphasis on the harmonious coexistence between nature and human beings. This concept has

a unique manifestation in the use of long shots in the field of Chinese film art, manifested in the clever combination of stillness and panorama, presenting a non intrusive image style. In this visual style, the director slowly unfolds the true face of the world through the still observation of the camera, allowing the audience to independently discover the ambiguity and internal order contained in the picture. Taking director Jia Zhangke's "Xiao Wu" as an example, this film can be regarded as a model of integrating Taoist aesthetics into film creation. In the film, the director extensively utilized fixed camera panoramic long shots to showcase the fragmented life of the small town, without deliberately creating dramatic conflicts or excessively guiding the characters' behavior. The camera just silently gazes at every corner of the town, from the grocery store on the street to the rundown billiard hall, from the bustling streets of pedestrians to the slightly deserted bus station.

### **3.2. Aesthetic Space in Contemplation**

The static effect unique to long shots plays a unique role in film art, guiding the audience's gaze towards the quiet passage of time and the endless extension of space, deeply reflecting the Taoist ideas of "non action" and "virtual stillness". Director Hou Hsiao hsien's "Love in the Wind and Dust" is an outstanding representative among them. In the film "Love in the Wind and Dust", director Hou Hsiao hsien extensively utilized fixed camera position panoramic long shots, interweaving distant mountains, rice fields, and characters to create a picturesque scene. The distant mountains stand quietly in the distance, their undulating mountain lines blurred yet natural with the boundary between the sky, like a tacit agreement between the earth and the sky; The rice fields sway gently in the breeze, and the golden rice ears twinkle in the sunlight, as if they were a precious gift bestowed by nature on this land. And in this natural painting, the characters work or rest, their actions and postures perfectly blend with the surrounding environment. Every element in the camera is not deliberately highlighted or emphasized, everything appears so natural and harmonious.

### **3.3. The Integration of Bazin Theory and Taoist Aesthetics**

In the development of film theory, French film theorist Bazin believed that long shots could maintain the ambiguity of the film. This theory is highly consistent with the natural view of Chinese Taoism, and the two have a wonderful resonance in their understanding of artistic creation and audience perception. Director Zhang Yimou's 'Return' is a great example, as he uses panoramic long shots to depict the vastness of the Loess Plateau and the insignificance of characters, creating a desolate and peaceful atmosphere. On the vast and boundless Loess Plateau, the colors of the earth are monotonous yet heavy, as if carrying endless history and memories. In the long shot, the characters appear so small on this vast land, their figures appearing and disappearing in the wind and sand like tiny specks of dust in the river of time. This visual presentation does not provide any clear emotional or ideological guidance to the audience, but rather allows them to naturally feel the complex and subtle relationship between humans and nature while enjoying the image. Viewers can feel the powerful force of nature and appreciate the insignificance and fragility of humanity in the face of nature while watching these long shots.

## **4. Buddhism - The Realm of Long Shot Production in Chinese Film**

### **4.1. Artistic Conception Realm: The Core Pursuit of Buddhist Aesthetics**

Buddhist thought has a long history, among which the concept of "artistic conception realm" can be regarded as the core. The so-called "artistic conception realm" refers to a state of blending emotions and scenery. Wang Guowei advocates the "selfless realm", which contains a profound understanding of the relationship between oneself and the outside world, and is a special experience that transcends secular perception. In the field of Chinese film art, there is a

close internal connection between long shots and the Buddhist concept of "artistic conception". The director's careful creation of empty shots and scenes of characters disappearing can vividly demonstrate the Buddhist philosophy of "impermanence" and "emptiness".

#### **4.2. The Application of Empty Camera and the Buddhist Thought of "Emptiness"**

In Chinese film art, aerial shots are an important means of conveying a serene atmosphere and triggering deep reflection among the audience, and have a profound internal connection with the Buddhist concept of "emptiness". In the practice of film creation, empty shots are often used by directors to convey emotions and ideas beyond the narrative level. Taking director Zhang Yimou's "Raise the Red Lantern" as an example, Zhang Yimou extensively uses aerial shots to record the daily life of enclosed courtyards. In these aerial shots, the audience can see the tall and strict courtyard walls, which cast long shadows in the sunlight or moonlight, as if they were heavy marks left by the years and months; The stone paved road in the courtyard carries the footsteps of countless people, yet it appears so silent. There are also those big red lanterns hanging under the eaves swaying slightly in the wind, their bright colors stand out particularly against the dim background of the courtyard but also reveal an inexplicable loneliness. These blank shots lack character activity and intense plot conflicts, yet they contain rich information. When watching these scenes, the audience seems to be able to feel the suppressed state of life deep in the courtyard. The audience is no longer just spectators of the story, but is guided into a profound realm of thinking.

#### **4.3. The Expression of "Selflessness" in the Buddhist Realm**

Buddhist aesthetics highly emphasizes the concept of "selflessness", which embodies a transcendence of the self and a transcendence of secular concepts, pursuing a spiritual realm beyond the external world. In film art, long shots often present the Buddhist concept of "selflessness" in unique forms such as blank space and delay to guide the audience into a deeper level of thinking and experience. Taking director Jia Zhangke's "Mountains and Rivers Old Man" as an example, Jia Zhangke delicately depicts the passage of time and changes in human affairs through long shots. The audience can see that as time passes, once familiar streets become unfamiliar, and once intimate interpersonal relationships are quietly changing. These changes are not presented through intense plot conflicts, but gradually presented to the audience in the slow progression of long shots. In the picture, the actions, expressions, and subtle changes in the surrounding environment of the characters become clues for the audience to interpret the meaning of life, and the delayed effect further enhances this sense of impermanence, making the audience more deeply feel the power of time and the fragility of life.

### **5. Conclusion**

In summary, the long shots in Chinese films are deeply influenced by the aesthetic ideas of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and reflect unique artistic value in reflecting reality, presenting stillness and panorama, and creating spiritual realm. In the future, Chinese films can continue to explore the infinite possibilities of the unique language of long shots by combining modern technological means with traditional aesthetics, showcasing the artistic characteristics of the Chinese film school.

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